ORANGE COUNTY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

VISIT ORANGE VIRGINIA | THINK ORANGE VA
ORANGE COUNTY VA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

OUR MISSION

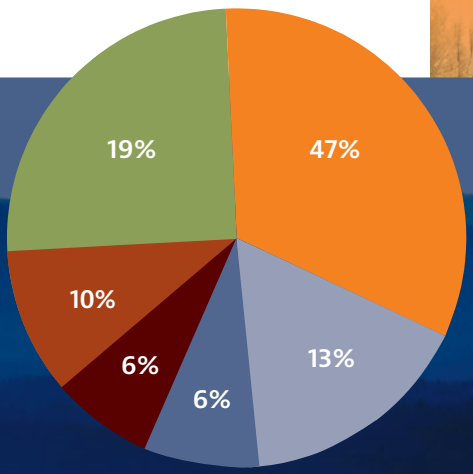
> *To develop a well-balanced economic development program through recruitment and existing business efforts that create increased tax revenue and high-quality job opportunities for Orange residents while preserving the natural and cultural makeup of Orange County.*

VISION

To create a business environment that fosters entrepreneurial growth and attracts quality investment, with high-value jobs in a community with an affordable cost of living and a great quality of life.

Largest Employment Industry Sectors in Orange

Orange County's supportive ecosystem and competitive advantages position the community as the place to launch, locate, and prosper.



- *Wholesale and Retail Trade*
- *Construction*
- *Manufacturing*
- *Accommodation and Food Service*
- *Health Care and Social Assistance*
- *Other*

Economic Development Authority Members and Economic Development and Tourism Staff

Edwin Yowell, *District #1*

Adam Bryington, *District #2*

Bill Hager, Chair, *District #3*

JP Tucker, *District #4*

John Licata, *District #5*

Sonja "Sunnie" Capelle, *Town of Gordonsville*

Arthur Bryant, *Town of Orange*

Crystal Hale, *BOS Representative*

Keith Marshall, *BOS Representative*

Julie Perry, Secretary, *Director of the Office of Economic Development and Tourism*

Regan McKay, *Program Manager, Office of Economic Development and Tourism*

Theodore "Ted" L. Voorhees, *County Administrator*

Amy Wilson, *County Attorney*

Dawn M. Herndon, Treasurer, *Fiscal Agent*

A NOTE

FROM THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM TEAM

Businesses and tourists can go anywhere in the world. In 2024, they chose Orange County and we're glad they did.

Whether it's because of our location or lifestyle, competitive advantages or characteristic charm, Orange County leads with consistency and solid results follow. The reliable standard of excellence our leaders, community partners, and staff uphold and the sense of welcome we convey builds trust among visitors and empowers businesses hoping to start or grow. Collaboration remained central to our approach as we strengthened regional alliances, engaged stakeholders, and enhanced business recruitment and retention efforts with partners such as the Central Virginia Partnership for Economic Development (CVPED), the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP).

2024 Highlights include:

- **The Aerojet Rocketdyne Expansion:** Announced in 2024, this transformative $41.2 million project by L3Harris received a Virginia Commonwealth Opportunity Fund grant to expand its manufacturing capabilities significantly, create 80 new jobs, and solidify Orange County's position as a growing hub in the aerospace and defense industry.
- **Share More Stories:** Designed for Orange County Heritage Tourism stakeholders, this May 2024 workshop provided an opportunity to review Virginia Tourism's *The Future of Travel* study and conduct an Orange County-specific analysis. The presentation informed community stakeholders about target audiences and shared strategies for deepening engagement. It also provided key data for Orange County's VA250 effort about Elijah Craig, a local Baptist Minister and Father of American Bourbon.
- **Regional Economic Development Studies:** In 2024, Orange County worked alongside the Rappahannock Rapidan Regional Commission, CVPED, GOVirginia Region 9, and Venture Central on two important regional initiatives: the Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and the Regional Entrepreneurship Investment (REI) Strategy. These studies helped us align our regional focus, prioritize future positioning, and secure new funding for all participating localities.
- **Placement and Unveiling of the Edna Lewis Historical Marker:** Celebrating Orange County's culinary icon was an incredible highlight of 2024. The culmination of a multi-year, award-winning effort, this marker celebrates Lewis' contributions to American cuisine and shares her story with a broader audience. Funded by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the marker is located at Freetown Farm.

- **Site Readiness:** The Economic Development Authority broke new ground, beginning site readiness work on Lots 14 and 15 in the Thomas E. Lee Industrial Park. This effort will position Orange County well for future growth and business attraction opportunities.

