There’s a lot to love about our new Shores Club—now underway at Potomac Shores. With 13,000 square feet of private family adventure, indoors and outdoors, it’s about to be the biggest and best social and rec center around. With a state-of-the-art fitness center. Two swimming pools. An event lawn. And community gardens. It’s resort-style living only 30 miles from DC. And it’s everything you dreamed it would be.

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Get Noticed with VRE Advertising

VRE carries 20,000 passengers every work day and 70 percent of our riders have an annual household income of over $100,000.

Reach our ridership with advertising opportunities on our platforms, in our trains and through our award-winning RIDE Magazine.

For more information go to www.vre.org/advertising or contact advertising@vre.org or (703) 838-5417

FROM THE CEO

VRE’S FOCUS ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

As I travel around Northern Virginia and the Washington region, I receive lots of comments and feedback about VRE. I am very proud of our safety record, on-time performance that is consistently above 90 percent and high customer satisfaction. We will continue to focus on customer service and ensuring that our passengers have a safe and reliable experience on VRE.

Customer service and your feedback are very important, VRE offers numerous ways for passengers to interact and engage with us.

We operate a call center that fields service inquiries as well as complaints and commendations. Inquiries may also be submitted by fax, mail, email or through our website. Go to www.vre.org/feedback for all the ways to contact us. VRE engages on social media and utilizes Facebook and Twitter to provide timely service notices, news and updates. Riders are also able to provide comments, concerns and inquiries through our social media channels.

On the first Wednesday of each month, VRE’s management hosts an online forum to answer passenger questions and respond to comments and suggestions. The forums are archived at www.vre.org so that those who were unable to participate can reference the questions and answers. Additionally, every spring, our management heads to destination stations for our “Meet the Management” events. On those dates, key VRE managers and I make ourselves available for face-to-face questions and answers from our riders.

Whenever major policy and/or service modifications are being considered, VRE conducts public hearings. The hearings are held throughout the service area and are conducted at various times to ensure maximum opportunity for public participation. For those unable to attend, a comment period is also advertised to allow input via mail, email and by phone. Recently, we hosted public hearings to solicit comments related to a proposed 4 percent fare increase and $2 increase to the Amtrak Step-Up ticket.

Finally, we perform annual passenger surveys to measure customer satisfaction as well as gather origin-destination information from our riders. The results of the surveys are made available online. This provides a transparent process and also allows our staff and others to conduct analyses of our survey responses.

We value our passengers and work hard to make sure that VRE is truly “A BETTER WAY. A BETTER LIFE.” Thanks for riding VRE and please keep telling us what’s on your mind.

DOUG ALLEN
Chief Executive Officer
Virginia Railway Express
LOCAL EVENTS

2015 NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL LAUNCHES AND CELEBRATES “OUR NATURAL WORLD”

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is the nation’s greatest springtime celebration. The Festival showcases Washington to the world and welcomes more than 1.5 million attendees each year. In 2015, the Festival program celebrates “Our Natural World.” Visitors are invited to step into spring and delight in trees and gardens, enjoying their environmental benefits and natural beauty.

Attendees will enjoy four anchoring weekends and daily events throughout the DC metro region. All events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.

Key Dates Include:

- Thursday, March 19 – Pink Tie Party fundraiser at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center (ticketed event)
- Saturday, March 21 – Official Opening Ceremony at Warner Theatre (free tickets required)
- Saturday, March 28 – Blossom Kite Festival on the Washington Monument grounds
- Saturday, April 4 – Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival at the Southwest Waterfront
- Saturday, April 11 – National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade® (tickets $20 grandstand seating, standing room along the route, free)
- Saturday, April 11 – Sakura Matsuri – Japanese Street Festival produced by The Japan-America Society of Washington DC (tickets $10 with children 12 and under free)
- Sunday, April 12 – The NEW Anacostia River Festival

Ongoing Programming:

- Free “Step-Into-Spring” fitness programming at the Washington Monument
- Experience “City in Bloom” – Created to visually unite the region with lighting, vibrant signage and blossom decals
- Enjoy free cultural performances on the stage at the Festival Welcome Center at the Tidal Basin
- More than 40 participating organizations offer official events daily

Visit www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org events for a full schedule
Bidding on an established commuter-rail service in the nation’s capital seemed like the perfect place to break into the American market.

So, when the opportunity arose in 2009 to compete for the VRE contract, Keolis General Manager Gregg Baxter said they jumped at the chance to operate VRE.

“VRE is a very high-profile commuter service and very important people are riding the trains,” Baxter said. “We felt [this] was a good agency for us to partner with and one we could work together with to help achieve their objectives.”

Keolis Rail Services America officially took over the operation and maintenance of VRE trains in 2010. After almost five years, the French-based company has proved to be the right fit for VRE.

“We are very happy with the service,” Baxter said. “Since we’ve taken over, we have run a very safe operation…Our customer service scores are evident of the hard work our [crews] put in and we are happy to see ridership grow and on-time performance improve.”

Baxter was recruited by Keolis in 2009 to help submit a bid for VRE’s operation and maintenance contract. A graduate of the University of Maryland, Baxter has a long history with the transportation industry.

