

2019-2021

# Impact Report

Uniting Strategic  
Resources for  
Communities



**UPPER SHORE**  
Regional Council

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[www.usrcmd.org](http://www.usrcmd.org)



Cecil County •

Kent County •

Queen Anne's County •

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# About

## Mission and Vision

The mission of the Upper Shore Regional Council is to foster regional planning and development for Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties; to afford federal, state, county, and local governments a regional forum to identify issues and opportunities; and to provide leadership in planning and implementing programs to improve the quality of life in the Upper Shore Region of Maryland.

Through collaboration with county, regional, and state partners, the Upper Shore Regional Council broadens opportunities for all by developing funds and programs to serve the region's interests. These initiatives offer a competitive advantage, bolstering community and economic development strategy.



Maryland's rural communities have real-time value in a **fast-moving economy**. The Upper Shore's abundant workforce, low cost of real estate, and proximity to three major metropolitan cities position us for **prosperity**. As the planning and development agency for Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties, USRC balances the region's bucolic identity with a commitment to remaining economically relevant. Your business **success story** begins on the Upper Shore; start it today.

## Message from **Susan O'Neill**, USRC Executive Director, and **Chris Corchiarino**, Chair of the 2021 Executive Committee

The past three years have undoubtedly shown the resiliency, tenacity, and fortitude of the businesses and people in the Upper Shore community. We proudly saw business leaders, public officials, and nonprofits all working together to address growing needs and workforce demands. We saw businesses flex their creative muscles and explore new ways to reach their customers in safe and socially distant ways. We developed partnerships with educational institutions, industry leaders, and statewide funders to implement impressive economic development initiatives. We continue to be amazed at the strength of our community.

As you will read in the following report, the Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) has continued efforts to expand and enhance business retention and growth initiatives in the Upper Shore through enabling government, education, and business collaboration for economic development. Our prospering region is supported by our growing workforce, developing infrastructure, robust communities, and tourism sectors. Without partnerships, the Upper Shore Region's sustainable growth would not be possible.

The USRC would not have been as successful the past three years without its Executive Committee and Full Council. Their selfless partnership, authenticity, and collaborative efforts have filled a tremendous need in the Upper Shore.

By supporting select projects and initiatives, USRC has been able to bolster businesses, farms, school programs, and counties as we grow our flourishing communities. Among the many highlights from the past three years, the Upper Shore Regional Council focused energy in increasing its capacity and creating resources:

- The organization went through a full rebranding process, working with professionals specializing in economic development marketing, branding, and web design to create a strategic communications plan and rebrand the organization. A new logo and tagline -- Uniting Strategic Resources for Communities -- has brought a greater level of awareness and brand recognition for USRC.
- After completing the rebrand, the USRC launched a new website, [www.USRCmd.org](http://www.USRCmd.org), to reflect the new messaging and branding of the organization. The new website includes more resources and evergreen information for the region. In tandem with the new website, USRC created a Facebook account to continue promotional efforts and engage with community members directly.
- Due to increased organizational activity, USRC welcomed a new full-time employee, Executive Assistant Janice Palmer, in 2018.

None of this would be possible without our partners, who have helped us amplify our reach. With their robust ideas and implementation strategies, our trajectory to uplift the Upper Shore remains on target.

Reflecting on the past three years, USRC has done more than just provide funding and resources -- we've touched lives and impacted communities. We are confident that the Upper Shore, with its fundamentals of a talented labor pool, successful workforce partnerships, and business-friendly environment, will continue to be a leader in Maryland as a premier place to live, work, and play.

Sincerely,

Susan O'Neill  
Upper Shore Regional Council Executive Director

Chris Corchiarino  
Chair of the 2021 Executive Committee

# Business and Workforce Development

Getting businesses from Point A to Point B is a **collaborative effort** on the Upper Shore. The USRC provides organizations with resources for success. Working together with Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties, USRC **nurtures** the region's physical, economic, and social development. From startups seeking capital to established businesses seeking a new home, USRC's tri-county collaboration makes **dreams** doable.

## Nurturing Our Regional Narrative

The industry landscape on the Upper Shore is diversifying every day. Ample real estate, workforce talent, and a keen business focus inspire industries to up their game on the Upper Shore. On average, **over 80% of residents** in Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties work in private industry, with **over 1/3 holding bachelor's degrees** or higher. Partnering with area businesses and higher education, the Upper Shore keeps skills aligned with the needs of local industries.

