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Chamber Meeting Highlights Economic Successes, Ponders Challenges

Sun Gazette

by Scott McCaffrey / reprinted from the Arlington Sun Gazette

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce spent the past year actively involved in issues ranging from energy policy to revamping county signage policy, and there's more activity on the horizon, the organization's outgoing chairman said at the business group's 87th annual meeting.

"We live in a small community...but we're able to embrace big ideas and get them done," **Michael Foster*** said in a valedictory speech Dec. 9 in front of about 250 business, government and civic leaders at the Sheraton National Hotel.

Foster said the combined efforts of all three groups—business, government and community—have led to ongoing improvements in Arlington's overall livability.

"We've made great strides," he said, "but there's much to do."

On that to-do list is finding ways to retain and expand a range of housing options despite limited land, soaring prices and near-constant redevelopment.

"How do we really address housing issues [for those earning] 5 percent of area median income to those earning 500 percent?" asked Foster, principal of MTF Architecture.

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.), who served as keynote speaker, said the local community should serve as a model for informed decision-making and forward-thinking policies.

"If we could all do as well as Arlington, the commonwealth and the nation would be a lot better off," Warner said.

Warner pressed his case for bipartisan solutions to dealing with a federal debt that recently passed \$15 trillion, painting a dire picture if no action is taken.

"We need to take on this challenge," he said. "We've got to put a plan in place. This is an equal Democrat and Republican problem."

The meeting marked the annual changing of the guard among Chamber leadership. Douglas Brammer of Verizon will serve as chairman for 2012.

"His dedication to the Chamber and the business community is truly impressive," Foster said of Brammer.

At the annual meeting, three awards were presented: Verizon received the Chairman's Award for its corporate support of the Chamber of Commerce; **Sonia Johnston** of John Marshall Bank received the President's Award for her individual contributions; and the Green Business Committee, headed by Kevin Shooshan, received the Committee of the Year Award.

Foster noted that the past year was a good one for the organization, which completed its largest capital campaign ever, revamped its Web site and had a voice in a number of economic-development and government issues.

"It's a very vibrant and diverse Chamber," he said.

*Mike Foster is a bank director for John Marshall Bank

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