

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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JANUARY 2021

Mental & Physical Fitness
Professionals

Lift Arc Studios

FRONT 2020
Contributors Celebration

Freedom First's
Shon Agüero

vbFRONT.com

A portrait of Anne Millehan, a woman with short, styled blonde hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark blue, lace-patterned top, a long silver chain necklace, a ring on her left hand, and a silver bracelet on her left wrist. Her left hand is resting under her chin.

New Year New You

Anne Millehan
Millehan Coaching and Consulting

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Welcome to 2021. We are all hoping and expecting that this will be a better year for most, personally and professionally (there were some that pivoted and still thrived), than was 2020, where a pandemic forced partial business shutdowns to various degrees, stranded people at home remotely to work – and to often become teachers. Some businesses (the eateries Wall Street Tavern, the Country Cookin' chain, Blue 5 restaurant in Roanoke come to top of mind; there were others) went under. There were an awful lot of retail and office "For Lease" signs around the last few months it seems. The January 2021 "New Year New You" issue is about personal wellness, life coaching and mental health services that can help wash 2020 right out of your hair.

We also look at additional help coming for small businesses in 2021, a new small business (Lift Arc) and a number of columnists weigh in on related topics. So, hoist a glass of something and toast to a better year, personally and professionally. Get a COVID-19 vaccine shot(s) when it's your turn and oh yeah, until then and as instructed – wear a mask in public, wash your hands a lot and observe social distancing. Let's get through this thing together and over the hump. Hopefully, the tighter restrictions Governor Northam announced in mid-December will end no later than the January 31 date he set forth then. Happy New Year.

Tom Field
Publisher

Gene Marrano
Editor

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Healing into 2021

By Nanette Levin



“90% of coaching is listening. — Page 19”

Cover photography of Anne Millehan courtesy of Sunny Wasiela, Sunnyography.

VIRGINIA WESTERN

“*I have set myself apart from my peers to pursue a degree and not debt.*”

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Brooke Bess

CCAP student at Virginia Western Community College

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JANUARY



Tom Ashton



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Doug Kidd



Jennifer Leake



Ian Price



Michael Shelton

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.

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finance – banking



Brian Powell
Wine Gourmet / retail



Amy White
Virginia Western Community
College / education

“”
Most bad hires are good people hired for the wrong job. — Page 34

“”
The last year has brought me from empowered working mom to woman treading water. — Page 25

“”
Charisma isn't an internal state, it's a cause for action. — Page 40

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 54.

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Twitter: [@vbfront](https://twitter.com/vbfront)
Blog: morefront.blogspot.com

““”

The stressor issues are at home and work simultaneously.

— Anne Millehan



Anne Millehan

Sunny Wasiela, Sunnyography

Healing into 2021

By Nanette Levin

Few disagree 2020 was challenging. For those in the personal development and mental health sector, though, business was brisk. After regrouping to handle the changes brought on by pandemic restrictions, most got busy figuring out how to best help clients deal with stressors.

Reducing barriers

Todd Vance, clinical psychologist and PhD with Breakforth Counseling and Consulting in Roanoke, offers a range of services including couples' counseling, assessments, and adolescent support.

Seven licensed therapists and two administrative staffers comprise the current team, which expanded in 2020.

"I hate to say this, but this crisis has been, in some ways, good for us in that people are seeking mental healthcare," says Vance.

“Most therapy practices are using telehealth right now and that’s actually been pretty seamless. It had existed prior to the crisis, but now our office is using it for 90% [as of early December 2020] of our appointments.” He notes the exceptions are children and those with disabilities. “The technology isn’t perfect yet, but it is certainly the way we do business now - and I don’t see it going away once COVID goes away.”

“One of the things that we’re going to accelerate is the erasing of state lines in various types of healthcare practices,” Vance continues. “Those lines will be no longer as rigid as they have been for licensing. Emergency measures, like the temporary license for West Virginia, that’s going to be a thing of the future that’s going to be sooner rather than later.” Vance sees e-passports and universal licenses as a positive for patients, allowing them to easily consult with specialized expertise out-of-state.



Todd Vance

Getting back to business

Anne Millehan offers individual coaching, workshops, and business consulting in the region through her company, Millehan Coaching and Consulting, Inc. She works with mostly business owners, but says “Business always bleeds over to personal when it comes to discussing space and interpersonal issues or work/life balance. This can be particularly challenging for brick-and-mortar business owners dealing with COVID, as they’re having to juggle different business hours, which means they’re also adjusting time at home. The stressor issues are at home and work simultaneously.”

Her business volume is about the same as it was before the pandemic hit. “I think the conversation, though, is different because of the stressors,” she says. “The coaching - or consulting - conversation is more about moving from daily in-person conversations to a more remote or virtual situation with teams and employees. How do I motivate my team virtually or remotely when I don’t have the access the office setting provides?”

Some could do a better job of making sure patrons feel safer about dropping in: “the fact that business owners haven’t truly addressed the safety precautions with their customers in a transparent way is jaw-dropping,” she says. “Putting something together that says: we’re masking up; we’re wiping down; we’re sanitizing; stay

““”

...this crisis has been, in some ways, good for us in that people are seeking mental healthcare.

—Todd Vance

““”

...give validation and normalization and outright love and support...

—Kristen Tully

in your car if you don't want to wear a mask; this is critical. When you explain how others are being managed to protect all patrons, those who are scared might be more open to coming in."

Millehan describes "three buckets" for pandemic era patrons. These include the scared or vulnerable, avoiding face-to-face interactions; those who are trying to resume some normalcy cautiously; and clients who shun face masks, behaving as though nothing has changed. "It's important to communicate to your customers at all levels how you're addressing their concerns. That means you need to tell those who are afraid of exposure how you're handling clients who don't want to wear a mask." Millehan offers a workshop to help businesses think strategically entitled "COVID has impacted my business, now what?"

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (you know, the Pyramid)

Kristen Tully is the Deputy Director for the Crisis Counseling Program, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. After the pandemic hit, the Commonwealth set up VA COPEs, a warmline for residents. This is a federally-funded program (COPEs is an acronym for compassionate, optimistic, person-centered, empowering support) that serves as a call center for those dealing with isolation, fear, or anxiety around COVID-19. "[Staff is] trained to give validation and normalization and outright love and support to our callers," says Tully.

Kristen Tully



Counselors are available weekdays from 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. and weekends from 9 to 5. VA COPEs also helps callers connect with community and crisis services. Access the no-cost service by calling or texting (877) 349-6428. "It's been really interesting to see the difference in our call content from when we first started in May to early June," said Tully in early December. Initially callers were focused on unemployment, immediate housing, and food banks. "Now, older adults are calling in about isolation; what people should do for holidays [and] this winter period; free COVID testing sites; what to do if a business isn't following VDH guidelines. Pandemic fatigue is real [as well]."

Tully cites the five levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as pandemic progression indicators and also as a factor in developing the VA COPEs wrap-around care model. These needs are physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. She




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suggests people seek out community through churches, virtual museum tours, pen pal exchanges, book clubs, and Zoom interactions to ensure people are “connecting with individuals to fuel their humanity.”

Six foundational principles

Ronny Angell of Next Level Fitness and Healing in southwest Roanoke County offers holistic lifestyle coaching to help clients achieve balance. “You need a healthy body to have a healthy mind,” he explains. Angell (also the Blue Ridge Marathon’s initial race director) recommends lifestyle changes through six foundational principles, including hydration, nutrition, sleep, breathing, thinking, and movement. He groups the first three into the yin category and the latter three in yang. Here’s what he advises:

- **Sleep:** get eight hours, preferable between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. to align with natural hormonal rhythms.
- **Hydration:** drink half your pound body weight in ounces of water, “So a 200-pound man should drink 100 ounces of water a day.”
- **Nutrition:** eat as much whole, real food as possible, preferably nutritionally dense organic. Angell also underscores the importance of primal pattern typing. This means your ancestry affects what foods

““”

You need a healthy body to have a healthy mind.

—Ronny Angell

Ronny Angell





This is something
I need to adapt
to, and if I do,
I come out on
the other side.

—Todd Vance

you can tolerate. As an example, he cites Scandinavian heritage with a short growing season and associated high dependence on fat and protein vs. equator cultures eating diets high in carbohydrates. “For thousands of years your body had to evolve to eat the food that’s around you. If you keep those in balance: your sleep, your hydration, your nutrition – that’s yin,” Angell explains.

- **Breathing:** “Breathing can be very disruptive if you’re not doing it correctly,” he says. Taking in air from the chest instead of the diaphragm results in the sympathetic nervous system triggering a fight or flight response and high cortisol levels. This activates fat storage.
- **Thinking:** “Just like with food you’re putting in your body, you’re making a choice with your thinking,” Angell explains. “If you don’t have a healthy body, it’s hard to have a clear mind too.”
- **Movement:** “Are you working out? Do you have the energy to work out? Or do you need to work in?” he asks. “If you don’t have the energy, that’s stress on the body.” He suggests tai chi, chi gong or other forms of movement with breathing attentiveness to cultivate energy in your body.

Making adjustments for a healthier 2021

“We don’t know how this is all going to play out,” says Todd Vance with Breakforth Counseling. “It’s really easy to get wrapped up in certain situations; schools, politics, how to handle businesses going forward. We all want to function as close as normal as we can . . . with challenges come opportunities. If we have a growth mindset we say, ‘this is something I need to adapt to, and if I do, I come out on the other side.’” Vance notes the COVID crisis accelerated what was already happening. “Things will not go back to exactly the way they were before.”

What can people do to make 2021 better? “There’s certainly physical self-care, [which] I think is really critically important,” says Vance. “The basics of fresh air, sunshine, exercise. Those aren’t limited by COVID and we know those are actually good for us. Taking a break from staring at screens. Watching your diet. All of those basic core practices are really, really important.” He adds, “If you have healthy family bonds, just nurturing them. If they’re not good, work to improve them.”

Vance is concerned about the ripple effect of the pandemic, including its impact on health, economics, schools, careers, and job losses as well as the impact on families in abusive situations. “Hopefully people will work

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together, help each other." He suggests cards, letters, video teleconferencing, pets, "anything one can do to have some human contact and some meaningful interaction, because it's really needed by all of us."

"Start by asking yourself what makes you happy," says Ronnie Angell with Next Level. "You need to do things that make you happy daily and weekly. The most important thing to you has to be big enough to pull you toward it, your dream. If you don't know your dream/goals, ask 'what is my nightmare that I'm living every day, that must change?'"

"Your emotional well-being is really important," says Kristen Tully with VA COPE. "Don't be ashamed to receive help. It's not a bad thing to ask for help. ... it's actually really brave."

““”

Things will not go back to exactly the way they were before.

—Todd Vance, *Breakforth Counseling*

““”

Don't be ashamed to receive help.

—Kristen Tully



All photos submitted

Burn Boot Camp

Being Good to Yourself: Personal Fitness and Wellness

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of normal life — including fitness routines. Although it might have been tempting to skip your workout during these challenging times, exercise is essential to your physical health and mental well-being perhaps now more than ever.

COVID-19 has been a wake-up call for the many out-of-shape Americans. More than four in 10 U.S. adults are obese, and 60% have at least one chronic disease, putting them at high risk of serious COVID-19 complications—or worse. Individuals with chronic illnesses are 12 times more likely to die from the virus. (fortune.com) The full mitigating impact of the vaccines just rolling out now may not be felt for many months.

