



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2010 Annual Awards Program

Professional Awards Nomination Form

Deadline for Nominations: March 12, 2010

Complete this form (sections 1, 2, and 3 as applicable) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominee

Professional Award Category (*select only one*):

- ☒ Award for Career Excellence in Honor of Mark E. Keane
- ☐ Award for Career Development in Memory of L. P. Cookingham
- ☐ Assistant Excellence in Leadership Award in Memory of Buford M. Watson, Jr.
- ☐ Academic Award in Memory of Stephen B. Sweeney

Name of person being nominated: James K. Spore

Title of Nominee: City Manager

Jurisdiction/organization where nominee is employed: City of Virginia Beach, VA

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Susan D. Walston and James Oliver

Title: Deputy City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Virginia Beach, VA

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City: Virginia Beach State/Province: VA

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E-mail: swalston@vbgov.com

SECTION 3 Endorsement of Elected Official *(for Award for Career Excellence in Honor of Mark E. Keane nominations only)* **or CAO** *(for Assistant Excellence in Leadership Nominations only)*

Signature of
endorsing elected
official or CAO:



Name of endorsing
elected official or
CAO:

William D. Sessoms, Jr.

Title:

Mayor

Jurisdiction:

City of Virginia Beach,
VA

Street address:

2401 Courthouse Drive

City:

Virginia Beach

State/Province:

VA

Zip/Postal Code:

23456

Country:

USA

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James K. Spore – City Manager – Virginia Beach, VA

When James K. Spore arrived in Virginia Beach as city manager 18 years ago, the city had the state's largest population, but no identity or vision. It had no downtown and no independent water system. It had a famous beach, but that was so severely eroded it regularly yielded cottages to northeasters.

Jim arrived in November 1991 with 23 years of successful public service to Washington, D.C.; Elgin, Ill.; Lakewood, Colo.; Burnsville, Minn.; and Garland, Texas.

Today, Virginia Beach isn't the sprawling bedroom community it once was. Jim helped it change.

Virginia Beach is an unusual city. Water is everywhere. The city is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Chesapeake Bay and Back Bay. Several large rivers cross it. The city's 435,000 residents occupy about 300 square miles, nearly one-third of it covered by water. Jim has successfully bridged the waters and the city's large, diverse population to create a unified Virginia Beach.

He started with the City Council – an 11-person governing body known for its disharmony. In Jim's first year, the council adopted a coherent vision and set in motion its first strategic plan. Since then, at Jim's direction, the council has held an annual goal-setting retreat with a professional facilitator. This has greatly helped the city's long-term strategic planning.

Also under Jim's leadership, Virginia Beach developed a downtown. It is called Town Center and it features the tallest building in the state, a world-class performing arts center, office towers, apartments, restaurants, shops and – most astonishing in this suburban city – pedestrians.

It began in 2002 with an innovative financing plan that includes a tax increment financing district. Jim Spore led the way.

Under Jim's leadership, Virginia Beach also developed its own water source. It's called the Lake Gaston pipeline and it stretches 90 miles from the city to a rural lake. It took a 15-year legal battle against the state of North Carolina and several counties to create the pipeline. The spigot opened in 1997. Jim Spore led the fight and saw the pipeline to completion.

And under Jim's leadership, Virginia Beach finally has a beach worthy of its name. It wasn't easy. It required approvals from the Army Corps of Engineers and major federal funding. In places, it also required approvals from neighboring homeowners – and their agreement to tax themselves to pay for a wider beach. Jim Spore made it happen. Today, there is a major new convention center at the beach – a \$200 million jewel – to replace the small, quirky Pavilion.

All this Jim Spore accomplished, and much more, in 18 years. He did it not by screaming and ordering, but by quiet, steady, low-key leadership.

"He is the Gary Cooper of city management," said James Keene, city manager of Palo Alto, Calif. "Quiet, strong, fair, modest, helping others and always getting the job done... Virginia Beach, as a result, is routinely recognized as one of the most livable communities in the U.S. and one of the best managed."

Temperament is crucial. No city manager leads alone. It is a testament to Jim's even-tempered demeanor that he is the longest-serving city manager ever in Virginia Beach – indeed, the longest-serving city manager in the region. He is skillful in the art of democracy and engages the City Council and the public in important issues. His style is always collaborative.

His conservative temperament is reflected in the city's finances. Virginia Beach has never been extravagant. It has built up reserves to weather the recession. That's why Virginia

Beach enjoys a coveted AAA bond rating, the lowest property tax rate among major cities in the region, and the lowest total tax burden for a typical family.

