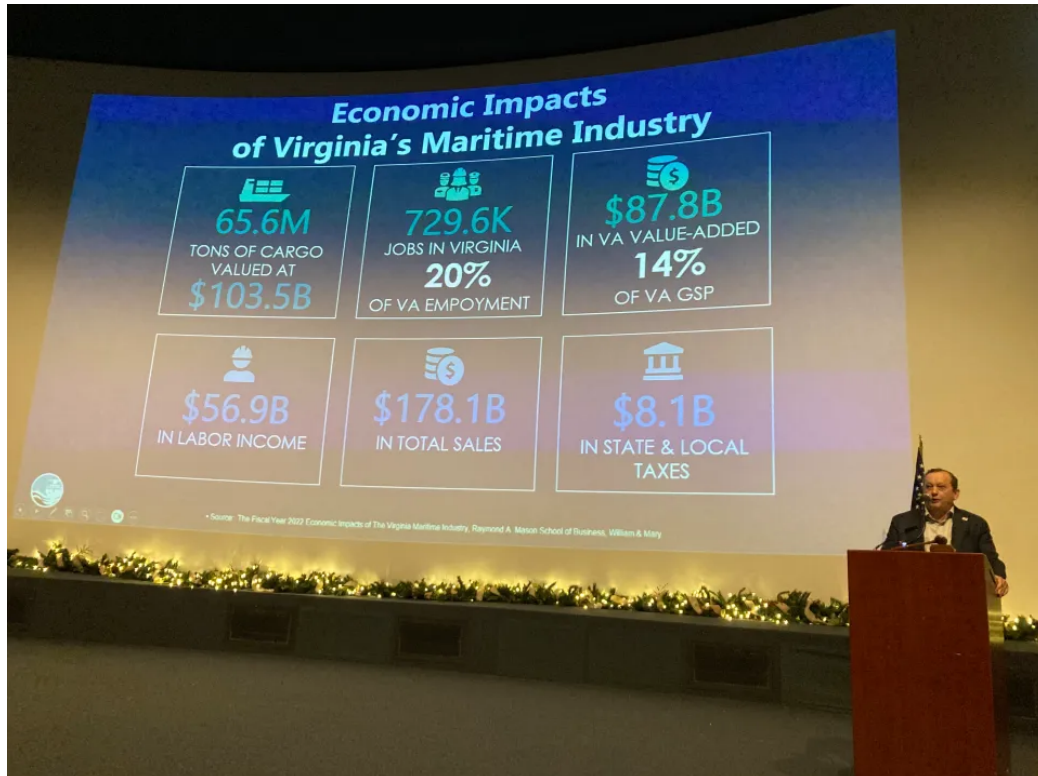


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As Virginia's maritime industry grows, this Norfolk-based group is focused on preparing the workforce



Sandra J. Pennecke/Staff

David White, executive director, Virginia Maritime Association, shares the results of an economic impact study, conducted by the College of William and Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business, during the organization's annual business meeting on Dec. 4 at Nauticus. (Sandra J. Pennecke/Staff)



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About 20% of employment in Virginia can be tied to the maritime industry where jobs are growing, industry advocates say.