After receiving an undergraduate degree in transportation logistics and a master’s degree from the University of Denver in intermodal transportation management, Baxter went to work for Amtrak for 16 years. He then spent five years with the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission before joining Keolis.

While passengers do not see the Keolis employees until 5:05 a.m. when the first train leaves the station, Baxter said there is a dedicated group of 30 people who work throughout the night to ensure service runs smoothly each day.

The Keolis staff has also created a new operating reporting system that was previously “unheard of in the industry” that allows for transparency and sharing of information, Baxter said. The system tracks everything from performance and ridership trends to mileage and equipment maintenance.

Keolis and VRE have a strong partnership and share a similar vision for the commuter rail system’s future, Baxter said.

“We want to be a partner with them for at least the next 15 years,” Baxter said. “I think Keolis and VRE are on the same page; eventually it is all about frequency. We run 30 trains a day and it sounds like a lot, but if we could run midday service, I think potential ridership would then go through the roof.”

Besides continuing a partnership with VRE, Keolis has been able to expand into other markets across the country. In July, the company began operating the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, which is the biggest contracted rail operation system in the U.S. Baxter said, adding that he can partially credit that win to VRE.

“VRE was an essential ingredient for us to win that and be successful,” he said. “We’re very pleased with our position in the US and want to expand into the light rail, intercity and state-supported markets in the next couple years.”

A Virginia resident, Baxter, however plans to stay on the VRE contract. When not on the job, he enjoys golfing, skiing and spending time with his wife and 18-year-old son.
A lot of time and energy goes into VRE delivering high quality commuter rail service. Trains do not run themselves and it is an intensive daily process to move commuters throughout the region. At VRE, we pride ourselves on safety, customer service, on-time performance and commitment to improving our environment and reducing traffic congestion.
VRE UPDATE

89.9 MILES OF TRACK VRE OPERATES ON

10TH

1,163 VRE TRAIN TALK ALERTS ISSUED IN 2014

LARGEST

BY RIDERSHIP FOR A U.S. COMMUTER RAILROAD SYSTEM

22,717 SUBSCRIBERS TO TRAIN TALK ALERTS

100 MILLION+

VEHICLES MILES REMOVED FROM OUR HIGHWAYS ANNUALLY BY USING VRE

18 STATIONS SERVED BY VRE

50,000+ METRIC TONS OF CARBON DIOXIDE REDUCED FROM OUR AIR BY RIDING VRE
VRE UPDATE

READY FOR SPRING WEATHER

At VRE safety is paramount! If severe weather is in the forecast, please keep in mind that your commute may be affected.

Our host railroads have policies in place that deal with severe weather. If conditions are favorable for flash flooding, CSX and Norfolk Southern require that passenger trains do not exceed 40 mph, as slowing down trains enables the engineers to more safely navigate through areas with limited visibility. Should deep water cover the tracks, or if a section of track is washed out, a slower rate of speed will allow the engineer to slow or stop the train. The slower speed will mean both the Fredericksburg and Manassas line trains will be approximately 30-45 minutes late to their final destination.

Other delays associated with severe weather can be caused by fallen trees. Tracks covered by fallen trees will be cleared as quickly as possible; but traffic and other conditions could hamper response time.

Keep up-to-date with information from VRE through Train Talk e-mail alerts and through VRE’s Twitter and Facebook pages. Ultimately, VRE’s bottom line is safety and it is important we are prepared for spring’s sudden and severe weather.

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SPOTLIGHT ON VRE
MEET PHIL LEONARD

Phil Leonard comes to work every day with one very simple, yet exceedingly important mission – maintaining a fleet of locomotives and passenger cars that are safe, efficient, and comfortable for both passengers and crew. As Assistant Superintendent of Equipment for VRE, his ultimate goal is to “make sure everybody is happy and safe, from employees all the way to customers.”

“My job is to maintain VRE’s fleet the right way, and make sure everything is done professionally and safely.”

Leonard began working for VRE in March 2012. He brings with him more than 25 years of rail industry experience. He worked for 23 years in the emissions and service departments developing Tier 2 emissions packages for the locomotive manufacturer Motive Power. He was involved in creating a patent on diesel engine cooling systems. His transition to a new role in maintenance carries greater responsibility, but is a position well-suited for him.

“This role in the Maintenance Department is a lot more responsibility as far as maintaining the fleet, keeping our customers happy and keeping the rolling stock going,” he stated.

To make sure these goals are met, Leonard puts strong emphasis on creating a safe working environment. He is adamant about keeping his maintenance team well-trained; ensuring they are qualified and compliant with Federal Railroad Administration safety standards.

“My job is to maintain VRE’s fleet the right way, and make sure everything is done professionally and safely,” he said. He feels most rewarded when watching VRE trains roll by on-time, and in tip-top condition. That, he says, keeps everybody happy!

Born and raised in Idaho, Leonard grew up with a passion for fishing and hunting. When he’s not working the rails, you’ll probably find him on the lake with fishing rod in hand. Annual trips to his native state are always a priority.

Leonard epitomizes the values and culture of VRE, always putting safety and the needs of passengers and crew first.

“My biggest concern is making sure the trains are running on-time, keeping everything safe and ready for the next day’s service.”

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