

Danielle Hornberger, Cecil County Executive



LEADERSHIP FOR THE MODERN ERA

BY MEREDITH GLACKEN

MAXIMILIAN FRANZ PHOTOGRAPHY

In 2020, Cecil County residents were seeking someone to lead their government who was forward thinking enough to position the region for the future, but also to be respectful of the area's rich history and those who had lived there for generations. That Fall, voters welcomed Danielle Hornberger to the County Executive's office. She has stepped up to meet that challenge with enthusiasm.

Hornberger credits her intrinsic call to service as central to her success as the county's lead decision-maker. "I always start with the question – how best can I serve my community and give back to this place that has given so much to its citizens, to my family, and to me?"

Her desire to help and lead those around her developed from the values she learned growing up in rural Maryland, and her experiences working in public service at the EPA, constituent services for the United States Congress, and as a teacher in Maryland's public schools. "Cecil County reminds me of where I grew up," says Hornberger. "It's an area with beautiful landscapes and an important agricultural heritage. And it's beginning to grow rapidly. There's exciting economic development happening in a lot of new sectors. It's been a wonderful place to live, work, and raise my family. So, I felt called to use my skillsets to help my neighbors, friends, and local businesses navigate this new period in our region's history."

Hornberger's first two years in office have been marked in equal measure by extraordinary challenges and accomplishments. Assuming office in the midst of the pandemic required her to deftly facilitate coordination between area residents and businesses and the public sector at the federal, state, and local levels in a remarkable effort to keep those living and working in Cecil County safe, healthy, and thriving.

"All of a sudden, I had a responsibility not just to my own family, but to my Cecil County family too," Hornberger says. "I needed to make decisions for the health and welfare of everyone who lives and works here."

The Covid-19 crisis also meant making tough decisions that departed from the status quo, with the ultimate goal of returning people, families, and whole communities to strength and health. One of those decisions was the purchase of Cecil County's first government-owned ambulance and hiring of professional emergency medical technicians that provide 24-hour support to the all-volunteer corps of first responders in the southern area of Cecil County. Thanks to good communication and a collaborative partnership between Hornberger's county government team at the Department of Emergency Services and the volunteer fire companies, the added equipment and manpower cut 911 response times by as much as six minutes and reduced the need to request assistance from neighboring counties. Hornberger also reinstated the EMS Advisory Board to ensure a sustained standard of excellence and strong working relationships between the Department of Emergency Services and the nine outstanding volunteer fire companies in Cecil County.

Hornberger says this bold new approach to emergency services is "different than 'what has always been done,' but it has the potential to save so many lives. Response time is critical when it comes to life and death situations, and we are extremely fortunate to have so

many dedicated volunteers working in our ranks to support their fellow citizens. With the county's first investment in this ambulance and personnel, we are much better positioned to augment services in difficult-to-serve regions and reduce response times. Minutes matter and thus our ability to provide critical lifesaving resources in a timely fashion increases our chances of reuniting loved ones following medical emergencies."

Separate from the advancements in health and safety, Hornberger also led several hallmark economic achievements, including the first tax cut in the county's charter government history as well as her first budget being unanimously passed by the County Council.

"Serving as County Executive is an extremely rewarding job that requires you to have a team focused on quality outcomes. I will forever be proud of the steps we have taken to support all facets of our community to include public safety, senior services, education, recreation, infrastructure, diversification of our economy, and more. Additionally, my administration and our resource partners have focused on stepping up in the fight against opioid abuse and domestic violence as sadly, no community is immune from their grips. Cecil County is a special place, filled with special people and together, we are tackling the large and small issues for the betterment of all," says Hornberger.

Her recent budget included yet another strategy that distinguished itself from "the way things had always been done," and as a result, saved taxpayers more than \$400,000 annually on county vehicles used for law enforcement, emergency services, site planning and permitting, and more. Switching from a sale to a lease program for the county vehicle fleet is allowing that savings to be rerouted directly into Cecil County communities for important initiatives like public safety and the OpenGov and GovDelivery programs that recently launched at Hornberger's direction. The two platforms will allow residents and business owners across the county to access government services and information in real time – an important step in modernizing the county government to make it more accessible and efficient.

