



City Manager's Office

P. O. Box 3300 ♦ Danville, Virginia 24543 ♦ Telephone (434) 799-5100 ♦ Fax (434) 799-6549

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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River District strategy tops best practices in 17 states

Danville's success in redeveloping the River District as a place to live, work, shop and play and in involving the community throughout the process has garnered an award for best practices from a regional economic development group that represents 17 southern states.

The city won the award from Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC) in competition with other communities with a population of 40,001 to 100,000. Danville's population is about 43,000.

"Through the efforts of many, the River District has become a positive place to be, and it is gratifying to have those efforts stand out in competition with our peers," City Manager Joe King said. "This award belongs to everyone in the community. It recognizes their involvement and support of the renaissance of this district."

The SEDC noted that Danville's downtown and tobacco warehouse districts were once considered the commercial and administrative heart of the city. With the popularity of shopping centers and malls in the 1980s and the exit of local tobacco and textile operations, these two districts took a hard hit and are now typical of many old central business districts with more than their share of vacant and blighted buildings.

In response, increased focus was placed on these two districts, which have been rebranded collectively as the River District. The city – in partnership with the Industrial Development Authority, Danville Regional Foundation, Averett University, developers, merchants, business owners and residents – developed a strategy for redeveloping the River District.

As a result of this strategy, vacant and blighted buildings have been saved and redeveloped as apartments, restaurants, retail space, and technology, educational and office uses. In

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conjunction, the first River District Festival was held last fall, and a second festival is planned for this year.

The revitalization effort, its impact on community development, the ability of the city's Office of Economic Development in attracting businesses to the district, and the amount of community involvement engendered all factored into the award.

The award will be presented at the SEDC's annual conference, which will be held Aug. 7 in Myrtle Beach, S.C. Virginia will claim three of the five SEDC awards for best practices, Highland County and the city of Williamsburg also will receive awards.

Highland County was selected among communities with a population of less than 5,000 after establishing a federally inspected livestock slaughter facility to address the agricultural decline in the county. The city of Williamsburg was selected in the population category of 5,001 to 15,000 for a demolition loan program it developed that provides capital to demolish underutilized buildings to allow for redevelopment projects to take their place.

Danville, Highland County and Williamsburg each won community economic development awards earlier this year from the Virginia Economic Development Council, which in turn submitted the winning entries for the SEDC regional competition.

Jill Loope, Virginia director to the SEDC, said, "Virginia continues to lead the way for its sister southern states in the awards program."

Organized in the fall of 1946, the SEDC is the oldest and largest regional economic development association in North America. It has members in 17 states in the South, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

This year is the sixth for the awards competition.

Other SEDC award winners included Pascagoula, Miss., as well as the state of Mississippi.

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