

**Welcome Address by
Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw
APWA Chapter Conference
May 11, 2017
(Full version)**

It is an honor and a privilege on behalf of the City of Fredericksburg to welcome the Mid-Atlantic chapter of the American Public Works Association.

Welcome - to the banks of the Rappahannock River where the Seacobeck Indians entertained Captain John Smith in 1608.

Welcome - to the county nearby where General George Rogers Clark, "The Hero of the Northwest Territory" was raised and the birthplace of his little brother, William who with Merriwether Lewis explored the great northwest after Jefferson made the Louisiana Purchase.

Welcome - to the gateway to the Northern Neck and its Tidewater progeny of Washingtons, Madison, Monroes, Masons and Lees.

Welcome - to Stafford County where George Washington grew up, chopped down Parson Weem's cherry tree and threw the Spanish dollar across the Rappahannock.

Welcome - to the city a short ferry ride away where Mary Washington, who raised George, spent her declining years close to her daughter Betty.

Welcome to the port of Falmouth, home of America's first millionaire and world renowned artist Gary Melcher

Welcome - to the only place in America that John Paul Jones truly called home and the place where Thomas Jefferson penned the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom.

Welcome - to the region which produced six Revolutionary War generals including Hugh Mercer, one of two generals in our country's history to die on the point of a bayonet and from whom, his great, great, great grandson, George S Patton, would proudly trace his lineage.

Welcome - to the town where a young lawyer named James Monroe buoyed by his success on our town council ran for the US House of Representatives from the First congressional District only to be soundly defeated by another James, James Madison.

Welcome - To the city whose city hall was constructed in 1816 and refurbished in 1824 to entertain Lafayette in his triumphant return to America and which remained in continuous use as a city hall until 1982 (second in continuous usage only to Tammany Hall in New York City). And is now the Fredericksburg Museum.

Welcome - To the hotbed of 19th century intellectual Agrarian reform as led by John Taylor of Caroline and Edmund Ruffin .

Welcome - to the home of Matthew Fontaine Maury, the pathfinder of the seas.

Welcome - to the site of four major Civil War battles: from the follies of federal failure at Fredericksburg to the audacity of Lee and Jackson at Chancellorsville to Grant's tenacity in the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania.

From the south porch of the original Farmers Bank where Abraham Lincoln spoke in the winter of 1862 to the east porch of the same building several months later where Jefferson Davis spoke.

From Clara Barton to Walt Whitman who nursed the injured and Stephen Crane's Red Badge of Courage which memorialized the battle.

Welcome - to the city which changed hands seven times during the Civil War, a city whose refusal to surrender in 1862 led to a northern bombardment of over 6000 rounds and more house to house fighting than in any other city during the war.

Welcome - to the city across whose river over 10,000 slaves fled to freedom during the war.

Welcome - to the 2nd city in our nation to employ the city-manager/council form of government.

Welcome - to the region that gave America gold medal winners in Jeff Rouse and Mark Lenzi - and blues music award winner and civil rights leader city native Gaye Adegbalola.

Welcome - to the city that provides the world with Carl's frozen custard.

Welcome - to the town where America grew up -

Truly our history is our nation's history - each century of it.

Fredericksburg is living history. I like to tell folks about my experience on the Fourth of July not too many years ago. The holiday fell that year on a Sunday. My walk to church that day took me past the home of Mary Washington, the home of Jane Beale whose civil war diary provided much of the dialogue for the movie Gods and Generals, and the law office of James Monroe, where he practiced law and began his political career as a member of the city council. I sat down in a church pew which happened to be across from Farmer's bank. All in the space of four city blocks. I would not have had to deviate far from my route to pass where Thomas Jefferson wrote the Statute of Religious Freedom, a significant document in the Virginia and the US constitutions and one of the things that Jefferson asked to be placed on his tombstone. We are never far from the roots of this nation – the men and women and the ideas that made this country what it is. Fredericksburg's history is truly our nation's history. And that includes the bad as well as the good. We cannot forget the struggles that occurred to live up to those principles. More than 10,000 slaves passed through our city to cross the river to freedom during the civil war.

But the 'burg', as we affectionately call our city, is not just fossils or ancient history - At the same time – on the same route - I passed by numerous very popular restaurants, our butcher shop – an area that is a

lively scene on a pleasant evening. These daily reminders of the past coexist with shops, excellent restaurants, and folks walking their dogs. We have runners and bikers and students from our excellent university and we have great and varied architecture. We ARE a vibrant modern city. We have been recognized nationally as a best place to live, to raise a family, #1 in quality of life in one national poll and a main street “you gotta visit”. The home of the American Canoe Association, our scenic river attracts kayakers and hikers. Our trails are busy in all weather and seasons. And over 8000 runners delight in our Marine Corps Historic Half marathon every May.

I have painted a pretty picture of a city with a great quality of life. BUT this is possible only because of what happens behind the scenes. Precisely because our public works employees do their job and do it well. They don’t show up in a promotional video - or a glossy ad - but they don’t go unrecognized either. When folks stop me to say the city is doing great, I thank public works – because they’re responding to a clean, neat downtown - well kept roads and public spaces – and clean, safe drinking water. Sometimes they actually say that! But I always know that is what they mean. They will say it just feels so good that the city looks good.

Moreover, I consistently receive compliments for our city employees, and the public works folks are often the most visible to our citizens. At a recent meeting a man made a point to tell me how impressed he was with our trash collection staff. Their diligence - the way the folks who pick up the trash literally run from one place to another. The polite manner of our workers.

This is what makes our city and yours a great place to live. The quality of life that any community enjoys is largely the responsibility of its public works department employees.

Thank you for building, maintaining, beautifying, and protecting our communities, and for improving our quality of life.

I hope that you have time to visit our city and enjoy our downtown. And that you will come back!