

Valley Business **FRONT**

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 136

JANUARY 2020

Virginia Tech Corporate
Research Center's COgro

Immersion Therapy

Roanoke County

Richfield's Lisa Clause

Developer Lucas Thornton

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Virginia Tech
Corporate Research Center

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Year 2020. Where do we start?

At the beginning, of course.

And we ask that you consider starting at the beginning, too. From the cover to the first ads to the table of contents and contributors page, on through to the very back of the FRONT. You're experiencing a new FRONTier at your business journal. A new look, a new editor, a new rotational lineup of columnists. And of course, new faces and new stories.

We think you'll enjoy Jennifer Poff Cooper's cover report on one of the newest shared working spaces in the region, COgro at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. This being the New Year, we also offer several of our columnists with their versions of resolutions for 2020.

A lot of new introductions, indeed. Let us know what you think – and send along your ideas for a great business story from Virginia's Blue Ridge, and the Roanoke and New River Valleys anytime — to news@vbfront.com. Happy New Year!



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
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vbFRONT.com

The COgro COworking COnccept

by Jennifer Poff Cooper



Cover photography of Joe Meredith by Tom Field.

Gene Marrano named editor

Gene Marrano has been appointed editor of Valley Business FRONT, effective December 2019. He served as interim editor beginning with the July 2019 edition. Gene is a long time print and radio news journalist in the Roanoke Valley. He has received a handful of local and state awards for news coverage over the years. The father of four great kids and four lovely granddaughters, Gene is also a long distance runner and community theater actor in his "spare" time.

"I have known Gene since his earliest days reporting on the news here in the Roanoke Region," says publisher Tom Field. "And like anyone who has any connections, is invested, or has any stake in what happens in our community, you're going to hear or read about it from something Gene produced. For many years, he has also been our 'go-to' source whenever we needed a quick, accurate, and solid report on a story in our journal, whether it was one of current urgency or an assignment to be developed."

Field says Gene's appointment to an editorship was both serendipitous and a natural fit.

"We kept running into each other," Field says. "At every significant press conference or media invitation, we'd



see each other as I was working as a correspondent in addition to my role as editor; and one day it clicked. Gene knows how to work the trenches as well as pack it all up and deliver it to market. And not just a handful of select assignments... he brings all the pieces, even as he observes the big picture and how that symbiotic force moves our community.

"Gene has the competency, the love of the game, and the tenacity required of a proficient editor to serve a readership that demands coverage and insight of all the activities that impact our economy.

"His answer in immediate affirmation to my invitation to be our editor was reassuring. Gene loves reporting. He believes in being well-informed. That's an exact match to our objective at Valley Business FRONT. I welcome aboard Gene Marrano, and know our readers will receive great benefit from this appointment."



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JANUARY



Ally Bowersock



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Mike Leigh



Gene Marrano



Dan Smith



Nicholas Vaassen

Advisory Board

Valley Business FRONT has organized an Advisory Board comprised of a selective group of diverse business professionals who support our mission and have an interest in how our business journal best serves our local communities and region. As a sounding board throughout their term, board members have been given the task of helping FRONT understand the issues and develop coverage. You will note that the Board is comprised of experts in many different business / industry "fronts." This is intentional, as we are reporting on all the areas that affect our regional economy and are important to you. Although the members are encouraged to keep FRONT updated on their own industries and the key players, they aren't limited to their area of specialty, as all commercial enterprises ultimately collaborate to impact our quality of life here in this part of Virginia. An additional contribution by the Advisory Board involves direct input on the various FRONTLists we present throughout the year. In keeping with our policy of being "the voice of business in the valleys" we ask each reader to join us as an editorial partner by contacting us with your ideas. You know more than we know about your business—or you certainly should—and that inside knowledge shared with our readers will make us all better at what we do.

2020 CONTRIBUTORS



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Lesa Hanlin



Ian Price



Pugh & Rotanz



Michael Shelton



Kaitlyn Van Buskirk



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Airport / transportation



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Mike Dame
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Katie Gehrt
Moss Arts Center at
Virginia Tech / culture



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Bank of Botetourt /
finance – banking



Paul Phillips
Freedom First Credit Union /
finance – credit unions



Brian Powell
Wine Gourmet / retail



Steve Zegarski
Branch Group / construction

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How does
this project
incrementally
improve
Roanoke?

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“”
I need a
space that
is totally
quiet... this
is it... my
refuge.

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Biographies and
contact information
on each contributor
are provided on Page 52.

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COgro

collaborate | connect | cowork

The COgro COworking COnccept

Coworking is a model in which workers from different companies share an office space, allowing cost savings and convenience through the use of common infrastructure, such as equipment, utilities, and receptionist and custodial services. Coworking is not only about the physical place, but about establishing a community.

"The Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center is redefining work with flexible workspace solutions in a coworking space environment. COgro is a community of entrepreneurs, professionals, remote workers, early stage and startup companies, trailing spouses, temporary staff, and companies in transition to permanent spaces at the VTCRC to conduct business," according to a recent news release.

Dr. Joe Meredith, President and Chief Executive Officer of the VTCRC (see sidebar story on Meredith's immediate future plans), said the idea came about in order to meet the needs of individuals who are sole practitioners. He added that the VTCRC can "use [COgro] as a device to get people to experience the park." They will love it and it will continue to grow, he predicted.

The Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center coworking space concept was conceived in June of 2019 and culminated quickly with its opening in October. Meredith said the process was "straightforward;" the VTCRC has been successful for over 25 years so "we knew what we were doing."

COgro, whose Community Administrator is Andrea Hammond, is located at 2200 Kraft Drive, in Blacksburg. It is a subsidiary of the VTCRC, which is owned and managed by the Virginia Tech Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit non-stock corporation established in 1948. There are now some 3000-plus employees and almost



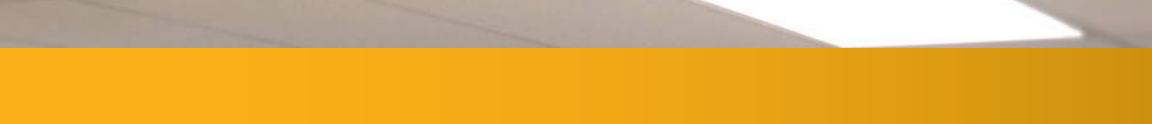
Get people to experience the park.

— Joe Meredith

VTCRC's COgro community

Executive Summary: *COllaborate. COncnect. COwork. Those are the buzz words surrounding a new project at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center.*

By Jennifer Poff Cooper



8 Initial Members @ COgro

- Alion Science & Technology Corp.
- DoLogic, Inc.
- International Management Solutions, Inc.
- Mayfair Group LLC
- Transformative Management Solutions LLC
- SS&C Primatics
- Anonymous (2)

200 companies with a presence at the VTCRC according to data from Virginia Tech.

Dawn Myers, Chief Operating Officer of the VTCRC, said that the staff sought guidance from office rental companies Gather and WeWork on “what worked and what didn’t work” at their coworking spaces in other places.

The new venture showcases workspaces for 64 members. At a press event late last year nine memberships had been leased – well over the initial goal of five, said Myers. Memberships are 12-month agreements, but there has

Joe Meredith and Dawn Myers





Pat Morris, Melissa Vidmar, and Andrea Hammond

been interest in daily, weekly, and monthly participation so those possibilities are being investigated.

COgro members receive flexible workspaces with amenities like free parking, free Wi-Fi; a HUBZone designation (thus making those small businesses eligible for federal grants), weekly snacks, unlimited coffees, teas, and flavored waters. There are also networking and training events; access to copy, print, fax and scanning machines. Not to mention recreation areas and adult leagues; and all the other amenities and benefits that employees of the research park receive - including 17 conference rooms throughout the VTCRC. Myers emphasized that having such spaces in which to meet clients is critical to maintaining the professional image necessary for success.

She touted other amenities for COgro during a tour. These include private phone booths, comfortable sitting areas, and power outlets throughout. Myers says that the kitchen, which includes everything from a dishwasher to a convection oven, is intended to be a place to “network and collaborate, to share ideas and help one another.” It also boasts a large television screen – the idea being to host tailgate parties and monthly “lunch and learn” sessions to bring members together. For relaxation and breaks, there is an indoor putting green. “Members asked for fun things,” said Myers.

COgro’s “secret sauce,” said Meredith, is the opportunity for collaboration. The coworking space prompts a vitality that stimulates the creation of ideas between each other



A place to share ideas and help one another.

— Dawn Myers

CO-working spaces by the numbers

- There are approximately over 35,000 flexible workspaces in the entire world.
- The global market value of flexible workspaces is estimated at an approximate \$26 billion.
- Through 2022, the number of coworking spaces is expected to grow at an annual rate of 6% in the U.S. and 13% elsewhere.
- In 2018, the number of coworking spaces rose 16% in the U.S. and 36% outside the U.S.
- In 2018, flexible workspaces accounted for more than two-thirds of U.S. office market occupancy gains.
- By 2030, the flexible workspace market is expected to represent 30% of U.S. office stock.

Source: Allwork.space

and the community as a whole. Melissa Vidmar, Business Development and Communications Manager, said a primary means of marketing is social media, especially LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. COgro has also sent targeted, personalized letters to those whom the staff feels might benefit from the COgro environment. Other avenues of promotion have targeted entrepreneurs, a “trailing spouses” group at Virginia Tech, the local Chamber of Commerce, websites, radio, television, and Google’s “My Business”.

“Word of mouth will sell the rest once people get here,” predicted Meredith as COgro opened its doors late in 2019. “There isn’t a [specific] business or industry that we are targeting, but instead we want to house those who are passionate about what they do and looking for an environment that inspires,” said Myers.

Transformative Management Solutions (TMS), which provides scheduling and planning services to government agencies and contractors, is a charter member of COgro. Eric Christoph, who calls himself a Solution Architect, said that the HUBZone designation (a government category for small companies that operate and employ people in historically under-utilized business areas) was a critical factor in their decision to locate their headquarters in



Members asked
for fun things.

— Dawn Myers

TOGETHER,

WE CREATE



Blacksburg. “To compete as a start-up, you really need to be in a special business class,” he said.