And that's not all. In December 2020, Hornberger signed an agreement on behalf of the county to approve the first phase of development for 3.7 million square feet of logistics and manufacturing space at the former site of the Bainbridge Naval Training Center in the town of Port Deposit. The new project will bring an estimated 1,500 jobs and millions of dollars in investment to Cecil County.

Bainbridge Development Corporation Director Toni Sprenkle says the development, which struggled with decades of bureaucratic delays at the local and federal levels, was able to make meaningful and accelerated progress and enjoys the full support of County Executive Hornberger and her team.

"There was a lot of excitement after the Bainbridge project was announced in 2000, and then years of waiting as we contended with myriad interruptions and delays while we waited for our federal, state, and local governments to work together to get the site cleaned up and approved for development. Many who live in the area conceded that the jobs and opportunities that were promised would never come," says Sprenkle.

She continues, "At the Town and County level, leadership really



“An added benefit of these farms and equestrian facilities is that they protect so much land. Horse farms make up 25 percent of Maryland agricultural lands, and represent 10 percent of all land in the state,” says Hornberger.

worked to streamline the approval process so that we could keep things moving, and we finally broke ground last year. It was a real hopeful moment for the community at a time when everyone was struggling with the impact of the pandemic.”

Hornberger’s “get-the-job-done” leadership style extends to her team inside the county offices as well. “It’s always been important to me to surround myself with people who are truly talented in their areas of expertise,” Hornberger says. “As it turns out, that’s a really efficient way to run a government.”

Hornberger’s leadership style uses trust and communication as focal points, offering those on her County Government team what she describes as “autonomy and support.”

“She does a lot of listening,” says David Trolio, Cecil County Director of Community Services. “She communicates her vision and trusts those on her team to put our skills to work for the people in this county. At the same time, she’s also there for guidance, support, or troubleshooting whenever we need it.”

Hornberger says it’s her experience in advocacy and public service that inspire her stewardship of Cecil County’s 576 employees. “Whether you’re managing people or projects, it’s so important to remember how much teaching and learning needs to happen in that process.”

“Communication is paramount,” she continues. “When you’re clear and concise about what the goals are and when you listen and think through as a team what’s needed to accomplish the task at

hand, you avoid confusion and you set everyone up for success. And then, when you succeed on a project that helps our community, there is so much joy in that.”

As for what’s next in Hornberger’s bold agenda, she’s focused on working side-by-side with the public and private sectors to facilitate more job-creating infrastructure and development projects like the new Fairhill equestrian and competition center, the expansions of Clene Nanomedicine’s science and manufacturing center and Northrop Grumman’s Hypersonic Center of Excellence. The addition of the Great Wolf Lodge resort destination opening next year, construction of the I-95 interchange at Belvidere Road, and increases to broadband access for homes and businesses are also among her projects for the coming year.

“Our economy is still fragile coming out of the pandemic, and we have a lot of work ahead of us,” says Hornberger. “We have one of the most picturesque landscapes in Maryland to protect while we also grow and advance as a community of diverse people and diverse economies.”

“It’s a unique challenge,” she explains. “How do we change and also stay the same? Achieving that harmony between old and new – that respect for our history and concurrent forward movement – demands a modern style of leadership to meet the moment. That’s exciting to me, so it’s a real honor and joy for me to do this job and serve my community.” *I95*

And they’re off!

Cecil County — An International Leader in Equestrian Activity

BY MEREDITH GLACKEN

Home to the Maryland 5-Star at Fair Hill, the 86th running of the Fair Hill Races, internationally recognized breeding operations, training facilities, therapeutic riding programs, and more, the horse industry has always fueled the beating heart of Cecil County, Maryland. In recent years, the region has become an even more active hotbed of equine business.

“There’s always been a lot happening with horses in Cecil County,” says Joann Dawson of the place she’s lived and worked for more than two decades.

Dawson and her husband Ted own Fairwinds Farm and Stables in the town of Northeast, Maryland, where they keep 26 horses on 52 acres of idyllic landscape. The couple moved from Delaware in 1999, in search of a location with enough land to run a working horse farm that was also close to economic centers. They settled on Cecil County as the perfect place to start their business. Dawson says it has grown to include riding lessons, a wedding venue, film locations, a bed and breakfast, and more.

