



Charlottesville Fire Department
Office of the Fire Chief
203 Ridge Street
Charlottesville, VA 22902
Phone: (434) 970-3323

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

While I am disappointed that scheduling conflicts prevented my participation today, I was compelled to write this note in order to be a part of what I believe to be a monumental event that will demonstrate the importance of the Virtual USA initiative for the public safety community. The ROPP demonstration does two very powerful things. First it demonstrates the power of geospatial data for public safety and establishes the foundation on which to build an effective and collaborative national public safety GIS strategy. Second, this initiative advances public safety information-intelligence sharing and situational awareness in ways that up until now have been only a dream. I must also note that if it weren't for the innovative and forward thinking of the Command, Control and Interoperability Division of the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate in combination with the collaborative Virtual USA concept, the separate GIS state initiatives demonstrated this day would have resulted in a divided and unproductive competition.

To those in attendance, I believe we are at a time of convergence when technology, applications and connectivity combine to create a once in a lifetime opportunity to change the course of human events. However, the window of this opportunity is short and must be acted on swiftly to insure a direction of coordination, cooperation and innovation while simultaneously preventing duplication and chaos. And I warn that while many will oppose Virtual USA as an attempt to takeover other GIS initiatives, it could not be further from the truth as Virtual USA has proven that its intentions are to be inclusive and build upon the success of existing GIS programs.

As I enter my 35th year in the fire-rescue service, this opportunity reminds me of the famous writing "A Splendid Torch" by George Bernard Shaw:

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

Thanks for allowing me to be a part of this truly special day!

Charles Werner, Fire Chief - Charlottesville, VA
International Association of Fire Chiefs Technology Council Chair
SAFECOM Executive Committee Chair
Virtual USA Steering Committee