Mental health is another area which has been emphasized during the pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control, anxiety and depressive disorders increased considerably during April through June of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019. As 2021 begins, a new focus on fitness and wellness can help alleviate both physical and mental health woes – and there are numerous options for doing so in the Roanoke and New River valleys.

TREBEL Wellness Solutions in Blacksburg



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Carol Beliveau and Jesse Hilmandolar -
TREBEL Wellness Solutions



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Cindy Shepardson, Head
Trainer- Burn Boot Camp



Lacy Meyer -
Burn Boot Camp

has seen some clients increase training – either online, or in person – because of more flexible schedules and more free time, said Carol Beliveau, co-owner (Jesse Hilmandolar is her business partner and a fitness coach). Offering both online and socially distanced in person camps, or classes, has given members options, said Cindy Shepardson, Head Trainer at the **Burn Boot Camp** franchise in Roanoke. Shepardson said that for those who are not ready to return in person online classes are “just like you’re in the camp.”

Both gyms have strict COVID-19 protocol. TREBEL has set training times and limits its numbers. TREBEL also keeps clients 10 feet apart, requires that they clean equipment after every use, and deploys foggers and a HEPA ozone air cleaner overnight and between classes. At Burn, there is touchless entry, controlled numbers, no sharing of equipment, personal work-out space, and staff sanitizing surfaces between camps.

In Balance Yoga pivoted to a largely virtual platform just two days after having to close the building in March with online classes and, most popular, video on demand. This service, said owner Nicole LaFon, is available only to members, who can search classes by filters and do the exercises at their convenience. The business’s two locations in Blacksburg have reopened but with decreased capacity due to having 10 feet in between yoga mats. The main building has radiant ceiling heat instead of forced air heat, allowing for the popular warm flow and hot yoga; external fans facilitate air exchange between classes.

People are asking for wellness services for many reasons. One is the need for accountability. Beliveau often hears “I can’t do it myself so I’m going to pay someone to help.” She and Shepardson both pointed to the social component as being of prime importance. “There is no judging,” said Shepardson. Lacy Meyer, Operations Manager at Burn, noted that diversity of ages and fitness levels helps everyone feel accepted. Meyer added that Burn’s child watch feature is popular with parents who need a break.

IN BALANCE YOGA KEEPS ON GIVING



In Balance Yoga

Between March 17 and November, In Balance hosted 21 donations classes, where 100% of the proceeds were given to specific organizations. On Thanksgiving Day, for the eighth year, In Balance hosted a donations class benefitting Feeding America Southwest Virginia food bank. “We are able to host these donations classes either online, in studio with social distancing, outdoors with weather permitting, or offsite at other venues,” says co-owner Nicole LaFon. In Balance also gives to three different non-profits quarterly: Homes of Hope orphanage in India (rescues and gives homes, education, food and care to thousands of girls), the Farm Sanctuary (rescues animals from factory farming), and Yoga Village (offers Yoga to underserved populations).

“Even under pandemic conditions we are committed to giving back to the community, which has supported our business through the struggles of 2020. We believe in the benefits of yoga for everyone’s mental and physical wellbeing - especially during a pandemic,” said LaFon. Pictured: In Balance Yoga owner Nicole LaFon and Keala Mason, studio manager, volunteered at the Montgomery County Christmas Store on behalf of the business.

Beliveau said TREBEL has a client range from “grandmas to elite athletes,” which is why a personalized progression of movements is important. It helps clients reach their goals, everything from being able to pick up a bag of mulch to losing weight. LaFon said In Balance has different yoga varieties to “meet each person where they are,” including restorative yoga for beginners, the more physical practice of hot yoga, and a popular noontime class for seniors.



Exercising is an outlet for anxiety during these stressful times

"It's 45 minutes to forget everything and work on your health and body," Shepardson said. LaFon points to a community survey that showed 95% of people come to her yoga studio to de-stress. What keeps them returning, though, are the communal feel and In Balance's penchant for giving back to the community. Clients start with physical benefits, and the mental, emotional, and spiritual unfold, she said.

Both TREBEL and Burn offer personalized

approaches with close client contact and tailored fitness plans. One-on-one meetings help keep clients on track with goals and manage fitness, nutrition, stress, and sleep. Beliveau said as part of TREBEL's coaching, they encourage clients to "not be so obsessed with the gym" but also to get out in nature, try a new sport, or go on an adventure. "Live a great life" is TREBEL's motto.

Massage therapy is another vehicle for improving health and wellness. Lori Lambert, a state licensed medical massage therapist (MMT) with Crystal's Healing



TREBEL Wellness Solutions



Burn Boot Camp

Hands in Roanoke, said there are myriad benefits. Physically, it primes muscles to prevent injury and increases range of motion. It also amps up the immune system, stimulates the lymphatic system, and is a natural anti-depressant and pain reliever. So, it can sometimes augment or even replace a pill without a pill's side effects.

Touch produces feel-good endorphins from "birth to death," said Lambert. Massage works well with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), ASD (autism spectrum disorder), and hospice care. Lambert also noted that a massage therapist gets to know his or her clients' bodies so the therapist can often feel if something is wrong.

Lambert has seen a decrease in elderly clients during the pandemic as they are fearful of the virus. This has been offset by an uptick in essential workers - as their jobs became incredibly stressful. While people often say they don't have time for massages, Lambert said that studies show self-care can increase productivity. "Massage therapy makes you realize that self-care is transformative," said Lambert.

Gym owners expect wellness to come back strong in 2021. They are hoping for a return to normalcy but are ready


CONDUCTING TRANSFORMATION VIA LIFE COACHING



Hugh Ballou-SynerVision

One wellness professional who helps people make progress in their lives is Hugh Ballou of Lynchburg, a Transformational Leadership Strategist with SynerVision International, Inc. He aids clients in improving their leadership skills – and by his definition "everyone is a leader." Ballou says that 90% of coaching is listening. He never tells anyone what to do but rather asks questions, the answers to which activate clients' hidden potential and help them sound out decisions. "Understanding self is key," said Ballou. Those who are self-aware and open to learning are coachable.

He offers help that is applicable from church committees to company executives to families. Quoting author Richard Rohr, Ballou said, "How you do anything is how you do everything." Some of the areas he focuses on are empowerment, the ability to accomplish something, how to influence people, and discovering the consequences of decisions. Overall, Ballou said, he "challenges you to be a better you."

to continue adapting. Beliveau said TREBEL is accommodating the wide variety of attitudes about the virus. As Burn's Shepardson notes, "We weathered this storm ... and we can do it again." 

Author's note: It is advised that before beginning any fitness or nutrition regimen you check with your physician.



Are you getting personal?

It's that time of year again when businesses set their goals and objectives for the next year. But what about the personal goals of each employee? A small business in Roanoke recently gave their employees a survey to ask them their thoughts for the upcoming year. The very first question they asked was "what would you like your personal goals to be for next year?" Some of the answers were:

- Better balance, more physical activity, and to get out of the house!
- Spend quality time with friends and family. Initiate small healthy lifestyle changes.
- I would like to get closer to God.
- Create deeper relationships with my spouse and children.

Most organizations care about the well-being of their teams. Some will also invest in professional development. Few companies, however, invest time and money to ensure that each team member is pursuing a personal goal plan. You may be wondering "what does a personal goal plan have to do with business operations?" In short, it has everything to do with your organization's performance.

Organizations consist of a group of employees who work for various reasons. High on the list of reasons is to "earn a living." Or in other words, to make money and earn benefits that can help them live a life they want to live. Most employees work in your organization to help them achieve their personal goals. That is a primary motivation for them to be in your company.

Doesn't it make logical sense then for businesses to invest in helping their employees develop and pursue a personal goal plan? Helping team members achieve their personal goals will increase motivation and engagement in the organization.

Leadership Management International (LMI) defines personal leadership as the ability to realize worthwhile, predetermined personal goals. More than simply a New Year's resolution, a written personal goal plan aimed toward our mission and purpose in life helps us achieve greater success and personal satisfaction.

Arguably the best development program we offer clients from LMI is our Effective Personal Leadership program, designed to help leaders identify their purpose in life and to develop and pursue a personal goal plan towards it. Consider investing in this program in 2021 for yourself and your team. There is nothing more gratifying for an organization or an employee than to know what your mission is, and to know that you are achieving goals to fulfill it.

Be safe, and let's have a successful year in 2021! 

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Is employee well-being good for business well-being?

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com


Plan retirement contributions now for 2021 tax savings

Sometimes saving can be as simple as finding good pre-tax investment options. What you save in taxes can grow more quickly than you think with the power of compounding returns. Of course, there are the actual financial returns for, but your investment in your employees' financial security can grow too as you build good will. Consider the following:

SEPs offer tax deductions for contributions: If you're self-employed, or an employer, you can set up a simplified employee pension (SEP) IRA plan. This allows the employer to take a tax deduction for contributions made to each eligible employee's account. This includes the owner. A traditional IRA needs to be set up for SEP monies to be deposited into for tax benefits. This can be as much as 25% of wages or \$57,000.

401(k)s deduct money from employees' paycheck pre-tax: the maximum annual contribution is \$19,500 (\$6,500 catch up contributions are allowed for those over 50). There is no government insurance on assets held in these accounts, so it's generally wise to roll the assets over to a new plan when you switch jobs.

SIMPLE IRAs is a tax-deferred employer-provided retirement plan: this is an abbreviation for Savings Incentive Match Plan for Employees. The administration rules are simpler and less costly than the better known 401(k) because it's not subject to ERISA and the regulations that come with it. Annual contributions are capped at \$13,500, or \$16,500 for those over 50.

You might be an employer looking for better incentives to keep valued employees that also saves you money in taxes. Even if you don't have employees, it's wise to figure out what to do as a business owner to set money aside for retirement. Understanding the different options will help decide what's best for you. Stay tuned next month for a discussion of cash balance pension plans, profit sharing plans, traditional and ROTH IRAs. 

“It's wise to figure out what to do as a business owner to set money aside for retirement.”



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Do you know the options for you and your employees when it comes to building a retirement nest egg?

Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at michael@discover360 Financial.com

““”

We would hope to be able to provide some strategies for coping...

— Karen Pillis



submitted

Karen Pillis

United Way, partner non-profits can also help with a “new you” as 2021 arrives

By Gene Marrano

After summoning up the courage to admit there may be a problem – there are a myriad of ways to find help.

It's not only private mental health counselors and “big box” providers like Carilion Clinic Psychiatry & Behavioral Medicine that offer services to those emotionally battered by the chaos and fear of 2020. Or perhaps battling substance abuse issues that were often exacerbated by what happened last year, including job losses and business shutdowns, the threat of eviction/foreclosure when you can't pay the rent or mortgage – due in large part to the coronavirus pandemic. The Healthy Roanoke Valley (HRV) coalition that can be found under the United Way of Roanoke Valley umbrella offers a clearinghouse of information (healthyrv.org), with links to the Virginia COPES warm line

at 877-349-6428 and local services like Blue Ridge Behavioral Health Care, which focuses on those fighting substance abuse. The non-profit has seen a spike in requests for help as some seek solace in drugs or alcohol for relief. HRV was created following a 2012 Carilion Clinic Community Health assessment that showed a gap in the availability of those services.

