

Rural communities to come back quicker, stronger and better, say Summit speakers

Cecil Whig December 30, 2021

ANNAPOLIS — When more than 200 citizens, state and local government officials and community leaders gathered recently in Annapolis for the biennial Rural Summit two things were obvious — with COVID-19 measures in place attendees were more than ready to resume face to face engagement safely and rural Marylanders feel they have what it takes not only to fully recover from the pandemic, but also to lead the state’s recovery efforts.

“I believe we have the opportunity to recover quicker than the urban areas of Maryland, and I need you to believe that too,” said John Hartline, Rural Maryland Council board chair, in his opening remarks. “I know you all are the reason that will happen because you work hard every day for your communities.”

Hosted by RMC, the Rural Summit, titled “Redefining Resilience and Recovery,” featured numerous noteworthy national and statewide guest speakers, including Xochitl Torres Small, USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, Maryland Comptroller Peter Franchot, and Whitney Kimball Coe, director of National Programs at the Center for Rural Strategies, who championed the message of strength and leadership in rural communities.

“We are in a great place to partner together,” said Xochitl Torres Small. “We’ve learned the hard way how much we rely on collaboration to do our work. It’s all about taking on new challenges and building new markets. One thing is for sure though when rural America succeeds, we all succeed. Whether we are feeding America or fueling America. We have been given a chance to write a happy ending.”

Perhaps Governor Hogan said it the best during his remarks on the opening day of the Summit, “‘Redefining Resilience and Recovery’ means thinking outside the box and working together to deliver real solutions to the problems we face,” said Hogan. “As we continue to move forward together, I have every confidence that not only will rural Maryland fully recover from this pandemic, but we are going to come back stronger and better than before.”

The Summit included 16 breakout sessions covering a variety of topics related to agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry, community development, economic development, and health care, as well two plenary sessions – one on broadband and a legislative review which featured a panel of state legislators.

For many attendees the Summit represented an important step in resuming traditional public meetings and face-to-face collaboration. “For many of our rural stakeholders this Summit was their first large conference since 2019,” said RMC Executive Director Charlotte Davis.

“They were particularly enthusiastic about safely collaborating face to face instead of using a virtual format. I have no doubt that the commitment to advancing equity for all Marylanders is stronger now than ever before. And if their efforts over the past 18 months are any indication, they are more than ready to take a leadership role as we roll up our sleeves to recover,” added Davis.

Upcoming RMC events include the legislative luncheon on Jan. 28 and Rural Maryland Day on Feb. 10.

In 1994 the late Maryland Governor William Donald Schaefer signed an executive order to designate a “rural development council” for Maryland. One year later the council organized itself as the “FORVM for Rural Maryland” and was permanently established by an act of the State legislature. Today the Rural Maryland Council operates under the direction of a 40-member executive board in a nonpartisan and nondiscriminatory manner.

It serves as the state’s federally designated rural development council and functions as a voice for rural Maryland, advocating for and helping rural communities and businesses across the state to flourish and to gain equity to its suburban and urban counterparts.

For updates on all RMC events and activities, visit rural.maryland.gov, call 410-841-5772, email rmc.mda@maryland.gov or connect at facebook.com/RuralMaryland or @RuralMaryland on Twitter.