

Al Van Huyck Acceptance of Heritage Hero remarks

Thank you so very much for this honor. You don't work for awards but they are very nice to get. When I opened the letter from Rich Gillespie, it took me several seconds to realize it was not another fund raiser. Then Harriett [Condon] called to confirm and I asked her if it was appropriate to make a few remarks. She said I could talk as long as I want. As many of you know, I love to talk. Therefore, I wanted to take advantage of this invitation and I've prepared some remarks...

We are so fortunate to live in Loudoun County. And it is worth taking a moment to reflect on all of the men and women who have donated their time and energy over the decades that have contributed so much to the quality of life and heritage we enjoy today. Starting with Mrs. Pickens, Powell Harrison, John Lewis and the many others who early on recognized the importance [of] sound planning, our heritage and environment. And all those who have sustained the effort, many of which have been leaders in the Mosby Heritage Area Association. And those who we have recently lost, such as Su Webb, Otto Gutenson, Jean Sagan, David McCarthy, and Steve Hines. So we look to a new generation of concerned citizens to take their place as the work with which we are engaged will continue.

Nowhere else in the Washington metro area can you find the depth and variety of so many important eras of American history which are still today visible in our unpaved rural roads, historic buildings and villages, sites of Civil War battlefields, [and] historic cemeteries, including black cemeteries, which are a component of Loudoun's unique black historical record. All of this [is] backed up by our fabulous set of records and papers going back several hundred years and preserved in our courthouse, and at the Balch Library, where their resources bring our history to life in human terms. But what makes our heritage all the more special is that we in Loudoun have combined our love and appreciation of our heritage with those folks who work to protect our environment, our streams and wetlands, our steep slopes and mountainsides, our ground water. And those who seek to protect animal habitat and corridors, the diversity of birds, and utilization of indigenous trees and plants. We have discovered the synergy amongst these diverse elements in sharing information, supporting each other's activities, and recognizing that a challenge to one element is in fact a challenge to all.

The vehicle that has been created that brings this unique set of forces together is the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition. It is really this group we honor today through this award to me as the chair. We started in 2007 and now have 40 organizations who are considered members and who send representatives to our meetings. Mosby [Heritage Area Association] was a charter member and has always had great representation. Our mission is "to provide a strong voice for its members in public forums and a convenient and effective way to share information, issues, and ideas." Note that the Coalition itself never takes a position. When an issue is raised which concerns several members we form a committee or group of members to analyze the issue and take appropriate action. Findings are always presented as "from the Coalition Committee" or "from the following Coalition members." We do this to protect any Coalition members who do not agree or do not feel strongly about any issue.

For example, tonight there are Coalition members speaking at the Board of Supervisors meeting trying to resolve the worst aspects of the Catesby Special Events Minor Special Exemption. While we also have a committee working with the underlying planning and zoning issues seeking to find ways to support the rural economy and rural tourism while avoiding negative impacts on the way of life of our rural residents, particularly what I call the land stewards. For if the land stewards no longer choose to live in rural Loudoun, then the entire rural economy and way of life will collapse.

In 2017, we will be challenged by the preparation of the new comprehensive plan. Loudoun's 2001 plan envisioned Loudoun as the low density suburban fringe of the metro area, with a transition area with 50 percent of the land in easement, and a rural area and rural economy based on agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry with rural tourism a supporting use. All areas would respond to the green infrastructure policies.

Today, that vision has largely collapsed as the planning for the silver line metro has opened the east to become an "edge city." This then sets pressure for development in the transition area and ultimately in the rural area as the need for lower density residential and commercial development seeks lower land costs. This is our challenge. This is our task. This is our commitment. Through all of us working together we must set forth specific proposals and policies that have the overwhelming support of our fellow citizens so that the new comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance does not sow the seeds of the collapse of rural Loudoun, our heritage, and our environment, but instead set in place the elements that will keep Loudoun the special place it is for the next 20 years.