

VIRGINIA

Hi, I'm Judy Friedberg and I am happy to tell you about my home state of Virginia.

Officially known as the Commonwealth of Virginia, this mid-Atlantic state is bordered by Washington, DC, Maryland, West Virginia and North Carolina. And, to the East, the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean border Virginia's Eastern Shore, another peninsula of Virginia land.

More than eight million people live in Virginia. Our state flower is actually a flowering tree – the dogwood. Our state bird is the cardinal.

Much of our state's natural beauty is protected by National Parks. My favorite is Great Falls Park which highlights a rushing section of the Potomac River, which flows to the Bay from the mountains in the west. Those mountains are also known as The Blue Ridge Mountains, due to the coloring of the trees and shadows, particularly in the early morning and early evening light.

Much of this area is included in Shenandoah National Park. Within the park is a portion of the beautiful Appalachian Trail – a rigorous hiking trail which extends from Georgia to Maine. In the autumn, the leaves are at their most colorful.

Skyline Drive runs through the park. This is a fantastic way to see the beauty of the mountains and the Shenandoah Valley from the comfort of your car.

The Shenandoah Valley is known for dairy farms and wineries. Virginia's farming history also includes tobacco and cotton.

Virginia's nicknames refer to its rich history. "The Old Dominion" refers to its status as one of the original 13 colonies. Virginia's other nickname is "The Mother of Presidents." Eight U.S. presidents were born here - more than any other state. Some of their homes are open to the public as historic sites.

Mount Vernon, home of our first President, George Washington, sits high on a bluff overlooking the Potomac River, not far from Washington, DC.

Monticello, home of our third President and drafter of our Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, is located in Charlottesville, Virginia. The University of Virginia, which Jefferson founded, is nearby.

But, back to some much earlier history...Native people, including the Powhatan, Algonquin, and Iroquois, were already living in the area long before the English settlers came. Some say the name Virginia was the settlers' way of honoring Queen Elizabeth the First of England, who was also known as "The Virgin Queen."

You may have heard of the story of Pocahontas? She was a native of the area and a friend to the English settlers of the colony's first capitol, Jamestown, in 1616.

Williamsburg served as the capitol of the Colony of Virginia from the early 1700s and was the center of political activity leading to the American Revolution.

Both Jamestown and Williamsburg have active historic centers where you can learn more about colonial life.

Richmond became the state capital in 1780 and remains so today. In 1861, after ten states seceded from the United States, Richmond became the capital of the short-lived Confederate States of America.

After the Civil War ended, and these states re-entered the Union, Richmond developed into a railroad crossroads for the region. These strong railroads helped develop trade routes between the middle of the country and the Atlantic Ocean and led to the founding of Newport News Shipbuilding which continues to produce battleships and aircraft carriers. Nearby Hampton Roads is the largest naval base on the east coast.

Virginia is also home to the world's largest office building, The Pentagon, headquarters of the Defense Department.

Other Virginia coastal attractions are historic lighthouses including Cape Henry, Fort Monroe and Assateague. Assateague is also the home of the Chincoteague wild ponies. And, if you visit there perhaps you will order some delicious Chesapeake Bay blue crab and a beer for your dinner.

Today, media, technology, software, communications, and consulting are the fastest-growing sectors of Virginia's economy. The education sector, particularly Virginia's 200-plus colleges and universities, and the government employment sector are also growth areas. All of this and more, make Virginia the wealthiest of the southern United States.

I hope you enjoyed hearing about Virginia today.