As a Tech alum, Christoph knew about the VTCRC. So why not rent a full office space? That is in the future plans. For now, the cost difference is “tremendous,” and he and his business partners felt COgro was a perfect environment in which to train the undergraduates they hire. Additionally, there is proximity to a talent pool: TMS management knows to expect high quality students, and when in need of personnel they can reach out to Virginia Tech department heads. Christoph also emphasized that “the people running [COgro] have been great in getting us situated.”

Susan Chapman and her husband, James, co-founders of Mayfair Group, are also Tech alumni who rent space in COgro. “We wanted to be one of the first tenants to support the wonderful concept,” Chapman said. Mayfair Group, which develops new software services to help lawyers and insurance adjusters make better decisions about claims they are handling, currently has students doing research in the COgro space and plans to bring new hires there this month. Mayfair was attracted to COgro’s “beautiful space” as well all of the basics such as private work zones and common areas. “It is a good launching pad,” said Chapman.

Another Tech alumnus member is Joseph Do, CEO of DoLogic, a small business providing professional services including IT and management to the federal government. DoLogic wanted a presence in Blacksburg to gain talent through internships and recruiting. When looking for space, the VTCRC suggested COgro as a “good fit for a small business still growing,” said Do, who especially liked the “vibe of a small start-up,” with the open space feel, networking opportunities, and the value of sharing a learning experience with other companies.

International Management Solutions (IMS) helps European companies get established in the United States, and started an office in COgro when its Accounting Manager, Myriam Joerger, moved to Blacksburg, following her professor husband to his new job at Virginia Tech.

Sydney Fleurance, IMS’s Marketing and Business Development Manager, said there were three main reasons for choosing COgro. First was the firm culture of meeting employee needs – in this case, the trailing spouse scenario. Also, it was strategically a good move, putting IMS in closer proximity to its east coast clients. Finally, the company liked the innovativeness of COgro.

Having worked in a coworking space in the Tucson office for IMS, Joerger recognized benefits like the shiny, well-organized space, the networking and the amenities of the research park – namely a bank, fitness center, a restaurant, conference rooms, and easy access from the Route 460

To compete as a start-up, you really need to be in a special business class.

— Eric Christoph

We wanted to be one of the firsts.

— Susan Chapman



I want to see
action and
progress.

— Steve Childers



Coworking
is catching
on quickly.

— Joseph Do

bypass. When Joerger was ready to move east, IMS simply Googled “coworking spaces” in this area and found COgro. “It was a perfect match,” said Fleurance.


Meanwhile down the road at RU: “excited” is the word Dr. Steve Childers, a professor in the Department of Management and Director of Innovation at Radford University, repeatedly used regarding RU’s new twist on its coworking space. The Venture Lab opened in September on the lower level of Kyle Hall, home of the Davis College of Business and Economics.

The Venture Lab is a free space for students, faculty, and staff entrepreneurs, from any discipline, to develop and test business concepts. Before Venture Lab there was no platform to help work through ideas with mentors or collaborators from other disciplines. Childers emphasized the importance of finding ideas of value, things that people care about. Members learn along the way, whether their ideas come to fruition or not. Membership is determined by interest. “We are looking for people with a desire to work on something. I want to see action and progress,” said Childers.

The Venture Lab is a “catalyst, an integrator” both within the university and from the outside environment. Uniquely, this innovation at RU is embedded in the curriculum with faculty from across campus working together. The biggest asset, said Childers, is the commitment from the leadership and campus-wide at RU towards the common goal. It is also a community service. Childers said people would be surprised at how many local entrepreneurs are RU graduates who stay in the area.

The lab has 24-hour, seven-days-a-week access and features resources that include business plan preparation software, tools for marketing research, meeting and storage space, maps and guides to existing Radford University technological resources such as 3D printers, and perhaps most importantly, human guidance to direct future entrepreneurs.

It was important, said Childers, to not reinvent something that already exists, such as a business accelerator, but this project helps would-be entrepreneurs get ready for that next step. Short of waving a magic wand for financial support, Childers said, the Venture Lab has the next best thing – funding in the university’s strategic plan. He envisions additional monies coming in organically as people see what the Venture Lab can accomplish.

Companies are settling here in the New River Valley; local college students are also staying after graduation in many cases. Coworking is catching on quickly in this area. Said DoLogic’s Do, “I hope it [COgro] works for Virginia Tech and for us.” 

A confession: We knew Joe Meredith was announcing his retirement before he made it official. We were working this story on COgro at Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, and he pulled me aside. Happy to contribute and serve as our FRONTcover model, he told me; but confidentially, he wanted me to know he would be announcing his retirement intentions in early December, followed by his continued service through January of the new year. "I understand if you want to make another selection for your cover," he offered.

Are you kidding? Having Joe on our January cover (the introduction of our new design look for the journal, too) is perfect timing. I told him so. Yes, a transition is coming for VTCRC; but what a way to commemorate the hand-off. What a way to recap Joe's service and celebrate the success that is the Corporate Research Center.

Joe (Dr. Meredith) served as president and CEO of VTCRC in Blacksburg since 1993. The CRC consists of over 180 high-tech companies and research operations that employs over 3,300 people. The campus has about three dozen buildings (for now) at over one million square feet of space. It was won numerous awards and has been cited by many organizations for its contributions to new ideas, products and services, entrepreneurial startups and new venture expansions, particularly in the technology field.

Joe Meredith's resume is too extensive to list here, but a short version includes degrees in aeronautics, astronautics, engineering, and industrial systems. He has served on numerous boards and councils and has been a member of both professional and community / civic associations. He was named Business Person of the Year for 2001, received the 2011 Professional Leadership Award, and honored as a Distinguished Alumni.

Given the many hats a leader has to wear to manage an organization with the complexities of a major university corporate research campus, I had to ask Joe: what area of competency do you think is most important for this role... finance, real estate...?

"Technology," Joe replied. No hesitation.

"Having a solid grasp on what technology companies want, how they operate, their strategies... is vital."

Call them members, tenants, startups, venture-builders, companies, community... whatever. Joe's response indicates whose mission really matters here.

Not a bad way to run a business complex for 27 years.

—Tom Field



Joe Meredith

"But, I'm leaving..."



Richfield Living
Lisa Clause
Special Events & Marketing
and Relationships

Lisa Clause

Captain Constellation

By Dan Dowdy

Richfield Living's Lisa Clause is practicing her profession in the midst of the organization's most comprehensive expansion.

Valley Business FRONT welcomes Lisa Clause as a 2020 advisory board member representing the region's senior community sector.

As Richfield Living's Senior Director of Marketing and Philanthropy, Clause views her role as multifaceted.

She oversees a department of six who are responsible for multimedia marketing (TV, billboards, print, digital, social media); maximizes opportunities to educate and inform the region about Richfield Living's vibrant community through public relations activities; and encourages philanthropy, i.e., tax-deductible donations that support the residents and facilities of the expanding 52-acre retirement community located west of downtown Salem.

In addition to several apartment complexes and a cluster of cottages that dot the campus, Richfield Living offers a five-level constellation of care: independent living, assisted living, memory care, rehab/vacation and recovery, and long-term nursing care. Richfield Living's competitive rental model, with no up-front entrance fee and one-year leases, sets it apart from some other senior living communities.

Construction currently underway of a 140-unit apartment complex is expected to be completed by fall of 2020. A new Health Care Center, also coming in 2020, will replace the aging Recovery and Care Center. It will feature a household model, the first in Southwestern Virginia. Clause explains that this model puts residents first and is centered around a kitchen as the heart of a home instead of centering around a nursing station. It enables residents to choose when they eat, bathe, sleep, and take medicine. A Town Center is planned that will provide facilities for residents to meet with families and engage in activities. It will house three restaurants,

"IN BRIEF"

NAME: Lisa Clause
(pronounced "Klouse"
as in "house")

POSITION: Senior Director of
Marketing and Philanthropy

COMPANY: Richfield Living


LOCATION: Salem

BACKGROUND: Grew up in
Radford, VA; undergrad degree
in Marketing from Virginia Tech,
MBA from Liberty University;
moved to Salem in 2006; worked
in Medicaid marketing and was
a television executive; married,
1 child, 2 stepsons; joined
Richfield Living December 2018

MOTTO: "Life is a journey; enjoy
the process"

all open to the public, including a pub, a café, and a more formal dining setting.

Clause's primary goal of consistency in strategy and branding across her three areas of focus, for all the current as well as the developing living options for seniors, affords her ample opportunities to live out one of her mottos: "live every day to the fullest."

Richfield Living, the oldest retirement community in the area, now in its 85th year, is a local community-based organization with no ties to an outside entity. It is governed by an active board of volunteer directors from the community and managed by a team of dedicated professionals. As a not-for-profit organization, Richfield Living directs money back into program development and service enhancements for residents rather than distributing it as profits to investors. 



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Lesa Hanlin

Executive Summary:
Do You Hear That?
Stop what you're doing
right now and listen.

The sound of silence

Are you at the office? Are you at home? What conversations are going on in the background and who is monopolizing them? I recently worked with a lively company that wanted Myers-Briggs training, part of which is determining if you are an extravert or introvert. Most of the participants are in sales, so the vast majority of participants were extraverts since sales positions naturally draw that personality type. Extraverts are typically uncomfortable with silence and want to fill it up. Introverts are generally better at using silence. Whether an extravert or introvert, you are missing something if you aren't comfortable with silence.

Here's what can happen if you're quiet for a minute during a conversation:

1. You can find out what matters to the other person/people.
2. You can give importance to the topic you're discussing. Silence indicates you are giving deep thought to something before responding.
3. People are given space to think for themselves.
4. You gain wisdom. How? By having more time to reflect before you speak.
5. When you do speak, your words will have more impact.
6. Someone else gets the chance to be heard. A fresh perspective might emerge.

And my favorite,

7. People often come up with their own solutions when met with silence.

When you begin to intentionally use silence, at first you may be uncomfortable with the lack of conversational direction and inherent social anxiety silence can bring. Just think of silence as another form of communication. Practice being comfortable with silence. Sharpen this skill by counting to ten in your head after speaking. Stop filling in the blanks for people and completing their sentences.

Plato said, "Wise men speak because they have something to say; Fools because they have to say something."

Shhh. Let them wonder what you're thinking.
Silence is golden. 🤫

Lesa Hanlin is executive director of Roanoke Regional Initiatives. Contact her: lesa@vt.edu

“People often come up with their own solutions when met with silence.”