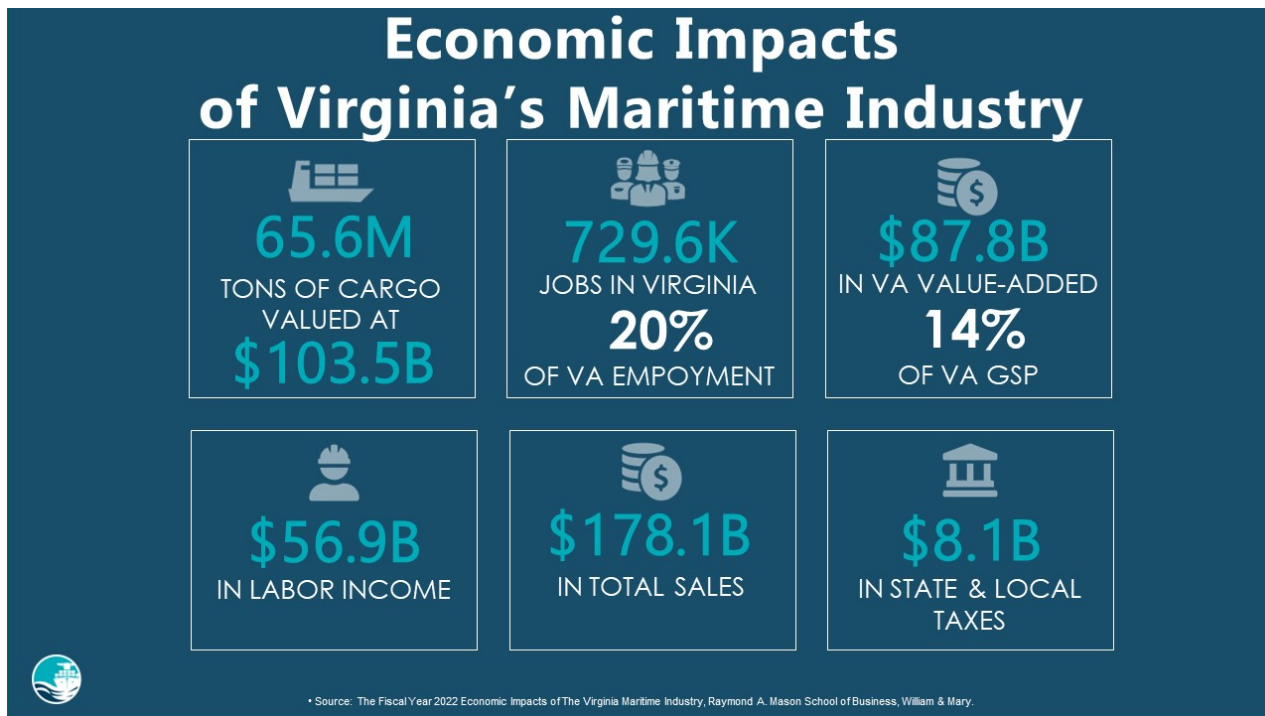
“We are a maritime economy,” David White, executive director of the Virginia Maritime Association, said at the association’s annual meeting on Dec. 4 at Nauticus.

White backed up his claim by sharing how the region and state include the second-largest port by tonnage and third largest by container volume on the East Coast filled with a diversity of cargo and vessels. Virginia handles the largest exports of coal in the country through the port. The region is also home to the largest naval base in the world with a strong shipbuilding and repair industrial base. Virginia has 55 commercial maritime facilities from Richmond to the North Carolina border and the largest offshore wind project in federal waters kicks off in 2024, he continued.

Nearly 730,000 jobs – or 20% of employment in Virginia – was indirectly or directly related to the maritime industry in fiscal year 2022, according to an economic impact study conducted by William & Mary’s Raymond A. Mason School of Business for the association, according to his presentation.

“The opportunities in front of this port are incredible,” White said.

During the pandemic, between 2020 and 2022, the port’s container operations grew 32% because it had the capacity and better operations to offer the marketplace than any other port on the East Coast, White said.



Workforce development is a huge focus in the association's strategic plan, said Judy Barrett, association board president and senior vice president with TowneBank.

"Maritime careers are in demand and expected to grow by 11%," she said of the 10-year projection from 2020 to 2030 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

Founded in 1920 and headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia Maritime Association has more than 450 member companies throughout the state. Representing a breadth of industries, it continues to grow and expand its reach, having just established its fifth chapter in Northern Virginia.

Over the course of the year, the organization has contributed to and helped advance the maritime lab school under development with Newport News Public Schools; Old Dominion University's School of Supply Chain, Logistics and Maritime Operations; and Reimagine Nauticus, as it undergoes a transformation of its exhibits and educational programming geared to provide greater awareness of the maritime industry and its opportunities.

Another focus of the organization since 2009 has been helping to create an environment for offshore wind to succeed in Virginia, White said.

"We need to be talking about diversifying and innovating our strengths," he said, "and be on the leading edge of modernization to meet the future demands of supply chains and our national security."

The association maintains ongoing discussions regarding economic development, including an industrial waterfront study in Chesapeake and supply chain demands and local planning centered on freight transportation.

Will Fediw, VMA's senior vice president, recapped wins in the state budget this year, which included securing \$9 million annually for a talent accelerator program for workforce development, \$150 million for the Interstate 64 gap widening, \$350 million for site readiness and \$10 million for an inland port in Southwest Virginia.

"Rest assured, we are already working on 2024 to get ahead of this next (General Assembly) session," Fediw said, stressing that the VMA is the only association to holistically monitor, promote and protect the commonwealth's navigational interests of the maritime supply chain.

White said the association is tremendously proud of its Maritime Leadership Certification Program, now starting its fifth class. The program, soon to have an alumni network, continues the culture of collaboration gives the port its competitive advantage, White said. The one-year program includes three opportunities outside the region, behind-the-scenes tours, networking and relationship-building and leadership development.

"A rising tide lifts all ships is something that has served this port very well," White said, "and we are intent on doing everything that we can to perpetuate it."

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