NOTABLE DEATHS OF 2014

Dr. Benjamin Joseph Lambert III, 77

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: He was an optometrist with a reputation for geniality for more than 50 years and served nearly three decades in the Virginia General Assembly, mostly representing Charles City and portions of Richmond and the counties of Henrico and Hanover.

WHAT HE DID: After years of civic and political activism, he won election to the House of Delegates in 1977 and to the Senate in 1985. He broke barriers, becoming the first black man honored as “Outstanding Young Man” by the Richmond Jaycees, the first black member of the Henrico County Democratic Committee and the first black man to represent Virginia on the Democratic National Committee. After serving as chief patron of legislation creating the VCU Health System Authority, he sat on its board and was honored “for being a champion of health care for underserved persons.” He served on the boards of Dominion Resources and of Dominion Virginia Power and of many institutions of higher learning. “I think he set the standard, just through his private life and public life, as to what it means to be part of a community,” said Sen. A. Donald McEachin, D-Henrico, who defeated him in a primary in 2007.

Phyllis Eason Galanti, 73

WHY YOU KNEW HER: A shy bride when her Navy pilot husband, Paul, was shot down over North Vietnam in 1971, she became a tigress working to free him and other POWs of the Vietnam War and advocating for humane treatment of prisoners.

WHAT SHE DID: While Paul languished in the infamous “Hanoi Hilton” for 2,432 days, Phyllis Galanti joined other POW wives in organizing the National League of Families and Friends of POWs and MIAs in Southeastern Asia, which she later chaired. Hundreds of thousands of letters generated by the League’s “Write Hanoi” campaign and its later “Write President Nixon and Congress” campaign helped her gain access to North Vietnamese officials and the White House. In 1973, her husband was in the first group of POWs released by the North Vietnamese. Said then-Virginia Gov. Mills E. Godwin Jr., “One dedicated woman and a handful of others had more influence on the communist world than legions of armies and diplomats.” She spent much of her life advocating for military veterans and their care and the importance of Americans serving their country.

Dr. Edmund Ferris Ackell, 88

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: The third president of Virginia Commonwealth University, from 1978 to 1990, he was a visionary who set about shaping VCU into what it has become.

WHAT HE DID: He was a college administrator who knew how to stretch a resource. A goal-focused man who had been a dentist, physician and athlete, he successfully integrated the VCU academic campus with the Medical College of Virginia, helping forge VCU as we know it today. His vision planned for everything from traffic to commuter students to preserving notable architecture near campus. His administration restructured the school’s administration, substantially increased the school’s annual budget, gifts and endowments and expanded VCU’s reputation as a research institution.

Robert Martin Atack, 66

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: If you live or visit in Ash creek, Church Run, CrossRidge, Henley, Hunton Estates, Magnolia Ridge, Jessup Station, Providence Creek or any of the many subdivisions he developed, you see the footprint of one of the Richmond area’s most prominent developers and real estate executives. He also was a major supporter of philanthropic, education and faith endeavors.

WHAT HE DID: After founding Atack
Properties Inc., he developed the first subdivision in Innsbrook, where he also bought the shopping center, retail parcels and buildings. Although his upscale Ash creek project in Hanover was compared to Wyndham in Henrico County, his favorite project was rundown apartments that he rehabilitated for Good Samaritan Ministries in South Richmond. “The reason for my success is owed to God,” he said.

**Oscar Leroy Blake, 91**

**WHY YOU KNEW HIM:** He was one of Richmond’s and Virginia’s early black firefighters.

**WHAT HE DID:** An architectural engineering major at Howard University, he applied to become a fireman with Richmond’s first all-black fire unit to earn $50 a week so he wouldn’t have to work several concurrent jobs to support his family. Although he recalled that a white homeowner once kept him and the rest of the all-black Engine Company 9 at bay with a shotgun until an all-white company showed up to douse a blaze at his home, Mr. Blake lived to see an historical marker and plaque honoring Company 9 placed where he had served.

**Raymond H. Boone Sr., 76**

**WHY YOU KNEW HIM:** He was the editor of the Richmond Afro-American and Planet for 15 years; feisty editor and publisher of The Richmond Free Press — which he founded in January 1992; a former journalism teacher at Howard University in Washington and a community leader.

**WHAT HE DID:** A man who boldly spoke truth to and challenged power at every turn, he was a fearless advocate for economic justice and a crusader for equality, progressive causes and Richmond’s black community, where he was one of its most-trusted editorial voices. A man who passionately believed in accountability and the importance of a free press and public dialogue to a community, he did not hesitate to hold anyone’s feet to the fire on important issues. He demanded excellence of the many young aspiring black journalists he mentored. His career landed him in the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame. His devotion to Richmond involved him in such enterprises as co-founding a junior baseball league so that black children could play organized baseball.