Know how much business is costing you

Calculating your business financials once a year or once a quarter simply for tax purposes doesn't do your business much good. If you're not clear on how your company is doing at least month-to-month, you're probably wasting money. It makes tax time a lot more stressful too.

Create good systems now to avoid potential IRS challenges with future returns and get a clearer picture on what your business is doing in real time.

Start 2020 expense records now. Yes, you're going to have to go back and get 2019 in order, but now's the time to start 2020 right. Granted, from a tax standpoint, the standard deduction has increased dramatically in recent years, so many small business owners are no longer itemizing. But, if you're smart, you understand the importance of tracking and adjusting expenses against income anyway.


Meals are deductible at 50% - entertainment is gone as a valid business expense. If you dine at a restaurant with a client, note on the receipt who lunch was with, and what you talked about.

Receipts require details. Whether you're handling invoices, payment vouchers and other documents electronically or in hard copy, make notes on the documents as they come in. Scan or make copies of receipts monthly as the register tape fades over time.

Get your categories right if you're using QuickBooks. Using multiple categories for the same type of expense or being too vague with your choice makes accounting more difficult and expensive. Seek help from a professional before you start your 2020 record keeping if you're confused.

Mileage records now require more detail. Whether your system is with an app or in a small notebook, set up a good process now. Begin with the year's starting mileage. Indicate the start, end and total miles for each related business trip along with the destination and reason for the trip. Know how many business vs. personal miles you travel.

Get W-9s from vendors before they start work. Ensure Tax ID numbers and addresses are filled out properly. You'll need this for 1099s at the end of the year.

Too often, small business owners fail because they discover financial issues too late. If you start paying attention to where your money's coming and going regularly, you'll be able to make adjustments quickly to delete unnecessary expenses and compensate for income lags. You can't do this without accurate, timely records. Of course, doing so also makes tax time and potential audits a lot easier. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Tracking business expenses matters even if you're taking the standard deduction.



Ian Price

Lucas Thornton

BIG PLANS

By Ian Price

His handiwork is already evident indowntown Roanoke, but the most visible project yet is still on the drawing boards.

Owner Lucas Thornton likes to ask a few key questions whenever Hist:Re Partners thinks about taking on a development. He says the first is “how does this project incrementally improve Roanoke?” Talking about the task of laying out downtown Roanoke’s historic Market Square,

Thornton said “that’s one I’m most proud of, because of the non-monetary benefits of the public square.” Hist:Re began conversations with the city in 2010 on eliminating 25 “poorly utilized” parking spaces to expand the Farmer’s Market and add a public plaza that’s now hosted

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a wide variety of events. Thornton says they turned the market square project over to the city before it was completed in 2013. He sites that as one example of how Hist:Re partners with different groups to accomplish common goals.

It's hardly ever a Hist:Re only project, that's where the "Partners" part of the name holds true. "For us it's about growing good quality partnerships" Thornton says. Just about every project involves residential development but he says, "in almost every instance there is some other user." It's usually "something missing from downtown," he adds. That's the idea behind the current bus station on Campbell Avenue SW. That land is being obtained by Hist:Re in a property trade with Roanoke City and will be demolished for Thornton's new development – which actually includes a new street between Campbell and Salem Avenues.

The plan is to turn that space into a 7 to 8 story office building for 150-200 employees downtown and 90 residential units. "What we have recognized is there has been a lack of new office space built downtown" says Thornton. The Valley Metro bus depot will be moved to a property on Salem Avenue already purchased by the City of Roanoke, now a parking lot near the Virginia Museum of Transportation.

Hist:Re turned another parking lot at the corner of Williamson Road and Tazewell Avenue into what's now Gramercy Row: 84 loft apartments with rooftop courtyards and private balconies, as well as 6,000 square feet of commercial offices and 47 concealed off-street parking stalls. The H.L. Lawson Building on Campbell Avenue SE now has 22 moderate income apartments, two studio live/work apartments, and a commercial office space after Hist:Re's work was finished

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H.L. Lawson Building on Campbell Avenue SE

there. Before it was a 25,000 square-foot merchandise warehouse, just across the train tracks from Gramercy Row.

By leaving many of the historic features intact Thornton and other developers are able to take advantage of state and federal tax credits that can reimburse them for a sizable share of renovation costs. You could say it's all in the family: through Restoration Housing LLC, Thornton's wife Isabell is redeveloping older single-family homes (100 years-plus old in some cases)

into affordable multi-family housing, also taking advantage of those tax credits.

"I think people are attracted to living downtown because they're interested in the experience, in urbanism" Lucas Thornton says. He believes another big reason people move downtown is for the character many apartments still have, intact due to historic features (exposed beams, high ceilings, unique layouts etc.) left in place. "They feel full of character and 'bleed' with their own histories." He

Gramercy Row



says that's attractive to people in today's throwaway world.


"I'd say 40% of our residents are moving to Roanoke for the first time," adds Thornton. "If you are moving to Roanoke for a new job but don't know anyone in the valley it can be challenging when picking an area to live in. The revitalization of downtown Roanoke has provided apartments in an area that's familiar to people from other cities."

It's also about balancing old versus new: "a challenge for us is how to preserve maintain and create that sense of character and authenticity in our new construction" Thornton says, as opposed to urban infill projects like the renovated Lawson property. "Especially [with a project] like Campbell Court."

Thornton says he strives to create special names for Hist:Re developments: "I'm interested in names and what they say



Campbell Court bus station

about the importance of the project." He admits that Hist:Re is a bit too clever. Whether it's on a tax return or written on a form, "it's invariably mistaken in terms of how it's pronounced, how it's said, or what it means. But it's some combination of reimagining history and our common heritage." In any case this young developer is making a name for himself in downtown Roanoke these days. 



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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:

Is it time to imagine a worst-case scenario for your business – and plan for that?

A big loss

I lost a special client recently. A tragic accident took his life. On top of a devastating loss for his family, his loss also, no doubt, caused significant turmoil for the company he led. Unfortunately, it wasn't an isolated incident. In 2019, three leaders from different clients I work with lost their lives in non-work-related accidents. We don't like to think about these horrible events. And we don't like to plan for them. Does anyone like to sit with family and discuss life insurance and what to do if you die? Yet we all know it should be done.

In your company, you have key people that are invaluable to your success. What would happen if you lost them? Eventually, everyone in your organization leaves. It could be from a career change, a family move, or retirement, but everyone eventually leaves (see my FRONT article on Succession Planning, November 2015, online at vbfront.com). But what if the top leader (President, Owner, CEO, etc.) were to suddenly be gone?

As a business owner with employees, I am responsible to them to ensure they have a safe and secure job. If you lead a company, you most likely feel the same way. If suddenly you were not there, would the company survive? Would your team be ok?

A friend of mine who runs a small business recently stepped away for several months to see what would happen. He completely took himself out of the operations. He learned a lot about his processes and his people, and the exercise highlighted for him what he needed to do to keep his organization healthy even without him.

Medium and large businesses can better handle a loss because there is usually a deeper bench to draw from, and processes and responsibilities are more standard. But for small companies, or small firms with few partners, you need to have a plan. If you work in one of these organizations, ask if a plan exists. If you lead one of these organizations, there is no better time than the new year to make one.

And please be safe out there. 🍀

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

“You have key people that are invaluable to your success. What would happen if you lost them?”

Social media resolutions for your business


The holidays are over, and we barely made it out alive. If you've been keeping up with your business's social media this whole time, good for you! If you haven't, don't be so hard on yourself. The thought of taking photos, writing captions, and posting consistently is a daunting task (even for those of us who LOVE social media). This has evolved into a full-time job, and you've already got one of those. Rest assured, there are ways to make this aspect of your marketing efforts more manageable.

Here are three strategies that we recommend for someone in charge of their own business Facebook/Instagram.

1. Make a list of categories. Say you own a coffee shop and want to revamp your presence online, but you're not sure what to post besides pictures of latté art. Try these:
 - Employee headshots, action shots, birthday shout outs
 - Your storefront (It may be obvious to you, but not everyone can spot you on the street yet!)
 - What the inside looks like (not everyone in town has seen it. Or maybe it'll remind someone how great your place is to study this evening).
 - Fresh ingredients that you get from the farmers market, etc.
 - Photos of Roanoke that remind your audience you are local
 - Behind the scenes videos of staff goofing around
 - Funny/inspiring quotes
 - Short videos of drinks being made (videos of latte art are even better)
 - Maybe even a regular customer spotlight
 - Borrowed content from other Instagrams (borrowed content means content from other accounts - but credit is required).

The list could go on and on but make it unique to YOUR place. Narrowing down a list of categories makes it easier to decide what to post when you go "SH**! I didn't post today!"

2. Download a post scheduling app. These allow you to sit down and plan out a week/month of content. You can plan all the photos, video, and captions, then schedule them to post automatically. We like "Planoly", but there are many out there to choose from.
3. Save inspiration. Make a point to follow accounts that inspire you and save posts that you like. This will allow you to have a little digital vision board when creativity plateaus – hits a dry patch - as it sometimes does!

You know what they say - New Year's resolutions don't really work unless you have a plan, so try taking these steps towards an online presence that you can be proud of. 



TECH WHISPERER

By **Spencer Pugh**
and **Maggie Rotanz**

Executive Summary:

You have them for personal goals – why not set some resolutions for your business?

Harvest Media helps local businesses with digital media creation and marketing strategies. For more tips like these, follow us on Facebook and Instagram (@harvestdm) or send us an email at hello@harvestdigitalmarketing.co

STEADY IS THE WORD

By Gene Marrano

Think long term and establish a firm foundation says Roanoke County's economic development director.



Photo courtesy of RoCo

Jill Loope

Consider the City of Roanoke perhaps as the more flashy cousin – the Virginia Tech Carilion campus, which will grow once again in 2020 as the Fralin Biomedical Research adds a wing and hundreds of researchers and students; the continued expansion of downtown living spaces, the brewpubs

of course and a return of big time retail to downtown when the outdoor-themed Mast department store chain occupies the first two floors of the long-dormant Heironimus building now under renovation.

Meanwhile Roanoke County economic development director Jill Loope touts slow but steady growth – like public property sales bringing in more than three million dollars of revenue to the county over a recent five-year period. Almost \$300 million in new project investments, more than 2100 jobs in the county in that same period ending last summer.

VBF: what do you want people to know about economic development in the county?