“Jim is the consummate professional who is able to apply calm, deliberative, incisive leadership to complicated situations – a manager’s manager,” said George Wallace, former city manager of Hampton, VA., and now a Hampton city councilman.

Jim is also an innovator. He has served on the board of the Alliance for Innovation. He pushes staff to find creative solutions to vexing problems. For example, when the issue of redevelopment became contentious, Jim began a two-year effort called “Public Voices on Redevelopment” to empower the public on this issue. It entailed dozens of public meetings and forums. Jim brought citizens into city government and gave them a voice.

“Jim Spore is a visionary leader,” said Bob LaSala, county administrator of Pinnellas County, Fla. “As a member of the board of directors of the Alliance for Innovation, Jim brought an entrepreneurial spirit to the challenges we faced... He served as a ‘thought leader’ that challenged us to engage in initiatives that propelled the board and the staff to achieve new levels of innovation.”

Drawing on his rich planning knowledge and experience, Jim coached his staff to completely overhaul the city’s Comprehensive Plan, with the help of citizens, creating a document that sets forth the city’s vision for the future in a new, easy-to-use format.

As a parallel effort, Jim sponsored the planning for four Strategic Growth Areas, formalizing initiatives that “Public Voices” began. These plans introduced new land use patterns, transit systems and redevelopment guidelines that will allow the city to continue growing with a denser, mixed-use, urban form in some areas. The plans also will protect the city’s agricultural

areas and preserve strong neighborhoods. The result will be more jobs and an expanded tax base well into the future.

Meanwhile, to protect Virginia Beach's natural and recreational resources, Jim helped create the Green Ribbon Committee, Clean Water Task Force, and Open Space Advisory Committee, all of which protect the environment and set standards for maintaining the city's natural resources. Jim has been a steadfast supporter of Lynnhaven River NOW, which has restored health to the city's Lynnhaven River. As a result, the famous Lynnhaven oyster is being harvested again for the first time in 20 years.

Harry Lester, former chairman of Lynnhaven River NOW and currently president of Eastern Virginia Medical School, said, "We couldn't have accomplished this without the partnership of the city and the leadership of Jim Spore."

Jim can be a risk-taker when the long-term reward exceeds the short-term risk. The best example occurred in 1994, when a local developer lost 1,200 acres to bankruptcy. Jim urged the city to grab it, even though the \$9.5 million cost seemed large at the time. Jim envisioned the tract as a center for commerce, recreation and education. The city bought it and Jim forged partnerships with the private sector, non-profit groups and other public entities.

Today, it is called Princess Anne Commons and it is a crown jewel. The land's value has skyrocketed. It has become a major sports mecca, with an athletic complex, a professional soccer stadium, a national field hockey training center, a golf course, and soon a \$14 million indoor Field House and a professional sports training center. It also has become a major medical complex, houses an expanding community college, a graduate center for two universities, an Advanced Technology Center, three public schools and other education-related buildings. Jim foresaw this 15 years ago and now, thanks to his initiative, it is a reality.

Jim also took a risk in 2000 when he led the city into a public-private partnership with the developer of a Hilton hotel at the resort, despite citizen opposition. Today, that hotel is the most successful in the city, generating \$3.5 million a year in taxes for Virginia Beach and setting a new standard for development at the Oceanfront.

“Jim Spore personifies the essence of professional local government management in terms of competence, style and temperament,” said Donald Borut, executive director of the National League of Cities. “In addition to having a fundamental appreciation and respect for the elected officials for whom he works... Within the profession, he is sought out by colleagues for his leadership, creativity and wisdom.”

Perhaps Jim’s greatest accomplishment came two years ago, saving Virginia Beach’s largest employer, Naval Air Station Oceana and its 12,000 employees. In 2005, the federal base-closure commission issued an unusual ultimatum: Virginia Beach could keep Oceana only if it stopped new construction around the jet base and rolled back existing encroachment.

Jim, with help from other leaders, found a creative solution without using condemnation. The city and state would spend \$15 million a year to buy property around Oceana from voluntary sellers and restrict development rights on other properties. The city also offered incentives to businesses within crash-potential zones to move, and began a land-use collaboration with the Navy. Residents were pleased that Virginia Beach did not seize property involuntarily. To date, the city and state have spent, or are committed to spend, \$70 million to buy 424 acres. Oceana remains a bedrock of the city’s economy.

Said Donald Borut: “Having worked at ICMA under Mark Keane and served at the time this award was created, I believe that Jim Spore clearly reflects the ideals set forth in the Mark Keane award and I am delighted to support his nomination.”