

Global Virginia

By Michael Cecire • Jan 5th, 2009 • Category: Economic Development, Feature

According to Loughborough University's groundbreaking research into World City formation as of 1999 there are 19 cities with evidence of World City formation within the United States, out of 123 listed globally, (not bad for a country with five percent of the global population). Of these 19 cities, one finds the usual suspects – New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington – and a few other unsurprising mainstays (Atlanta, Houston, Boston and San Francisco). Guess which Virginia city makes the list? Our very own Richmond.

To be sure, Richmond is no London or Tokyo and in fact did not make the actual list of 'World Cities' (four points or more were needed, Richmond had one). Still, given Richmond's small size and its proximity to other major cities, to be included on that list was a major accomplishment for the River City-that-could.

Globalization finds itself used in everyday parlance and is the reality of commerce and society. No longer the mere province of High Table bragging rights, a well-globalized city is a prerequisite for economic and cultural success. A World City, by extension, is a comparative advantage. This brings us back to Richmond where evidence of World City formation puts it in a small percentage of US cities (and an even smaller fraction of cities in the world). If Richmond and Virginia as a whole seek to be international economic centers there are still issues left to consider.

Get serious about regionalization.

At the risk of sounding like a miniature Crupi Report, Virginia needs to corral the stakeholders from Arlington to Richmond to Virginia Beach to work on a comprehensive vision on how their economies have, do and will interact. In particular an economic framework is needed that can help inform the conversation on transportation issues, economic development strategies, workforce planning, possible cost savings and the like. For example, Jim Crupi's once vaporous-sounding 'defense crescent' seems to have taken on a new life with the Pentagon South project in Hampton Roads.

If a major weakness in Virginia, as Crupi cites, is a lack of cooperation between municipalities, its drawback is even more pronounced from one metropolitan region to the next (Think DC-NoVa to Richmond to Hampton Roads). Virginia's leaders and citizens alike need to get serious and get used to the idea of regional and inter-regional cooperation to avoid cannibalistic industry redundancies, to optimize complementary economic clusters and to take advantage of DC public-sector growth without becoming subsumed in it. A regional and even inter-regional approach to growth and land-use would be a monumental accomplishment, especially if it embraces livability, affordability, sustainability and business opportunity.

Create the economic conditions for growth.

With the economic downturn in its full fury, the Commonwealth may be tempted to reach into the taxpayers' wallets – this should be avoided. Now more than ever Virginia's competitive environment needs to remain intact and reliable, especially as our neighbors around the country seek to raise their taxes. This is a prime opportunity for Virginia to rededicate itself as a growth-enabling economy, as an opportunity destination and as a safe and sure place to invest. When the national economy recovers and investment dollars flow again those places who raised taxes in panic will fail to dismantle them and Virginia will be recognized for its fiscal temperance and rewarded with investment, and with it, new jobs.

Foster an internationally competitive, full-spectrum workforce.

Virginia is home to some of the finest universities in the world and yet Virginia education from pre-K to the tertiary level are not adequately responding to the current and projected needs of the economy. Despite Virginia's reputation for having decent public education, Virginia is far behind its neighbors to the north in the creation and operation of successful charter schools due to stultifying enabling-legislation. Even more self-destructive is the public education industry's myopic obsession with college entrance numbers over career success and feeding industry pipelines.

Traditional college is not for everyone, as lamentable retention numbers often demonstrate, and certainly not for all those graduating from secondary school. Secondary education should be graduating students that are armed with the competencies for skilled work. Equally important is to reach out to school counselors and faculty to impart the importance of STEM education; this economy is not crowing for more anthropology graduates, to that I can personally attest. The key is a full-spectrum workforce – competent, tech-savvy workers from the vocational and trade level all the way up to the post-graduate level.

Have some self confidence.

We all know Virginia is for Lovers, but surely there is a greater story to tell than can be imparted by a decades-old branding campaign. Virginia is home to one of the most robust marketing and advertising clusters on the East Coast and yet the Commonwealth has little in the way of a central narrative that tells Virginia's story. Let's get on the same page and tell that story to both the country and the rest of the world – Virginia can and should be a mandatory stopover destination in every traveler's itinerary. Deliver an international branding campaign that combines Virginia's best, from the world famous (the history) to the emerging (the wine regions) to the offbeat (Tangier Island) to set Virginia apart as a unique North American experience.

These points are broad and do not touch on some of the more specific issues that demand attention like transportation and infrastructure, fiscal and budgetary sobriety and creating a comprehensive outcome-based government **incentivized to create growth**. Nonetheless, they underscore the need for a fundamental retooling of outlook on the economy and Virginia's place in the world; not as a mere constituent element of the United States, but as a powerful economic force in its own right. Virginia can bolster its credentials as an international destination for investment, travel and opportunity at a moment when political inclinations favor protectionism

and withdrawal. All that is required is the will and energy to take full advantage of these times to reinvent Virginia as the Global Commonwealth.

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Michael Cecire is an economic development practitioner living in the Philadelphia area and working with a New Jersey public investment agency. A former Peace Corps Volunteer, Cecire earned his Bachelor of Science in Anthropology from Virginia Commonwealth University and is currently pursuing graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He has published articles with the London Telegraph, MichaelTotten.com, and TCS Daily.

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2 Responses »

1. **George L. Hiller** on **January 11th, 2009 at 4:52 pm**:

Dear Mr. Cecire,

I enjoyed reading your article. As you might imagine, the title caught my eye given that **<http://www.globalvirginia.com>** is the address for our international programs website at the SW Virginia Higher Education in Abingdon. We provide export promotion assistance for area businesses as well as international education program support for the smaller colleges in this corner of the Commonwealth.

Of course, I concur with your basic argument that the Commonwealth must continue to develop globally-competitive communities, companies, and students. However, I think the “stakeholders” certainly extend beyond the “Golden Crescent” of Arlington-Richmond-Virginia Beach. The southside and far southwest areas of the Commonwealth are also important players in this enterprise. Moreover, we cannot have a truly globally-competitive Commonwealth unless those areas outside the Golden Crescent also prosper.

We have many challenges, including low numbers of college graduates, an economy that was based largely on low-tech industries, plus our historical isolation and even suspicion about globalization. Fortunately we have a number of educational institutions in rural Virginia, including my own, that are aggressively working to increase higher education opportunities and graduation rates. This is, of course, key to global competitiveness. We also have real success stories in rural SW Virginia about colleges and businesses that are making “Global Virginia” a realityfor the entire Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Geo. Hiller

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2. *Scott Burger* on January 13th, 2009 at 2:24 pm:

Richmond is blessed with great geography and natural resources. As a citizen of Richmond, I am more interested in Richmond's economy being economically self-sufficient, sustainable and environmentally aware, less about being a 'World City'. No more Kepone. No more Land America. No more Dominion coal plants. No more dumb models that don't work and/or come at too great of a cost to our quality of life.

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