Make no mistake: consistency should not be confused with complacency. We're deploying new initiatives while maintaining the momentum of ongoing programs such as **the Locally Made Market, the Virginia Brownfield Assistance Fund (VBAF), Enjoy Orange, Orange Uncovered, Corks and Caps**, and partnerships with organizations like the Central Virginia Small Business Development Center (CVSBDC), Virginia Career Works, and the Community Investment Collaborative (CIC). Our clarity of focus, unwavering leadership, and ongoing collaborations create loyalty with visitors and affirm businesses hoping to put down roots or scale.

The Orange County Visitor's Center had a **35% INCREASE** in visitor attendance from last year.

Julie Perry, *Director of Economic Development and Tourism*

Regan McKay, *Economic Development and Tourism Program Manager*

Shannah Mort, *Tourism Counselor*

ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

Orange County has advanced its efforts in business attraction and retention this year by fostering stronger community collaboration, securing critical grant funding, and preparing sites to accommodate new opportunities. The Economic Development team has implemented creative solutions to achieve goals from the strategic plan to support growth throughout the county while also participating in regional collaborations.

- Attended VEDP's Women's Leadership Forum and Site Selector Event in conjunction with the Solheim Cup in September of 2024. This inaugural event introduced a select group of regional and local Economic Developers to site selectors from around the country.
- Participated in regional grant efforts through GO Virginia Region 9 to support the Wine Industry and Food & Beverage sectors in their work to identify barriers and enhance scale-up opportunities.
- Broke new ground with the site readiness work on Lots 14 and 15 in the Thomas E. Lee Industrial Park, positioning Orange County for future growth and development opportunities.
- Hosted the GO Virginia Region 9 Council Meeting at the Orange County Public Safety Building. Economic Development and Industry Sector Representatives from around Central Virginia were in attendance.
- Awarded Virginia Brownfields Restoration and Economic Redevelopment Assistance Fund (VBAF) grants to Earl's Glass and the VMI Building for remediation efforts. Brownfields are properties affected by hazardous materials, pollution, or contaminants, which can hinder reuse or redevelopment. VBAF grants support local governments in overcoming these challenges, making former commercial sites viable for new business opportunities.

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- Planned and coordinated logistics for the ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the expansion of McMillian Publishing Company's facility, adding 200,000 square feet to the existing 400,000-square-foot MPS building on Route 15 North. With this expansion, MPS now boasts 880,000 square feet of space in Orange County and employs over 300 people in the region.

NEW AND EXPANDING
BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

Orange County offered businesses numerous tools for success in 2024. These tools helped support new local businesses as they joined the Orange County community and existing businesses expand and grow.

Celebrated Controlled Environment Agriculture Month with a visit from Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Matthew Lohr.

- Staff engaged with the Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA) by participating in the inaugural mentorship program and attending their annual continuing education conferences. Director, Julie Perry also completed the first of three sessions at Oklahoma University's Economic Development Institute in 2024.
- Aerojet Rocketdyne, an L3Harris Technologies company, announced the expansion of its Orange County facility. The new site features cutting-edge facilities, including the Orange Altitude Test Facility, a fully-equipped propellant lab, and a state-of-the-art air-breathing test facility. This expansion, a capital investment of $41.2 million, not only enhances their operational capabilities and the expansion of new facilities but also brings 80 new job opportunities to the county.
- Our team was thrilled to support MPS, a division of Macmillan Publishing, in celebrating the grand opening of a 250,000-square-foot expansion in Orange County. The facility now employs 300 people and stores an impressive 55 million books. MPS ships 93 million books worldwide, solidifying its role as a key hub in global publishing logistics.

Additional new and expanding business projects include:

Click to learn more

- VERDANT by Monica Garrett Interiors
- The Country Gathering
- A Seat at the Table Catering & Events
- Starbucks - Locust Grove
- Walmart - Locust Grove (Expansion)
- Rita's Italian Ice & Frozen Custard - Locust Grove
- Virginia Foothills Distillery & Co

Major Employers

850+ EMPLOYEES
Orange County School Board

350+ EMPLOYEES
Aerojet Rocketdyne

300+ EMPLOYEES
MPS (Von Holtzbrink Publishing)

250+ EMPLOYEES
Walmart

200+ EMPLOYEES
Dogwood Village of Orange County
Food Lion LLC

150+ EMPLOYEES
American Woodmark Corporation
Battlefield Farms, Inc.
Green Applications
RIDGID Products

