

In March, the media introduced us to an initiative sponsored by several local businesses and organizations titled the Community Stewardship program. Over the spring and summer this stewardship initiative has ignited a group called Advantage Alexandria.

Advantage Alexandria is a group of over forty members committed to the long term well being of the region. We strongly believe in uniting our communities through leadership, communication, and commitment to a common future. As stewards of the region, it's time we begin working together.

That is exactly what Advantage Alexandria is poised to do. Advantage Alexandria is a challenge to our communities to begin a dialogue about who we want to be and how we will get there... working together as a region!

We are fortunate to have a wonderful natural environment, an environment that links together our region and provides us a strong social, recreational, and economic foundation. This natural environment has built our region into strong economy, centered on manufacturing, health, tourism, and retail sectors. But will these foundations and strengths naturally carry us into a brighter future? Should we rest on our laurels?

Syndicated columnist George F. Will once said, "The future has a way of arriving unannounced". Our world is changing rapidly. The global economy, rising energy costs, changing demographics and rapid use of technology are forcing change in our communities and region. Businesses have found a way to integrate change into their organizations to adapt to the new economy. The use of technology allows companies to be more productive in the market place, a market place that does not recognize geographical boundaries. This lack of boundaries forces collaboration and innovation. Why should it be any different for our communities?

We have transitioned to a world where place still matters, but for different reasons. Now, most knowledge workers and businesses can locate virtually anywhere. Skilled and knowledgeable people tend to locate in communities that have a good quality of life and strong social, cultural and natural assets.

Identity is important to all communities, keeping your summer festival, supporting your school and its programs, are just a few things that generate true community identity and in all sense, pride. We are not asking you to forget about those things, but we are asking you to set your pride aside and have a candid dialogue about the future of the region and our communities. By the pure definition, stewardship means the careful and responsible management of something entrusted in our care. It's time we start caring again.

We know that change isn't openly embraced by all, but we know our businesses are changing at a greater pace in today's world. Change doesn't happen by accident. It is a product of vision, disciplined thinking, energy, passion, and an unwavering commitment to see the challenge through. To paraphrase President Harry S. Truman, "Individuals make history, and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skilled leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better".

Join us at [www.advantagealexandria.com](http://www.advantagealexandria.com).

Submitted by Jason Murray, Advantage Alexandria