



# Loudoun County

VIRGINIA

WHERE TRADITION MEETS INNOVATION

**PHYLLIS J. RANDALL**

**CHAIR AT-LARGE**

**2022 STATE OF THE COUNTY**

*“TELLING LOUDOUN’S STORY”*

Over the past year, there have been quite a few people... for quite a few reasons, who have felt the need to highlight what they think they know about Loudoun. While I would like to assume all those people had the best of intentions, it’s likely some may have had other, less commendable motives for making Loudoun the center point of their attention.

Having lived in Loudoun for almost 30 years, having raised two sons here, been involved in our public school system as a member of various PTOs and PTAs, having been a room mom for years, spent hundreds of hours in our schools and chaired the Minority Student Achievement Advisory Committee; having supported my spouse as he started two small businesses in Loudoun, having worshipped, volunteered and been active in just about every aspect of life in Loudoun and having been chair for seven years. I believe I may be just a bit more qualified to tell Loudoun’s story than the people who, with dubious agendas, have been talking about our county.

Loudoun’s story is the story of a county whose response to the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most efficient and effective in the nation. Sadly, Loudoun lost 384 souls to COVID. While we recognize and remember every single Loudoun resident who is no longer with us, we should also recognize that, according to the Virginia Department of Health, adjusted for population, Loudoun lost fewer residents to the COVID-19 pandemic than any other health district in Virginia. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to hundreds of county staff and volunteers for Loudoun’s effective, compassionate response to this health crisis. They stepped up and stepped in, often at great personal risk. Collectively, they worked tens of thousands of hours serving Loudoun’s citizens.

Our economic response was no less remarkable. Despite the COVID pandemic, Loudoun’s economy fared better than almost any other county in the nation. According to U.S. News and World Report, Loudoun has the strongest economy in the country. Post pandemic, Loudoun’s unemployment rate is 2.2%, which is 1.3% lower than our pre-pandemic unemployment rate. Our office vacancy rate is just 8.4% and remarkably, at over 150,000 dollars, Loudoun’s household median income remains one of the highest in the nation. We’re 70,000 dollars above

the median household income in the Commonwealth of Virginia and \$82,000 above the national median household income. In addition, Loudoun continues to retain our triple- A bond rating.

So many of our economic successes in the county can be credited to Buddy Rizer and his dedicated staff in our Department of Economic Development, or ED. Buddy, who has been named a Tech Titan six times by Washingtonian Magazine and one of the fifty (50) most influential Virginians five times by Virginia Business Magazine, was also recently named to the Washington Business Journal's 'Power 100' as one of the most influential businesspeople in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Understanding the prestige and professional capabilities Mr. Rizer brings to our ED Department, enables one to fully grasp why this chapter in Loudoun's story is so successful.

Like every other department in Loudoun, ED remained open throughout the COVID pandemic. But Loudoun, your county government didn't simply economically survive the pandemic; we adapted and prevailed. During the last two years, Loudoun's ED department assisted in disbursing COVID CARES and ARPA grant money to the tune of \$21 million dollars. That money allowed businesses to remain open, keep the lights on and pay their employees. In addition, after realizing minority and women-owned businesses were not accessing this needed, one-time revenue stream from the federal government, Buddy and his team specifically reached out to those communities to ensure they were aware of grant opportunities.

That effort resulted in approximately \$12 million in federal grant money being disbursed to minority and women-owned businesses. More importantly, the time and effort Mr. Rizer and his team dedicated to outreach resulted in higher awareness of county government offerings and increased involvement in our commissions, committees, and boards.

Moreover, Loudoun's Chamber of Commerce, realizing its critical role in ensuring minority and women entrepreneurs had the information needed to sustain their businesses during the pandemic, reached out to communities of color and women to serve in positions of leadership. This effort resulted in the creation of one of the most diverse board of directors in our Chambers' history. Throughout the pandemic, the Chamber supported our small business community with the *COVID Business Resource Guide*, which assisted small business owners in navigating and accessing the various federal and local relief funds. Today, Loudoun's small business community is not just recovering, they are flourishing. Loudoun's small businesses have a remarkable potential for growth and are a key component of our economy. Today, 87% of Loudoun businesses have fewer than twenty employees. In Loudoun we have an economic ecosystem where small businesses receive support to thrive.

And our successes are not just east of Route 15. In Western Loudoun, our agriculture and related activities increased by 8.6% over the previous year. Thirty percent of the business "wins" identified by our ED Department occurred in the rural economy, totaling more than \$16 million dollars in new investments and 50 new jobs.