Loope: we're healthy and growing and stable.

VBF: "repurposing" seems to be a buzzword with Roanoke County? How does that factor in?

Loope: former county libraries and schools in particular [have been redeveloped]. Most of that occurring

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in the Town of Vinton. We have repurposed four public facilities over the past 5 years – nearly \$30 million dollars in investments in the Town of Vinton alone. (Not to mention private buildings like the former Allstate Building on Electric Road now a multi-tenant Metis Holding property).

VBF: talk about “Reimagine” plans for the 419 Town Center (already approved by the Board of Supervisors), the Oak Grove and Hollins Reimagine plans, which are not that far along.

Loope: the Reimagine plans are a roadmap for the county’s future. They’re 20-year plans – a roadmap for better mobility, higher density in these corridors – basically telling developers and investors what we want to see in these corridors.

VBF: what’s the game plan overall?

Loope: I think its important to understand we’re positioning the county for the future with public investments in infrastructure. We put \$5.7 million into Explore Park and we’re now yielding results there with the small business development going on. We’ve secured [\$17 million plus] for improvements at the 419-US 220 intersection. Basically about \$30 million for transportation on 419 [Electric Road] alone. Its going to take a while to actually see the results but those are important investments. I think you’ll see slow incremental growth [at and near Tanglewood Mall]. On broadband we’ve put over \$5 million into expansion throughout our commercial corridors. Businesses and residences expect this kind of high speed [internet] access or they won’t even consider moving here.

VBF: what about the Woodhaven Technology Park, the 100 acre-plus



Martha Parrott
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Metis Holdings announcement

property Roanoke County co-owns with the cities of Salem and Roanoke near I-81? When will that pay off with a major tenant or two?

Loope: we are preparing that site, which is a gateway for the Roanoke Valley, for future investments.

VBF: can you point to any “gamechangers” perhaps for Roanoke County over the past few years?

Loope: Ardagh Packaging, the single largest manufacturing project the county has attracted [including \$4.2 million in new equipment expansion], that was a \$100 million dollar project with 100 new

jobs. We have more to come by the way. (The recent Carilion Children’s expansion announced for the former JC Penney property at Tanglewood Mall is one prime example).

VBF: do you think people are impatient sometimes when they don’t see the visible signs of economic development and tax base growth?

Loope: its human nature, we want to see immediate results. The good news is we have a strong foundation, a strong economic base. We are a steady growth community, not a fast growth community. We’d like to see our growth rate a little stronger [than




one percent annually population-wise she says], but the good news is that means we're slow to go into recessions. We have a stable base of employers. Economic diversification helps us to weather the storms.

VBF: talk about raising the visibility for Roanoke County – to the outside world

Loope: we're hitting the reset button on that, embracing the innovation economy, [for example] what's happening at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute – and how that is expected to transform our region in the future. We are aligning our resources behind this. New advertorials are going out into national site selection

publications, better positioning the county as a place to live and invest. We're innovating and we have a lot of transformative projects underway.

VBF: what do investors and developers want?

Loope: it begins with real estate. The right building and or the right site at the right time. That's the secret sauce. Then it becomes a matter of selling our community, our workforce and quality of life, then negotiating the deal through incentives – or whatever is necessary. We're making those investments. We're a healthy, stable economy. 



Carilion announces another major project >

The Agees – as in Carilion Clinic President and CEO **Nancy Howell Agee** and her husband, the Honorable **Steven Agee**, a Circuit Court judge, have donated one million dollars towards the new **Carilion Clinic Cancer Center**, which will be built on Reserve Avenue across the street from the Virginia Tech Carilion Campus in Roanoke. The project is expected to cost \$100 million, for construction of the Cancer Center, and to outfit it with equipment. Nancy Agee said she envisions synergy between the new treatment facility (which she estimates may take four years to fundraise, design

and build), the VTC campus and independent Blue Ridge Cancer Center, which now treats Carilion-referred patients at several locations in the Roanoke Valley.

The Carilion Clinic Cancer Center will be built on property the City of Roanoke swapped with Carilion – which deeded the former Gill Memorial Hospital for use now as the RAMP business incubator. “Cancer care has long held a special place in my heart,” said Nancy Agee – her father died from the disease and husband Steve had a bout with prostate cancer. The Carilion Foundation will fundraise for the project – which is not part of a one-billion-dollar system-wide expansion plan announced in May 2019.



Community kitchen open for business >

Millstone Kitchen, a shared use facility in Blacksburg that opened in the former Prices Fork Elementary School last year, is envisioned as a place where caterers, small retail food distributors, bakeries, value-added food processing startups, food trucks etc. can rent space in a commercial kitchen space before perhaps they outfit their own commercial kitchen. Several small firms are utilizing Millstone Kitchen now, but manager **Jessica Schultz** with Live Work Eat Gather Inc. says they are looking to jump start the process by

holding a Shark Tank-like competition between January and April. Participants will also be required to attend 6 workshops where some of the basics on certification and business plans will be taught.

Schultz says some of those basics – or a lack of knowledge about them – may be preventing some local New River Valley startups from getting to the point where they can utilize Millstone Kitchen. Those workshops are also open to aspiring foodies not taking part in the competition – which does include \$20,000 in seed money for the winning businesses. See millstonekitchen.org for more on the facility and the workshops.





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WELLNESS

By Ally Bowersock

Executive Summary:
It's always good to set new goals – go for it but make them realistic.

Goal setting 101 in 2020

With a new year usually comes new interest in fresh starts: a cleaner house, healthier eating patterns, less alcohol consumption, better self-care. Why is it that some people are able to start and maintain new habits while others struggle with the yo-yo effect year after year? Evidence suggests there are a few key elements to successful goal setting which can be applied to 2020.

Follow the SMART acronym: Specific. Measurable. Accountable. Realistic. Time-Oriented. It is critical for goal achievement that pairing it with each of these variables occurs in order to both track progress and evaluate efficacy of goal-setting strategies. Take “weight loss” for example: many people identify losing weight as a top-tier new year’s goal, but many fall short when it comes to pairing the SMART acronym with said goal. Look at it this way: Do you want to track bodyfat loss or just overall pounds? How MUCH weight do you want to lose and by what date? Is this goal realistic? How are you planning to stay accountable for this goal? Why is the timeline you’ve identified helpful/important? Asking these questions up front and pairing them with your goal will help refine the vision of what your day/week/month/year will look like in order to achieve this goal.

Set one short-term and one long-term goal: current culture dictates instant gratification: the most “likes”, the most clicks, most tags, the most engagement. By identifying smaller more realistic goals achievable in a short amount of time, you are more likely to feel a sense of accomplishment and therefore renewed motivation for striving towards the overall goal. If you are currently not physically active and want to train for your first 5k, yet find the daily half-mile walk to your mailbox an arduous task, you are less likely to seek fulfillment from a weekly “investment” in your health if the only goal is the long-term reward of the 5k. Your best bet is to set smaller, more incremental goals (i.e. by the end of the month, walking to my mailbox and back without feeling breathless) and celebrate small successes on your path toward the more distant goal.

Document: whether you share experiences on the worldwide web, or prefer to keep it “old school” and use a journal, research has repeatedly shown that self-reflection is a powerful tool in behavior change and maintaining healthy habits. You may prefer to keep health journey details close to the vest, or if you feel the validation from others is important, perhaps documenting it via social media channels. No matter what your personality or goals, evidence has shown that sharing them with at least one other person for accountability purposes is an effective means of keeping in check and staying the course. 📖


Ally Bowersock is the Co-owner of RunAbout Sports Roanoke. Contact her: runaboutroanoke@gmail.com

Helping the mobility-challenged be F.R.E.E. to get around easier

Imagine everyday functions like getting in and out of the shower becoming so difficult that you constantly worry about becoming totally disabled. Many people who have challenges with mobility are wondering how they will provide for their family, when it is difficult just to take care of themselves. The solution to these problems could be as simple as a wheelchair, a walker or some other piece of equipment to regain independence. Yet, there are many who don't have insurance and can't afford to purchase this type of mobility enhancing equipment.

With these barriers in mind, a local nonprofit called the F.R.E.E. Foundation started in 1999 under the leadership of Dr. Bruce Stelmack and a group of fellow medical professionals who were determined to help the elderly and disabled. F.R.E.E.'s mission is to acquire and provide mobility related rehabilitative equipment to maximize functional independence and improve quality of life. The F.R.E.E. Foundation takes in community donations of walkers, wheelchairs, shower chairs, bedside commodes, tub transfer benches, and more from the community.

The organization sanitizes, cleans, inspects, and makes minor repairs on donated items, and then provides the equipment to adults with disabilities. The organization's services are completely free to qualified individuals, but monetary donations and equipment donations are always needed. Over the years, the growing need for these services became more and more apparent, which is why F.R.E.E. now serves all of Virginia through programs located in Roanoke, Lynchburg, Winchester, Richmond, Williamsburg, Virginia Beach, and Salem.

In 2018, F.R.E.E. served 2,478 individuals with 3,626 pieces of equipment. These services helped provide people with a greater independence, the ability to remain living safely at home and have greater community involvement. The agency has also seen a significant decrease in falls, emergency room visits and hospital readmissions involving the people it serves. Because of these outcomes, F.R.E.E. estimates that it saves the Commonwealth over 24 million dollars annually and over 6 million dollars locally in medical costs. Needless to say, the F.R.E.E. Foundation is changing lives in our community one equipment donation at a time. 



GOOD WORK

By Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

Executive Summary:

An organization flying under the radar, perhaps, has been making a difference for two decades now.

Kaitlyn Van Buskirk is a grants associate with the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia. kaitlyn@cfwesternva.org



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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

Although our journal is called the FRONT because we're current, at times it is revealing to look back at what we've reported.

FRONTlookBack

One neat thing about our satellite office in Crafteria at 16 West Church Avenue in downtown Roanoke, is that we have every edition of FRONT magazine on our wall display—currently 136 monthly magazines. Not only is it an eclectic visual (a cast of characters reflecting the diverse state of our business here in Virginia's Blue Ridge); but it's a timeline of commercial life that's unique to our little part of the world.