## Upper Shore Target Industry Analysis Report

At the request of Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties, USRC commissioned an in-depth Upper Shore Target Industry Analysis Report produced by Emsi, an organization that provides data-driven economic prosperity solutions. This report analyzes the regional economy and identifies the unique strengths and opportunities present in each county. See the report by scanning the QR code below!



## USRC Small Business Marketing Grant Pilot Program

A grant program was created to assist “mom & pop shops” located in the downtowns of the Upper Shore region. Small business owners are experts in their business’s products but many struggle to make the most of their marketing budgets. With the assistance of a marketing and public relations firm, this program was structured to educate business owners about marketing, create a marketing plan specific to their business needs, and provide seed money to implement their plan. This program was key during the COVID-19 pandemic, which heightened its impact. By helping small businesses thrive, small downtowns also benefited by drawing more foot traffic to their sidewalks.

The first phase of this program was unveiled in partnership with the Kent County Department of Economic & Tourism Development. The USRC Small Business Marketing Grant pilot program **assisted 14 businesses, representing 39 jobs**. Phase two is expected to begin in FY 2022.



Jamie Williams, CECD, Director, Kent County Department of Economic & Tourism Development, and Cindy Newsome of Sarah Paige Studio, Small Business Marketing Grant recipient, and Susan O'Neill.



## Oyster Harvest Rotational Pilot Program

The Oyster Harvest Rotational Pilot Program is a **four year program** that provides an economic and ecological benefit for the Upper Shore. Commercial watermen represent a **\$5 million industry sector** on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. USRC cultivated a partnership with Kent County and Queen Anne’s County Commercial Oyster Committees and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to assist small commercial watermen and oyster production. This partnership works to leverage the resources of committees and DNR to create a self-sustaining oyster harvest rotational program in the Upper Shore Region. Approximately **30 million oyster spat** (oyster larvae) have been planted in a prepared, mutually agreed upon, 7-acre section of water in the first year. Funds generated from the project will be used to fund the next iteration of oyster spat planting.

## Upper Shore Micro Ag Grant Program

The Upper Shore Micro Ag Grant Program is a collaborative effort, funded and supported by USRC, to assist agribusinesses in Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties.

The USRC, in partnership with the Cecil County Office of Economic Development, the Kent County Economic & Tourism Development, the Queen Anne's County Department of Economic Development, and the Maryland Agriculture & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) has committed **\$90,000** to **32 agribusinesses** across the Upper Shore.

The program aims to improve the regional food system by creating cohesive relationships between the economic development offices and farmers within the Upper Shore Region that promote partnership and resource sharing. The micro-grant program helps rural communities within the Upper Shore access fresh food, ultimately helping to create a vibrant and economically sustainable region.



## USRC Farm Incentive Fund

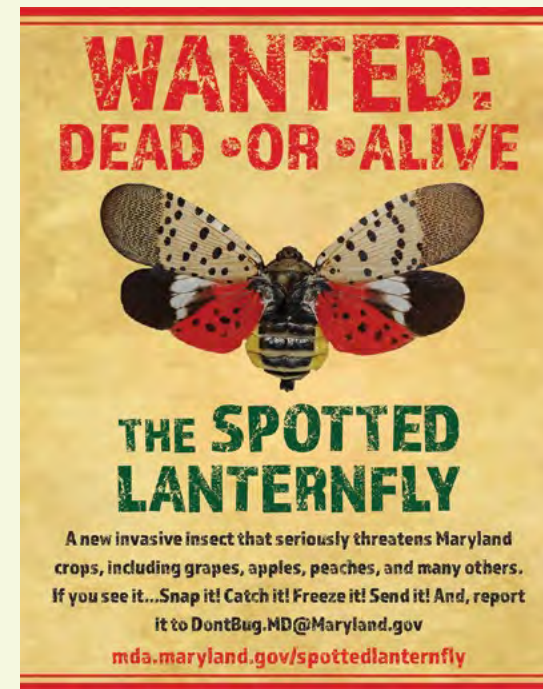
USRC partnered with the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) to create the USRC Farm Incentive Fund. Designed to incentivize loan requests from food and fiber-producing farms, this program helps farmers meet down-payment requirements and improve the credit quality of their applications. The USRC Farm Incentive Fund provides a **5% equity contribution** towards financing a project funded through a MARBIDCO loan program.

In the three years of this program, the USRC Farm Incentive Fund has **approved 6 grants** totaling **\$31,500**, which leveraged **\$570,000** of MARBIDCO funding for agriculture/rural businesses.

