

10TH ANNUAL **SWVA ECONOMIC FORUM**

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AGENDA

9:00 a.m.

OPENING WELCOME

Donna P. Henry, Ph.D., Chancellor of The University of Virginia's College at Wise

MEET THE EMCEE

Josh Mancuso, Actor, Comedian & Filmmaker

STATE OF THE REGION

Christine Chmura, Ph.D., CEO & Chief Economist, Chmura Economics & Analytics

SHIFTING LANDSCAPES: DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

Hamilton Lombard, Estimates Program Manager, Demographics Research Group, The University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service

KEYNOTE

Michelle Rozen, Ph.D., Researcher & Author

NETWORKING BREAK

STATE LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES: AGENCY PRIORITIES FOR A THRIVING SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

Juan Pablo Segura, Virginia Secretary of Commerce & Trade

Glenn Davis, Director, Virginia Department of Energy

Bryan Horn, Director, Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development

Rita McClenny, President & CEO, Virginia Tourism Corporation

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SANDY RATLIFF COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD

Cindy Green, Relationship Manager, Locus

John Kilgore, Economic Development Director, Scott County, VA

DECADE IN REVIEW

Dan Minahan, Senior Director, SWVA Operations, Crutchfield Corporation

LUNCH

AGENDA

1:30 p.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Tourism | Visitor's Locker Room

Facing the Storm: Response and Recovery for the Outdoor Recreation Industry

When a storm strikes, communities face a cascade of challenges—from immediate emergency response to long-term recovery and rebuilding. This session examines regional responses to Hurricane Helene and explores how communities can use such experiences to diversify and strengthen their tourism assets, infrastructure, and events—not only to minimize economic disruption during disasters, but to enhance year-round vitality.

Kalen Hunter, Director of Destination Development, Virginia Tourism Corporation

Chris Bell, Town Manager, Damascus, VA

Leesa Brandon, External Affairs Specialist, Blue Ridge Parkway, National Park Service

Rural Virginia Opportunity Dashboard | Lakeview Room 1

Unlocking Rural Potential: A First Look at the Rural Virginia Opportunity Dashboard

Get an exclusive look at the Rural Virginia Opportunity Dashboard, an innovative new tool from the Virginia Rural Center designed to empower rural communities across the Commonwealth. This dynamic platform offers rich, data-driven insights into demographics, housing, education, business, and health—complete with interactive maps and downloadable trend reports. This session will explore how the dashboard can support strategic planning, attract investment, and drive meaningful growth in rural communities.

Kristie Proctor, Executive Director, The Virginia Rural Center

Chandler Vaughan, Project Coordinator, Rural Virginia Opportunity Dashboard, The Virginia Rural Center

Regional Resiliency Planning | Lakeview Room 2

Strengthening Communities: Resiliency Planning in Action

As communities across Southwest Virginia face increasing economic, environmental, and social challenges, resiliency planning has become more essential than ever. This session will explore the critical role of resiliency in fostering long-term stability and growth. Participants will gain insights from successful strategies in neighboring states, learn about current initiatives locally, and discover available resources to help build stronger, more adaptable communities.

Tanya Denckla Cobb, Director, The University of Virginia's Institute for Engagement & Negotiation

Joshua Ball, Chief Operating Officer, Shaping Our Appalachian Region, Inc. (SOAR)

Brianna Hickman, Community + Business Resilience Initiative (CBRI) Project Director, The West Virginia Community Development Hub

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AGENDA

2:15 p.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Community Development | Visitor's Locker Room

Ten to Win: Southwest Virginia's Decade of Development Trivia Game

Community development takes a variety of forms in Southwest Virginia, each building on the unique assets and qualities of the people and places that make this a home worthy of investment. Celebrate ten years of the SWVA Economic Forum by testing your knowledge of the regional strategic building blocks from Main Street and destination development to broadband capacity and support of the region's vibrant future. Play alongside guest contestants representing regional and state development partners in this interactive and fast-paced session with a game show format.

Doug Jackson, Capacity Development Specialist, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development

Kim Davis, Executive Director, Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation

Becky Nave, Director of Destination Development and Advocacy, Virginia Tourism Corporation

Chris Thompson, Director of Strategic Housing, Virginia Housing

Energy | Lakeview Room 1

Powering Virginia: The Present & Future of Energy in the Commonwealth

Join the Virginia Department of Energy Director and Deputy Director for an in-depth conversation on the current landscape and future direction of energy in the Commonwealth. This session will explore Virginia's evolving energy diversification strategies, key policy initiatives, and the role of innovation and infrastructure in achieving energy resilience, affordability, and sustainability. Attendees will gain insights into how state leadership is supporting economic growth and energy equity across Virginia's diverse regions.

Glenn Davis, Director, Virginia Department of Energy

Julianne Szyper, Deputy Director, Virginia Department of Energy

Agriculture | Lakeview Room 2

Cultivating Opportunity: Advancing Agriculture in Southwest Virginia

Southwest Virginia's agricultural sector is evolving—driven by research, technology, and a growing recognition of agriculture as a tool for economic and community development. This session brings together leaders driving growth through innovation and emerging technologies and explores what lies ahead for this critical sector.

Mike Gutter, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension; Associate Dean, Virginia Tech

Lee Wright, Senior Research Associate, Virginia Tech

Steve Critchfield, President, MOVA Technologies, Inc.

Luke Allison, Chief Advancement Officer, MOVA Technologies, Inc.

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NOTES





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