Although each magazine is full of stories from all “fronts” or industry sectors, just the covers alone can be quite revealing. Our FRONTcovers — showing blogging (2008), Millennials and entrepreneurs (2009), alternative medicine and angel investing (2010), craft brewing (2011); medical research (2012); agritourism and wind energy (2013); drones and cybersecurity (2014); analytics and coal town conversions (2015); mechatronics and broadband (2016) — featured reports on industry and economic impact trends we brought to the forefront at the catalyst stage, before they became the next big thing.

An interesting and educational timeline, indeed. A consortium of business intelligence for even the most embedded and connected professional.

Sometimes, it's useful to be a bit nostalgic. Yes, our emphasis is on looking forward; but one can learn from a historical perspective, or as some folks in the business call it— “institutional memory.” I thought I'd grab just one example... a “FRONTlookBack” if you will, and see if there is any change in our perspective on a subject we covered then versus now.

We all... well, most of us... are more than familiar with our neighborhood grocery stores. Many of us are reeling from the effects of extra activity at grocery stores from the recent holiday blitzkrieg. My, oh my, can you rack up a ticket in November/December. Our Christmas tree is 12 feet high, and I could have encircled and wrapped it on every branch level using the white roll of sales receipt from Kroger, WalMart, Food Lion, and Fresh Market. Had the grocers printed some holiday themed icon on the back of the receipts, maybe I could have gotten by with such a feat.

We published a little report on grocery stores in our December 2012 edition. Ours was a fun little assignment that included an “embedded reporter” who actually took a grocery store run across our region, making five stops from east to west (Bedford County to Montgomery County). Okay, it was me. I was a covert mystery shopper at the biggest of national grocery chains to the small locally owned community / neighborhood grocer.

For the most part, the employees I encountered liked their jobs well enough; and the customers definitely expressed their preferences as to why they were at that particular store


continued on Page 40

The more things change

So said Heraclitus, a Greek Philosopher from way back. In the business world of course, no matter what that business is, change is a constant. You know, if you're not moving forward, you're drifting backward, which is a quote attributed to actor Sam Waterson and is similar to other quotes. Speaking of change, our recent cover story by Michael Abraham on big expansion plans at Volvo Trucks in Pulaski County was followed by a short term layoff when a parts supplier in Maryland went on strike – and then a longer term partial workforce layoff due to an anticipated downturn expected in the demand for heavy trucks. What happens to the major long-term expansion and hundreds of jobs announced with great fanfare by the Governor's office several months ago remains to be seen.

As a former veteran of the manufacturing world, ups and downs in employee numbers (I've been caught up in a layoff or two) and product line course corrections are nothing new. Its why I found Beth Macy's first book *Factory Man* so interesting, as the Bassett Company (specifically John Bassett III) tried to stay light on its feet to avoid being swallowed up by foreign cheaper furniture imports that had started flooding into the country.

Elsewhere: several months ago we profiled Michelle Darby as the new executive director for the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce – she's now with United Way of Roanoke Valley as a Vice President for Development. And even in our cover story last month, on community theaters in the area, several may be out of business or on hiatus in 2020.

"Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." George Bernard Shaw said that; I like it. Speaking of change, watch for a new look for Valley Business Front that starts taking shape this month. I'm sort of a change agent, always have been, and we've collectively come up with some creative makeovers we think readers will like starting with this issue. Anyway, it's the New Year and a new decade, what are you looking to change in 2020 and beyond? As Wayne Dyer once said: "change the way you look at things, and the things you look at change." One more: "a wise man changes his mind, a fool never will," – Spanish proverb. Happy New Year. Please let us know what you don't like or do like about the changes here – what you also would like to see in terms of story coverage. Send us a short letter to the Editor/Publisher if the mood strikes you: news@vbf.com. We can take it. 

“Ups and downs in employee numbers and product line course corrections are nothing new.



Gene Marrano

THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
"Change is the only constant in life."

Letters

Trifecta

Your magazine gets better with every issue. It's well-designed and well-written and you know your audience. Do you have any idea how rare it is to accomplish all three of those objectives? Good job.

Peg McGuire
Roanoke

Send letters to news@vbFRONT.com or any FRONT contact of your choosing (page 6). Submissions may be edited. You can see, read, print any current or back issue online at www.vbFRONT.com

Field / On Tap

from Page 38

that particular day. The on-location report included Walmart, Kroger, Tinnell's, Food Lion, and Wade's. We also visited Roanoke Natural Foods Co-Op, and looked at a list of top supermarket chains in the nation (by sales). The report concluded with a list of grocery stores we no longer have here (what happened to them) as well as a list of grocery stores we wish we had. The FRONT cover feature ended up naming about 50 grocery store brands.

Which brings us to today.

What is the state of our local / regional grocery store segment today, in comparison to our report exactly seven years ago?

Here's a summary:

1. A sad note. Of all the grocery stores Consumer Reports compiled in its most recent reader survey (75,000 respondents), only two that we have in our region placed near the top: The Fresh Market and Aldi. Granted, the list includes the large national and regional chains; not your smaller neighborhood stores; but this finding seems to indicate improvement is needed.
2. Of the list we provided indicating stores we wish we had; not a single one has moved into our market. We're still patronizing pretty much the same grocery options today than we did seven years ago.
3. Positive note. The new grocery shopping service options available today (versus just seven years ago) are gaining

momentum and increasing customer satisfaction. Apparently, more of us like the curbside app pickup service; and some of us are even embracing home delivery from the grocers themselves or third party operators.

4. New locations of ANY grocery type store is something almost everyone appreciates. We want even more convenience. We want groceries downtown, we want them in "food desert" locales, we want them in actual convenience stores, we still like small grocers in neighborhoods, and we don't even mind other retailers getting into the grocery business (Target, Big Lots, etc.)

When we report on any business in our journal, we may not address how that information might change in the coming decades, but it's a good idea to keep those thoughts in the forefront of our minds as we collect and share those stories. To discount the "what comes next" is just not FRONTworthy. 📰



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Following are book recommendations from our contributors and business people in the Roanoke and New River Valleys who are inveterate readers. Readers are invited to submit short reviews of books you've read during the past six months. Our goal is to recommend good books on any topic and in any genre. Send reviews to news@vbFRONT.com

When dystopian seems progressive

Once I read a description of *The Warehouse* (Crown; 2019) by Rob Hart, I knew I'd pick it up. It's a glimpse into the future of a consumer-based society, flush with the technology advancements we're already experiencing, and the monopolistic-capitalistic potential model from that merger. If it weren't for the environmental destruction that painted the scene of our outside world (all truly functional life happens inside the mega-corporate warehouse distribution complexes scattered across the country), our story could be merely a decade or few away.

The story is a bit juvenile at times. Some of our new society makes sense; other parts—such as smart watches allowing and restricting movement and three bathrooms for gender choice—seem more dated than the intended progressive state or future likelihood; however, the impact of the mega-corporation's role proffered an intriguing study. The corporate communication examples were also quite juvenile with an unrealistic voice (resulting in a contrived narrative), but *Warehouse* was still worth the read. If nothing else, the warning of an impending split between the one percent haves and 99 percent have-nots and what could happen when all production sucks down into a funnel of purely service sector fulfillment makes for a compelling story. If everything was Amazon (controlling all your needs and "giving" you the comforts of life in a suite of apps right at your disposal), well... you get the picture.

—Tom Field

Soul bearing autobiography

What's a book written by actor Sally Fields doing in a business magazine review section? Well for starters it's about a decade-plus struggle to overcome her Gidget-Flying Nun television debut, when the pixie-like, too "cute" perhaps Fields had trouble landing other meaningful acting gigs. *In Pieces* (Grand Central Publishing, paperback edition 2019) details her dogged determination to overcome that stigma, the lengths she went through to audition and re-audition for parts, even when studio heads and directors said they didn't see her as the right girl for the role. Those who have struggled to get past their public image in a corporate setting about what they can accomplish might relate.

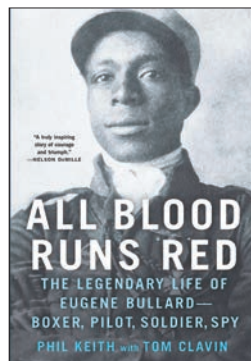
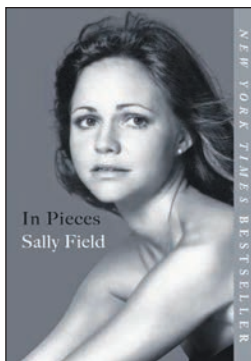
It was the television tour-de-force as the multi-personality Sybil that promoted Sally Fields to the big leagues. Soon after it was on to Smokey and the Bandit, then to meatier stuff like *Steel Magnolias*, *Forrest Gump* and Spielberg's *Lincoln* – where they thought Fields was too old to play the doomed President's wife until she showed up to the audition in full Mary Todd Lincoln mode and won over leading actor Daniel Day Lewis to her side.

In Pieces is also a story about dysfunctional marriages and family dynamics, relationships where she yielded too much control to men like Burt Reynolds – and an abusive stepfather, in a story Sally Fields writes about in obvious, conflicted pain. What comes through in her own words and almost reads like a diary is determination – a fighting spirit that eventually made her an Oscar (*Places in the Heart*) and Emmy winner (*Sybil*). She's still a fighter – Fields now suffers from osteoporosis and has become a vocal advocate for women's health issues.

—Gene Marrano

More dogged determination

For more than a decade a predator committed dozens of rapes and burglaries in the Sacramento area and in northern California, terrorizing whole communities, before moving on to southern California and committing ten murders. Some three decades



later the writer Michelle McNamara, also the force behind TrueCrimeDiary.com, began poring over police reports and interviewing victims, trying to find the person she dubbed the Golden State Killer. *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* (Harper, paperback edition 2019) is the unfinished masterpiece that others completed for McNamara. She died suddenly at age 46 in 2016 from an accidental overdose after a fatal mixing of drugs – taken perhaps in part to let her find some rest while in pursuit of a person she paints a vivid picture of, with the help of law enforcement types who had worked on the cold case many years before.