Fairwinds is also a Maryland designated Horse Discovery Center, inviting people of all ages to experience and learn about horses – often for the first time. “Our purpose is to welcome people and teach them something. We have had a lot of people who just stopped by to watch a lesson or take a trail ride and they come back again and again,” she notes.

Dawson says that more visitors were tapping into those opportunities during the Covid-19 pandemic. “We went from 70 riding students before the pandemic to 120 students now. People wanted to get out of the house and were looking for outdoor activities where they could be socially distanced. We got a lot of people on horses for the first time.”



The Maryland 5-Star is one of seven prestigious international 5-star riding competitions and just one of two that take place in the U.S.

“We love what we do, and we work seven days a week,” she continues. “We love introducing people to horses. There’s a lot of pride in horses in this state.” And she’s right. According to the Maryland Department of Agriculture’s Horse Industry Board, there are approximately 200 equine organizations in the state and 16,000 horse farms and stables, many of those located in Cecil County.

“About 52 percent of Marylanders consider themselves horse enthusiasts,” says Jeffrey Newman, who is CEO of the Maryland 5-star at Fairhill equestrian event. Newman heads the new annual riding competition at Fairhill International in Elkton, which boasts world-class training and eventing venues. “5-star” is the top level of eventing for the dressage, showjumping, and cross-country riding disciplines, and the Maryland 5-Star is one of only seven prestigious 5-star riding competitions in the world, and one of two that take place in the U.S.

Newman says that Cecil County was the obvious choice to host the four-day elite sporting event. “It’s ideally situated 45 minutes from Baltimore, 45 minutes from the Delaware border, and 45 minutes from Philly – all places that, along with Maryland, have very active equestrian communities.”

2021 was the first year for the four-day elite sporting event, and attendance exceeded expectations with more than 21,000 tickets sold. The competition featured 184 competitors from all over the world and brought in more than 13,000 visitors from out of state. In addition to those who attended in-person, an estimated 140,000 viewers from all over the world tuned in to watch the event’s more than 13 hours of live coverage on broadcast television as well as online on the USEF Network and Horse & Country livestreams.

Maryland 5-Star attendance is expected to rise over the next four years and could welcome as many as 80,000 spectators to Fair Hill annually, according to Newman. County Executive Danielle Hornberger says Cecil County’s local economy got a major boost from the arrival of the competition. “Spectators and competitors who were here for the event booked rooms, shopped, dined, and supported our local businesses. It was a wonderful week to showcase Cecil County to the world.”

The Horse Industry Board estimates that Maryland’s competition sector has a total economic impact of \$270 million annually and supports more than 3,000 workers. Cecil County will showcase the Maryland 5-Star competition again this year from October 13-16. “The organizing committee is hard at work planning this year’s Maryland 5-Star at Fairhill,” says Hornberger. “We’re excited to grow this event year over year and create an unrivaled atmosphere for seasoned horse professionals and first timers alike.”

In addition to family horse farms and competition facilities, Cecil County is also home to a variety of other equine businesses. “Cecil’s horse industry is incredibly diverse,” says Maureen O’Shea Fitzgerald, the agriculture business coordinator for the Cecil County Department of Agriculture. “There are therapeutic riding centers, breeders, even farms where racehorses go to retire.”

“Our therapeutic riding centers offer differently abled people unique opportunities to experience the thrill of riding and our

breeding farms are world-renowned and equipped with cutting edge technology,” she continues. “This wealth of activity comes with an added benefit, as all of these farms and equestrian facilities protect so much land.”