# County Specific Initiatives

The USRC strives to boost employment, empower existing businesses, attract new industries, and foster budding agriculture initiatives. Led by a strategic plan for regional success, collaborations with government, education, economic development, businesses, and private citizens are at the core of every project.

As a regional organization for Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's counties, the USRC supports county initiatives that align with the Upper Shore's regional narrative.



## Spotted Lanternfly Workshop - Cecil County

The spotted lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) is an invasive pest that presents a significant threat to Eastern Shore agriculture, including the grape, tree-fruit, hardwood, and nursery industries, which collectively contribute billions of dollars to Maryland's economy. USRC partnered with the Cecil County University of Maryland Extension Office and the Cecil County Office of Economic Development to provide a 'Lunch and Learn' event regarding the Spotted Lanternfly.



Information presented at this Lunch and Learn can be found on the USRC website.

## Partnership with Susquehanna Workforce Network- Cecil County

USRC partnered with The Susquehanna Workforce Network (SWN) for two projects.

The first project, USRC and SWN focused on enhancing warehouse/distribution and healthcare careers in Cecil County by supporting entry-level and mid-level workforce training. These two industry sectors comprise nearly 45% of the employment base in Cecil County. The project's primary goals were to i) increase the pipeline of workers and advance worker skills for these industry sectors and ii) increase employment opportunities for area residents.

SWN teamed with Cecil College as the primary training provider for the project. The project proposed **training 11 unemployed or underemployed** Cecil County residents for entry-level training and **5 incumbent workers** for mid-level training in the county's key industries of Warehouse/Distribution or Healthcare. However, the program met with such a demand for mid-level training that **49 employees were trained, a 980% increase** over projected numbers.

In the second project, SWN targeted unemployed citizens and underemployed workers to help fill workforce pipeline needs in Manufacturing, Transportation/Distribution/Logistics, and Healthcare. SWN provided basic individualized career services, skill upgrades, and occupational training for **21 project participants**. After the training, **71% of participants entered employment**, earning an **average wage of \$19.51** at placement.

## Eastern Shore Entrepreneurial Center hotDesks Program - Kent County

USRC continued to provide financial support for the Eastern Shore Entrepreneurial Center's (ESEC) hotDesks program located in Kent County. Kent County Department of Economic & Tourism Development partnered with ESEC to develop a hotDesks location in Chestertown. hotDesk members have access to shared office space, entrepreneur and innovation training, capital for high-growth, scalable startup and growth businesses, and gigabit broadband connectivity.



### Agriculture Awareness Day - Queen Anne's County

For multiple years, the USRC has sponsored Queen Anne's County's annual Agriculture Awareness Day. This day-long program educates 7th-grade students on the agricultural sector and agriculture-related career paths in Queen Anne's County. The events are held at the Queen Anne's County 4H Park, and the following agricultural topics were discussed: technology, equipment, crops, aquaculture, nursery, produce, greenhouses, forestry, and farm animals. The program dispels common myths about the agricultural sector and demonstrates the variety of career opportunities present for Queen Anne's County students in this industry.

In 2019, **583 students** attended from four middle schools, accompanied by **25 administrators** and **90 volunteers** from the agriculture community. USRC intends to continue funding this program for future iterations.



Video Courtesy of QACTV

### Project Bright Future Summit - Queen Anne's and Kent counties

USRC supported and participated in the Project Bright Future Summit, a regional initiative aimed at youth in the community interested in pursuing careers in hospitality, manufacturing, construction, and other trades. The summit aimed to i) create awareness of the excellent career opportunities available to students in the five-county service area (Kent, Queen Anne's, Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot counties) of Chesapeake College and to ii) increase student participation in Career Technology Education (CTE) programs, Youth Apprenticeships, and Dual Enrollment programs. The program's vision was to create a pipeline of skilled workers to meet the demands of the region's current business base and assist in business retention, expansion, and attraction for the area.



Held on September 25th, 2019, the Project Bright Future Summit promoted middle-skills positions and included a tour of Chesapeake College, a keynote address from Kurt Landgraf, President of Washington College, and a panel discussion featuring Dr. Cliff Coppersmith, President of Chesapeake College; Chris Garvey of Allied Builders and Contractors; Delegate Jeff Ghrist; Alan Stein of Tanglewood Conservancy and the Untangled Minds Foundation; Jeff Smith, MD Department of Labor, Apprenticeship Maryland; and Cody Pine, Washington County Public Schools CTE. Local businesses interested in hiring students were also in attendance. Jack Wilson, Queen Anne's County Commissioner and a voting member of the USRC, emceed the event.



