

VBCOA holds annual conference; members also honored with ICC awards

IN SEPTEMBER, THE VIRGINIA Building and Code Officials Association (VBCOA) held its first in-person event in two years at the new Virginia Beach Oceanfront Marriott. The conference drew over 250 attendees as well as a sold-out exhibitor expo. Matt Westheimer was sworn in as the new VBCOA president by Cindy Davis, International Code Council (ICC) president during the Annual Banquet on September 13, 2021. Westheimer serves as the chief building official in the City of Williamsburg and has over twenty years' experience in building code enforcement.

Westheimer delivered a passionate speech to the membership during the Annual Banquet, stating that last year, when he was preparing for what everyone hoped would be an in-person annual conference, he had prepared a speech on teamwork. A lifelong baseball player, he felt this was a great theme to stress the importance of VBCOA's work with other agencies that play a critical role in code development and enforcement. Earlier this year, however, he began working on a speech with a theme of "togetherness" since a return to a pre-pandemic lifestyle seemed eminent. Then, July happened, and it became apparent that the pandemic was not going to disappear overnight. So, Matt threw away that speech he'd started and wrote something simply titled "COVID." [see sidebar below for full speech]

Welcome to 1929!

The first meeting of the VBCOA was held in 1929. Coincidentally, the Virginia Beach Marriott is part of the Cavalier Resort group which owns the Historic Cavalier hotel which opened in 1929. Photos from that year are displayed prominently throughout the space.



New officers

Also at the Annual Conference, Michael Eutsey (Hanover County) was elected as the association's first vice president; John Broughton (Franklin County) second vice president; and Michelle Coward (City of Richmond) to the position of sergeant at arms – marking the first time in the VBCOA ninety-two-year history that an African American female has served as a VBCOA officer. Coward has served as the VBCOA membership chair and worked tirelessly during the pandemic to ensure members continued to be engaged.

Speech delivered by President Matt Westheimer

Circumstances: *Over the last year and a half, life has been full of unusual circumstances. I dare say that no one in this room was prepared for the pandemic we all faced and continue to face. We found new ways to do business whether it be conducting inspections, attending meetings, issuing permits, grocery shopping, going to church, life was turned upside-down for many of us. But the unusual circumstances we faced taught us that no matter what challenges are thrown at us we can preserve, adapt and still be successful.*

Obstacles: *I have always viewed obstacles as something that I needed to accomplish in order to avoid failure. But as I have grown older, I have realized that life doesn't always go as planned. I have always been so focused and determined on succeeding; forgetting the fact that success also comes with failure. Obstacles shouldn't be something that we avoid in order to escape from the cruelty of failure, hindering us from the numerous opportunities that we could've had if we weren't too reluctant. They aren't meant to obstruct us in achieving our goals but are meant to make us keener and tenacious to face the harsh reality of life. In life we get the chance to choose whether or not we seize our limits and discover our potentials. Obstacles should only enhance our strengths and never deepen our weaknesses.*

Victorious: *fly past no matter what we do, and if we always look to the future, the present slips past – and the present is life itself. You must live as if today were your first day and your last. A life of victorious days is far better than a life of well-intended tomorrows and is a victorious life indeed.*

Importance: *Each of you are important. Important to this organization, to your families, to your localities, to your friends and many other groups.*

Weather you realize it or not you play a critical role in the lives of a very large group of people. You are an important addition to humanity, offering what only you can, YOU. Who you are, your character and personal qualities are the value you contain? And who you are is the best and most incredible thing you offer to all those around you.

Determined: *Webster's dictionary says it best. Determined is defined as: not willing to let anything prevent you from doing what you have decided to do. A determined person can accomplish great things; a determined team of people can accomplish things once seemed out of reach. Keeping the "I can" attitude will empower you to press on when things get tough. In life, there is no difficulty, which we cannot overcome when we are really determined. Determination is key because it enables us to persist in the face of difficulties. ... It makes us march fearlessly ahead with faith until we achieve our goal.*

In closing. When many of us here the word COVID we cringe. After all it has taken so much from us but, it has also taught us a few things. It has taught us to appreciate what we have and to cherish the things we oftentimes take for grant. It has taught us to be resilient no matter what our circumstance. It has taught us those obstacles are placed in our way to make us stronger and to learn from challenges that are placed in our way. It has taught us to be victorious not only in future endeavors but also in our day to day lives. It has taught us that each one of us is important to someone else and that each of us offers something special. And it has taught us to be determined. Determined not to let anything alter your path for success or stand in your way of accomplishing something you have decided to do.



(L-R) James Moss, Matt Westheimer, John Broughton, Michelle Coward, and Mike Eutsey.