**Richard Manuel Bowman, 86**

**WHY YOU KNEW HIM:** He was a walking encyclopedia of Charles City County history and genealogy, a civil rights pioneer and first black chairman of the Charles City County Board of Supervisors.

**WHAT HE DID:** He was a co-founder of the Charles City County Historical Society and was instrumental in the establishment of the Center for Local History, which collects history of the Charles City County area. After sending his children as the first blacks to attend an all-white Charles City High School, he initiated a suit that was a companion of several suits that went to the U.S. Supreme Court and dismantled the “freedom of choice” option, which had stalled integration of schools. He brought his county into modern times by establishing a county office building, regional landfill, industrial park and first county plan.

**William Cleveland Bosher Jr., 68**

**WHY YOU KNEW HIM:** After serving as an English teacher and principal in Henrico County, Dr. Bosher went on to become superintendent of schools in Henrico and Chesterfield counties, state superintendent of public instruction and founding director, distinguished professor of public policy and executive director of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Commonwealth Educational Policy and dean of the VCU School of Education.

**WHAT HE DID:** What didn’t he know about Virginia schools? An educator whose depth of knowledge was well-respected, he was the state superintendent of instruction...
who implemented Virginia’s Standards of Learning. In doing so, Dr. Bosher, who believed in educating children to their highest potential, set a standard of proficiency for students that built a state system of educational accountability. Some educators consider him one of the greatest Virginia educators of the 20th century.

Robert Pegram Buford III, 88

**WHY YOU KNEW HIM:** He was a corporate, securities and banking lawyer at the firm of Hunton & Williams known for his fierce negotiating skills.

**WHAT HE DID:** Joining the firm when there were only 18 lawyers, he played a critical role in building Hunton & Williams into a major international law practice of more than 800 attorneys. He greatly expanded the firm’s corporate and banking practice. He helped combine the six banks that became United Virginia Bankshares Inc., helped First Colony Life Insurance Co. grow into a major life insurer and Tultex Corp., apparel business become one of the best-managed companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

Simeon Alexander Burnette, 79

**WHY YOU KNEW HIM:** He was the founding president of Central Virginia Community College in Lynchburg, second president of J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College and an early vice chancellor of a fledging 20-college Virginia Community College System.

**WHAT HE DID:** Dr. Burnette became president of CVCC before it was built and guided its development for the first five years. Under his leadership, JSRCC built its second building on the Parham campus and broke ground in 1979 for its first permanent building at a new downtown campus. Two years later it dedicated a new Goochland campus. An authority on computer-assisted management systems, Dr. Burnette was instrumental in establishing two such programs to streamline the educational process at the state level. He led a school pilot project to provide training in office and supervisory skills for state employees that was later opened to all individuals and businesses. He was a master in getting the most from resources and people and focused on how involvement with a community college could change people’s lives.

Claudia Emerson, 57

**WHY YOU KNEW HER:** She reigned as Virginia’s Poet Laureate from 2008 to 2010, won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for her poetry collection titled “Late Wife” and was one of the most honored, decorated and revered poets in Virginia history.

**WHAT SHE DID:** Her upbringing in Chatham in Southside Virginia ignited the writing spark that never subsided. For years, she made the art of words accessible to the undergraduate students she taught and loved at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. She had taught at Virginia Commonwealth University since 2013. She won a 2011 Guggenheim fellowship, which she used to travel to Italy to pursue a poetry project about mummies.

James Bryan Erb, 88

**WHY YOU KNEW HIM:** As associate professor of music, choir director and former professor of the music department at the University of Richmond, this energetic musician mentored several generations of singers who became core members of local singing ensembles, as well as many of the region’s choral directors. He founded the premier community chorus known as CAFUR and was founding director of the Richmond Symphony Chorus.

**WHAT HE DID:** His passion and enthusiasm for perfection, his insistence on detail and what the composer wanted inspired those he led to rise to the occasion as they reached for the musical mark. It was all about the music and not about his expectations. His CAFUR group performed choral masterpieces and sang
everything from medieval chant to Gershwin. The group he organized to sing Beethoven’s “Missa Solemnis” under legendary choral director Robert Shaw in Richmond in 1971 evolved into the Richmond Symphony Chorus. His beautiful eight-part arrangement of the folk song “Shenandoah” is sung around the world.

Jack J. Green, 71

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: He was founder and publisher of The Richmond Voice and The Hampton Roads Voice, newspapers serving Virginia’s African-American community. He also had owned Green Advertising in Richmond and had been a civic leader in Nottoway County.