Health Roanoke Valley's website features links to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, a Veteran's Crisis Line, and another for Virginia veteran and family support. Dozens of non-profits, social service agencies and school systems are coalition members


says Jeremy Holmes with Ride Solutions – another partner. They were already planning a mental health awareness campaign, and then “the pandemic simply forced that to become a priority. Various groups working within Healthy Roanoke Valley got together and decided this is something we need to move on quickly,” says Holmes. Let’s make asking for help normal urges the coalition at healthrv.org/normal, where healthy brains, bodies and connections to family and friends are the goals.

One Healthy Roanoke Valley partner is Family Service of Roanoke Valley (FSRV), which is almost 120 years old. Late in 2020 it began offering free virtual caregiver support groups – emotional support for those taking care of others. That could mean a parent-turned-educator with their kids remote learning for part or all of the week due to coronavirus precautions (one group is for those caring for youths under 18). The other was for those perhaps caring for an elderly parent or disabled adult. COVID-19 was often just a pile-on to an already stressful situation that for some also included teleworking. These groups “will provide self-care strategies, mindfulness activities, and information on how caregivers can take care of themselves while taking care of others,” Family Service stated in announcing the caregiver groups.

Karen Pillis is director of mental health services for FSRV, which can help everyone age three and up with their emotional and mental health wellbeing. They accept insurance plans, Medicare/Medicaid and offer sliding scale fees for others who need help and have no

other way to pay for it. Typically, in a given year one of five people report they have some type of mental health issue says Pillis, but in 2020 “it was more like 1 in 3.” Maybe closer to 40 percent even. “We had seen that call volume [increase] in our agency as well.” Family Service switched to virtual counseling services in 2020 for all but the very young, who still come for in-person visits with an adult. At the height of the pandemic lockdown “many were scared to come out of their house,” so tele-health made sense for that reason as well notes Pillis.

Fifty percent of parents with children under 18 said they had a higher level of mental health needs in 2020 says Pillis, citing another statistic. Children sometimes feel isolated in the COVID era and “they are [also] reaching out.” AARP reported in November that 1 of 6 caregivers for older adults reported some mental health issues. “We felt like that was a group not being identified with [needing] services,” says Pillis of the motivation for the caregiver support groups. The plan was to launch them last month; each with about 7-8 members, each lasting 8 sessions.

Pillis plans to make them sustainable and ongoing. “We would hope to be able to provide some strategies for coping, [for] self-care, some more mindfulness and grounding. Maybe connect them to other resources in the community.” Finding others that are “kind of in the same boat as they are,” may be reassuring says Pillis – and reassurance that everything’s going to be just fine (with vaccinations on the horizon) is something many need right now. 



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STYLE NOTES

By Doug Kidd

Executive Summary:

Our newest bi-monthly column will (hopefully) help you dress for success, at work or at play.

Doug Kidd is with Tom James Company. He is an image consultant and clothier. Reach him at d.kidd@tomjames.com

Make sure the clothes fit your personality

Have you ever known someone that just had great style? The way that they carry themselves, their clothing, their accessories, their whole ensemble seems to just work for them. It allows them to move forward with confidence and distinction. Whether you have chosen to dress casually, business casual, or more traditional business dress, you can infuse your own personal style throughout your entire wardrobe. Here are just a few tips to help you get started in the right direction:

1. Color - Have you ever noticed that you get compliments every time that you wear a certain outfit? Just a suggestion, it might be associated with the color that you are wearing. Some colors naturally look better with your skin tones. There is a whole industry based around matching up colors and what looks best on a person. Let common sense rule, typically people are aware of colors that they look best in, so make sure when you are building a wardrobe, to consider this when purchasing clothing....especially the clothing like shirts, and blouses that sit on our skin, and up against your neck.
2. Fit - You would be surprised at how much a better tailored garment can improve the overall look of an outfit. Choose garments that suit your body, and match with your desired look. Generally, looser, less defined clothing portrays a more casual look.
3. Seasonal: consider the season. Is it fall, and time to bring out the chunky sweaters....or is it going to be a balmy 95 degrees in the middle of the day? This must be in consideration when building a wardrobe.
4. Accessories: Perhaps more than any other area of dress, accessories give us the opportunity to express ourselves. Whether you like the clean look of simple, no nonsense shoes, or the flare of an exotic purse or clutch, the smallest of additions to an outfit can put on the finishing touches. Choose your accessories wisely, and they can work for you, and help you to make the statement that you are going after.
5. Invest: if you are serious in developing your own style, consider investing your time in figuring out what look you are going after. Look through images of different styles that appeal to you. Be willing to see your wardrobe as an investment in yourself. Invest in a relationship with a clothier or wardrobe consultant that can help match your ideas with actual garments that build a wardrobe to your liking. 

“...a better tailored garment can improve the overall look...”

Women's answer to professional development in 2021


I'm a female CEO. I'm also a mom to two children, both home most days in virtual learning. So, I can add homeschool teacher to the list of things for which I am now responsible. Most days I don't feel overly successful at running my business, mothering, or facilitating my children's learning. The last year has brought me from empowered working mom to woman treading water.

An onslaught of job reports reveals the steady hemorrhage of women from the workforce. With childcare centers closed and schools operating remotely, many families have children at home and women are carrying the lion's share of care responsibilities. One in four women are either considering cutting back on work or leaving their jobs completely. This comes after we've worked so hard towards equality in the workplace. The pandemic quickly showed us that caregiving is still primarily a women's issue. With all this going on, why and how should we engage in professional development? If we want to bounce back and return to the workforce, it may be our key.

Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) are groups of colleagues and mentors that allow us to take charge of our learning. PLNs function in the online environment, primarily through social media, and give you access to problem-solving with like-minded professionals, collaborating with peers across geographies to improve practice, and crowd-sourced topics relevant to your field. In addition to the autonomy PLNs bring, they also promote a sense of belonging, something we all could use a little more of right now.

How do you start your PLN?

1. Identify your need. What is most important for you right now? Is now a good time to dive into the latest literature in your field? Or be part of important conversations happening among colleagues? Or maybe you just need connection with other like-minded individuals. Figure out what's most important so you can target the right groups.
2. Find your people. Where are the highest profile people related to your need? Are they posting on Twitter or Instagram? Is there a Facebook group? The influencers are likely leading conversations and driving engagement. Find them and you'll find the flow of where and when activities are happening online.
3. Engage broadly and locally. While it's great to have your finger on the pulse of what's happening broadly, nothing beats the intimate learning you'll find with local connections.

Great thing about PLNs, they're personal! You can change your engagement as your needs change. If you're looking to connect with local mothers facing our current challenges look up Huddle Up Moms, a local non-profit focused on empowering, connecting, and educating mothers. We're a team of mothers connecting you to local resources so you can "build your village" of support in all areas. Find us at huddleupmoms.org, and @huddleupmoms on Facebook and Instagram. We'd love to be part of your PLN! 



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Kimberly Whiter

Executive Summary:

Before 2020, one might think of professional development and conjure images of workshops or lunch-time sessions listening to speakers.

Now with the world functioning so differently, so should our professional development.

Kimberly Whiter is Director of Education and Support for Huddle Up Moms, the CEO for Elder Care Solutions, an eLearning Specialist, and mom of two.



All photos submitted

Tay Whiteside

NEW YEAR ALSO A NEW START FOR SALVAGE DAWGS CO-STAR

By Ian Price

It took about three years to turn a machine shop located on Rorer Avenue SW near the intersection of 5th Street in downtown Roanoke - packed with late 1800s and early 1900s era machines - into Lift Arc Studios.

Owner Tay Whiteside started cleaning out the shop part-time while still working for his dad at Black Dog Salvage and appearing on the subsequent (and now defunct) DIY Network TV show "Salvage Dawgs." He had been looking for a change. "The emphasis is on metal fabrication" at Lift Arc Studios says Whiteside. (His father Mike is the co-owner of Black Dog Salvage and was one of the Dawgs TV show's principal players with partner Robert Kulp.)

There is also some media production mainly run by his colleague and friend Walker Hooper. Hooper is no stranger to a complicated computer rig. Tay Whiteside says, "he runs the [Lift Arc] YouTube channel" and if someone wanted them to produce a video "we could probably figure it out—and what I mean by that is fit it into our schedule, because we

are about 85% a fabrication shop."

The skill he developed at Black Dog was mainly an architectural one. "Wrought iron gates, lighting fixtures, custom doors, bed frames - mostly furniture and house related" said Whiteside of the time working at his dad's shop. He still does all of that but also has an automotive background; he's built "custom race cars, roll cages, full on aluminum pipe systems for turbo cars."

Those skills come in handy because he will also do repairs. "If you have some complicated or hard to find piece of equipment or heirloom - that's the kind of stuff I like to figure out," said Whiteside, who claims that Lift Arc Studios can help with almost anything metal: "signage, bracketry, table bases, metal furniture, custom lighting, tables - I'm casting a wide



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net right now and try not to say ‘no’ too often.”

The Lift Arc Studios YouTube Channel - which started out as “The Machine Shop” - was originally a video account of Whiteside cleaning out the late 19th century machines on premises (next

door to the Golden Cactus craft brewery) but now videos feature him constructing the solution to someone else’s problem. “If it’s a big project we’ll sometimes do part 1 and part 2 videos, but mostly we do one build per episode.” They try to release at least one episode per week so that “people can experience




Before the cleanup

this type of work, that I believe most people our age are not doing.” Whiteside continued however that, “people from 25 to 65 have contacted me on the YouTube channel, to thank me for bringing them along on the ride - which is really cool.”

Lift Arc Studios opened officially in October 2020. Whiteside says despite only being open for a handful of months he feels fortunate to have a backlog of projects already. “One thing that’s been really interesting is that the trades haven’t really fallen off during the pandemic, in fact I’ve noticed an uptick to some degree because people are now at home more [and] they are noticing [potential] projects.” The pandemic he contends has taught some people to not rely so heavily on the overseas markets for manufactured goods, saying “what can we make in this country for ourselves, if the world falls apart?”

Whiteside says Lift Arc Studios should not be confused with a mass production operation. “If you want 500 of one thing made you are probably better off going to one of these large production shops” but, he said “if you want something custom-made that can’t be found anywhere else, come here and let us help you.” Whiteside also promises that if, “someone wants to invest \$10,000 in me to build them something - that’s huge and I don’t take that lightly. You are going to get what you paid for.” In short he adds, high end quality over quantity, but personalization above everything else.

For custom metal fabrication, metal repair, and CNC plasma cutting needs Whiteside says, “I like to think we are a viable option right here in downtown Roanoke, in an over 100-year-old machine shop, trying to carry on the theme that was established in the building.” 



Martha Parrott
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“Playing handbells in my church choir has always been one of my favorite activities. When I had a stroke at just 51 years old, I didn’t know if I’d be able to play music again. The LifeWorks Rehab 7-day-a-week custom therapy program helped me get back home and making music again fast.” - Martha Parrott



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All photos by Gene Marrano



Hope to Walk raises more funds for its Third World Mission >

A December 1 concert that was recorded ahead of time and featured a roster of musicians from around the county helped the Blacksburg-based non-profit Hope to Walk raise more than \$14,000 for its mission – providing very low-cost prosthetic legs to amputees to third world countries. Hope to Walk (profiled in Valley Business FRONT several years ago), works in a handful of countries now – mainly in Central America and Vietnam, but has requests from dozens more says founder **Phil Johnson**. The prosthetic leg “kits” cost about one hundred dollars to make – still out of reach for most recipients, which is why a virtual 5K race (which raised 60K) and then last month’s Grateful Live concert (hosted by VBF editor Gene Marrano) helped raise money

and awareness for the Hope to Walk Mission.