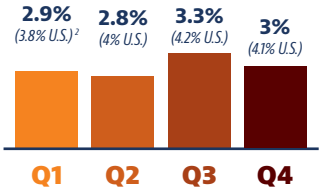
100+ EMPLOYEES
Lake of the Woods Association
Zamma Corporation

75+ EMPLOYEES
American Color
Homestead Building Systems
Montpelier Foundation

9,628 AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT
Total Average Employment for Orange County Employers

347 BUSINESS TOUCH POINTS
Staff Outreach to Businesses

2024 Unemployment[1]



REVENUE

Business Equipment & Fixtures Revenue
$1,114,241.59
↑ Increase of 5.03% from 2023

Meal Tax Revenue
$1,254,420.20
↑ Increase of 18.37% from 2023

Machinery & Tools Tax Revenue
$1,048,196.06
↓ Decrease of 7.48% from 2023

Commercial & Industrial Real Estate Revenue
$2,331,399.75
↑ Increase of 3.92% from 2023

Transient Occupancy Tax Revenue
$112,329.21
↑ Increase of 15.02% from 2023

[1] *Current Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) - LAUS, https://virginiaworks.com/Local-Area-Unemployment-Statistics-LAUS.*
[2] *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Click to learn more

The Economic Development team created opportunities for fostering the growth of Orange County's workforce by organizing networking and educational events to highlight local careers, industries, and employers.

- Staff participated in Orange County High School's Job Cafe, where students had the chance to enhance their job readiness skills by preparing resumes, dressing professionally, and taking part in mock interviews.
- Staff co-hosted the student job fair at Orange County High School in partnership with the Orange County Workforce Center. Local businesses offering opportunities in administration, agriculture, distribution, food service, healthcare, logistics, manufacturing, and retail were connected with hundreds of juniors and seniors eager to explore career pathways.
- Hosted an HR Roundtable to gather local business and industry representatives to learn more about customizable training and continuing education programs at Germanna Community College and Workforce services available through Virginia Career Works.

Small Business Development and Entrepreneurship

The Economic Development team is committed to fostering business growth and entrepreneurship in Orange County through innovative programs, valuable networking opportunities, and strategic initiatives. By offering support, collaboration, and financing opportunities, we provide local businesses with the resources they need to thrive, ensuring the county remains competitive and attractive.

- Sponsored the 2024 Business and Industry Picnic with the Orange County Chamber of Commerce to celebrate National Small Business Week.
- Kicked off 2024 by celebrating the graduation of the inaugural class of the Culpeper-Orange Entrepreneurship Workshop through the Community Investment Collaborative. Modeled after a successful Charlottesville-area initiative, this hands-on course equipped aspiring business owners with the skills, resources, and connections needed to navigate the challenges of small business ownership and set them up for success.

Click to learn more

- This year we had our first business succesfully use the The Orange County Revolving Loan Fund. This is a flexible source of supplemental financing for businesses expanding or locating to Orange County. This fund was created to assist businesses responding to impacts from COVID-19, and was funded using American Rescue Plan Act monies allocated to Orange County. Community Investment Collaborative (CIC) administers the Fund and only Orange County businesses are eligible to receive loans from the fund.
- Co-hosted the final Quad Tank Pitch Competition at the Public Safety Building alongside Greene, Madison, Louisa, and Fluvanna counties. Nomad Nursing, based in Greene County, won the prize for its innovative business offering flexible training and certification options for individuals entering the healthcare industry.
- Grew the annual Locally Made Market business incubator program to provide five county businesses the opportunity to showcase their products to 20,000 visitors at the annual Montpelier Hunt Races.
- Expanded the *Enjoy Orange* fourth quarter marketing efforts to highlight both local businesses and local events. The full initiative engaged a variety of community partners and secured a $10,000 Microbusiness Marketing Grant from the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

Click to learn more

AMERICA'S SBDC VIRGINIA CENTRAL

Central Virginia Small Business Development Center

The Central Virginia Small Business Development Center (CV SBDC) remains a stalwart partner in job and opportunity creation and held

27 Training programs in 2024.

Launched a **NEW Lunch and Learn Series in 2024** covering topics such as Funding Sources for Your Business, Effective 30-60-90 Day Planning, Let's Search for Grants, and QuadTank.

Hosted 3 Business Essentials Training Cohorts, each consisting of **5 to 8** sessions.

62 ↑ residents attended programs

Direct advising and preparation hours for Orange County clients:

66 direct contact hours ↑

41 prep hours ↑

QUALITY OF LIFE

Orange County is cultivating an environment that draws visitors, residents, and businesses. Leveraging the county's unique assets, the Orange County Office of Economic Development and Tourism organized successful promotional campaigns and tourism initiatives in 2024 designed to enhance visibility and engage key stakeholders.