WHAT HE DID: In 1985, wanting to give a voice to “his people,” the black community of Virginia which he dearly loved, Green began publishing The VOICE. It became The Richmond Voice when he launched a sister publication, The Hampton Roads Voice, in 1992. He could be a lamb, championing unsung heroes, and he could be a lion, especially if exposing injustices. In July 2014, with his blessing, the two papers merged to again become The VOICE. Devoted to the growth and development of his community, he also served as chairman of the Nottoway County Branch of the NAACP.

Ruth Schaufus Harris, 94

WHY YOU KNEW HER: A parent turned expert on dyslexia, she teamed with Patricia De Orio at the Riverside School in Chesterfield to transform it into a premier school for educating children with dyslexia.

WHAT SHE DID: Her life did an about-face when her 12-year-old son was diagnosed with dyslexia, a neurobiological learning disability characterized by difficulties with word recognition and poor spelling and word decoding skills. A former college science teacher, she studied with pioneers in the treatment of dyslexia and began developing techniques of her own. She and De Orio impacted hundreds of lives at Riverside School. Much honored for contributions to her field, Mrs. Harris was a former president of the Virginia branch of the Orton Dyslexia Society, served on The Learning Disabilities Council and had been on the advisory board of The New Community School in Richmond.

Vernard W. Henley, 85

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: He served as chairman and CEO of Consolidated Bank & Trust Co., the oldest continuously black-owned U.S. bank.

WHAT HE DID: His college roommate told him he was nuts to go to work at a “dead end” black bank. A soft-spoken, elegant man who would become a powerful leader, Mr. Henley followed his own voices. He rose to president when the bank had one branch and $14 million in assets. When he retired, assets had risen to $115 million and there were seven branches in Richmond and Hampton Roads. He was a leader in professional groups, the arts, civic groups, commerce, education and health. Notably, he served five terms as a trustee of the $35 billion Virginia Retirement System, the public employee pension fund.

Mary Frances Warden Lambert, 102

WHY YOU KNEW HER: You might have enjoyed her cooking — especially the Cheese Dreams! She and her husband were caterers for 35 years for debutante parties, bar/bat mitzvahs, dinner parties, weddings, corporate and private galas and holiday gatherings.

WHAT SHE DID: A gourmet with a marked French flair, she cooked for private clients for nine years before establishing Lambert Catering with her husband, “Bennie,” in 1950. They became official caterers of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the Richmond Academy of Medicine and had catered for several Virginia governors. Her largest ever din-
ner party was feeding about 500 for the 25th anniversary of VMFA. She brought up her seven children — including the late former Sen. Benjamin J. Lambert III — in the business as a way to teach them about working and responsibility and helped their friends earn money to further their educations. Publications like Gourmet and Town & Country featured her cooking. She was a YWCA Outstanding Woman in 1979.

Lorin Maazel, 84

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: During 72 years on the music director’s podium, he guided nearly 200 orchestras in at least 7,000 opera and concert performances.

WHAT HE DID: He took his first violin lesson at age 5 and was 7 when Arturo Toscanini invited him to conduct the NBC Symphony. By age 15, he had conducted most of the major American orchestras. He served as music director of the Cleveland Orchestra; general manager, artistic director and principal conductor of the Vienna State Opera; and music director of Pittsburgh Symphony and the New York Philharmonic. He moved to Castleton, where in 2009 he and his wife founded The Castleton Festival to mentor young musicians.

Dr. James M. McGrath, 79

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: You likely never heard of him, but you probably have benefited in some way from his more than 40 patents and 400 research articles he wrote on the way to being inducted into the Plastics Hall of Fame. He was University Distinguished Professor and Ethyl Corp. Professor of chemistry at Virginia Tech and a world authority on the science of polymers — substances structured like shellac, amber, natural rubber, nylon, PVC and waterproof plumbing sealant.

WHAT HE DID: Dr. McGrath’s state-of-the-art research made possible optical devices made from thermoplastic materials; a method for making astounding heat- and chemical-resistance polymers; composites for rapid production of fuel cell bipolar plates and chlorine-resistant desalination membranes. In recent years, he focused on polymeric membranes for fuel cells with an eye to replacement of the internal combustion engine over time as well as reverse osmosis water purification methods, high-temperature polymer dielectrics for computers and fire-resistant polymers and composites.

Kimberly Bowman Newlen, 57

WHY YOU KNEW HER: She founded the worldwide monthly evangelical ministry for women called “Sweet Monday: Woman’s Socials on a Shoestring...Tied to a Generous God.”