“The most important thing is remembering why we do what we do,” says Johnson, who has a background in the field of prosthetics. The Hope to Walk leg – simply PVC piping, wood, a crepe sole and Gorilla Glue (now a sponsor) is not approved for use in the United States nor by the FDA he notes. “There’s no way they [the recipients] could ever afford a commercial prosthetic that cost 10 to 25 thousand dollars,” says Hope to Walk Director of Marketing **Kristen Staples**, who helped assemble Grateful Live. “It’s incredible the connections we’ve been making ... with other organizations and non-profits,” says Dr. Ken Jones, a retired family physician who is now the CEO. With more exposure, “there’s no limit as to where Hope to Walk could go. We want to put a big dent in the 35 million amputees that need legs. Most of these patients [once fitted] walk home.” (see hopetowalk.org for more information)

The Wellnest calls itself a "Holistic Hub" >

Open a unique business as the pandemic rears its ugly head again in November? Why not says **Valerie Angle** of her new retail space, tucked in one corner inside the front door at 16 Church Avenue SW in downtown Roanoke. In what sounds like a perfect tonic for the start of 2021, her shop offers wellness mercantile (how about a lavender, blue sage and "yerba santa" smudge, a straw-like material you light, with the ensuing smoke helping to relieve stress?), and classes/ events in a Holistic Provider Network. The Wellnest Roanoke is also part of what Angle calls a Member Zen Zone. "Our vision [with and co-owner/fiancé Josh] is that we will create this dynamic community of diverse holistic providers and healers, so that we can connect them [to Roanokers]."

Mind, body and spirit items for those living in downtown Roanoke is the primary target market. "I think there's enough people living,

working and visiting downtown to do that." Long term Angle is eyeing a bigger space where some of those other providers and healers can also set up shop. Maybe rooms for seminars and a small café as well, a "real community gathering space." There are gift items from local artisans and other goods that support a more spiritual, less stressful lifestyle. Angle is also a holistic life coach, where she endeavors to help people find more healthy lifestyles "through natural resources. I work with people to find what areas of their life they are struggling with."

20 years ago, Angle might have thought all that was "hippy dippy," but over time she uncovered "a ton of scientific research," to support the benefits of mindfulness and some of the other disciplines she now espouses. The brakes on her big plans were applied when COVID hit last year, so she opened for now on a reduced scale at 16 West Church Avenue, using social media and offering smaller in-person groups (for guided meditation, laughter yoga etc.) "I think now, more than ever, we need to focus on our wellness."



All photos by Gene Marrano



NO BAD HIRES

By Jennifer Leake, CMC

Executive Summary:

The hiring process requires detailed attention and strategy.

Avoiding a hidden bad hire

Most successful businesses wouldn't think of running their business without accounting, operations or other systems. Yet many lack a system to hire, develop and retain key talent. A 3-year study of hiring managers revealed only 19% of new hires were successful. The 81% of unsuccessful hires had been successful in other companies, had great resumes with respected educations, interviewed well, seemed to match the company culture, and possessed superb skills and knowledge. Then why did they not succeed in the job they were hired for?


Most bad hires are good people hired for the wrong job. When an individual lacks a critical strength needed for success, no amount of training will raise performance to an acceptable level. When you hire a smart, hard-working person who lacks the cognitive abilities and hard-wired traits needed to succeed in your job – you hire someone who can almost do your job.

Every job has a few critical factors that are absolutely necessary for success. For example, all baseball players need to be able to hit, throw and catch a ball. But when you consider what you need for a great Center Fielder versus a First Baseman, critical factors start to vary. You want a Center Fielder who can run like the wind, leap walls and throw a long way very accurately. Your First Baseman needs to have lightning fast reflexes and do a split. The same concept is true when you hire employees.

When factors can't be described in behavioral terms, they are open to interpretation and are difficult to observe or manage. Instead of words like dependable, team player or self-starter, it is more important to use observable critical abilities. In sales, these might be specific behaviors such as get appointments, follow-up effectively, handle sales rejection, close sales, and build customer relationships.

It is important to identify and list vital job behaviors compared to how most job descriptions or job postings are written. Most don't identify what you are looking for when interviewing candidates. The need to have a clear system for hiring is even more important today because we may be hiring and managing virtually.

When asked, even professional interviewers feel their exceptional hiring rate is only 75%, and their really good rate only 60%. How do you improve your personal hiring rate?

- Identify and list specific job behaviors needed for success in your position.
- Rank them as Critical, Important or Good to Have.
- Assess to screen out anyone who lacks one or more Critical traits.
- Eliminate candidates who lack any critical specialized skills or knowledge required that you can't or don't want to train.
- Conduct interviews using assessment results, resumes and interview questions to select from the remaining best candidates. 

JA and its Hall of Fame


Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia has served more than 528,000 students since its founding in 1957 with innovative, relevant programs delivered in schools by volunteers from the business community. Our high-impact national and state-accredited programs give K-12 students knowledge and skills in financial literacy, work readiness, and entrepreneurship.

This past year unlike any other in present day history has challenged our routine work and life habits. Despite the many changes, Junior Achievement is still here to provide students the programs and foundation that level the playing field, and the equipment and skills that change the game. This change also affects one of our largest programs each year, the Business Hall of Fame event. The event, which will be held virtually on Wednesday, March 24, 2021, honors business and community leaders who exemplify our mission – to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy. For our 30th year, we celebrate our laureate, Deborah L. Petrine of Commonwealth Care-Roanoke, along with Kevin Bloomfield as Entrepreneur of the Year.

Like our honorees, Junior Achievement has embraced innovation and change to stay in the virtual school setting by pivoting from traditional classroom kit materials to digital resources. Our program volunteers help young people have conversations about eliminating financial anxiety and adjusting to the flux in the job market. Students in either virtual or in person classes are learning about transferable skills that help them explore careers that match their academic strengths.

JA and local educators are witnessing the need to stop the cycle of poverty by empowering young people to succeed in the global economy. The social and psychological well-being of generation Z are underpinned by financial well-being. That's why JA is helping build financial equity and equitable opportunities—to the benefit of every student, our community, and our world.

Every day we all work hard to succeed. To contribute. To lead. To give back. To do this, it takes perseverance, resiliency, and experience. We are able to offer these same lessons to each and every student in our area through gifts from the community and our volunteers.

Let's keep working together to give our youth the opportunity to prepare for a life of success and to positively change the future, one life at a time. For more on the Junior Achievement and the Business Hall of Fame, visit www.jaswva.org. 



GOOD WORK

By Katherin A. Elam

Executive Summary:
Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia brings students and the business community together resulting in opportunities.



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Valley Business FRONT honors 2020 contributors

First off, we salute every one of our contributing writers, columnists, and members of our 2020 Patron Advisory Board for their efforts in 2020. It's corny yes, but it truly is a team effort as we continue to strive to make Valley Business FRONT a better product, and to truly be *Virginia's Blue Ridge Business Journal*. At the end of a very challenging year for the business community we did want to recognize the following folks, however:

Columnist of the Year: Mike Leigh for Business Operations. Mike has worked with a lot of companies on their management, leadership and operational methods. As



Mike Leigh

someone with a background that includes more than two years in manufacturing, I often find myself nodding “yes” when Mike Leigh brings up a spot-on point – which he does on a regular basis.

Writer of the Year: New River Valley-based Jennifer Poff Cooper was a “workhorse all year long,” and I mean that as a compliment. She was always willing to tackle new fields for her and to ask questions as she prepped for the interview process. Her stories are typically very conversational and an easy read. The November 2020 story on Jeanne Stosser with SAS builders was a real “get” as apparently Ms. Stosser doesn’t do many full-length interviews.



Jennifer Poff Cooper


Story of the Year: Nannette Levin for her September 2020 story on Sunbelt Brokers entitled, “It’s Still Business As Usual for Buyers & Sellers.” Nanette did a great job of breaking down exactly what a business broker does for sellers and buyers, a niche many were probably not aware of. Nanette did that all year long – tackling various business sectors and breaking them down for readers without making their heads hurt.



Nannette Levin

-Gene Marrano

The end of year 2020 Valley Business FRONT Contributors Celebration was virtual this year; it’s available on the VBF Facebook page, our website at www.vbFRONT.com or request a link to it: news@vbfront.com.

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LEGAL BUSINESS

By Tom Ashton

Executive Summary:

With 2020 ending, if your business has survived, you should work to position it properly for the new year and beyond.


Tom Ashton is a Roanoke attorney. Reach him at tom@ashtonlawoffice.com

Small business in 2021 – position yourself for anything

2020 has been a train wreck for most small businesses. The lockdowns and other virus-related uncertainties took a sledgehammer to what was a booming economy, shattering businesses and individual lives in the process. Now on to 2021. First, conduct a review to ensure you can adapt to our ever-changing, virus-centered reality. Even the most optimistic timeframes for a return to “normal” aren’t until the spring or summer of 2021. Until then, review your requirements for physical plant and staffing, and think about what you’ll need in 2021. Game out some possible scenarios (another lockdown, greater staff absences for medical reasons, etc.) and make sure you can adjust to become quickly compliant with most of the most likely related restrictions. Periodic review of human resource, health and safety compliance plans may help avoid potentially costly existing issues related to noncompliance. Be proactive in your contingency planning.

If you are planning to start a new business in 2021, understand that you are doing so in the most uncertain legal and economic climate in recent human memory. Before you commit fully, be sure to consult an attorney on all the legal questions about starting and running your business. You may not be able to foresee everything, but taking a comprehensive look at the current regulatory climate is a good idea. Consider whether that new commercial lease you are about to sign contains any provision to address a situation where governmental emergency regulations prevent you from operating for an extended period. If it doesn’t, can you afford to sign it?

Third, you need not cower in fear in this new reality. There is opportunity out there for enterprising entrepreneurs. Many old industries must now either adapt or die, and that creates space for innovation. Do you have an idea for a new business or product in that space, or do you own a business that can be easily adapted to fill an emerging need? If so, by all means proceed cautiously in the face of pervasive economic uncertainty but examine the framework of regulations applicable to your industry in order to gauge feasibility and market limits.

Finally, commit to getting involved in networking and making connections with government representatives. Local and state governments are largely responsible for making and enforcing virus-related regulations. The government needs to hear the voices of local small businesses. Waiting until the next crisis hits means you’re too late. Start now to ensure that elected and appointed representatives keep you and your business in mind the next time they make emergency decisions on behalf of your community. 

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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
*Coaches, consultants,
counselors, oh my; how
do you pick a good one?*

Lemme give you some advice, kid

Do you take advice? Do you heed it? Do you get a second (or third, fourth...) opinion? What qualifications matter most to you when seeking advice?

These questions fascinate me. Especially that last one.

Qualifications.

You'd think qualifications would be the most important characteristic when considering an advisor, yes? "Of course," most of you are saying. But therein lies the rub (I say in my best Shakespearean phraseology). "Qualifications" are defined in many different ways, it seems. And as a veteran reporter on all things business, I have found all of the variations fall under two categories: competency and charisma.