Stephen King called *I'll Be Gone In The Dark* a “brilliant genre-buster,” a book that deals with the Golden Gate Killer’s obsession – and with Michelle McNamara’s obsession. She also wrote TV script pilots and advised for NBC’s Dateline. HBO plans to turn her years-long investigation into a mini-series. After her death husband Patton Oswalt – the actor and comedian – was at an event last year for the book with several of the investigators Michelle worked with. HBO was filming footage for the docuseries. Hours later in the middle of the night word came that police had arrested 72-year-old Joseph James DeAngelo as the Golden State Killer. He had been living in the Sacramento area for three decades. HBO filmed Oswalt’s reaction as he talked to people on the phone about the arrest, made possible in large part by the DNA testing McNamara used extensively during her investigation. None of the leads Michelle McNamara wrote about in *I'll Be Gone In The Dark* (a phrase the predator whispered to one of his blindfolded victims) pointed to DeAngelo but the page-turner is widely credited for reviving interest in the very cold case – and providing closure now perhaps for surviving victims and their families.

—Gene Marrano

An amazing adventurer

Eugene Bullard’s life could have inspired many shelves of books and more than one motion picture, yet he has remained largely unknown until now. His father, born in slavery, raised him on tales of France as a land free from the racist animus of his native United States. As a young teen, he ran away from his home in Georgia and embarked on a journey that would eventually take him there. Bullard made a living as a jockey, an entertainer and a boxer, and had already lived a life of adventure before the Great War broke out. He then enlisted in the French Foreign Legion, where he would eventually become the first African American combat pilot. In the interwar years, Bullard played in and eventually managed a jazz club, where he employed such future celebrities as Josephine Baker and Langston Hughes—and also spied on Nazi officers.

In *All Blood Runs Red: The Legendary Life of Eugene Bullard—Boxer, Pilot, Soldier, Spy* (Hanover; 2019) Phil Keith and Tom Clavin take great care to examine any discrepancies in differing sources, and they build the intrigue with cinematic detail. In one case, a night at Bullard’s club involved Nazis, members of the French resistance who couldn’t know his motives in entertaining them, and Dooley Wilson, who would go on to play Sam in *Casablanca*. This is a fascinating look at a life that, if it were fiction, would be too amazing to be believed.

—Kristen Allen-Vogel

The reviewers: **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is a Roanoke news reporter and editor of FRONT; **Kristen Allen-Vogel** is an information services librarian in Dayton, OH.



New supervisor steps in to Reimagine 419 >

Paul Mahoney is the new supervisor for the Cave Spring District in Roanoke County. **The Reimagine 419 Town Center** plan for the Tanglewood Mall area was a centerpiece of the three-candidate campaign that the Republican Mahoney, a long time County Attorney, won handily. He said Board of Supervisors had some “hard decisions to make,” on economic issues.



State of the County >

The State of Roanoke County is “solid.” So said Roanoke County Board of Supervisors chairman **Phil North**, at the annual address given to a Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce breakfast audience in November. North, who represents the Hollins District, touted the Board-approved 419 Town Center Plan that gets underway next year with \$30 million in road improvements in the Tanglewood Mall area. North also highlighted \$200 million in new business investment in the county that have helped bring 800 new jobs. Meanwhile Roanoke County School Board chair Don Butzer spoke about school renovations needed at 9 schools and how “state funding has not kept up with inflation ... especially construction costs. That places the burden for funding on localities to cover the gap.”



More scooters? >

Even as Roanokers are still learning the ropes when it comes to the “Lime” e-scooters that appeared a few months ago, another company has entered the market. **Bolt Mobility** introduced its rentable e-scooters in the city market plaza. Before a public demonstration in late November Bolt Mobility spent time with city officials and law enforcement during a “safety education” session. Bolt’s July application says there could be as many as 400 scooters deployed here eventually. Daniel Charlton, general manager for Bolt in Roanoke, says their scooters have separate platforms for each foot – for better stability. Bolt also plans to have live 24/7 service support in place to take care of any maintenance/charging issues and questions from e-scooter users. Roanoke City Manager Bob Cowell also says at least one more e-scooter provider may soon arrive in town.



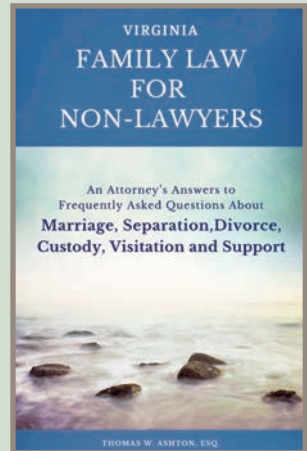
VT school spirit effort >

The Virginia Tech Board of Visitors has approved transformation of the greenspace and paved areas adjacent to Dietrick Hall on the Blacksburg campus into **Spirit Plaza**, described as a gathering space that will be “lively, user friendly and sustainable.” The plan includes outdoor seating and WiFi access, and more lighting for safety aspects. Its one component of Virginia Tech’s Beyond Boundaries 2047: The Campus Plan.



New VTCSOM dean lays out vision >

On July 1, 2019 **Dr. Lee Learman** officially became new dean at the **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine**. In late November he had appeared before the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, looking back and forward. To date VTCSOM has graduated six classes and a total of 240 students, all matched to residency programs cross the country. Learman (profiled last year in *Valley Business FRONT*) told the Board on November 20 that the medical school is focused on a mission of developing physician “thought leaders, ready to partner with others and create positive changes in the systems in which they practice.” Learman also said a task force is exploring the ramifications of expanding the class size at the medical school in Roanoke - now at 42 – while preserving “what makes VTCSOM special.”



Roanoke attorney publishes how-to book >

A local family law attorney in Roanoke, has recently published a book titled, *Virginia Family Law for Non-Lawyers*. **Tom Ashton's** goal: to help prepare people with the key information they need to know about process and procedure and terms relating to separation and divorce ahead of an office visit, so they don't have to use their resources (namely time and money) for that with an attorney. Instead they can then maximize their resources to hire an experienced Family Law attorney who can work with them on their individual case - rather than explaining the basics on billable time. Ashton appeared at the Raleigh Court Library to discuss his book, which was published last July; its available on Amazon and on his law firm website, ashtonlawoffice.com. “I really wanted to write this book to make sure that that people facing these complex issues can make better decisions,” says Ashton.

Still a ways to go >

For the first time ever the Roanoke Chapter to the NAACP welcomed the organization's national chairman, Pulaski native **Leon Russell**, a Floridian retired from a state government job there. Despite White house claims that African American employment rates are higher than ever, Russell said before spoke at the Roanoke branch's membership meeting in mid-December that "black unemployment is double what the regular unemployment is. When we look at how equitable the economic situation is our [black] community still earns less than its counterparts in other communities. We still have less wealth. There's lots of work to do."



Direct – not fair – trade >

A new coffee company that's operating from a powered cart is popping up in different places in Roanoke. **Honest Coffee Company** is serving only direct-trade coffee, which co-owner **Jonathan Kelly** says is more fair than "fair-trade" coffee - because they're getting the beans straight from farmers in countries like Honduras and Peru. Kelly says the cart has all the offerings of a brick and mortar coffee shop, including espresso drinks. Kelly says it's not "fair-trade" coffee, it's direct trade with farms in countries like Honduras and Peru. Honest Coffee made its debut at events including Dickens of a Christmas and the Rescue Mission's Drumstick Dash last month.



State of the Town >

Vinton Mayor **Brad Grose** touted economic development projects like the recently opened Billy Byrd apartments and the upcoming Vinyard Station, a new restaurant that will occupy what was the old Vinton Motors Ford dealership, by mid-2020. During his early December State of the Town address, Grose also said tax revenue from Rosie's Gaming Emporium is helping to fund infrastructure projects – like water and sewer work. The **Town of Vinton** is also using a \$300,000 EPA grant to study brownfield sites for redevelopment potential.



Tech teams up with pharmaceutical company >

Virginia Tech and **Indivior** are collaborating on a multisite study that examines long-term recovery in individuals with moderate to severe opioid abuse disorder. The study will be carried out by a team of researchers led by **Dr. Warren Bickel**, a professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC. Bickel is also a professor in the College of Science at Virginia Tech. **Michael Friedlander**, executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, calls it a study focused on "a major health problem that is causing unprecedented hardship throughout the United States, particularly here in Virginia." The RECOVERY study will look at how environmental and socio-economic factors play a role in recovery from opioid abuse. "We are determined to find scientifically sound solutions to the opioid crisis," says Bickel. "We believe that this Virginia Tech-Indivior study ... will contribute to a better understanding of how patients are pursuing the life changes they aspire to achieve," adds Indivior Chief Scientific Officer **Christian Heidbreder**. Researchers hope the study can provide information to health care systems and policymakers on how successful treatment and long-term recovery can reduce the economic burden of opioid use disorder by reducing health care costs, crime, and unemployment. (pictured left to right: Michael Friedlander, Christian Heidbreder, Warren Bickel)



Combined data >

The Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM) and Averett University announced the development of an exclusive Master of Science in Applied Healthcare Data Analytics program on Nov. 22, 2019, in Blacksburg. Averett will begin offering the online program in January 2020. The program will help prepare students to use data and analytics to solve significant problems facing the healthcare industry, creating more stable workplaces for both hospital personnel and patients. The online program is designed for working professionals and has a flexible format that will teach the students to comprehend data for better decision-making within health organizations.

Valley Business FRONT is FRONT'n About at many events each month. Check the social media links at www.vbFRONT.com for more coverage.

FINANCIAL FRONT

First Bank & Trust



Brizendine

Company, a diversified financial services firm, has hired **Terry A. Brizendine** as Senior Vice President and Commercial Lender. Brizendine has 27 years of banking and investment experience, most recently with Atlantic Union Bank in Blacksburg. His office is located in Christiansburg.

LEGAL FRONT

Gentry Locke has announced that **Abby Broughton** and **Christina Hubbard**



Broughton



Hubbard

have joined the firm's Roanoke office as associates. They will join the plaintiff's and business litigation practices respectfully. Prior to joining the firm full-time, both were summer associates at Gentry Locke. Broughton is a second-generation attorney who attended law school at the University of Richmond. Hubbard was a high school and college teacher who attended Washington



McMann

and Lee University's School of Law.

WELLNESS FRONT

Dr. Delaney McMann has joined the Tuck Chiropractic Clinic located in Bedford and is now accepting new patients. McMann brings a unique perspective to her patient care Tuck says in a news release, "after experiencing the healing powers of chiropractic while battling Lyme Disease."