We welcome new sources of revenue coming online as Loudoun's rural economy expands and diversifies. One such example is our burgeoning unmanned aerial systems or drone industry. In the past two years, Loudoun has become home to 15 Unmanned Aerial System companies, to include X-elevate and Uavionix. The nationwide, emerging UAS industry will allow landowners in rural Loudoun to monetize not just their land but their air, without increasing residential housing or feeling pressured to sell their farm or build on prime agricultural soil.

Thankfully, we are also seeing the return of leisure travel, weddings, social gatherings, and sports tournaments in Loudoun. Our tourism and hospitality sector, which fuels our rural economy, is showing signs of a strong recovery. Loudoun continues to outpace the Washington, D.C. region as a whole and leads Northern Virginia in hotel occupancy. In fact, this past March, we hit 2019 occupancy levels for the first time since the start of the pandemic. A survey conducted by Visit Loudoun showed that 82% of leisure visitors would recommend Loudoun as a desirable destination. And we are.

Buddy Rizer, Tony Howard and Beth Erikson and their staff help us tell Loudoun's thriving economic story. They enable us to envision Loudoun's promising future, and are a vital part of our community, and we are pleased they could be with us tonight. Join me in recognizing their contributions.

Although Loudoun's strong small business community provides us many examples of leaders, tonight I'm going to highlight two businesswomen who have positively influenced and supported thousands of other women, helping them to pursue their dreams, tap into their strengths, and believe their voice and contributions are valued and needed.

In 2000, Kristina Bouweiri became the President of Reston Limousine. In 2005, she moved the company to Sterling, and two years later Ms. Bouweiri registered her limousine company as a woman-owned business with the Women's Business Enterprise National Council. Over the years, Ms. Bouweiri has grown the business, and today Reston Limousine and Travel Service operates as one of the top ten largest chauffeured fleets in the country. It is one of metropolitan Washington's largest providers of luxury transportation and government contract services.

Now, I could talk about Kristina Bouweiri the businesswoman, for the next hour, but honestly you can read about her business acumen in dozens of trade journals. The person I want to introduce you to tonight is Kristina Bouweiri, advocate for women and girls in Loudoun and across the Northern Virginia region. In 2016, when I assumed the gavel and became Chair-At-Large, I immediately realized that, although Loudoun was rightly supporting many Chamber of Commerce and business events, we were not supporting the only monthly event specifically designed to support women's businesses and networking opportunities: the Sterling Women's Business Lunch. Founded by Kristina Bouweiri in 2008, this monthly event gathers businesswomen from across the county and region to network, share best practices, welcome a keynote speaker, and -- most importantly -- provide an opportunity for women to support women-owned businesses in Loudoun County.

Over the years Kristina Bouweiri has contributed tens of thousands of dollars to our nonprofits and encouraged hundreds of people, but most especially women, to pursue their business goals, lean into their strengths, find their superpowers, and step boldly into their future. Today, Loudoun proudly supports the Sterling Women's Business Luncheon just as we do so many other vital business organizations in our county.

Along with Ms. Bouweiri, Tina Johnson has proven to be a force for good. She has worked for years to support women in every arena. In her words, she believes, quote, "to be a strong leader, you must give back and get involved in your community," end quote. Tina Johnson has brought together thousands of women through her events and her consulting company, now known as the CEO Consulting Group. A Loudoun native and former emergency room nurse, Ms. Johnson, has started not one or two, but eight small businesses in Loudoun.

Much like her counterpart, Ms. Bouweiri, I could spend hours discussing Ms. Johnson's business successes. However, I'd prefer to highlight her extensive philanthropic and community involvement that includes sitting on eight boards and nonprofits. In 2008 while serving as the President of the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, Ms. Johnson also started the Women's Business Conference.

Over the subsequent 11 years, the conference welcomed thousands of women. Its singular mission? To connect and empower women on their journey to own and successfully operate their own businesses. In addition, in 2018 and 2019, Ms. Johnson welcomed hundreds of women to a regional Women's Health and Wellness Summit where all aspects of physical and mental wellness were discussed in informative, supportive breakout sessions.

Today, Ms. Johnson's CEO Consulting Group holds the Women's CEO Conference. In March of this year, Ms. Johnson added to her many accolades and awards not one, but two awards from the Chamber of Commerce for her leadership in the business community, especially her work with women entrepreneurs.

Both Ms. Bouweiri and Ms. Johnson help tell Loudoun's story of, not just business success, but businesswomen invested in serving, empowering and mentoring the next generation of women in the county and region. Please join me in thanking Tina Johnson from the CEO Consulting Group and Kristina Bouweiri from Reston Limousine.