The Competent Consult

The advice from a provider who is competent usually refers to someone with experience. But not always. Yes, it's more likely you're going to get better information from a veteran in a field of study or industry. But there are exceptions. There's the surgeon who performed an operation with skilled perfection—right out of med school. We know many stories of high tech startups, often by entrepreneurs who didn't fully understand or know the business going in. And perhaps the best example where seniority may not be an indicator of competency is the education field. How many "best teachers" are those who are in very early stages in their careers? Competency is competency. You may or may not see it or even pick it out correctly from a list of accomplishments. You only truly know it when you get it.

The Charismatic Consult

The advice from a provider who is charismatic usually refers to someone who inspires. But not always. Yes, it's more likely you're going to respond quicker and with higher engagement to a person with a creative or energetic force or just outright likeability. But there are exceptions. There's the crabby, mumbling, editor who everyone avoids, but is actually passing along super valuable insight if you can stand to listen. There's the team coach who just seems to stand there, never throwing his hands up or screaming at players and referees, and yet the entire organization improves when he's in charge. And there's the presenter whose presentation is not "branded" or humorous or sentimental... and yet there is that one nugget the audience gets that may not seem inspirational, but it is used and applied with amazing results. Charisma isn't an internal state, it's a cause for action.


I have known coaches, consultants, and counselors who are competent, but not very charismatic. I have known that same lot who presented charismatic energy, but weren't particularly competent. When I run across an individual with both qualities, I take note. And if both of those qualities are in the high 9 or 10 range (on a scale of 10 of course), I listen. I really, really, really listen. 📖

More help for small businesses could be in order this year

As for 2021 programs available at the local SBDC office (located inside the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce office on South Jefferson Street), director Amanda Forrester could only promise early last month that “everything’s going to be different – because everything is different.” That might be an understatement after the business wrecking ball that was 2020. As they were still formulating programs, Forrester, an entrepreneur as well, said minority, veteran and women-owned businesses – which often bore the brunt of the pandemic-induced recession – would be a major focus in 2021. Those sectors are typically a focus anyway she adds; also noting that there are regular SBDC workshops “for everybody.”

The Roanoke Small Business Development Center, which receives federal funding, has been hiring people to run those new programs. Here and nationwide Forrester says minority-owned businesses – which tend to be smaller and undercapitalized in many cases, were hit “much harder,” than were some other business sectors by the lockdowns and restrictions enacted as a COVID safety precaution. “Women [owners] are close behind on that.” The goal with new programs planned is to help smaller businesses learn how to survive such a catastrophic event – should (heaven forbid) it happens again on that scale. She’s hoping for more federal CARES Act funding to help pay for those programs.

It’s been desperation time for some local small businesses in recent months notes Forrester, when the dialogue often turned from earlier hope, “to conversations about do I close my business? do I go bankrupt? do I sell my business?” We’re having those conversations with people now – we were not having them in September and October.” Some eateries – ones that pivoted early to a different model – are doing okay; other larger establishments are struggling says Forrester and some are finding trouble hiring the staff they now need.

The big lesson many learned? Having successful business processes in place to fall back on says Forrester, not jumping in and hanging up an “Open” sign too early. “We see a better understanding of that now.” In fact, some of the Roanoke SBDC’s small business workshops have seen attendance soar by 500 percent. “All of a sudden people are very interested in what we do. Before we had to pull teeth. They need help and we’re trying to listen to what they need.” Case in point: she says businesses large and small now realize they need to be online in some fashion, with some type of e-commerce or social media presence, to really compete. Better to get religion late than never perhaps when it comes to running a small business. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Roanoke's Small Business Development Center is working on some new programs that could assist COVID-battered local companies.

FRONTReviews >

Readers and patrons of the business journal are invited to submit reviews (along with an optional photo) to news@vbFRONT.com. We've expanded our reviews to include books, music, art, performances, culinary—with a preference for local productions. Reviews must be original, include the author's name and location, and should be brief, under 350 words.



Abra KaBabra

Little magic window

My husband and I recently moved here from a big city and have had many "authentic" Mediterranean meals, but this restaurant — **Abra KaBabra** (roadside off Colorado Street, Salem, right as it curves into Apperson Drive)— by far has the best lamb gyro (and baklava) we've ever eaten. We came for the lamb gyro, but we also had falafel unlike any other and the baklava was delicious. The lamb was perfectly seasoned and shaved thin, the pita was perfectly crunchy yet soft, and there was a perfect amount of tzatziki sauce. Most gyros are dry and disproportionately stuffed, but that is not the case here. The baklava had so many pastry layers and wasn't overly soggy like most. This restaurant is the real deal and a must-try. You'll be sure to become a repeat customer like us.

—Kelsey Monahan

Lovely lab

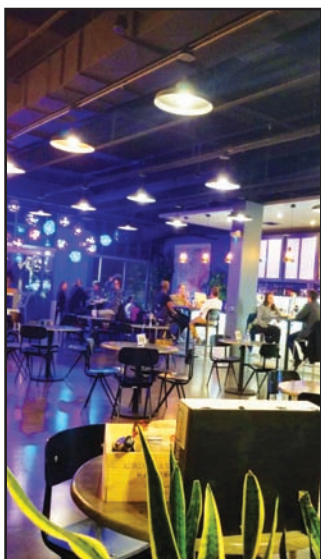
The **Wine Lab** in Blacksburg, practically latched to Virginia Tech campus-proper (on the North Main side) is a respite you must enter if you enjoy libations, charcuterie, and, well... wine. My first visit was pure

perfection, as it was accompanied by a most literal dark-and-stormy night, along with two about-to-graduate college students I adore. When a merchant serves product you already seek, it's hard to go wrong. But couple that with crafted supplements on a well-versed menu, and the review stars just keep compounding. If that isn't enough, the contemporary environ is pleasing (even if your sampling involves vintage and tradition). Speaking of sampling, flights are served in small lab beakers—but no worries, the experience is far from clinical. This is one lab you'll want to visit and bring along with you, any significant other.

—Tom Field

A little bit of soul – Caribbean style

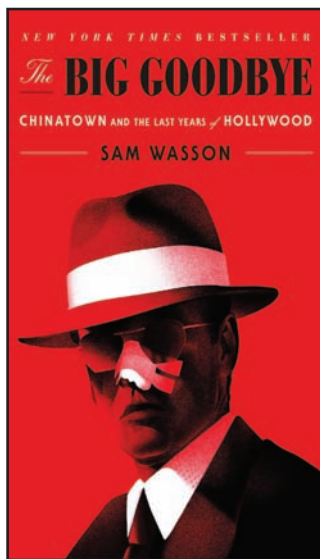
I sure hope local eateries like **Carribica Soul** can weather the pandemic and see their tables crowded once again. Located on Market Street in downtown Roanoke (where Cancun Mexican restaurant was), the family-owned restaurant gained major notoriety a few years back when they spent time with country music star Kacey Musgraves on her tour bus (during Floyd Fest 2019), after members of her band stopped in at their previous location in



The Wine Lab



Carribica Soul



the City Market building to pick up some of Arton William's jerk chicken. At the end of 2019 Williams and his family/staff catered the Musgraves tour wrap party in Nashville. I stopped in to pick up some outstanding jerk chicken, rice & beans and plantains (sauteed and slightly sweet) just before Thanksgiving – when Williams said they were going to try jerk turkey, mostly for family. Tasty food if you like a little spice, worth the trip downtown – of worthy of any support they can get from local foodies. Caribbean Jerk is “in” these days – another spot in southeast Roanoke just opened as well.

—Gene Marrano

The making of Chinatown and the last days of a movie era

When fabled screenwriter Robert Towne went looking for the topic he wanted to take on to describe Los Angeles in a movie, it wasn't about movies, dazzling starlets or Beverly Hills. It was about – water. Based on chicanery that actually took place in the 1930's as the rich and powerful sought to divert much-needed water from the rest of LA for their own benefit, *The Big Goodbye: Chinatown And The Last Years of Hollywood* by Sam Wasson

(2020, Flatiron Books) is also a tale of Jack Nicholson at the height of his acting career as gumshoe Jake Gittes in Chinatown. Plus, the maniacal, flawed and brilliant director Roman Polanski (his cameo in the film when he cuts Gittes' nose as a warning to lay off still makes many flinch) and the talented but mercurial Faye Dunaway as lead actress. It was the tail end of an era when the story was at the core of Hollywood filmmaking – the summer blockbuster *Jaws* in 1975 proved that a top-notch script was no match for special effects (and Bruce the shark) when it came to putting people in the seats. *The Big Goodbye* is also the story of the tortuous process to find a Chinatown script that made sense (it wasn't even set at all in Chinatown). Some still scratch their heads at the myriad plot twists. But it's a great, easy read and a glimpse at a bygone era of moviemaking.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Kelsey Monahan** is a technology sales agent in Salem; **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT and an award-winning news reporter.



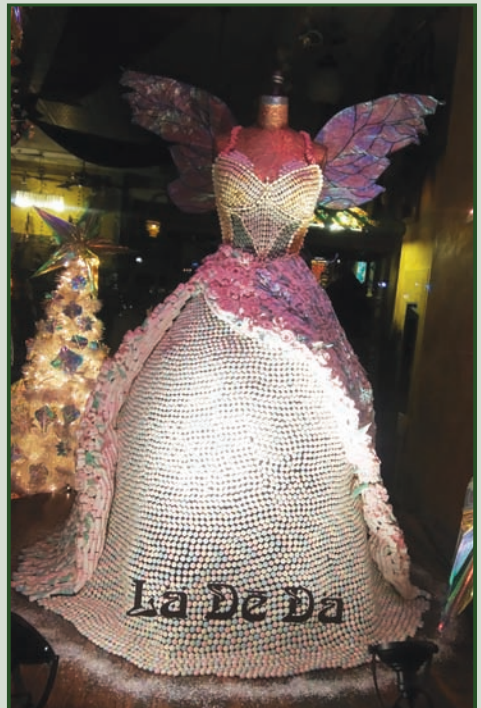
courtesy photo

SBDC statewide honor for local business owner/veteran >

Just in time for Veterans Day, a feel-good story about a veteran: **Bill Hume** is the CEO for Roanoke-based Interactive Design Group, and last month he was named the Virginia Small Business Development Center Veteran of the Year for 2019. Hume founded IDG in 1997, after attending Virginia Tech to study architecture and serving in the Air Force. He supports the Wounded Warrior Project and "Heroes on Track" - where he drives wounded warriors in a race on closed-circuit courses. The decorated veteran is also a founding member of the Virginia's Veterans Parade in Roanoke. "We've been in business almost 22 years, we've got 12 architects and just opened an office in Richmond," Hume told Tom Tanner with the Roanoke SBDC office when receiving the Veteran of the Year Award. "The business is run very much like we did back in the military - we're very schedule driven, and mission driven."



Gene Marrano photos

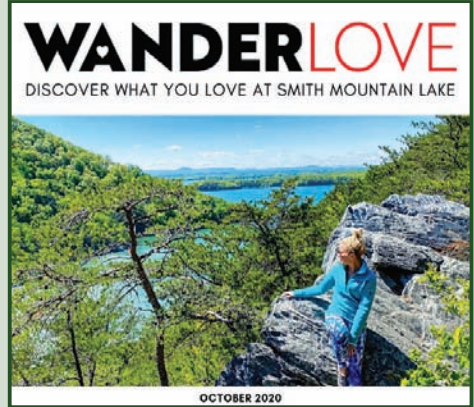


A different Dickens >

No parade, pet costume contest or horse-drawn carriage rides on three Friday nights in December for **Dickens of a Christmas** at the end of 2020. Do we really need to explain why? Instead, there were 25 days of festive lighting in Roanoke's downtown market area and in storefronts - or in the case of the La De Da clothing shop, a dress consisting of 30 pounds of candy.