Nichole Miller has joined Carilion Wellness Botetourt as a membership sales representative. **Betty Bridges** is now the



Eversole

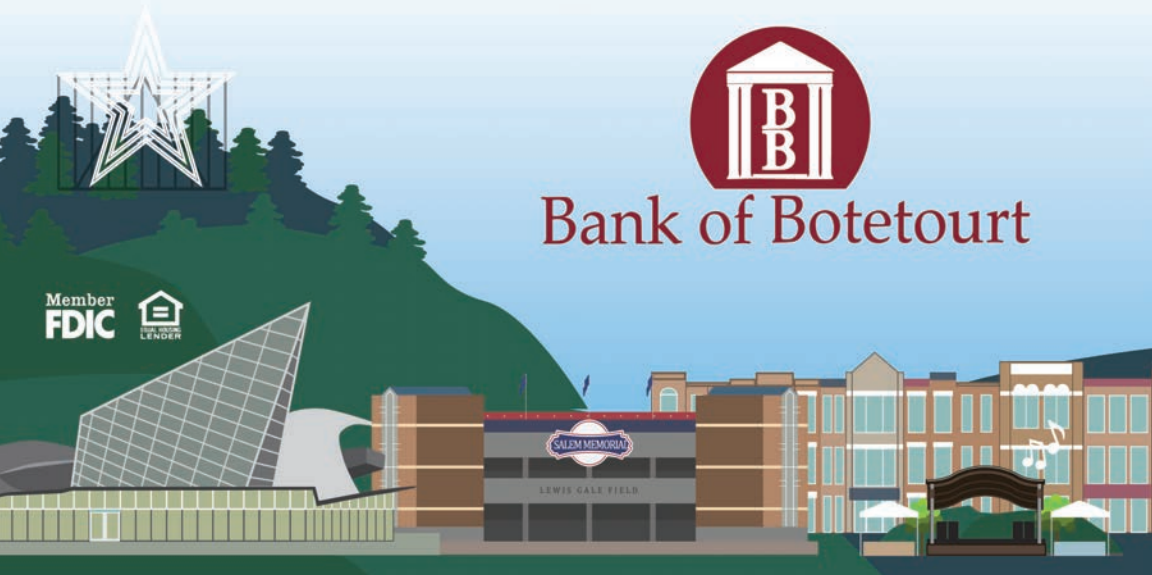


Phillips

Carilion Wellness Westlake operations assistant director.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

The Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC) has hired two new team members. **Lindsey Eversole** has joined the organization as director of programs and events, and **Sarah Phillips** will serve as its membership



Member
FDIC



coordinator. In addition, the RBTC has partnered with Roanoke-based agency B2C Enterprises to oversee its ongoing marketing and communications activities. Eversole had coordinated the Virginia Tech Entrepreneur Partnership. Phillips is also the project manager for the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP), based in Roanoke.

DEVELOPMENT FRONT

Brett Dietrich has been named Vice President and a member of the board of directors for Roanoke-based Lanford Brothers Company.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Justin T. Noble has been named director of internal

Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to news@vbFRONT.com. Photos should be color, 300dpi. A contact / source must be provided. Inclusions are not guaranteed and all submissions are subject to editing.



Noble

audit at Virginia Tech. He will provide management direction in planning all risk-based, compliance, information technology, investigative, and advisory reviews. Noble will also supervise a team of internal auditor. A certified internal auditor, Noble has worked in higher education for more than 10 years, and in internal audit for more than 15 years. In his

most recent position for the Texas Tech University System, he directed and conducted fraud investigations and assisted in executing the annual audit plan.



Lee

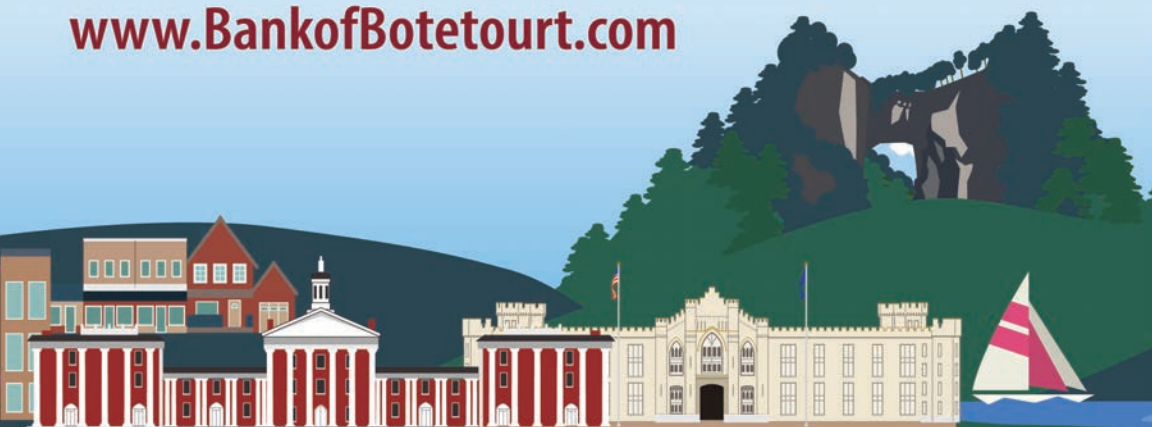
Lisa M. Lee, associate vice president in the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation and director of the Division of Scholarly Integrity and Research

Compliance, has recently been honored by the American Public Health Association's (APHA) Ethics Section with its 2019 Distinguished Career Award. Lee also holds a faculty appointment at Virginia Tech in the Department of Population Health Sciences in the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinarian Medicine.

M. Daniel Givens has been named dean of the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (VMCVM) at Virginia Tech, effective June 1, 2020. Givens currently serves as the associate dean for academic affairs in the College

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ally Bowersock, PhD, is the co-owner of Runabout Sports and several other businesses with her husband and fellow fitness fanatic Tyler. She is also an Associate Professor at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and consults with local companies on employee wellness. [runaboutroanoke@gmail.com]

Tim Bradshaw is the executive director for the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. A native of Roanoke who returned to the area in 2014, Tim has an Aviation BA degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Master's in Public Administration from Western Kentucky University. He lives in Troutville on a small farm with his wife Janee. His daughter Jessica and son-in-law Matt reside in Roanoke. Tim is an avid outdoorsman.

Lisa Clause is senior director of marketing and philanthropy at Richfield Living. She is a recent MBA graduate with distinction of Liberty University and has a bachelor's degree in marketing and minor in professional and technical writing at Virginia Tech. She began her career at the Roanoke Times, moved to WSET television rising to national sales manager. She co-owns Fine Line Interiors with her husband, and enjoys gardening, bike riding, and church activities.

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjpp1@gmail.com]

Mike Dame is the vice president of marketing and communications at Carilion Clinic. A graduate of the University of Florida, he spent nearly a decade as a sportswriter for the Orlando Sentinel before transitioning to a career in digital communications that landed him at Virginia Tech in 2005; he joined Carilion in 2008. Mike lives in Roanoke with his wife Valeria and enjoys golf, guitar, spending time with friends and cheering on his beloved Florida Gators.

Dan Dowdy is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Pro proofreading services (proofingprof.com). His background includes service in the U.S. Air Force and an extensive career in education, including teaching college-level writing competency and business courses, and working for a Fortune 100 company. [ddowdy@vbFRONT.com]

Tom Field is a creative director, marketing executive and owner of Berryfield, Inc. in Salem, and owner of Valley Business FRONT magazine. He has written and produced programs and materials for local and international organizations for 40 years. [tfield@berryfield.com]

Katie Gehrt is the director of marketing and communications for the Moss Arts Center and the Center for Creativity, Arts, and Technology at Virginia Tech. She holds degrees from Virginia Tech and West Virginia University. She's an avid equestrian who loves to travel and lives in Blacksburg with her husband and potcake dog.

Lesia Hanlin, Ed.D. is the executive director of Roanoke Regional Initiatives and works for Outreach & International Affairs at Virginia Tech. [lesa@vt.edu]

Mike Leigh is president of OpX Solutions, LLC, a performance improvement company that helps organizations pursue operational excellence. A retired naval commander and former GE manufacturing manager, he has extensive experience in leadership development and process improvement. [Mike@OpXSolutionsLLC.com]

Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. [gmarrano@cox.net]

Frank Martin is a senior associate broker and the top sales agent for Hall Associates, Inc., the oldest commercial real estate brokerage west of

Richmond. He specializes in Sales and Leasing for office and industrial properties in southwest Virginia.

Mary Ann L. Miller is vice president of business banking and community relations at Bank of Botetourt. A graduate of Bridgewater College, she has been in the banking industry for more than fifteen years and currently serves on the board and executive committee as past-president with the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce, a board member with the Daleville Institute, and is vice chair of the board of with the Botetourt Family YMCA. A native of Botetourt County, she resides in Daleville with her husband, Matthew and their son Ira.

Paul Phillips has served as the chief executive officer of Freedom First Credit Union for the last twenty years. Freedom First was chartered in 1956 as a federally-insured member-owned financial cooperative and currently serves residents and businesses through its ten locations in the Roanoke and New River valleys. Prior to moving to Roanoke in 1998 Paul and his wife Missy lived in Cheyenne, Wyoming with their three children. A resident of Fincastle, Paul enjoys numerous outdoor activities, travelling and spending time with his two granddaughters.

Brian Powell is the owner and operator of Wine Gourmet in Roanoke Virginia. Brian moved to Roanoke when he purchased Wine Gourmet in 2011. Brian attended Virginia Tech and is an avid Hokie Fan! A member of the Guild of Sommoliers, Brian resides in Roanoke and enjoys time with family and friends.

Ian Price is a radio and print journalist in Roanoke who looks at things through a Millennial's eye. The Radford University communications major is also a pretty good DJ and trivia host, some say. [IanPrice23@gmail.com]

Maggie Rotanz and **Spencer Pugh** were born and raised in Salem, VA. Maggie graduated from Ohio University with a degree in Photojournalism in 2016 and Spencer graduated from Virginia Tech in 2015 with a degree in Communication

Studies. Upon exploring similar career paths, Maggie and Spencer decided to team up to start Harvest Digital Marketing to help local businesses turn online followers into paying and loyal customers. [hello@harvestdigitalmarketing.coj]

Michael Shelton writes a column on financial management for FRONT. He owns 360 Tax Solutions and 260 Financial Solutions, and holds his Series 6, 63 & 65 licenses and received the prestigious Chartered Financial Retirement Counselor designation. [michael@discover360Financial.com]

Dan Smith is the former and inaugural editor of FRONT magazine and a award-winning veteran journalist, now freelancing. [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

Nicholas Vaassen is a graphic designer with 19 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]

Kaitlyn Van Buskirk is a grants associate with Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia. Her experience includes development, planned giving, philanthropy, and fundraising roles with non-profits and community service organizations, and she has a BA from Sweet Briar College focused in business, management, marketing, and related support services. [kaitlyn@cfwesternva.org]

Steven Zegarski is the vice president of corporate real estate for The Branch Group. Steve is originally from Cincinnati, Ohio and completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Dayton. After completing his graduate studies from Virginia Tech, Steve moved to Roanoke and has enjoyed a career path that has included teaching, youth ministry, pharmaceuticals and real estate. Steve and his wife, Kirsten, have three children and enjoy family vacations and home improvement projects.



