

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Hampton a finalist for All-America City award

April 9, 2014 - The City of Hampton is one of 25 finalists for the National Civic League's All-America City Award, which is given annually to communities that demonstrate innovation, inclusiveness and civic engagement.

In a news release announcing the finalist, Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock, chairman of the League board, said: "All-America cities are at the forefront of a nationwide movement. From preparing our kids to compete and succeed in the 21st century to promoting livable neighborhood revitalization, new ideas often start in one community."

Hampton Mayor George Wallace said Wednesday afternoon, "we have always known how wonderful Hampton is, but it is very gratifying when others acknowledge it, especially as prestigious an organization as the National Civic League."

The awards this year focus on successful efforts to address underlying conditions that affect the health of a community. Hampton submitted three projects in its award application:

- The annual "I Value" public input and involvement campaign for the city budgets
- The Mayors Book Club
- Hampton's high school dropout reduction programs

I Value: During three years of real estate declines, Hampton held fast on tax rates, giving homeowners reduced tax bills during tough economic times. To close the budget gap, City Manager Mary Bunting solicited input from residents, businesses and visitors about what services were most valued. She gathered input before recommending a budget, resulting in cuts more palatable to the public than others might have been. For the current year, School Superintendent Linda Shifflette joined in the campaign, and, with another decline in real estate, agreed to restore some of the lost real estate revenue with a tax-rate increase. I Value has also been used for capital projects planning, and overall input on city priorities.

Book Club: The Mayors Book Club started because of a simple but alarming fact: Virginia, like many states, determines how many jails it will need to build in 10 years based on how many of its students fail to read by third grade. Disadvantaged students may begin school without ever having seen a book, starting way behind their peers. The community rallied behind the effort to read to pre-schoolers and give them copies of books they can take home, read, and re-read. To date, volunteers have read to some 5,000 children a year for 5 years and handed out more than 100,000 books, many

donated by business and non-profit partners. The program is so popular that it has expanded to cover Newport News as well.

Dropout reduction: Seven years ago, more than 10 percent of students in Hampton City Schools were dropping out before graduation. That has economic consequences for the individuals, as well as the community. Dropouts earn less (and pay fewer taxes); need more services; and commit more crimes. Hampton redesigned its high school curriculums to add career pathways and academies; implement more orientation and transition support for 9th-graders; and develop intervention and support for students who needed better attendance and tutoring. In addition, the school system created more options for students who just weren't able to succeed in a traditional environment. The Performance Learning Center offers e-learning, individualized plans, and job training. This has decreased the dropout rate to 3.8 percent.

Other finalists include Portsmouth, Va., Columbus, Ind., Whittier, Calif., and Marshall, Texas. Award winners will be announced in June after finalists finish a series of presentations about their communities and projects to a jury of civic experts in Denver.

Created in 1949, the All America City award is the oldest community recognition program in the nation. Sponsors for the award include Southwest Airline, U.S. Bank, and FirstBank. Hampton previously won All America City awards 2002 and 1972.

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