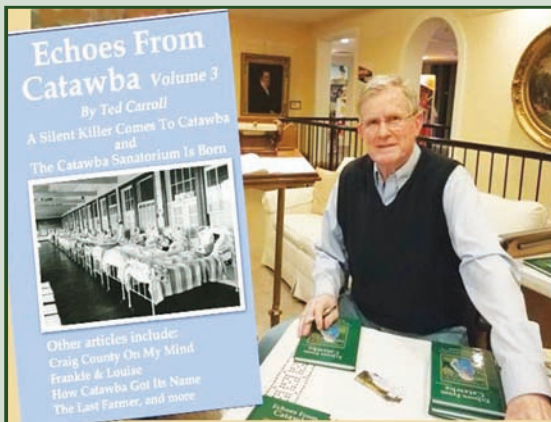
SML Chamber says read all about it monthly >

The **Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce** has developed a tourism email newsletter that is being marketed to a growing list of thousands. SMLRCC Executive Director Christopher Finley says the monthly email highlights the region's top activities and events, and spotlights Chamber members. Subscribers include those who previously requested the annual Smith Mountain Lake Newcomer and Visitor Guide. The newsletter was created using funds provided by a grant awarded to destination marketing organizations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. "Our goal with this email newsletter is to tout the best of the Smith Mountain Lake region year-round and encourage tourists to consider it as the ideal vacation destination," says Finley.



This author really knows Catawba >

Catawba native **Ted Carroll** began writing a series of non-fiction books about life in the Catawba area (including western Roanoke County) about three years ago, focused on the first half of the 1900s. His newest book is *Echoes of Catawba: Volume Three*. All three volumes contain



stories about the cultural heritage and history of the Appalachian community. Included is a history of the Catawba Sanatorium, which opened in 1909 and is located on property once occupied by a resort community in the late 1850s. Carroll was born in Catawba, worked for 25 years for the Virginia Tech Extension faculty and was then a 4-term Mayor in Orange, Virginia. All three *Echoes of Catawba* volumes are available at the Salem Museum bookshop, where Carroll also signed copies late last month.

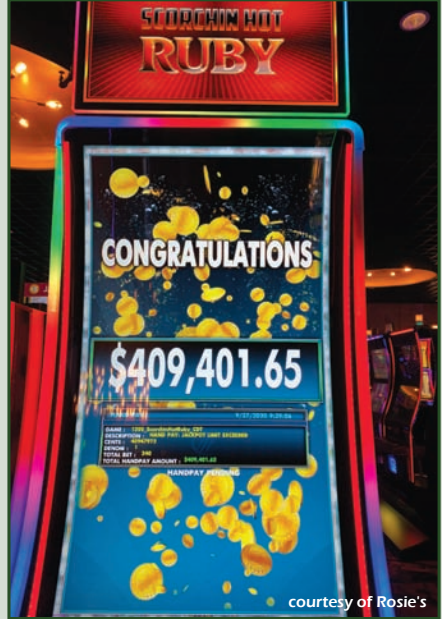
New branding for NRV company >

Inorganic Ventures has launched a new brand tagline, "Refine Your Results. Redefine Your Industry," designed to better articulate the company's position in the high-quality analytical inorganic standards industry as a manufacturer of specialized Certified Reference Materials. Inorganic Ventures underwent a strategic reorganization earlier this year, as the company conducted a comprehensive branding review. "The rebranding is part of our long-term strategy to evolve our business and create a platform for new opportunities," said **Christopher Gaines, CEO**.



Historic Racing machines, off-track betting parlor will grow exponentially >

Rosie's Gaming Emporium has big expansion plans in Vinton, planning to add 18,000 square feet; the number of gaming machines will go from 150 to 500 and a multi-story parking garage with an elevator will be added as well. A stage for live entertainment and a new circular bar is also in the works. Around 70 people are now employed by the Vinton Rosie's. **Ernie Dellaverson** is the general manager: "January 2021 we'll break ground and we're on schedule to finish in December as well." Dellaverson also says extra steps taken by parent company Colonial Downs to make people feel safe during the pandemic helped them survive - and didn't dampen plans for the major expansion.



Catawba Center gets boost >

Last month Governor Ralph Northam visited Roanoke County to announce \$40,000 in funding for a program at Virginia Tech's **Catawba Sustainability Center**. It will be employed to help forest farmers produce and market medicinal herbs. The money, \$20,000 from an Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development grant - combined with another \$20,000 in matching funds from the county — will be used to establish and maintain a propagation center for goldenseal, ramps, and black cohosh at the 377-acre farm property 20 miles east of Blacksburg. "As Virginia's first-and third-largest industries, agriculture and forestry are vital to the health of our economy, and they have been upended by the pandemic," Northam said.



Chamber recognizes United Way executive >

United Way of the New River Valley Executive Director **Sara Bohn** was awarded the 2020 Distinguished Non-Profit Leader Award by the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. Bohn's response? The best way to send a compliment would be to donate, "so we can continue to improve lives in the New River Valley."



A fourth rehabbed property for Roanoke non-profit >

Slowly and steadily since 2016 - about one property a year - **Isabel Thornton's** non-profit **Restoration Housing** is rescuing older homes in Roanoke, turning most of them into multi-family, affordable living spaces. The latest to be finished is on Dale Avenue southeast near the Rescue Mission, where Thornton helped cut the ribbon in mid-November. The non-profit ARCH Services will house chronically homeless people there while they get on their feet. "To [qualify] as permanent supportive housing you need to have both the construction subsidized and the [tenant] rental expenses subsidized," noted Thornton, "and that's where ARCH comes in. They're able to be a partner; they can both pay a rental stipend for the tenants and provide supportive services." That partnership with ARCH allowed Restoration Housing to receive funding from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development to help defray renovation costs for the 130-year-old house, that was once home to a Roanoke mayor. Two more older homes in southeast Roanoke City are targeted next for makeovers says Thornton.



One to watch says Forbes >

A doctoral candidate conducting research at the **Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC** in Roanoke was named to Forbes Magazine's 2020 list of the 30 young innovators in science with potential to make it big. **Ubadah Sabbagh** (27), a fifth-year student in Virginia Tech's translational biology, medicine, and health program, performs National Institutes of Health-funded research mapping the architecture of underexplored circuits of the visual brain. He's also a writer and voice for underrepresented groups in science.



submitted photo

Writer does his part to feed those at risk in Smith Mountain Lake area >

Bruno and Tiffany Silva, owners of **The Landing Restaurant** and **The Landing Love Project**, recently received a \$100,000 dollar matching gift donation from **David and Michelle Baldacci**, to expand on the hot meals dinner delivery service for local at-risk families and seniors throughout the greater Smith Mountain Lake region and surrounding counties. David Baldacci is the prolific, best-selling novelist and has a house at the Lake. Says Bruno Silva, President: "we recently reached another milestone by delivering over 35,000 meals to those in need within our community. The Landing Love Project is a part of us now and we have no plans to stop feeding those in need within our community." Silva says The Love Project's goal is to secure a facility so these additional services can be provided in a physical space that is safe and conveniently located. "This only makes our community stronger and an even better place for all of us to call home," said David Baldacci.

Santa sees seniors >

Citizens Telephone Cooperative of Floyd adopted ten senior citizens who are enrolled in the Agency for Aging to provide gifts for the holiday season in a "Santa to a Senior" program. Citizens' Events Coordinator, **Tina Osborne**, stated "due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the gifts will be purchased by one person in the company to avoid possible cross-contamination of any kind." This is quite different from how Citizens would normally handle this event. "Our employees love to give and normally 'adopt' the person and take their wish list to purchase the items as a group or department." The Citizens' spirit that is normally exhibited during this



Citizens

time of year was not dampened by fewer people being involved. Instead, the company's marketing department made a Christmas card showing the individuals of each department within the company for the residents. The gifts were nicely wrapped in festive gift wrap and delivered to the residents by the Agency on Aging (www.nrvaoo.org) which serves Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski counties and the City of Radford.



More Buzz on the way >

BUZZ, a TV show seen on Blue Ridge PBS and set in the Roanoke and New River valleys, features local nonprofit organizations working in their communities - and area marketing pros who donate time and talent so these nonprofits can do more and better. After a pilot run in 2020, the Virginia Film Office will help sponsor future episodes. **Michael Hemphill**, a former journalist and marketing/development director is the creator of Buzz, which has shown the spotlight on Ram House, Healing Strides and Southwest Virginia Ballet among others in early segments. "They are doing life-giving work in our community," says Hemphill of many of the BUZZ subjects to date; "these are great stories that should be told."

Its inspired he says by the 24 hour "create-athon" that for several years brought together local creative firms (members of the American Advertising Federation of Roanoke chapter) to help small, under-funded non-profits with marketing campaigns: websites, brochures, advertising, social media etc. 7 episodes have been aired to date, also carried on the Buzz 4 Good YouTube channel. "We are excited to support production of BUZZ in Virginia, and we look forward to providing assistance on many levels, financial and logistical," said Andrew Edmunds, Virginia Film Office director in a new release. VFO's support will help underwrite production of five new episodes. "They have indicated they would [then] do another five episodes," says Hemphill, "they are big believers in the project."

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

DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Potter

Roanoke-based Interactive Design Group (IDG) is expanding its architecture and interior design services to Richmond, in a move to increase the firm's presence in the state. IDG has also announced that **Quintin Potter** has returned to IDH to lead the Technology Solutions Studio, which will be housed in the new Richmond location.

LEGAL FRONT

Gentry Locke announced that **Imani Elizabeth Sowell** has joined the firm's Roanoke office as an associate with the Employment & Labor team. Sowell will



Sowell

assist with internal investigations and the defense of federal and state court cases. She joins Gentry Locke following her time as a summer associate and as a law clerk with The Poppe Law Firm in Louisville. Sowell earned her J.D. from the Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville. She earned her B.A. in political science from Virginia Tech.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Virginia Tech's Advancement Division has named **Monecia Taylor** as senior associate vice president for advancement. Taylor previously served as the university's associate vice president for principal gifts, a position she held since



Taylor

joining Virginia Tech in 2016. Prior to that, Taylor served as associate director for external affairs at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum.



Volpe

Stella Lucia Volpe has been appointed head of the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. Volpe comes to Virginia Tech from Drexel University, where she had served as chair of the Department of Nutrition

Sciences for almost 10 years.



Halsey

Wendy Halsey has been named assistant vice president for facilities operations at Virginia Tech following a national search. She now leads a team of over 300 personnel. Halsey comes to Blacksburg from Washington, D.C., where she served as deputy superintendent of House Office Buildings for the Architect of the Capitol.



Forte

John Forte has been named president and chief executive officer

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of the Virginia Tech Applied Research Corporation (VT-ARC). Forte will guide strategic growth and development, working with Virginia Tech's Office for Research and Innovation and reporting to the corporation's board of directors. Before joining Virginia Tech, Forte served as the senior technical advisor for communications and networking department of the U.S. Air Force.



