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VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS HONOR VIRGINIA COMMUNITIES
Alleghany County/City of Covington/Town of Clifton Forge; City of Lynchburg; Arlington County; Roanoke County; and Southwest Virginia all named winners with best practices nominations

Charlottesville – The Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA) announced the selection of Alleghany County/City of Covington/Town of Clifton Forge; City of Lynchburg; and Arlington County as winners in three different population categories of the 2017 Community Economic Development Awards (CEDA). The awards were presented last week at the association’s Spring Conference in Charlottesville.

The communities of Alleghany County, the City of Covington, and the Town of Clifton Forge were nominated and selected in Category Three (population of 15,001 to 40,000) for their cooperation in revisiting the fundamentals of Business Retention and Expansion Activities. The new combined BRE program makes use of aggressive outreach, volunteers, and other tools to reach existing business and to remove any barriers to their continued success and growth, whether the challenges are related to finance, logistics, real estate, workforce, or access to markets. These activities are all plugged into a system of comprehensive quantification that allows for tracking advancements. The CEDA Committee applauded the communities for first, working across jurisdictional boundaries to bring this inventive program to life and secondly, for embracing a fundamental tenet of economic development and rebuilding those efforts from the ground up.

The City of Lynchburg’s *Lynchburg Innovation Week* was the recipient of the award in population Category Four (40,001-100,000). Over three days during June 2016, a variety of interested parties gathered into the Riverviews Artspace to engage the public with interactive content and to have meaningful conversations about Lynchburg’s economic development future. Additionally, a nine-week entrepreneurial training program culminated in a pitch night at which \$40,000 was given to five different businesses, all of which now have open storefronts. *Lynchburg Innovation Week* represents the confluence of innovation and homegrown business assistance and for that reason was chosen by the CEDA Committee.

The CEDA award in Population Category Five (>100,000) was presented to Arlington’s *Startup Arlington* program. As one of the Country’s major technology hubs, Arlington has made significant efforts to go beyond its reputation as a “government town” to compete with such recognizable, branded places as the Silicon Valley and Austin Texas. To foster this effort, *Startup Arlington* was envisioned as a nationwide competition for emerging or growing companies in the technology sector to compete for the ability to live and work in Arlington for three months at no cost. *Startup Arlington* is a collaborative effort among public and private partners and the end results include tech sector growth, excitement among the entrepreneurial community, and overall great PR and buzz. *Startup Arlington* was chosen by the CEDA committee for its collaborative spirit and its creative holistic prize package.

The 2017 CEDA entrants represented all geographic regions of the Commonwealth, and the ten applicant communities ranged from large in population, urban areas to large-in-area, rural regions. “The field of entrants was very competitive this year,” said CEDA Chair David Manley (Joint IDA of Wythe County). “Because there were some exceptional projects that deserve to be recognized, the CEDA Committee decided to present two honorable mention awards.” Submitting in Population Category Four, Roanoke County received an honorable mention for its *Site Selector* website. The County’s Department of Economic Development launched the website to serve as a one-stop for businesses in the area, site selection consultants, real estate professionals, and other interested parties. The second honorable mention award went to Opportunity Southwest Virginia for its placemaking initiative called *Rally Southwest Virginia* in Virginia’s coalfield region that has now expanded across 19 counties and three cities—stretching from Lee to Montgomery Counties, catalyzing sustainable growth in the participating communities.

The CEDA awards are designed to recognize outstanding communities in the Commonwealth for their efforts in advancing the economic viability of their community through economic and community development programs. VEDA is following the format developed by the Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC) and will submit its eligible winners to SEDC to be considered by that organization for a southern states regional award. This is the eleventh year for VEDA’s Community Economic Development Awards.

“The work of the committee is admittedly difficult each year because of the high caliber of the entries and this year was no exception, having received 13 quality nominations. Two of Virginia’s four winners last year went on to win at the SEDC level – truly a testament to the high performance economic development efforts going on across our state,” said Manley. Entries are judged on factors including innovativeness, transferability, community commitment, and the benefits derived from the initiative. To see copies of each of the selected Community Economic Development Awards submissions link to www.GoVEDA.org.

VEDA is a member-based professional association committed to providing training and development; networking opportunities; and serving as the voice of the economic development community, creating economic opportunity and prosperity for the Commonwealth of Virginia. VEDA’s membership is comprised of more than 550 economic development professionals and related industry professionals from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more information about VEDA visit the website at www.GoVEDA.org.

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