As a result of the pandemic, one of the greatest challenges throughout the nation has been the disruption in the world's supply chains leading to higher prices and empty shelves. Throughout the pandemic, the entire nation realized the importance of farming, and to the extent possible, producing our own foods. In the United States, we import more than half of our fresh fruit and almost a third of our fresh vegetables. Many of these goods come from countries that are not allies of America or even good actors on the international stage. In 2017 alone, the U.S. imported \$4.6 billion worth of food from China. Although we all recognize that an international economy

requires importing foods and other goods, we should be equally aware that, according to the 2017 United States Census of Agriculture, viable farmland in America shrank at a rate of 3.2% which equates to 3.3 million acres. Additionally, Virginia lost 6% of its farmland.

Loudoun, our farming industry has always been a vital part of our rural economy. We must protect our farmland by vowing not to build permanent structures on our prime agricultural soil, by encouraging landowners to put valuable farmland into conservation easement and by adding protections through our zoning policies.

- It is our farmers who supply food to Loudoun's farmers markets;
- It is our farmers who provide safe, stable food sources in times of crisis; and
- It is today's farmers who are teaching the next generation of American farming families to sustain this vital economic sector.

Two of Loudoun's farmers markets, the Loudoun Valley Homegrown Markets Cooperative and Eat LOCO, have been operating for a combined total of 16 years. Although we regularly drive by road stands and farmers markets, over the past two years more people than ever have pulled over to purchase high quality food they could not find at national grocery store chains. Many may not realize what a critical role our farming community played in Loudoun's COVID response, but tonight we are honored to recognize their vital contributions. I'd like to welcome, from the Loudoun Valley Homegrown Markets Cooperative, Mr. Chris Hatch, a 40-year farmer and Mr. Jason Plybon from Eat LOCO, who is joining us on behalf of Eat Loco's founder Dan Hine, for their commitment and contributions to feeding Loudoun's families during these times of historic need.

While Loudoun's story embraces our farming community as part of our heritage, we also continue to write new chapters in our story. This past year, our county government, for the first time, passed an ordinance that will allow for the formation of public sector unions. To be clear, no county employee is forced to join a union, nor would there ever be any repercussions if one chose not to. However, the passing of this ordinance should be seen as a signal that the Board of Supervisors, as a body, supports the notion of collective bargaining and the creation of public employee unions in Loudoun. The writing of this ordinance involved multiple meetings with members of the Service Employees International Union (Local 512) the International Association of Firefighters, (Local 3756), county staff and Board of Supervisors staff members. I want to thank them all for their commitment during some very long and at times tense meetings. We understand that county government works most effectively when we have open, clear, honest dialogue and respect the voices of front-line workers and all county employees.

Loudoun, I'm pleased to report that two weeks ago, on May 13, the Loudoun County Chapter of the International Association of Firefighters, (Local 3756) made history when they became the first union in Loudoun and one of the first public sector unions in the Commonwealth of Virginia to petition for certification to be the exclusive bargaining unit for our exceptional, award-

winning firefighters.

While we know this is simply the beginning of the process, certifying a bargaining unit is an important first step that should not only be recognized, it should be celebrated. I want to congratulate Local 3756 and pledge my commitment to work collaboratively to craft a strong, fair agreement. More broadly, I want to acknowledge every county employee. Your dedicated, professional public service allows your friends, your neighbors, and your families to have a better quality of life. Loudoun County employees, I see you, I appreciate you and on behalf of a grateful county I, thank you for being an essential part of Loudoun's story.

Like every county in the nation, Loudoun received the results of the 2020 census, which will help shape our story for the next decade. Although we all knew Loudoun's growth outpaced every other county in Virginia, many were surprised at our astounding 35% increase in population over the past ten years. With that growth, Loudoun welcomes a new, more diverse population of friends and neighbors that are now an integral part of our community.

Our new residents arrive in Loudoun with dreams and hopes for themselves and their families. We welcome them to our schools, our neighborhoods, our places of worship and places where we gather. Loudoun is now and will always be a county that strives to meet our vision statement: to be a prosperous, inclusive, equitable and sustainable community. We endeavor to always to be a place where residents feel free to live, work, learn, and play.

