

Good Morning – Welcome Everyone! It is great to be here in Maryland's State Capital Annapolis. I am Kathy Beisner, Acting State Director for Maryland and Delaware. First I'd like to thank Charlotte Davis, Josh Hastings and all the RMC Board for the invitation to be here today.

Maryland has many nicknames like the Old Line State, the Free State and among my favorites **the Chesapeake Bay State**. The Chesapeake Bay is well known for its shellfish and one of my very favorite foods is the Blue Crab. I'm sorry I couldn't join you last night at Buddy's crabs and ribs..... 5 years ago I started Family & Friends Beach Day, it occurs each year the first Sunday after Labor and yesterday .....# turnout.

I grew up working on my Dad's commercial crabbing boat where I learned the value of hard work and perseverance. The downside to this is that you quickly realize that good things don't happen overnight, they take time. This rings true for the rural communities that we serve. Work to improve community & economic development, infrastructure improvements, access to broadband, and quality healthcare - it all takes time.

I've had the pleasure of serving USDA Rural Development for 32 years and I'm encouraged with our leadership at USDA. Secretary Sonny Perdue has a strong interest in improving our infrastructure and particularly broadband. Early on when he arrived at USDA he said, I "Quote, In today's world of connectivity...If the water goes off, that's kind of a disadvantage. If your lights go off, oh bummer. If your heat goes off, you'll get a blanket. But if your Wi-Fi goes off, that's a crisis. end of quote"

Earlier this year I reached out to our stakeholders across Delaware and Maryland to see if there was interest in having a State Broadband focused event. Quick to respond was Charlotte Davis. It was a real privilege to partner with the Rural Maryland Council last May to host a regional event here in Annapolis. 160 were in attendance representing Maryland and Delaware Congressional Offices, towns, service providers, and industry leaders both

public and private to discuss all things broadband. A wide range of topics were covered, from the current state of broadband in rural America today, to broadband technologies 101 to how to make rural communities attractive to broadband providers and so on. Our event went over so well that my colleagues in Pennsylvania decided to duplicate the agenda and keep the broadband momentum going.

(Recognize Shannon Reed)

Going forward, Secretary Perdue and Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development Anne Hazlett have a strong interest in customer service, regulatory reform and how can we remove barriers that will help communities prosper.

The Secretary announced last Thursday the creation of an Innovation Center within Rural Development. We will learn more about this in the days and weeks ahead, but for now what I know is that State Directors will be a part of working alongside the Innovation Center to enhance the important work that we do on behalf of rural communities.

Internally for us at Rural Development that means we need to:

- Enhance and strengthen the use of our resources
- Promote and create synergy between the three program areas meaning: the Rural Housing Service, Rural Utilities Service and the Rural Business and Cooperative Service. We are not three agencies – we are ONE tool box for communities to use in addressing needs or pursuing a new opportunity.

Last month, we had the opportunity to host Anne Hazlett for a tour of MD and DE projects that we have supported. It was a good 360 tour of all of our programs (I will mention the visits ending with the Chesapeake Culinary Center).

This afternoon, Shannon and I will join you for the first tour stop at the Chesapeake Culinary Center in Denton. At each of your planned stops, with the exception of one ... USDA Rural Development has helped provide loan or grant funding to support the organizations work.

Our relationship with Maryland's Rural Development Council began in the mid 1990-s when it started out as the ForVum for Rural Maryland. We enjoy being a part of your work and look forward to many more years of working together.

Thank you for being here I wish you a great meeting over the next couple of days.