

BY KATRINA MULLEN

## Regional News at a Glance



**MARYLAND** In February, Gov. Larry Hogan and the Office of Rural Broadband launched SpeedSurvey, a website for residents to test internet speed or report service issues such

as an inability to access internet from local providers. While Maryland ranks third in the nation for broadband access, some residents, particularly in low-income and rural areas, still face slow internet speeds, no internet, or access to only one provider. (See “Closing the Digital Divide,” *Econ Focus*, Second/Third Quarter 2020.) The website will also allow the state to collect data and generate federal funding for future projects.



**SOUTH CAROLINA** BMW Manufacturing will expand its campus with the addition of a 67,000-square-foot training center, which broke ground in February. Located in Greer, the center will focus on workforce recruiting and training and will

include classrooms, an outdoor amphitheater, and an outdoor meeting space. This \$20 million investment is part of BMW’s \$200 million plan to attract and retain workers as the automotive industry continues to evolve. The center is expected to be completed in summer 2022 and will provide numerous training opportunities, including within the BMW apprenticeship program, BMW Scholars.



**WEST VIRGINIA** In early March, Sens. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., announced that the U.S. Economic Development Administration had awarded the Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIFund) a \$1.5 million CARES

Act Recovery Assistance Grant. The federal grant will allow the Charles Town-based NCIFund to establish an Emergency Response Loan Fund to support businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The NCIFund will also use the grant for existing programs and additional services for businesses.



**NORTH CAROLINA** Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU) recently announced a one-year partnership with Smartvel, a Spanish business-

to-business software company that supports the travel industry. The partnership, which began in early March, will provide travelers with an interactive map on the airport’s website that shows COVID-19-related information on testing, quarantining, and socializing for all 50 U.S. states and select international destinations. RDU will become the first airport to include Smartvel’s information on its website in an effort to increase travel through the area and deliver up-to-date resources.



**VIRGINIA** In June, the Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Virginia, will embark on a three-year project called

“Equity in Virginia’s Public Education System: A Longitudinal Examination Spanning the COVID-19 Shutdown.” The project, which received nearly \$1 million from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, will focus on equitable access and will measure how the pandemic has affected students and teachers, including pre- and post-pandemic trends related to attendance, retention, and mobility through the 2022-2023 school year. When the project concludes in May 2024, researchers hope to identify future policies that could help schools recover from COVID-19 disruptions at state and local levels.



**WASHINGTON, D.C.** To increase minority representation in leadership and executive roles in the hospitality industry, the J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation donated \$20 million to Howard University in February to establish the Marriott-Sorenson Center for Hospitality Leadership. The center will provide students with career development

and mentorship opportunities through the \$1 million Arne M. Sorenson Hospitality Fund, newly created by Marriott International. Separately, the foundation funded \$500,000 in scholarships awarded to hospitality students nationwide by the American Hotel and Lodging Foundation.

IMAGES COURTESY: BMW MANUFACTURING CO. AND THE RALEIGH-DURHAM AIRPORT AUTHORITY