- Unveiled the Edna Lewis Historical Highway Marker at Freetown Farm with the Orange County African American Historical Society, Africulture, and the Department of Historic Resources. The ceremony marked the culmination of two years of efforts to honor Lewis's contributions to culinary arts and share Freetown's story.
- Hosted a workshop bringing together historic sites and regional stakeholders to explore the Share More Stories: The Future of Travel study. The session provided valuable insights and practical tools for engaging future generations of travelers in Orange County. Orange County audiences are 43% Harmony Seekers, 33% Curious Explorers, and 23% Community Champions. Marketing strategies to reach audiences were also developed to ensure we capture the attention of each type of traveler.

- Featured on Good Morning Washington to highlight summer travel ideas and places to visit. Consisting of 5 themed segments, over 20 sites and attractions in Orange County were highlighted in the week-long program.

- Updated and created a variety of print materials for Orange County visitors, including a newly redesigned 32-page Visitor Guide, a rack card showcasing the Gordonsville Fried Chicken Story, a new Weddings in Orange brochure, tear-off maps, and more. These updates and NEW offerings ensure that all materials remain current, engaging, and informative for visitors exploring the area.

Click to View the Visitor Guide

This year marked the 3rd Annual Corks and Caps Craft Beverage Passport Program, with a new addition—Orange County's first distillery, VA Foothills Distillery, joining the lineup. The Corks and Caps contest ran from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Participants who collected stamps from at least seven of the seventeen participating businesses were awarded a free T-shirt.

- 7500 stickers, 4500 rack cards, and 5000 passports were distributed.
- 249 passports were turned in
- 26% of participants were out-of-state visitors
- 14% of participants were Orange County residents
- 60% of participants were from the state of Virginia (outside of Orange County)

Direct Visitor Impact for Orange County[3]

$54.4 MILLION
Direct visitor spending in 2023

3.1%
Spending increase from 2022

0.16%
Spending share of Virginia

$2.3 MILLION
in local taxes

$15.7 MILLION
Spent on food and beverage

$13.2 MILLION
Spent on lodging

$8.7 MILLION
Spent on recreation

[3]*Direct Visitor Impacts for Virginia Localities 2016-2023, Tourism Economics*

visitorangevirginia.com

Website Traffic

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

103,254
Unique Users
↑ 21.48% Increase

122,095
Sessions
↑ 24% Increase

202,604
Page Views
↑ 26% Increase

OVERALL WEBSITE TRAFFIC FROM TARGET MARKETS INCREASED YEAR OVER YEAR (YOY)

126.08% Ashburn, VA
126.72% New York, NY
94.79% Baltimore, MD
268.91% Philadelphia, PA
19.81% Fredericksburg, VA
53.2% Virginia Beach, VA
15.92% Locust Grove, VA
25.23% Washington, DC

Social Media Metrics

Facebook:

582,600 Reach
↑31.4% Increase

12,300 Visits
↓29.2% Decrease

30,800 Link Clicks
↑86.4% Increase

Instagram:

31,500 Reach
↑ 21.4% Increase

1,000 Visits
↓ 21.4% Decrease

2,900 Link Clicks
↑ 262.3% Increase

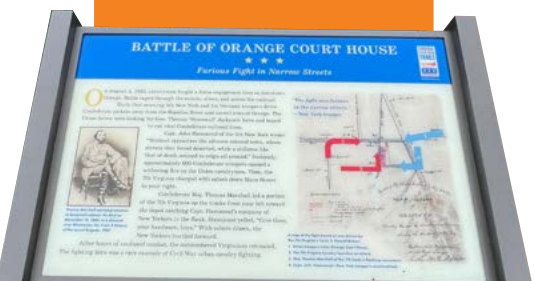
COLLABORATED WITH VISIT CULPEPER

on a social media campaign to support the unveiling of the new Historic Germanna boat launch. This newly opened launch site offers access to the tranquil waters of the Rapidan, while also representing a key milestone in the ongoing efforts to preserve and celebrate the historic Germanna landscape.

Staff represented Orange County at a variety of conferences this year, learning new and innovative ways to attract visitors to our area including the Mid-Atlantic Tourism Public Relations Association and the annual VA-1 Governor's Conference on Tourism.

Started a VA 250 project to showcase Elijah Craig's Orange County origins. This project is in the early stages, with the creation of a logo and filming for an Orange Uncovered series complete.

NEW Civil War Trails sign installed at the Orange County Train Depot.



CONTACT US

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