Givens

of Veterinary Medicine at Auburn University, where he is also a professor in the Department of Pathobiology. He is described as a veterinarian, researcher, and educator.

HoneyTree Early Learning Centers has announced new center directors for the Hunting Hills (**Stacy**

Bermo) and RiverWalk (**Christine Duncan**) locations in Roanoke.

Ron Young is the new general manager for Durham School Services in the City of Roanoke. Durham operates the public school bus system – beset early in the school year by late pickups and drop-offs of students, a problem Durham blamed in part on a lack of qualified bus drivers.

OTHER FRONTS

In memoriam: the president of the



Segelke

Roanoke-based Lawrence Companies, died in an accident in Florida on November 18. **Peer August Segelke** was 40; he leaves behind a wife and three daughters. Segelke first joined Lawrence in 2013 as a Vice President. The University of Texas Austin School of Law graduate had been

an attorney with LeClairRyan at one point previously. Segelke earned his BA from Washington & Lee University.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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Governor appointments

Governor Ralph Northam announced the appointment of Steve Karras, veterinarian-in-charge at Cave Spring Veterinary Clinic, to the Board of Health Processions. Meanwhile Mitchell P. Davis of Salem, Vice President of Operations for Saber Healthcare, has been added to the Board of Long-Term Care Administrators

RCT ensemble returns

Roanoke Children's Theatre has revived its competitive youth ensemble program that will provide a yearlong theatre academy for aspiring young performers – some of whom have performed at the community theater venues described in last month's cover story. The inaugural 10-member group was selected by invitation and audition only. RCT recently moved its administrative offices from the Jefferson Center to a nearby space on Campbell Avenue SW that also includes sleeping quarters for out of town actors brought in for its productions.

Fasttrack healthcare creds at VWCC

Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke is launching a Certified Nurse Aide (CAN) program this month. The intensive 6-week program is designed to prepare students for the National

Nurse Aide Assessment Program exam they will have to pass to become certified as a Nurse Aide. Gigi Mulhauser, the program head, says she, "frequently hears from employers about how eager they are to find qualified employees with a desire to take the next step in their careers."

Cyber Defense Education designation

Meanwhile **Virginia Western CC** has been named a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education (CAE-CDE) by the National Security Agency (NSA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Students who graduate with a certificate in Information Technology: Cyber Security will now earn a designation that can help them land employment in the rapidly growing field. "Cybersecurity professionals are in incredible demand nationally and across the Commonwealth of Virginia, where our government is increasingly reliant on a strong cyber-defense," said B Bagby, assistant professor of IT.

RGC head to step down amidst winning streak

The parent company for Roanoke Gas Co., **RGC Resources**, has announced a 5th straight year of record growth. Net income for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019 was \$8.7 million, compared to

\$7.3 million the year before, according to a news release. President and CEO John D'Orazio attributed that to customer growth, infrastructure upgrades and investment in the Mountain Valley Pipeline project. There was also an interim base rate increase granted in January 2019; meanwhile RG is asking the State Corporation Commission to approve a residential base rate hike near 11%. D'Orazio has also announced his retirement, effective February 7. "It has been an honor and a privilege to lead RGS Resources," said D'Orazio in a news release. Current Roanoke Gas president Paul Nester will succeed D'Orazio, who took over for John Williamson (the current RGC board chair) six years ago.

VMT director resigns

On the job for just six months, **Bob Sigman** chose not to renew what he says what was an agreement for that time period and stepped down as the executive director for the Virginia Museum of Transportation late in 2019. Sigman, who had directed a museum of Western films in California, said he will pursue other opportunities in the Roanoke area.

Big building

Blacksburg Town council has approved plans for the **Virginia Tech Foundation** to construct the largest

building ever in the downtown area. The project calls for a six-story structure to be constructed on a shopping center in the area of Prices Fork road and Gilbert and North Main Streets. The building's height will be allowed under a special use permit also approved during a council meeting in mid-December.

State funds for business growth

Governor Northam's office has announced almost \$6 million in "Growth and Opportunity for Virginia," funds to help bolster workforce, STEM and site development projects around the Commonwealth. In this region the Valleys Innovation Council will work with entrepreneurs to develop strategies - after receiving \$300,000 of that funding.

Be careful out there

Quote Wizard by Lending Tree says a team of auto experts analyzed Virginia Insurance data, along with stats from the Federal Highway Administration and the National Association of Insurance Commissioners – and gave the overall state of driving in Virginia a "D" grade. Virginia was the 14th worst state for driving in 2018 per the numbers and had the 8th most distracted drivers in the nation. 10% of roads rated as

being in poor condition cost Virginia drivers \$430 annually. The state of Virginia roads and the need to repair/replace/expand them is often viewed as an economic development issue by state lawmakers and local officials.

Another bank merger

Look for signage changes as the merger between **BB&T Corporation** and **SunTrust Bank** became official last month. The new name is Truist – called the sixth largest commercial U.S. bank with a current customer base of around ten million consumer households and business clients.

Power up

Appalachian Power awarded \$15,000 to Roanoke County Economic Development for economic planning;

and \$7,500 to First Regional Industrial Facility for marketing New River Valley Commerce Park; the funds were part of AP's Economic Development Growth Enhancement (EDGE) program.

Mis-transit

Valley Metro bus transit in Roanoke is under investigation by the Federal Transit Administration for misuse of about \$2 million in capital funding for operating expenses; the bus company claims unintentional mismanagement rather than fraud.

G3 @ CC

Gov. Northam has proposed a "Get Skilled. Get a Job. Give Back." (G3) initiative in the next budget earmarking \$145 million for **tuition-free community college** for

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eligible low- to middle-income students.

Distinctive aid

Radford University has introduced \$13 million into a scholarship program under its Highlander Distinction Program, a combined merit-based, needs-based financial aid for on campus student recruitment.

Maroon reveals blue wave

The latest **Roanoke College public policy poll**, interviewing about 600 Virginia residents, indicates a shift toward

priorities currently championed by Democrats; including gun control measures (84% supporting universal background checks); passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (73% in favor); climate change regulations (68% in favor); raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour (66%). About the only issue that did not favor a popular Democratic position was repeal of the state's "right to work" law (38% supported a repeal).

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field

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Tabby Cain and David Landes of Still Water Floatation

Dan Smith

Float away the stress

By Dan Smith

A brief float in Epsom salt saturated water is helping a lot of Roanokers with stress relief, among many other maladies.

Though floatation therapy has been popular in some corners of the U.S. for more than 60 years, it is new to the Roanoke Valley and is quickly becoming a go-to treatment for everything from stroke recovery to fibromyalgia to

work-related stress. Pro football teams use it and so do physicians.

At Still Water Floatation on 3rd Street in Roanoke, owners David Landes, 46, and Tabby Cain, 50, prepared steadily for two

Exterior view of Still Water





The floatation tanks hold 1,000 pounds of Epsom salts and are a foot deep

years before opening their center this past fall to an enthusiastic welcome. They converted an old carriage house, adding treatment rooms, tanks and, essentially, doubling the building's size with room for expansion again in the future. "We might want to venture into infra-red, sauna, massage and add more tanks" in the coming years, says Landes.

At the moment, Still Water is the only floatation center west of Charlottesville and Roanokers are rapidly discovering it. Floatation therapy—most often done nude—has been a focus of medical research for some time. The treatments involve floating in Epsom salt-saturated tanks, and "the findings have been extraordinary," says



FRONT

Landes, a former construction executive. People “use it to manage pain and anxiety,” he says, even “as society in general looks less to western medicine” for answers, Cain adds.

Each floating session in one of four tanks, each with its own shower, lasts 90 minutes in water that is at body temperature, creating

full sensory deprivation. The water in the tanks is filtered between each use and the Epsom salt (about \$800 worth per tank) is treated such “that nothing can grow in it, so it doesn’t have to be replaced,” says Landes. Each tank, which has a foot of water, has contains 1,000 pounds of Epsom salt.



Still Water
FLOATATION

HOW TO USE BACKS
EASILY

The U.S. Air Force is using floatation therapy to treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), says Landes and some of Still Water's clients are medical professionals who refer their own patients to Still Water.

Susan Fujita has had five strokes and is now a regular at Still Water because the treatment "calms everything that's in my head. It's been beneficial." She has been "agitated by noise. I need a space that is totally quiet. The effects go far beyond [the time of] the float. The first time I floated, I thought, 'O.K., this is it.' It was like my refuge."


Andrea Weeks uses floating as stress relief. "It's the most relaxing thing I've ever done," she says. "It is total peace and quiet." She also likes "the clean environment. That was a concern before I actually floated."

High-level athletes—Notre Dame football, the New England Patriots and Washington

Redskins, among others—have taken to floating for a variety of reasons, says Landes.

Treatments at Still Water are \$45 per session for regulars or \$70 for those doing a one-of-kind experience, says Cain, that "feels like lying in bed, but with no pressure points."

Cain and Landes met some years ago while both were working at Snap-On Tools. She has a varied background working in corporate environments and entrepreneurial endeavors in printing, tools, formal wear and property management. Landes says that when the two met, "I was doing well financially, but I was unhappy. I had a mid-life crisis, sold all my stuff and drove all around the country."

Cain and Landes became fast friends and decided working together would be their own stress relief. And it has been. He even works barefoot because "I like to feel a connection to the earth." 



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I had a mid-life crisis, sold all my stuff and drove around the country.

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Your best bet is to set smaller, more incremental goals and celebrate small successes on your path toward the more distant goal. — Page 36

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