In fact, VBCOA increased its membership by over 10 percent during 2021 proving that the strength of VBCOA continues to be in the membership. As Coward put it, as an organization “we are only able to accomplish the many things that we do by the members volunteering their time, talent, and skills.”

Immediate Past President Moss, elected in 2019, served the VBCOA for two years during the pandemic and helped the association pivot to online platforms to conduct its business. Membership Chair Michelle Coward put it best during the Annual Membership meeting, “through an unprecedented time – full of uncertainties, unknowns, fears and losses – President Moss’s commitment to VBCOA and consistent leadership ensured that VBCOA remained strong in the midst of adversity, connected in the midst of social distancing, and relevant through the shut-downs.”

Moss ensured that members had networking opportunities through his monthly Final Friday Chat Series, virtual training opportunities, and the 2021 Virtual Mid-Year Conference, all of which were very well attended. The quarterly newsletter kept members informed about their organization’s accomplishments, VBCOA sister organizations, happenings throughout the Commonwealth, and upcoming events. As Coward observed during her remarks, President Moss embodied “leadership by example” and she thanked him for leading the association during a time when there was no road map yet remaining faithful to VBCOA’s purpose, strategic vision, and values.

Honorary members

Three members were voted in as Honorary Members.

Randy Pearce, who retired from the City of Emporia, was honored as a valuable member not only to VBCOA but to VPMIA and VFPA as well. Pearce made sure that VBCOA was kept abreast of what was happening with its sister organizations and was always a willing participant. He was a huge supporter of both Building Safety

Month and the High School Technical Training Program as well as a dedicated Code Official and mentor.

Michael Redifer served the VBCOA and the Commonwealth of Virginia in various roles over his career and retired from the City of Newport News in February 2021. Redifer served on the State Building Code Technical Review Board, Virginia Board for Contractors, State Corporation Commission Underground Utility Damage Prevention Advisory Committee, several ICC Committees and was a member of the VBCOA since 1987 and VBCOA Board member, serving in many roles including region chair.

Steve Shapiro, who retired as the building official for the City of Hampton in July, served the code development community for decades and has been a VBCOA member since 1983; served as president in 1992; served on the ICC Board of Directors from 2003-2009; and was ICC president 2007-2008 (the first ICC president from Virginia).

Only fifty-five other VBCOA members have achieved Honorary Membership in the ninety-two-year history of the organization. Honorary Membership is given to individuals of distinction who have rendered outstanding service in the furtherance of the purposes and objectives of the association. Active members may recommend an individual for honorary membership by applying to the president, and upon recommendation from the Board of Directors. The nominees are then presented to the membership for a vote.

Awards

Cindy Davis, deputy director, Division of Building and Fire Regulations, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development received the Jack A. Proctor Meritorious Service Award in special recognition and appreciation for her extraordinary efforts, including facilitating the first state level version of code development access, cdpVa, providing a digital database that includes all the legacy

codes and overseeing the shift to virtual training sessions during the pandemic.

Mike Hamilton was awarded the Jack A Proctor Meritorious Service Award for Technical Assistants, for developing the commercial energy code plan review and inspection process in Arlington County.

Michael Redifer, City of Newport News building official, was awarded the Jack A Proctor Meritorious Service Award for Building Official, in special recognition and appreciation for over 35 years ensuring public safety as an inspector, building official, and serving on the Department of Professional Occupational Regulation Board of Contractors.

International Code Council

After the VBCOA Conference, many members travelled to Pittsburgh for the ICC Annual Conference, also the first to be held in person in two years. **Cindy Davis** was elected ICC President and **Kris Bridges**, City of Martinsville building official, was also re-elected as the Section E Director.

At the ICC conference, VBCOA immediate past president **James Moss** was awarded the 2021 Gerald H. Hones Code Of-

ficial of the Year for leadership, professionalism, and dedication. The Gerald H. Jones Code Official of the Year Award is awarded to an individual whose contributions advance the code enforcement profession and the Code Council's mission. The award is presented in honor of the founders of the three model code organizations: Albert H. Baum, M.L. Clement and Phil Roberts. Moss received the award for his lifelong contribution to the building safety and code industry.

William Dupler was presented the 2021 Bobby J. Fowler Award, which honors the memory of the first chairman of the Code Council Board of Directors who led the charge to consolidate three regional model code organizations into one association. This award is presented to a leader who demonstrates integrity, professionalism, and compassion. Dupler has served the code industry for more than 40 years, most recently as Chesterfield's deputy county administrator of community development.

For more information about the VBCOA, please visit the Association's website www.vbcoa.org.

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Photos by Angela Hilderbrand