**PROJECT BRIGHT FUTURE**  
"Creating Opportunities For Our Youth."



# Keeping Growth Smart and Sustainable

The USRC's commitment to the land—and to economic longevity—fuels participation in plans and projects impacting its **communities**. Whether the topic is business recruitment or broadband development, the Council supports initiatives aligning with its regional narrative. The **expansion** of area amenities, jobs, and transportation strategies will encourage more residents to work where they live. Infrastructure **development** creates places that people want to work in, invest in, inhabit, and enjoy.



## Cecil County Broadband Expansion Pilot Program

The Cecil County Department of Land Use & Development Services approached USRC to expand broadband in Cecil County through their pilot project called the “Customer Contribution Model.” At the time, there were approximately **2,514 homes and businesses** without access to broadband service. After meeting with three major broadband providers serving the County, a draft financial model (the Customer Contribution Model) was developed to expand service. Specifically, this model uses two sources to fund broadband expansion – the broadband provider and the served customers. Funding assistance was granted by USRC and resulted in providing an additional **31 homes** with broadband access.

## Creation of a Datastory for the Upper Shore Region

To assist the region's business attraction efforts, USRC funded a regional Datastory and Datastories for the USRC counties. A Datastory is a sophisticated business attraction and expansion tool that allows users to visualize the region/county's data points through an interactive map.

The Upper Shore Region Datastory was created to answer the fundamental questions of “Who, What, Where, and Why.” Individuals and businesses unfamiliar with the area will get a sense of the region and do a deep dive into the data. Each Datastory provides an analytical view of the area's current opportunities and magnitude of possibilities.



Discover the Upper Shore's Datastory by scanning this QR code!



The Datastory project also serves as a platform to inform stakeholders of the Upper Shore Region and the public at large about the area's exciting changes. Because the USRC Datastory is an interactive map, it can be tailored to each user's needs.

## Kent County Transportation Program

In 2018, the United Way of Kent County conducted a community needs assessment for the county, denoting public transportation as one of the top needs. A Transportation Taskforce, in which USRC participated, was formed to explore transportation management within Kent County and Kent County's connectivity to the robust transportation systems in neighboring Cecil and Queen Anne's counties. The task force recommended hiring and appointing a transportation coordinator to build capacity and improve the current transportation service. In 2020, the Kent County Commissioners voted to create a new Housing and Transportation Coordinator position housed under the purview of the Kent County Local Management Board's Community Plan for Children and Families (LMB).

The USRC is partnering with the LMB to improve the availability and accessibility of current transportation services vital to medical appointments, work, food shopping, and other services. Specifically, USRC funds will assist the Housing and Transportation Coordinator in establishing a Basic Needs Workgroup to continue the work of the United Way's Transportation Taskforce. The Workgroup will guide and address the key findings of the Transportation Taskforce. These findings include a marketing plan to increase usage of existing service, installation of additional signage, and assist employers with establishing a rideshare program.



## GIS Circuit Rider Program

USRC recognized that many municipalities on the Eastern Shore do not have the capacity (adequate staffing or time) for GIS-related tasks. Responding to this need for on-site assistance, the USRC joined the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Circuit Rider Program. Through this program, jurisdictions throughout the Upper Shore have access to specialized GIS solutions. Circuit Rider projects may include GIS implementation, web mapping, technical support, data collection, cartographic services, GIS training, data analysis, and task automation.



More information can be found on [www.USRCMD.org](http://www.USRCMD.org)

# Community Support



## Cecil Cares

Cecil Cares is an annual countywide day of service and USRC funds were used to assist advertising efforts, provide lunch for volunteers, purchase basic supplies, support volunteer recognition, and contribute to the Volunteer Cecil site fee. In 2019 and 2020, **250 volunteers** served with **26 community organizations** to complete **27 projects**. Cecil Cares staff and volunteers provided capacity-building services for community organizations, including promoting and maintaining Volunteer Cecil, an online volunteer recruitment and matching system.



A robust economic climate **strengthens** neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and the quality of life along the Upper Shore. USRC's partners are economic development innovators, business leaders, and county, regional, state and federal officials collaborating on behalf of the Upper Shore. Their breadth of experience and **diversity** of viewpoints keep our **trajectory** on target.