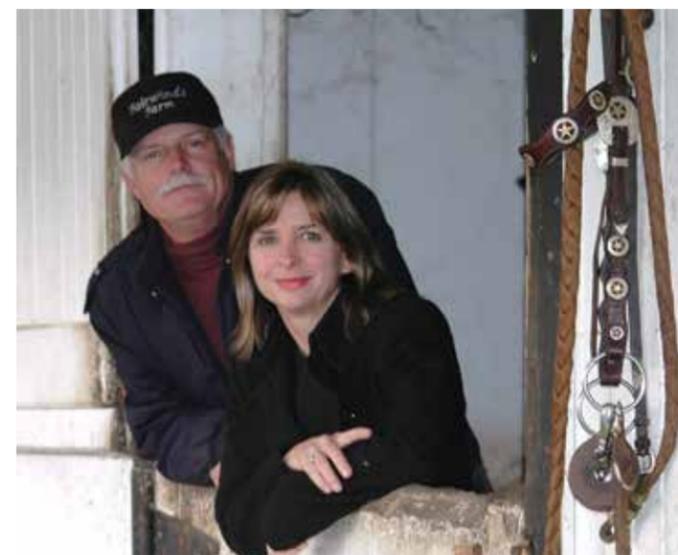
Horse farms in Maryland comprise 705,000 acres, which make up 25 percent of Maryland agricultural lands, and represent 10 percent of all land in the state. In Cecil County, Winbak Farms cares for Maryland’s largest piece of contiguous preserved farmland. Specializing in breeding, raising, and selling horses, Winbak operates on close to 3,000 acres of lush pasture, making it the industry’s largest single family owned and operated breeding farm.

“It’s remarkable how much our equine businesses do to safeguard our rural communities’ beautiful landscapes, agricultural upbringing, and even the Chesapeake Bay,” says County Executive Hornberger.

Cecil County sits atop the northernmost stretch of the Chesapeake Bay and five rivers intersect nearby. With a thoughtfulness for protecting the land and the local environment, many farmers and equine businesses plant cover crops in the winter to prevent soil erosion and runoff into these waterways. Farms in Cecil County are singled out year after year for their excellence in cover crop planting by organizations like the Sand County Foundation, whose mission is to support and promote voluntary conservation on working lands through science, ethics, and incentives. In addition, Cecil County’s well-maintained horse pastures during the warmer months function as natural water filters and fix carbon in the soil.

County Executive Hornberger says she is proud of Cecil County’s equestrian heritage and the local contributions it makes to the state and country, as well as internationally. She expresses her hope that the county will see even more people visiting in the next few years to appreciate the horses, watch events, and support the local businesses.

“Right now, Cecil County horses are the highest valued in the state. They rank 18th in the country. And it’s not hard to see why. They’re special animals. I’ve spent time around horses since I was a kid, so I’m thrilled that more people are beginning to discover them here,” Hornberger says. **I95**



Joann Dawson and husband Ted own Fairwinds Farm and Stables in the town of Northeast.

Cecil County, Maryland is On the Move

BY MEREDITH GLACKEN



Northrop Grumman’s new 60,000 square-foot expansion will generate hypersonic defense technology. “That means rockets,” says Hornberger.

On the Upper Shore of Maryland, an hour north of Baltimore and an hour south of Philadelphia is Cecil County, Maryland – an idyllic water-oriented community on the banks of the Chesapeake Bay with a long agricultural heritage and a well-kept secret. It’s rapidly becoming a center for business growth in sectors ranging from logistics and manufacturing to biopharmaceuticals, defense operations, and more.

“Cecil County is a perfect place to do business,” says County Executive Danielle Hornberger. “That’s why companies move here, and once they do, they can’t help but expand. We’re experiencing economic prospecting and growth at a never-before-seen pace.”

Among that expansion is Northrop Grumman’s new 60,000 square-foot “Hypersonic Center of Excellence” in Elkton, which broke ground in July 2021 and is expected to bring hundreds of new jobs to the area. Scientists and workers at the facility will generate design, development, production, and integration of next generation hypersonic defense technology.

As County Executive Hornberger likes to say, “That means rockets.”

For more than 70 years, Northrop Grumman’s existing Missile Defense and Controls headquarters in Elkton has held a stake in historic moments like the moon landing, the development of GPS technology, and the pioneering of jet engines that break speed records and sound barriers. They’re excited to keep growing in Cecil County, Hornberger notes.

“Our new hypersonics production facility will optimize our development efficiency, drive affordability, and ultimately deliver weapons to our warfighters faster,” Northrop Grumman Vice President of Missile Production Rebecca Torzone said in a statement.

Another high-tech company that is currently expanding its footprint in Cecil County is biopharmaceutical company Clene Nanomedicine. Clene’s focus is on the treatment of neuro-

degenerative diseases, and their nanotherapeutic technology is set to transform the way we protect and heal brain health and function. The company is currently renovating its future pharmaceutical manufacturing production facility in the former WL Gore Plant, where it plans to hire 500 workers by 2025. Clene officials say they expect that the renovation will quadruple the company’s manufacturing capacity.

