

Champions of the Chesapeake

Remarks by Joel Dunn, President & CEO, Chesapeake Conservancy

George Washington's Mount Vernon

10.15.17

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Champions of the Chesapeake and thank you for joining us at this beautiful and storied place.

I'm Joel Dunn, President and CEO of the Chesapeake Conservancy. If you weren't familiar with our work before, Microsoft has now given you a sense of how the Chesapeake Conservancy is using technology to change how land management and conservation are done.

When the world's largest software company calls to feature your small nonprofit on the global stage, you know you're starting something revolutionary.

Just as the use of technology changed the banking, health care, and communications sectors, making them faster and more efficient, we believe that it must do the same for the environment.

We are gathered together tonight to recognize extraordinary leaders from across the Chesapeake for their cutting edge and tangible accomplishments that protect and restore our natural systems and cultural resources.

Our awardees and their work highlight how the Chesapeake is a bipartisan, multi-generational, multi-cultural priority – for its beauty, for our economy, for our health and for our history. It also shows us that everybody has a role to play in protecting the Bay.

I'd like to thank the Chesapeake Conservancy's Board of Directors, and my mentor Patrick Noonan, for entrusting me with the extraordinary opportunity to lead this organization, and I'd like to thank our staff for their hard work to deliver conservation results for our region.

I'd like to thank some of our organizational sponsors who are here tonight and who have made this event and our programs possible:

- Elinor K. Farquhar
- The Bunting Family Foundation (Marc Bunting)
- The Helena Foundation (Jim & Sylvia Earl)
- Intel (Steve Harper)
- Hogan & Lovells (Doug Wheeler, Philip Katz, Mark McConnell)
- Randy Larrimore

- Beveridge & Diamond, (Ben Wilson, Paul Hagen)
- Benchworks (Thad and Renee Bench)
- Cherry Baekart (Scott Denlinger)
- Herrington on the Bay (Anna Chaney)
- Herrington Harbour North (Hamilton Chaney)
- And, Andrew and Ann Rose

I also want to recognize few attendees in particular:

- Mike Reynolds, Acting Director of the National Park Service, and his wife Amy
- The Honorable John Warner, a hero and a friend, along with his daughter Virginia Warner who recently helped us protect a key piece of property on the Rappahannock River.
- Molly Ward, Virginia's Secretary of Natural Resources
- Jeannie Riccio, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan's Deputy Chief of Staff, handling the environment
- Chuck Hunt, Superintendent of the National Park Service's Chesapeake Bay Office and the John Smith Chesapeake Trail, along with his wife Dana
- Last, but not least, my mother, sister and uncle – demonstrating our family's strong support for conservation.

I want to thank all of our awardees for their work and for being with us tonight. I will describe their accomplishments, which complement and reinforce each other, and invite each of them up to speak shortly.

And finally, I'd like to thank the Mount Vernon Ladies Association for allowing us to celebrate the Champions of the Chesapeake at the home of our nation's greatest citizen.

In 1853, Louisa Cunningham was traveling on the Potomac River. She saw Mount Vernon in the bright moonlight and realized it was a very special place, a place that mattered to America.

Mrs. Cunningham understood that George Washington, and his view of the world, had resulted in the sustained prosperity of this great country, and therefore Mt. Vernon needed to be preserved.

Louisa inspired her daughter, Ann, to gather her friends -- all women -- and asked them to engage as many people as possible to save this place. And they did and they have continued to do so.

Similarly, the Chesapeake and its great rivers are part of our nation's culture. Its land, water and history, nurture us, inspire us, and at times console us, as indeed it has for Chesapeake people for thousands of years.

As stated by many Presidents, beginning with Ronald Reagan, the Chesapeake is a national treasure. Indeed, it is as grand as the Grand Canyon or as beautiful as Yellowstone. Captain John Smith certainly recognized this in 1607, when he wrote that "Heaven and earth had never framed a more perfect place for man's habitation."

I have spent my entire adulthood chasing after a vision to protect our planet, especially the Chesapeake Bay, because I believe it's special and that we have a responsibility to maintain ecosystem function and preserve biodiversity for our children's future. This would ensure that they have the same opportunities we've had.

With a 2-year-old-daughter, I have only gotten more passionate about this important and worthy cause. My wife, Heidi, and I will be having our second child in a few months, which will no doubt double my inspiration.

The truth is that the problems which the Chesapeake now faces are staggering. We have serious challenges with pollution, habitat loss, invasive species, climate change and limited public access. But fortunately, we are seeing several hopeful signs of the Bay's restoration. Water clarity is the best in decades. Rockfish, oysters and blue crab populations are rebounding and we have 132 new access sites in the watershed.

This is important because a healthy and accessible Bay is essential to a healthy economy and society. For example, outdoor recreation in Maryland contributes \$14.0 billion in consumer spending and more than 100,000 jobs.

Only by protecting the Chesapeake and our environment do we enable our citizens to realize their full potential in business and in family life as parents or mentors.

Working with many of you in this room, we're proud to have played a leadership role in creating a national trail - the Chesapeake Trail, a national park, national monument and state parks. Now we're working on helping to designate the first national marine sanctuary in the Chesapeake just down the river. These both protect resources and generate economic opportunity and awareness.

With people having an ever-increasing impact on our land, water, air and climate, I take heart in these accomplishments and the commitment of our awardees. As 21st century conservation entrepreneurs, I am especially excited that, we are now entering a new era of conservation.

There is no question that emerging technology can unlock epic conservation collaboration, which will result in clean water and saving the land that matters. And that with the right data, we can save everyone time and money, enhance growing ecosystem markets and use mathematics and evidence to advance our goals.

Not even George Washington could have ever imagined that one day we'd have the massive computing power of the cloud in the palm of our hands. Think about it. Your smartphone is millions of times more powerful than all of NASA's combined computing in 1969.

That same decade, President Kennedy created the term "moonshot" when he literally inspired our nation to send a man to the moon and back.

The conservation community – our community – needs a moonshot. This year, one of my heroes, a Pulitzer prize winning author and noted biologist EO Wilson, garnered significant attention when he called for the goal to devote half the earth to nature.

To do this here, we will need to protect or restore roughly 50% of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and in precisely the right place.

With less than half of that protected now, reaching that goal will require us to step on the gas, not the brakes. We need epic levels of purpose, direction and courage from people like you.

Just like Mrs. Cunningham realized that night on the Potomac, this is a national priority. This moonshot needs exceptional leadership from people like Governors Hogan and McAuliffe, our corporate leaders like Microsoft, the extraordinary Ladies of Mt. Vernon and all of us.

If everyone in this room unites for conservation, we can accomplish anything we put our minds to.

Thank you for joining us.

Now, we'll watch a short video about our first honoree – the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association.