**UPPER SHORE**  
Regional Council

Uniting Strategic Resources for Communities

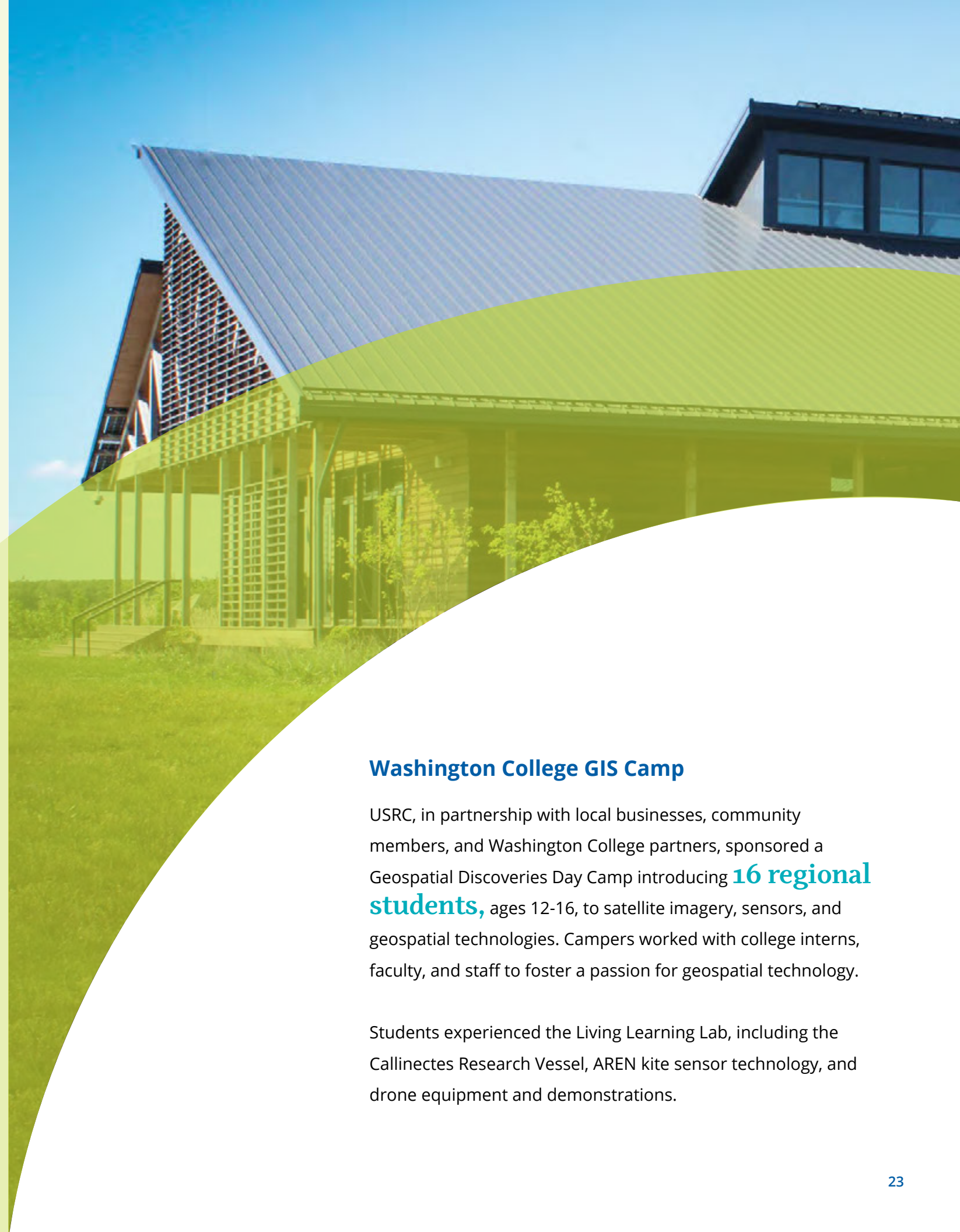


### WKHS (90.5 FM)

USRC provides programming support for WKHS, a non-commercial educational FM radio station owned by the Board of Education of Kent County and run by Kent County High School students. To support students and their voices, the USRC has sponsored this radio station for the past several years.

### Cecil College Foundation

The Cecil College Foundation, Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)3 dedicated to developing financial and other resources to support Cecil College students. The USRC has supported this organization to continue growing the talented workforce present in the region.



### Washington College GIS Camp

USRC, in partnership with local businesses, community members, and Washington College partners, sponsored a Geospatial Discoveries Day Camp introducing **16 regional students**, ages 12-16, to satellite imagery, sensors, and geospatial technologies. Campers worked with college interns, faculty, and staff to foster a passion for geospatial technology.