To fulfill the goal of living in Loudoun we need a supply of attainable homes. For an elected official in Loudoun with our high growth rate, housing is a difficult subject to discuss. When we talk about housing, the immediate response we get from so many of our constituents is "please stop building houses" often followed by "my son/daughter can't afford to live in Loudoun." Few people want the board to approve more homes, but many want an attainable home for themselves, their children or their parents. According to the Dulles Area Association of Realtors, Loudoun currently only has a 14-day supply of available homes. Loudoun's Department of Economic Development, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Loudoun Chamber of Commerce, Loudoun's Economic Development Authority and almost every economist agree, attainable housing is crucial to a strong robust economy. Of course, infrastructure to support new development needs to be built in advance of, or in conjunction with, building new homes. However, as a county, we cannot claim we want the people who serve our community--our firefighters, law enforcement officers and teachers, nurses, wait staff and others—to live in Loudoun if we don't provide them with attainable housing opportunities.

Loudoun, I'm pleased to report that, for the first time:

- Your Board of Supervisors has approved an Unmet Housing Needs Strategic Plan;
- For the first time, we will endeavor to meet the challenging but achievable goal of creating 16,000 attainable homes by 2040, and;
- Very importantly, the Board of Supervisors for the first time, has approved a dedicated source of revenue to achieve this goal.

In the past seven years, we have constructed, leased, or approved 728 below market rental homes. Included in this number are:

- Forty-one apartments for households with incomes at or below the 30% Area Median Income, or AMI, threshold;
- One-hundred-eighty-nine apartments for households with incomes at or below 50% AMI, and;
- Four-hundred-ninety-eight apartments for households with incomes at or below 60% AMI.

Attainable homes for rent, but more importantly for purchase, will allow more families of varying incomes to help us write the next chapters in Loudoun's story.

The ambitious goals of our housing strategic plan will only be realized through the continuous hard work of committed staff who believe everyone deserves a place to call home. Loudoun, I'd like to introduce you to one of our most devoted staff members who has spent much of her career focused on helping families call Loudoun home. Sarah Coyle Etro has worked for Loudoun for over thirty-two years. She began her Loudoun career in Planning and Zoning before transferring to lead the Housing Division within Family Services. Ms. Etro is a sought-after Affordable Housing Practitioner throughout the region. She has served as the project manager for the creation of the county's first, Unmet Housing Needs Strategic Plan. Currently she serves as the acting director of the newly formed Housing and Community Development Department. Sarah is retiring after a fruitful, impactful career with Loudoun. Years from now, a young family will pick up their keys to their new home, and although they won't know it, their dream of home ownership will be directly linked to the work of Sarah Etro. That is her legacy. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in not only thanking Sarah but in wishing her Godspeed in her retirement.

Ms. Etro and our entire county staff understand that as we welcome new neighbors, our school system also welcomes new students. Although the Loudoun County Public School System is an entirely different governmental entity, it is certainly a vital part of our Loudoun story.

Across the nation the past two years have been extraordinarily difficult for educators in our public and private school systems. If like me, you've spent any time in our classrooms, you'll understand how challenging it is to be a teacher. Our educators are asked to be psychologists, nurses, counselors, coaches, mentors and, for some students, the only adult to nurture the potential of that young person. If you take the time to talk to teachers, you'll realize, not only do they extend themselves emotionally, all too often they literally spend their own funds to outfit their classrooms. Just about every involved parent appreciates the commitment, devotion, care, and hard work it takes to be an educator. In Loudoun, our educators are also truly fortunate to have the Loudoun Education Foundation, or LEF, standing by them. For over two decades, LEF has had one single vision, to make Loudoun County Public Schools the best public school system in the nation. Their mission statement? Engaging the Loudoun community to invest in critical and innovative programs to foster the academic success and well-being of students and teachers

in Loudoun County.

Understanding the personal cost educators often bear, one of the goals of LEF is to raise and donate funds directly to educators so they don't need to use their own money to educate our children. During the 2018–2019 school year, the Loudoun Education Foundation raised and donated over two million dollars to Loudoun's schools and educators. LEF looks past the noise—and past the politics—as they focus on who really matters: the students, parents, and educators.

In addition to offering financial support for teachers and grants to fund many innovative programs, including STEM programs, LEF, a nonprofit organization, sponsors the Loudoun County Schools International Youth Leadership Summit, the Regional Science and Engineering Fair, and various professional development opportunities for educators. Danielle Nadler, Keri Murphy and Wade Tetsuka from the Loudoun Education foundation have joined us tonight. For the support they show to our educators, please join me in thanking them.