Several new tenants are moving into the Clene original Principio Business Park facility, located in the town of Northeast. Manufacturing and logistics management tenants there include market leaders like Amazon, Lidl, KeHe, Medline, Smithfield Hams, and TruAire, to name a few. Boasting 1,200 acres, 22 million square feet of building space, and a new I-95 interchange (opening 2025), Principio Business Park is ideally situated to attract and house additional world class tenants in Cecil County for many years to come. According to Hornberger, “Positive economic growth requires mindful planning. The new Belvidere Road interchange will support my goal of providing direct access to major employment centers while removing or reducing commercial traffic from our residential roads and communities.”

To the west in Port Deposit, the Bainbridge Development Corporation in partnership with Hillwood and MRP Industrial have signed an agreement with the Cecil County government to begin development of Phase 1, which features 3.7 million square feet of new distribution and logistics space. The location of a former naval training center, a flag was lowered in 1976 when it was decommissioned by the Department of Defense. In honor of the site’s history and in celebration of the thousands of new jobs the project will bring to the county, a flag raising will be held this month to mark the 440-acre development’s rebirth. “This exciting development at Bainbridge, together with a commitment to creating additional open space parkland, signals a new chapter for the property as a modern employment center on historic lands that helped shape Cecil County’s western identity,” says Sandra Edwards, Acting Director, Cecil County Economic Development.

“The community in Port Deposit is excited to see construction commence,” says Bainbridge Development Corporation Director Toni Sprenkle. “Not only are they raising their hands to join the workforce around this project, but they’ve been integral in much of the planning – even in some of the design elements that face the town’s roadways.”

While Cecil County continues to be a leader in job creation across multiple sectors, it has not abandoned its agricultural roots, which continue to make a major contribution to the region’s business success. Farms and pastures dominate the rolling landscape, which



In Port Deposit, the Bainbridge Development Corporation and partners will develop 3.7 million square feet of new distribution and logistics space.

has for generations provided livelihoods and homesteads for a proud group of residents. From farm-to-table foods to its growing craft beer market, Cecil County remains at the forefront of economic tourism. In addition, modern technology in farming assists in monetizing the land and creating more ways to produce new, higher quality products, according to Cecil County’s Agricultural Coordinator Maureen O’Shea Fitzgerald.

Cecil County boasts more than 73,000 acres of farmland, as well as a flourishing equine industry that rivals the state of Kentucky. In fact, there are more horses per square mile in Maryland than in any other state in the country. Many of those reside on family farms, breeding farms, and therapeutic riding facilities in Cecil County, O’Shea Fitzgerald notes.

“The County’s serene settings, miles of shoreline, charming small towns, vineyards, world class events, and culinary delights offer visitors a perfect chance to experience Cecil County for a day, a weekend, or a lifetime,” says Sandy Turner, Cecil County Tourism Manager. With its location on the I-95 corridor, which allows easy access from the mid-Atlantic, Great Wolf Lodge, America’s largest family of indoor water park resorts, chose Cecil County as the site of their newest investment.

The new hospitality destination will feature 700 family friendly suites, a 126,000 square-foot indoor waterpark, multiple dining options, adventure park, and event space. Opening summer 2023, Great Wolf’s Cecil County location will be the largest resort in the company’s expansive portfolio and serve as the centerpiece for the burgeoning Chesapeake Overlook entertainment center complete with a casino, retail center, multiple food service locations, and more.

Turner explains, “Great Wolf Lodge is a great fit for Cecil County’s vibrant tourism market which continues to expand with new venues, quaint Main Streets, and sports tourism events focused on attracting visitors to the county all year-round.”

“The future for our business community is bright,” County Executive Hornberger states. “We’re bringing in companies and people who understand how special our county and eight unique municipalities are, who create and innovate, and who show great respect for our history. It’s a real testament to the generations of families who established homesteads here long ago, as well as newcomers with the courage to bring ideas and businesses that fit well into our economic and geographic landscape. This is Cecil County’s time, our chance to shape our economic future while pursuing new growth, energy, and the rewarding opportunities that come along with it.” **I95**



Great Wolf Lodge, opening summer 2023, will be the largest family resort in the company’s portfolio.