Students experienced the Living Learning Lab, including the Callinectes Research Vessel, AREN kite sensor technology, and drone equipment and demonstrations.

# Tourism



## Cecil County Farm Museum Regional Agriculture Center

The Cecil County Farm Museum (CCFM) was created to preserve and promote the rich agricultural heritage of the northeast portion of Maryland. As the organization has grown, they decided to expand their vision to develop a Regional Agricultural Center. To open a Regional Agricultural Center for students and citizens, the Cecil County Farm Museum needed several infrastructure improvements, including making an ADA-compliant bathroom. USRC was able to provide funding to assist them with this improvement.

## Taste of the Eastern Shore

In partnership with the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Mid-Shore Regional Council, and the Upper Shore Regional Council, Taste of the Eastern Shore is a networking event highlighting local vendors. Over **175** of Maryland's Senators, Delegates, Cabinet Secretaries, staff, and elected officials representing the Eastern Shore are in attendance. Both the 2019 and 2020 events were held at the Graduate Annapolis Hotel.

Scenic shoreline, idyllic downtowns, and wide-open spaces **invigorate** recreation within Upper Shore **communities**. The Upper Shore Regional Council strives to amplify attractions, empower existing businesses, and attract new visitors to experience the **vibrancy** of its community.



Uniting Strategic Resources for Communities

# Video Visualization

To increase regional tourism along the Upper Shore, the USRC funded production for the following tourism videos and equipment, demonstrating the richness of community and culture. Scan the QR codes below to sneak a peek!

Cecil County  
Tourism



Winter Nights,  
Cecil Lights

Queen Anne's  
County  
Tourism



## Eastern Shore Harvest Directory

To promote local businesses and tourism, the USRC maintains the Eastern Shore Harvest Directory as a resource for residents and visitors to find local products. The directory showcases organizations in Kent, Cecil, Queen Anne's, Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties.

With the help of the Washington College GIS program and Octavo Designs, the Harvest Directory was melded into the USRC web page. Expanding the Harvest Directory to include breweries and wineries will be a focus going forward.



## 2019-2021 Executive Committee

- **Chris Corchiarino**, Queen Anne's County Commissioner
- **Ron Fithian**, Kent County Commissioner
- **Jackie Gregory**, Cecil County Councilwoman
- **Tom Mason**, Kent County Commissioner
- **Bob Meffley**, Cecil County Councilman
- **Jack Wilson**, Queen Anne's County Commissioner



## Full Council

- **Bill Coutz**, Cecil County Councilman
- **Jackie Gregory**, Cecil County Councilwoman Vice President
- **Bob Meffley**, Cecil County Councilman President
- **Al Miller**, Cecil County Councilman
- **George Patchell**, Cecil County Councilman
- **Rich Taylor**, Mayor of Chesapeake City
- **Ronald Fithian**, Cecil County Councilman
- **Bob Jacob**, Kent County Commissioner
- **Tom Mason**, Kent County Commissioner
- **Donald Sutton**, Mayor of Betterto
- **Chris Corchiarino**, Queen Anne's County Commissioner
- **Phil Dumenil**, Queen Anne's County Commissioner
- **Jim Moran**, Queen Anne's County Commissioner, At Large
- **Jack Wilson**, Queen Anne's County Commissioner
- **Stephen Wilson**, Queen Anne's County Commissioner
- **Charlie Rhodes**, Church Hill Town Commissioner
- **Steven Hershey**, State Senator/USRC Legislative Representative
- **Steve Arentz**, State Delegate District 36
- **Jeff Ghrist**, State Delegate District 36
- **Jay Jacobs**, State Delegate District 36
- **Jason Gallion**, Senator, District 35
- **Mike Griffith**, Delegate, District 35B
- **Kevin Hornberger**, Delegate, District 35A
- **Teresa Reilly**, Delegate, District 35B



## In Memoriam of William Pickrum

**USRC would like to recognize William Pickrum for his dedication to public service in Kent County and the Upper Shore region.**

Former Kent County Commissioner William Pickrum passed away on April 15, 2021 at the age of 73. In addition to serving as a Kent County Commissioner for sixteen years, Commissioner Pickrum served on the USRC Executive Board from 2002 – 2018. During his 16 years actively participating as a board member, Commissioner Pickrum was Chair, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Vice Chair, as well as Treasurer. His absence will be felt by all who served with him.

# Partners