WHAT SHE DID: A stay-at-home mom and former teacher who missed the company of other adult women, Mrs. Newlen invited 30 women, some of whom she did not know, to her home in May 1995 for 90 minutes. They ate a simple dessert, listened to a brief biblically themed inspirational message and a fun or practical topic and enjoyed the company. Her monthly “Sweet Monday” meetings evolved into inspirational groups that spread to every state and continent except Antarctica, and she became a sought-after speaker. On “Sweet Monday’s” 10th anniversary she organized “The World’s Greatest Tea Party” at the University of Richmond, where a wave of 7,291 people — many dressed in pink — broke a Guinness World Record tea party mark set previously in Singapore.

Beverly Lynn Ward Reynolds, 68

WHY YOU KNEW HER: She was founder-director of the art gallery known as The Reynolds Gallery, helped bring modern art into its own in Richmond and was one of Richmond’s most prominent supporters of the arts.

WHAT SHE DID: A come-here from New York, where she worked in an upscale art gallery in her boss’s home, Mrs. Reynolds decided to open a contemporary art gallery in her Fan District home and have home art shows with refreshments. Her friends told her there was little market for modern art in Richmond and that a Tupperware-type art party just wasn’t
going to fly. When she sold four works at her first show, including a gouache for $3,000, she was on her way, soon showing and selling works by all the major Pop Art names. She teamed with a partner to open the Minor-Reynolds Gallery, which became The Reynolds Gallery when her partner moved on. She supported the effort to create the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, helped establish The Pollak Society and served on the boards of many arts and civic groups around Richmond.

Charles Joseph “Joe” Schaefer, 86

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: He and his friend and lawyer John W. “Jack” Keith Jr. donated 380 acres, comprising 2 miles of the James River shore-to-shore and from Reedy Creek at Forest Hill Park to Powhite Creek at Willow Oaks Country Club to the city of Richmond, with the proviso that the land be preserved as a city park.

WHAT HE DID: A Richmond school teacher, Joe Schaefer was a Cub Scout and Explorer leader wanting permission in 1965 to use a river island near the Nickel Bridge for a weekend Boy Scout camping trip. He enlisted Jack Keith to the owner, discovered that this and other James River islands were owned by individuals who had not paid taxes since 1939 and could not be found. They found a 380-acre tract the city unsuccessfully had tried to sell to collect back taxes. With Keith doing the legal work, Mr. Schaefer paid the delinquent taxes and purchased the tract. The men donated the land to the city in 1972, when the James River Park System was created. It became the park’s first land acquisition.

Virginia Ann Henry Shelton, 108

WHY YOU KNEW HER: She lived a long time, encouraged a lot of people and got her picture taken hugging President Barack Obama when he came through the Richmond area in 2010.

WHAT SHE DID: A retired private nurse for newborns, Shelton had a rocking chair she never used. She stopped driving at 99, wore high heels until she was at least 104 and lived independently until the last eight months of her life. When she missed the first inauguration of “her president” because it was too cold, Ashland officials arranged for her to meet the president when Obama visited the Richmond area.

Lester Barbour “L.B.” Taylor Jr., 81

WHY YOU KNEW HIM: Ever read any of the 13 “Ghosts of Virginia” books? This freelance writer, magazine editor and public affairs director wrote them, along with 12 other books on Virginia ghosts. He wrote an additional 25 books on other subjects and hundreds of magazine articles for publications ranging from Reader’s Digest to The Saturday Evening Post.

WHAT HE DID: He had walked cemeteries in the wee hours of darkness, slept in haunted houses and followed a parapsychologist into buildings beset by paranormal phenomena, but never had seen the ghosts about which he wrote so prolifically. Nobody wanted to publish his “The Ghosts of Williamsburg,” so he self-published what came to be his most popular volume. It sold more than 150,000 copies and was the inspiration for Williamsburg’s popular ghost tours, which entertain thousands each year.

Gloria Pollard Thompson, 90

WHY YOU KNEW HER: She was the “mother” of age-group diving in the United States, a member of the U.S. Women’s Olympic Committee for the Tokyo Games in 1964 and an acclaimed
swimming and springboard diving coach for 72 years who refused to let the sport of diving die in Richmond.

**WHAT SHE DID:** In advocating and implementing a system where divers competed against their age peers instead of against athletes of diverse ages, she changed the face of AAU competition in all sports. Age grouping birthed a separate feeder track for international and Olympic competition. A retired elementary school guidance counselor and former teacher, she was not shy about expecting children to live up to their potential. She made sure divers got life coaching with pool lessons and showed parents that the most important thing was not a gold medal.

— Ellen Robertson