



For Immediate Release

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Richmond Region Tourism President Jack Berry Announces Retirement

EVP Katherine O'Donnell to succeed Jack Berry beginning July 1

Richmond, Va. (Jan. 18, 2024) – Jack Berry, the president and CEO of Richmond Region Tourism whose visionary leadership for the past 31 years has helped the Richmond Region more fully leverage its historic, cultural and natural assets to create record-setting visitation and tourism spending, has announced his retirement effective June 30, 2024.

Richmond Region Tourism's board of directors has named Katherine O'Donnell, executive vice president and 22-year veteran of the organization, as Berry's successor, beginning July 1, 2024.

"We couldn't be more grateful for the unparalleled role Jack has played in building the thriving regional tourism industry that we all benefit from today," said Lisa Sims, board chair for Richmond Region Tourism. "His legacy of accomplishments is unprecedented, not least of which is the incredibly strong staff he leaves to carry on the mission. Katherine O'Donnell is an experienced, knowledgeable, respected leader who is perfectly positioned to lead our region's tourism efforts and continue the organization's impressive trajectory. As we wish Jack all the best in his retirement, we also celebrate Katherine's new role."

Berry, who began his career at Richmond Region Tourism in 1991 (formerly the Richmond Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau), has overseen exponential growth in tourism – in both numbers and prestige – over the past three decades. The region attracts close to 18 million visitors annually, contributing more than \$3.5 billion to the local economy and creating over 27,000 jobs. Last year, the region's hotels collected more than \$35 million in occupancy tax, a record amount.

A sampling of Berry's accomplishments include:

- Passage in 2023 of the Tourism Improvement District, a regional self-assessment among hotels that generates an additional \$8 million annually toward tourism promotion.
- \$165 million renovation and expansion of the Greater Richmond Convention Center in 2002, which significantly broadened its meeting and conference capacity.

- Raising the region's visibility and stature, leading to a steady stream of accolades in a variety of national publications and outlets, including *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Frommer's*, *National Geographic*, BuzzFeed, *Travel + Leisure* magazine and many others.
- The creation of Richmond Region 2030, a 10-year tourism master plan to responsibly grow the region's tourism industry while supporting quality of life for residents.
- Launching programs dedicated to celebrating and encouraging diversity and inclusion in the region, including BLK RVA and OutRVA.
- Leveraging the region's sports tourism assets to recruit sports tournaments, a sector that has become one of the community's most profitable tourism strategies.
- The establishment of the I Am Tourism ambassador program, the RVA Sports Awards, the RVA Champions programs and the region's Inspiration advertising campaign.
- Dozens of national tourism awards presented during Travel and Tourism Week by the U.S. Travel Association.

"The Richmond Region has enjoyed tremendous success over the past few decades on the tourism front, largely due to the unwavering support from local leaders and our incredible community," Berry said. "I have been blessed to lead an organization full of talented and dedicated professionals – which includes the extraordinary Katherine O'Donnell – and together we share the legacy of our achievements."

Lincoln Saunders, chief administrative officer for the City of Richmond said: "Jack has long recognized that investing in tourism pays exponential dividends, and he has worked hard for more than 30 years to help the region fuel that economic engine. The economic success from tourism we're seeing today is a direct result of Jack's vision and leadership."

Dr. Joe Casey, Chesterfield County administrator added: "Jack is a visionary who not only understood tourism's potent impact on the region but was able to create a coalition of support to make great things happen. His foresight in recognizing the potential in sports tourism has helped put the region ahead of the competition and has become one of the biggest reasons why our tourism numbers are so robust. I consider Jack the epitome of a tourism leader and an even better title – a dear friend."

John Vithoulkas, Henrico County manager said: "Jack has helped turbocharge tourism in Central Virginia through his unparalleled capacity to engender cooperation among the region's jurisdictions. More than anyone, Jack has worked to put the region in the national tourism spotlight and harness our many assets in ways that provide phenomenal economic returns. The

shoes he leaves behind are big ones and I'm hopeful that Katherine will be leading in full stride from day one."

John Budesky, Hanover County administrator added: "Jack has built a regional organization that has provided countless contributions over the years, from the construction and later expansion of the convention center to the recently passed Tourism Improvement District and the programming that leverages our history and diversity – it's clear that his legacy will endure in so many ways. Jack has been a friend to the region and his thoughtful leadership has left us with a broad foundation on which to build. We look forward to working with Katherine and the talented Richmond Region Tourism staff to continue this important work."

O'Donnell began her career at Richmond Region Tourism (Richmond Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau) in 2002 in the marketing department, eventually becoming director of marketing. She later assumed the position of vice president of community relations before assuming her current post of executive vice president in 2018 where she has been largely responsible for the organization's day-to-day operations.

A Certified Destination Management Executive, O'Donnell is a graduate of the University of Richmond where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and English. A native of Winston-Salem, N.C., she and her husband live in Henrico County with their two children.

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About Richmond Region Tourism

Richmond Region Tourism includes the counties of Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico and New Kent as well as the city of Richmond, the city of Colonial Heights and town of Ashland. The organization's primary funding comes from a portion of the transient lodging tax that hotel guests pay. RRT also is partially funded by the Greater Richmond Convention Center Authority (GRCCA), ChamberRVA, and from local partners and sponsors.

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