

We Hear You



Maurice A. Jones, President and Publisher

From time to time, someone will plead with me, "Can't you just publish some good news for a change? We need some good news, so employers will start hiring again, people will resume buying houses, banks will increase their loans to car buyers, and the recession will end!" I welcome this advice, including the hyperbole, and thank all of you who have provided it to me over the last 18 months.

Your sentiments remind me of two important lessons I must never deny or forget. One, the products and services of The Virginian-Pilot Media Companies are pervasive and significant in this community. And two, because of this influence, every day we have a duty to work our hardest to publish the achievements occurring throughout the region as well as the challenges.

Each week more than 580,000 adults (72%) in South Hampton Roads seek information from our products and businesses: The Virginian-Pilot, PilotOnline.com/HamptonRoads.com; The Apartment Book; The Flagship; Inside Business; Tidewater Parent; Pilot Direct; skirt!, etc. On Sundays alone, more than 450,000 adults read The Virginian-Pilot. More than 72,000 individuals a day – over 1.2 million unique visitors a month – visit our Web sites. We print and distribute more than 400,000 copies a month of our targeted print publications.

I am humbled by the demand for our products and thankful to all of you for your trust in us. I am also aware that such widespread usage of VPMC products gives us a unique opportunity to inform and help shape opinions, behaviors and results in our community. We take this opportunity seriously. Every day our goal is to produce products that accurately and fairly reflect the experiences of the people of this community. We strive to paint a picture of Hampton Roads (and the rest of the world) that you recognize.

In these challenging times, in the midst of the longest-lasting recession since the Great Depression, your advice "to publish good news" counsels us to avoid the temptation to become so absorbed in the tough stories of the day that we miss the bright spots. Along with covering the trials and tribulations that accompany a recession, it is our job to exhaust ourselves covering the many stories demonstrating the durability, courage, determination, tenacity and success of the people and institutions of our community. In essence, you say to me what my grandparents, who lived through the Great Depression, taught me: even in the worst of times, people, institutions and communities make progress. Tell us those stories.

I hear you. We get it.

Thus, in June in The Pilot, Kerry Dougherty told you about Lauren Cootes, a senior at Cox High School in Virginia Beach. While battling cancer, Lauren doggedly pursued her high school studies and became an honor student. Even though she had successfully completed the coursework necessary to graduate on time, The Virginia Department of Education initially ruled that she could not receive her diploma at graduation with her classmates because she had failed to satisfy regulatory requirements. Kerry's column, titled "GIVE THE GIRL HER DIPLOMA, YOU INCONSIDERATE VA BUREAUCRATS," argued against that ruling. Soon after, the Virginia Beach school superintendent decided that Lauren could graduate with her classmates. A few days later, we reported on her graduation. This ending was a testament to the durability of the spirit of this brave teenager. Her story offers inspiration to all of us.

Back in February, Pilot reporter Rainer Sabin told the story of Galaisha Goodhope, a standout player on the Norfolk Christian girls basketball team. Though only a freshman, Galaisha was already in her third year on the varsity basketball team. At the time of the story, Galaisha was coming off of a 36-point performance in a game in which Norfolk Christian defeated Kellam. At 5:30 the next morning, Galaisha was where she usually was at that time: working out with her father inside the Greenbrier North YMCA gym. Rainer was right there with them. His story let us in on the unrelenting determination of a daughter to be the best at her passion, the commitment of a father to help his daughter to do her best, and the sacrifices they were making together to pursue a shared goal. It was a story about the tenacity of two people and the power of their relationship.

Last month, Inside Business recognized 21 companies as "The Best Places to Work in Hampton Roads." These companies were recognized for exemplary benefits, health and wellness incentives and compensation policies. They are models for the excellence that's possible even in difficult times.

In June, skirt! published its Shero issue profiling "female heroes" nominated by friends, family members and fellow workers. Heroes included: Luree, who fights every day to regain normalcy after suffering a stroke in her 30s; and 82-year-old Pearl, who bakes cakes for neighbors, teachers and others she determines deserve recognition or need an uplifting gesture of kindness.

These are just a few examples that I hope will persuade you that we are taking your advice to heart. There are many more illustrations, but time and space will not permit me to recount them all. Can we get better? Yes. Will we get better? Absolutely.

But please rest assured that we endeavor to reflect the totality of our community every day. We are optimistic about its future and will continue to bring you those stories that inspire hope and make us all want to do better.

My humble request to you is to help us find these stories. I invite you to e-mail me at maurice.jones@pilotonline.com or call (757) 446-2056. Together, we can ensure that during these unprecedented times, the success stories in our community get told every day. Thank you for reading us, viewing us and advertising with us. And thank you for your feedback.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maurice A. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Maurice A. Jones
President and Publisher

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