Bankole

Azziza "Kemi"

Bankole, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and geriatric psychiatrist for Carilion Clinic, will serve the medical school in a new role as chief diversity officer. Bankole has been

an associate professor for the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine since 2016. With Carilion's Center for Healthy Aging, Bankole is the geriatric psychiatry fellowship program director and a clinical researcher.



Benson

The Roanoke County School Board has selected **Chris Benson** as the new principal at Hidden Valley Middle School (HVMS). Benson replaces Sammy Fudge, who retired in November. Benson has been serving as the assistant principal at HVMS

since July 2017. He is a graduate of Roanoke County Public Schools and holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, a master's degree from Hollins University and an Educational Specialists degree in educational leadership and policy studies from Virginia Tech.

WELLNESS FRONT



Pressman

Sean Pressman, the CEO at LewisGale Hospital Pulaski, has been elected to the board of directors

for the Virginia Rural Health Association beginning this month. Pressman has been active in several other organizations, including the Virginia Health Care Association, Virginia PACE Alliance, National PACE Association, and the Near Southwest Preparedness Alliance. He also served on the board of directors for the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce for 10 years, and currently serves on the board of directors for the Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce. "This is an important time to be involved with organizations such as the Virginia Rural Health Association in order to advocate for those healthcare needs within the more remote portions of the Commonwealth," says Pressman.



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CAREER FRONT

SENIOR FRONT



Tate



Brooks



Randolph

Retirement Unlimited, Inc (RUI), a Roanoke-based senior living community management company, has promoted **Ray Tate** to Northern Virginia Regional Vice President and **Mandy Brooks** to Executive Director for Paul Spring Community in Alexandria. **Christian Randolph** is now Executive Director at Aarondale Community.

Says Doris-Ellie Sullivan, President of Retirement Unlimited, "we have built a high performing team that affords us the opportunities to focus on our recruitment, retention, and recognition of individuals for their leadership and contributions."

Richfield Living has also announced the selection of **Jeff Bird** as new Executive Director of Residential Living. Bird, a graduate of Georgia State University with a Bachelor of Business Administration, and a Master's of Science in Organizational Leadership and Development from Mercer University in Atlanta, joined the team in October 2020.

AGRICULTURE FRONT

Jeannie L. Dudding of Craig County has been elected to a three-year term on the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation board of directors. Dudding will represent Farm Bureau producer members in Alleghany, Bedford, Botetourt, Craig, Franklin, Henry, Patrick and Roanoke

counties. Dudding also serves as the Virginia Cooperative Extension agriculture and natural resources agent for Giles County. She currently serves as president of the Craig County Farm Bureau and has served on that organization's board for the past 14 years. Dudding is also president-elect for the Virginia Association of Agriculture Extension Agents.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Peters

The Town of Vinton has appointed **Richard W. "Pete" Peters, Jr.** as its next Town Manager. Peters had served as the Acting Town Manager since August 1, 2020 after former Town Manager Barry Thompson, announced his retirement effective December 31, 2020. Peters, a William Byrd High School graduate, has more than 20 years of experience

in local government including the City of Roanoke and Botetourt County and first joined the town in 2015 as Assistant Town Manager/Director of Economic Development.



Drumond

Fabricio D. Drumond is the new Police Chief in the Town of Vinton. Drumond had served as the Interim Police Chief since July 2020, after former Police Chief Thomas Foster left to become the United States Marshal for the Western District of Virginia. Drumond first joined the Town of Vinton in 2009 as an Officer and was promoted to Deputy Police Chief in 2016.

The Executive Committee of the Western Virginia EMS Council announces the hiring of **Stephen G. Simon** as its next executive director, effective in early March. Simon currently serves as Chief of

Aztec Rental

www.aztecrental.com



Wedding & Special Event Rentals



Simon

the Roanoke County Fire and Rescue Department, a position he has held since 2015. He recently announced his retirement after 20-plus years with the department. Simon will replace Robert Logan, who has held the executive director position since 1995. "We welcome Steve aboard, and look forward to his leadership and participation following

Rob Logan's long tenure with the Council," said Council President Mike Jefferson.

ARTS FRONT



Sullivan

Virginia Children's Theatre has named **Kari Sullivan** as Associate Artist. Directing the annual VCT4TEENS production will be a part of Sullivan's many roles,

with her first being the newly announced production, **JUST LIKE I WANTED**, February 25-26 in the Fishburn Auditorium at North Cross School. It will also be toured around Virginia to middle and high schools. Sullivan was involved with VCT (formerly Roanoke Children's Theatre) since its inception, as an actor, teaching artist, director, assistant stage manager and more. Sullivan was also the founder of Kaleidoscope Summer Camp. VCT4TEENS is a program that provides a creative approach to connecting with young people about current health issues through a theatre arts experience.

Sullivan is a former Roanoke County teacher and local radio show co-host, currently residing in Oregon with her husband, golf pro Chip Sullivan.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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Lisa Clause is senior director of marketing and philanthropy at Richmond 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. [cooperjp91@gmail.com]

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Doug Kidd has 25 years in the business as a professional image consultant and clothier. He's with Tom James Company, a service that comes to clients in the privacy of their home or office.

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editing books for non-fiction authors, she's trying to get control of her talented, always happy, but easily distracted mutt Morrie on the agility field. [Nanette@WordsmithofRoanoke.com]

Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFR 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]

Michael Shelton is a Registered Financial Consultant, tax specialist, and owner of 360 Wealth Consultants. His firm specializes in providing retirement planning and wealth preservation strategies for business owners and astute individuals. What really has the locals excited, though, is his groundbreaking, proprietary software, designed to streamline accounting and wealth planning for business owners of medical practices, real estate properties, and construction industry businesses. [michael@discoverj360Financial.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]

Amy White is the Dean of STEM (School of Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) at Virginia Western Community College. She has a Bachelor's degree in biology from James Madison University, a Master's degree in microbiology and immunology from Virginia Commonwealth University, hails from Botetourt County, and has worked at VWCC since 2003.

Kimberly Whiter is CEO and Cofounder for Elder Care Solutions, a Roanoke-based remote company focused on helping caregivers across the U.S. face the financial challenges of long-term care needs. [kimberly@eldercareolutionsinc.com]



It takes perseverance, resiliency, and experience. — Page 35

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RAMP seeking more focused cohort for early 2021 class

Starting in 2021 **RAMP – the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program** based in downtown Roanoke – will host two cohorts a year – 5 to 6 tech-oriented startups looking for help with their growth – instead of one. Recent grants are helping to make that change possible. “We’re going to run a spring and fall cohort,” says RAMP director Mary Miller. For the first time the spring cohort will be more narrowly focused on Life & Health Sciences adds Miller. Applications for those hoping to be accepted are being accepted until February (see www.rampnb.com for more information). That could mean anything from software that helps manage patient care to drug development to a new healthcare-related tool; adds Miller, “anything related.” She says the focus came about “because of our region,” and not due to the influence of COVID-19. “In the heart of Roanoke, we have Carilion and Fralin [Biomedical Research Institute], we have Radford [formerly Jefferson College of Health Sciences], we have Virginia Tech. Medical and healthcare is a [major sector regionally].”

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

It’s not just about helping people from lower-income backgrounds - often living in public housing - to find jobs. It’s also

about Economic Empowerment, Educational Advancement, Health and Wellness, character and leadership. **The EnVision Center** is getting off the ground in Roanoke. Last year the Roanoke Redevelopment Housing Authority was designated as an EnVision Center by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development - and a \$55,000 grant will help turn the old Melrose Library into that hub. One partner on site will be Virginia Career Works, where Morgan Romeo is executive director: “besides being a key contact for the employment piece of that in partnership with our training providers like the community colleges, we are really working hard with them to ensure the EnVision Center has all of the resources there it needs.” Virginia Career Works has their main office on Thirlane Road, VCW can help with unemployment applications but more importantly perhaps with job placement. Romeo says there are currently “tons of jobs available. We have seen success in placing folks.” Until the old Melrose Library renovations are completed the EnVision Center is operating from the Villages at Lincoln in northwest Roanoke.

Overcoming obstacles to spread Christmas cheer to seniors

Home Instead, an Omaha-based franchise network that supplies support services for seniors aging in place, continued its Be a Santa

to a Senior program for a 17th year in late 2020, despite safety precautions in place due to COVID-19. Home Instead collected and distributed gifts for area seniors through online shopping via special Amazon Business store only this season. “The Be a Santa to a Senior program brings so much joy to seniors in our community,” said Betsy Head, owner of the Roanoke Home Instead office. “Seniors are especially at risk for the feelings of isolation that we’ve all felt at some point during the pandemic, and a simple gift can show them that they have been thought of, which is more important this year than ever.” Holiday shoppers were able to find out what homebound seniors wanted by reading notes left on Be a Santa to a Senior trees on display at shopping venues and apartment complexes in the Roanoke area.

Apple will pony up to The Commonwealth

Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring helped secure a \$113 million settlement with Apple, Inc. regarding Apple’s alleged 2016 decision to throttle consumers’ iPhone speeds to address unexpected shutdowns in some iPhones. Herring joined a bipartisan coalition of over 30 state attorneys general in reaching this settlement, wherein Apple will pay Virginia \$2,648,658.22. “For years, Apple willingly and knowingly concealed defects in its iPhone models, going as far as to install

a software update to intentionally hide those defects,” said Herring in a news release. “Apple did not tell consumers that the software update reduced the performance of their phones, and, in fact, profited off the intentional slowdown when consumers upgraded their phones because of the reduced performance.” A battery defect allegedly led to the iPhone shutdowns.

Vinton project gets big boost

Governor Ralph Northam has announced **Industrial Revitalization Fund** awards for three towns including Vinton, totaling more than \$1.4 million. The fund helps to leverage local and private resources to aid redevelopment of deteriorated structures, creating a catalyst for long-term employment opportunities. The Gish Mill Redevelopment Project in Vinton will receive almost \$470,000. Once completed the mixed-use project it is expected to create 37 full- and part-time jobs.

VTC grant for VVBR

The **Virginia Tourism Corporation** has issued \$80,000 in grants to several localities as part of its “Recovery Marketing Leverage Program.” Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge got \$20,000 of that and Vice-President Catherine Fox it will help promote the more COVID-safe outdoors, “focusing on how we can get folks to outdoor amenities.” But Fox says the

Governor's latest order (in mid-November) to limit gathering sizes to 25 for now will hurt. (It went down to 10 people in December). "That will impact weddings, conferences, meetings, groups and definitely will impact people coming to our area," Fox said in November. The City of Salem, Botetourt County, the Town of Rocky Mount and the Smith Mountain Lake Chamber split the rest of that local Recovery Marketing Leverage Program grant money.

City works out deal with closed business on greenway access

The Roanoke River Greenway takes another step towards efforts to "Bridge the Gap," - making the paved path unbroken from Southeast Roanoke City to Salem. After years of threatened legal action by Walker Machine & Foundry in the Norwich neighborhood and the possible use of eminent domain by Roanoke, the city and the now-closed Foundry have agreed to swap land parcels so the greenway can continue towards Salem. At the Salem-Roanoke City line another section with a bridge over Barnhardt

Creek should be finished by next summer.