In telling Loudoun's story, we don't ignore the chapters we find troubling. As a community, we should face hard issues head-on and resolve to do better in the future. But no person or organization should ever be defined solely by their worst moments or decisions. And while we should never minimize our failures, or ignore the pain of a victim, it is also wholly inappropriate to use that pain as political fodder. When people outside of our county decide that our worst moments are the entirety of our story, it becomes necessary to set the record straight. And ours is a record of relentless achievement.

- Nine of Niche.com's top fifty high schools in Virginia are Loudoun schools. Loudoun has a higher percentage in the top 50 than any other school system in the Commonwealth.
- The LCPS Class of 2021 had an on-time graduation rate of 97.6%. This is 4.6% higher than the state average of 93%.
- A team of students from Harmony Middle School recently won first place in the Odyssey of the Mind World Finals.
- The 2021 SAT scores for (LCPS) students were once again well above state, national and global averages and improved by an average of 9 points. The average overall score for LCPS students was one thousand one hundred and eighty-two (1,182). The LCPS total average exceeded the state average by thirty-one points (31) and the global average by one hundred twenty-two (122) points.
- U.S. News & World Report recently ranked all 15 eligible LCPS high schools among this year's Best High Schools in the nation.



- Sixteen LCPS teams were awarded Virginia High School League State Championships. These championships are in everything from football to gymnastics, from ESports to debate, and from the Scholastic Bowl to volleyball.
- Stacker.com lists LCPS at number five (5) in its ranking of top school divisions in Virginia. LCPS is the largest school division in Virginia in the top five ranking.
- And this past spring, Ashrita Gandhari, a former student at Stone Hill Middle School, was a semifinalist in the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee.

Young Ms. Gandhari and everyone in generation Z are already writing the next chapter of Loudoun's story. She represents the talent, hopes desires and potential of so many; and she puts the story of our county, and our school system in context. Ashrita Gandhari, her parents, and sister are here with us tonight. Please join me in celebrating her success.

Soon young Ms. Gandhari will experience one of the rights we as Americans hold most dear; the right to vote in free and fair elections with confidence that our votes will count. In Loudoun, our Department of Elections – headed by Judy Brown, who, as a thirty-seven-year employee, is the second longest serving Registrar in the Commonwealth of Virginia and Richard Keech, the Deputy Director / General Registrar – have not had one substantiated case of voter irregularity or voter fraud. Not one. Not ever!

Unfortunately, like many election offices around the nation for months, Loudoun's election office has been besieged with frivolous FOIA requests and unfounded allegations. Accusations that our elections department is anything but a well-run organization operated with the highest ethical standards and staffed with dedicated professionals who go about doing their job in a non-partisan, impartial manner are false and should be refuted by every person who has ever been on a ballot in Loudoun. The right to vote without interference or intimidation is what countless millions of people throughout American history have fought and died for.

Dr. King best described the importance of having your vote count when he said, quote “So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote, I do not possess myself. I cannot make up my mind - it is made up for me. I cannot live as a democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to enact - I can only submit to the edict of others,” end quote. Loudoun, voting is fundamental, and in our county, we thank our committed elections staff not just for doing their jobs well, but for doing them with grace and dignity while rising above the baseless charges they continue to endure. Loudoun, please join me in thanking Judy Brown and Richard Keech.

Loudoun, our story is ongoing. It is a story of a county that is not just economically strong but whose residents will, at a moment's notice, drop everything to assist a family devastated by a fire, offer assistance to our allies seeking asylum from a war-torn country, and show up in droves in this board room to fight for causes they hold dear. We are a county where people from different faiths share common dreams, hopes and aspirations for their families. We are a county

whose residents, with little fanfare and without hesitation, delivered a retiring Loudoun firetruck halfway across the country to our sister county in need. We are a county with a nationally ranked public school system attended by 85% of K-12 students. And we are a county whose response to a 100-year pandemic was literally the most efficient and effective in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Our award-winning county staff is the envy of counties across the nation. Together, we have written, and continue to write, Loudoun's story. Others may believe they know who we are, but they don't understand; the greatness of Loudoun resides in the goodness of our people, and our people are the only true authors of Loudoun's story.

For the past two years, we have been tested by fire, but we have emerged stronger, more resilient, and more committed than ever to Loudoun's future, a bright future full of hope, vitality, and equal opportunity for every Loudoun resident. That is Loudoun's story.

My colleagues on the Board of Supervisors, fellow elected officials, County Administrator Hemstreet, Deputy County Administrator Yudd, County Attorney Rogers, county staff and most especially residents of Loudoun County, it is without reservation, without hesitation, without equivocation—without any doubt—I say to you the state of Loudoun County, Virginia is strong.

Thank you and I will see you next year.

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