The only sticking point left then is in Salem near the Riverwalk apartment complex where a right of way has not been agreed on – coordinator Liz Belcher says the greenway may opt for a short stretch along Apperson Drive as a work-around. "I really give the city credit for five years of persistence," says Belcher of the deal with Walker Machine. "They realize that this is Bridge the Gap; this is the toughest part." Belcher also points to Roanoke City's use of some CARES Act funds for the greenway project as a sign they know it's also become an economic driver.

Salute to Mill Mountain guardian

Barbara Duerk, a longtime Roanoke environmental, bicycling and neighborhood advocate, saluted Betty Harris Fields after her passing this way: "Feb 6, 1933 – November 22, 2020 [Harris] championed leave Mill Mountain Natural. She changed the name of the Mill Mountain Development Committee to the Mill Mountain Advisory Committee. As a Girl

Have an announcement about your business?

Send announcements to news@vbFRONT.com

A contact / source must be provided. Inclusions are not guaranteed and all submissions are subject to editing.

Scout leader her troop learned, through her example, to love and protect the out of doors. Thank you, Betty for leading the way. Let us not forget."

Logging on to see Santa

The Christmas season looked a bit different last month because of COVID, but one local business helped keep some of the magic alive by giving children the chance to have a virtual visit with Santa. With many parents concerned about their children's safety this year, local business Jump Into Mystery created a way to interact with Santa virtually over Zoom. Sabrina East is owner of Jump Into Mystery: "how do you explain to a child you can't see Santa this year? Hopefully, this will help parents not have to explain that. They can still get that experience." It cost

twenty dollars for the 10-minute virtual Zoom meeting with Santa. Until gathering restrictions are lifted East says are offering their murder mystery events virtually via Zoom as well, to families, college groups, retirement communities and for corporate team building. "Our virtual events are turnkey events, with no actors, where everyone that attends are given a uniquely written character role, designed to fit their personality and comfort level," says East.

Roanoke author's book becomes miniseries filmed in the region

Beth Macy's third book, **Dopesick**, will become a Hulu limited series filmed in Virginia. The series inspired by Macy's bestselling book Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors, and the Drug Company that Addicted America, will become an eight-episode

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series filmed in Central Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley and Roanoke area, according to a press release from Governor Northam's office. Dopesick was developed by writer and executive producer Danny Strong. A start date has not been announced but Virginia Film Office Director Andy Edmunds said in an email that the production will add more than \$40 million to the economy within eight months. Academy Award-nominated actor Michael Keaton will executive-produce and star; other actors include Peter Sarsgaard and Rosario Dawson.

Dr. Pepper Park planning on full 2021 season

The complete schedule is far from being set but **Dr. Pepper Park at The Bridges** is raring to go for 2021. A Jamey Johnson concert in mid-May was the first show seen on a late November email. New in 2021 will be season passes for every concert that is scheduled, ranging from \$299 for a general admission pass to \$375 (includes the standing only Pit section in front of the stage) and a \$999 Skybox pass to the rooftop deck.

Gauntlet expands its reach again

The Gauntlet business Competition staged every spring by the Advancement Foundation in Vinton is expanding to Bedford County. The Gauntlet will take applications until

February for its next round of mentoring, business planning and a competition that awarded more than 300-thousand dollars in cash and in-kind services this year. See the Advancement Foundation website for details. Mary Zirkle is the director of planning and community development for the Town of Bedford, which is working with Bedford County to find Gauntlet participants: "we're using this as a platform here to fill in some gaps of what we've not been able to do, especially with COVID. We're focusing on what we have and growing the [business] assets; filling the gap for entrepreneurs." The Gauntlet had already welcomed startups from the Roanoke Valley, Botetourt County, the Alleghany Highlands, and Rockbridge County. Last year more than \$300,000 in cash and in-kind services were awarded to those that went through the program.

ROA Investigation

In mid-November, the Roanoke Regional Airport Commission placed Timothy Bradshaw, Executive Director of the airport and Richard Osbourne, Director of Planning and Engineering, on administrative leave pending the completion of an internal investigation regarding a procedural matter. No further details were provided at the time and a Commission release said then airport operations would not be impacted. The Commission

then appointed David Jeavons, CPA, Director of Finance and Administration, to act as Interim Executive Director.

Volvo announces short range electric truck line

Volvo Trucks North America has announced that electric trucks will be built at the New River Valley Assembly plant in Dublin starting this year. Company officials said this is the company's first electric truck for the North American market and is meant for regional distribution and deliveries. The vehicle will have a range of 150 miles and will take 70 minutes to recharge.

Local restaurant chain steps up again

Macado's and the **YMCA** of Virginia's Blue Ridge partnered for a second time this year on Giving Tuesday in early December. On that national day of giving Macado's provided staff at Roanoke City Public Schools and hungry neighbors in the community with 3,000 free boxed meals. Meals were picked up drive-thru style at the Gainsboro YMCA parking lot as a COVID safety precaution. The first 1,000 cars received a goody bag of food items to help with holiday meal preparation.

Bank of Botetourt coming to Vinton

The **Bank of Botetourt** broke ground in late November for a new 2,700 square foot

branch at 410 South Pollard Street in Vinton. The bank's mortgage company, Virginia Mountain Mortgage, will also be housed there. President and CEO C. Lyn Hayth III noted that this will be Bank of Botetourt's third new branch in four years when it opens later this year. It's the largest community bank headquartered in the Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area as well.

Virginia Chamber honors several local lawmakers

The **Virginia Chamber of Commerce** has announced its Blueprint Virginia 2025 Business Advocate Awards, which recognizes state legislators for their support of the Chamber's long-term economic development plan. Those recognized from this region include New River Valley delegate Nick Rush, along with State Senators David Suetterlein and Steve Newman.

Luna makes strategic acquisition

Roanoke-based **Luna Innovations Incorporated**, an optical technology company, has acquired Great Britain-based OptaSense Holdings, Ltd., and its fiber optic distributed monitoring solutions for pipelines, oilfield services, security, highways and railways, as well as power and utilities monitoring systems. The combination is expected to create the world's largest fiber optic

sensing company. "The acquisition of OptaSense marks an incredibly important milestone in Luna's history and will further support our growth trajectory," said Scott Graeff, President and Chief Executive Officer of Luna, in a news release.

Foot Levelers offers personal rehab website

Roanoke-based orthotics maker **Foot**

Levelers has launched a Rehabilitation Website, which features interactive resources showing patients how to perform rehabilitative exercises – which it promises are safe and easy-to-follow routines to help prevent and reduce pain. (see www.footlevelers.com/conditions-rehab-exercises). The website contains rehab articles and videos that demonstrate the proper way to perform exercises and use equipment.

Content is organized by different parts of the body: feet, shoulders and spine, with information on common conditions in those areas and their treatments.

Floyd manufacturer gets new work order

Hollingsworth & Vose has secured a second contract with Department of Defense to increase domestic production of filtration media. H&V is a global manufacturer of

advanced materials used in filtration, battery, and industrial applications. The new contract with the DOD further expands production capacity at the Floyd, Virginia facility. In June 2020, H&V received its initial contract with DOD, which enabled the company to increase production of face mask filtration media, including at the Floyd plant.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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Bad time, perfect timing

By Tom Field

Valley Business FRONT introduces Shon Aguero, an advisory board member representing the finance / credit union sector.

Imagine being so embedded in a community, you worked your way all through your first post-college position in the same industry, at the same company, for fifteen straight years. And then, an opportunity comes up where you accept the position of CBO (Chief Banking Officer). It's a 55,000-member credit union with a formidable community development program, a leading commercial business

unit, and expanding regional footprint. It's also 850 miles away.

You say "yes" to the offer and are ready to begin your new job on Day 1:

It's March 2020.

Really? You make a big career move and join a new organization at the exact same time

a global pandemic hits in full force, and the most aggressive lockdowns and economic shuttering happens on your first day. You left familiar territory, in a comfortable environment where you were aware of all the operations, only to go into an unfamiliar place.

That's how Shon Aguerro made his decision; and his road to Freedom First Credit Union began... with a road block, you could say.

"I worked remotely the first six weeks," Aguerro begins. Not the typical onboarding. And, he says, the task list was fierce, since the crisis-response PPP loan program rolled out in early April. His first meetings with all the new folks were by telephone. Despite the unusual circumstances, Aguerro and the Freedom First team were among the first local lenders to make the PPP loan program available; delivering nearly \$20 million in forgivable relief funds to nearly 300 small business owners in the Roanoke and New River Valleys.

"I have to give great credit to Paul Phillips (CEO) and the team," he continues, "as they were so gracious and allowed me to 'borrow credibility'" until he could eventually meet people in person.

Shon Aguerro's responsibilities involve leading all revenue-producing business units, which includes commercial banking, mortgage banking, the retail branch network, business and private banking, treasury and wealth management. He currently has six direct reports and 80 employees on these teams.

He's happy with the new opportunity at Freedom First, and he's already enjoying the Roanoke Region.

"There is so much history here," he says. "And of course, the nature here—the mountains, the Parkway—it's great. I'm still getting used to the time zone change, though." Aguerro, who makes his home in downtown Roanoke, also loves the music, arts, and cuisine that the businesses and organizations in the city's center have to offer.

Aguero's professional trek confirms banking

"IN BRIEF"

NAME: Shon Aguerro

POSITION: Executive Vice President, Chief Banking Officer

COMPANY: Freedom First Credit Union

EDUCATION: BA – Political Science: SE Oklahoma State University; MBA – Finance: Walden University; SW Graduate School of Banking, Cox School of Business, SMU, New York Institute of Finance

BACKGROUND: Lived in Southwest/Midwest until this year; Birthplace: San Angelo, TX; College: First banking position at Landmark Bank (Durant, OK – Columbia, MO), promoted from senior credit analyst to commercial lender to market president to regional president to executive vice president; joined FFCU in Roanoke, March 2020. Served on leading finance industry associations. SMU Graduate School of Banking faculty, ABA Bank Marketing School faculty.


PERSONAL: Age: 42; Married 25 years (Nikki); Two children (Austin 24, Isaac, 17)

MOTTO: "Things turn out the best for those who do the best with the way things turn out."

is in his blood. But it almost seemed accidental how he walked through that first set of doors at the bank.

"I'm a musician and love music," he says. "I'm at Southeastern Oklahoma State, and I hear about this job at a guitar shop... Perfect, right? Well, as I'm going to apply, my wife suggested I might also apply at the bank right across the street."

From his vocational scores to his personal mission statement (which he says he likes to change out periodically), Aguerro's experience shows the significance of timing—and its simple but profound impact. He appreciates the idea and practice of "constant self-evaluation."

Despite this Year-of-Our-Pandemic 2020, maybe there is no such thing as bad timing. You just work with the time you're given. 

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“”
Be proactive in your contingency planning. — Page 38

2021 SEASON LINEUP
so far...

- 5/8 Jackyl
- 5/15 Jamey Johnson
- 5/28 Eagles Tribute: EagleMania
- 6/5 Aaron Lewis
- 6/26 Blues Traveler/JJ Grey & Mofro
- 6/11 Van Halen Tribute: Completely Unchained
- 9/9 Blackberry Smoke
- 9/24 Prince Tribute: Dean Ford & the Beautiful Ones

(Jamey Johnson, Aaron Lewis, and Blues Traveler/JJ Grey & Mofro are not included in the season passes. Sorry!)

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