

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 171

DECEMBER 2022

FRONTList 2022

RAMP & RBTC

The Wine Lady

Salem's Tommy Miller

Stuckey's Story

Patterson's Passion

vbFRONT.com



In Our Spotlight

FRONTList 2022:
BUSINESS LEADERS

Michael Hemphill
BUZZ4Good



KAT PASCAL
FARMBURGUESA

I FOUND MY FREEDOM BANKING WITH FreedomFirst

Kat Pascal, co-owner of local restaurant Farmburguesa, became a Freedom First member when she realized she could have a personal relationship with her banker and not be treated like just a number.

Freedom First employees often eat at Farmburguesa, creating a sense of community that Kat didn't experience prior, and it made her feel like she was a part of something bigger.

Farmburguesa is a farm-to-table restaurant with Colombian influence that serves locally-sourced burgers, as well as chicken and vegetarian options. Locals love the unique fusion fare that they can't get anywhere else in town (or at big chains). Visit their Vinton and Grandin locations to try for yourself!

WATCH THE FULL STORY AT [FINDYOURFREEDOM.FFCU.COM](https://www.findyourfreedom.ffc.com)

WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Entrepreneurs and those who promote an entrepreneurial ecosystem come in many forms, from people starting very small businesses to others rebranding an iconic store brand, to local government leaders and private organizations looking to promote a business-friendly environment that welcomes those with the next great idea. You'll learn more about some of those players – no matter how big or small - in this issue. Several of our columnists also address the subject of entrepreneurialism.

We also present our latest FRONTList of business notables in the region – entirely subjective of course, and we welcome any feedback about whom we might have left off at news@vbfront.com. We are planning our calendar for next year as well, when again each month Valley Business FRONT will feature at stories on the business sectors impacting the region. Look for some new columnists to appear over the next few months as well. Let's all hope for a joyful and healthy holiday season – and support your local retailers along the way. Happy reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor



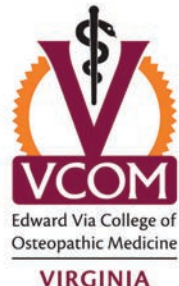
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Leaders in Our Spotlight

The 2022 FRONTList

By Tom Field



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You have to give to get. — Page 61



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Salem, VA 24153
(540) 389-9945
www.vbFRONT.com

Staff

Publisher / Creative Director	Tom Field tfield@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945
Editor	Gene Marrano news@vbFRONT.com
Advertising	Dan Dowdy (540) 797-7943 ddowdy@vbFRONT.com ads@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945
Graphic Design	Nicholas Vaassen nvaassen@berryfield.com
Office Administration	Emily Field info@vbFRONT.com
Production	Berryfield, Inc. PO Box 1041 Salem, VA 24153 (540) 389-9945

Departmental Contacts

Advertising	ads@vbFRONT.com
Subscriptions	info@vbFRONT.com
News / Releases	news@vbFRONT.com
Admin / Ops	info@vbFRONT.com

(540) 389-9945
vbFRONT.com
morefront.blogspot.com

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Aila Boyd



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Frazier Hughes



Zack Jackson



Gene Marrano



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.

2022 CONTRIBUTORS



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Jen Grassler



Jennifer Leake



Mike Leigh



Nanette Levin



Nicholas Vaassen



Neal Cummings
Freedom First Credit Union /
finance – credit unions



Michelle Darby
Goodwill Industries of the Valleys /
community service



Christopher Finley
LewisGale /
healthcare



Micah Fraim
Fraim & Cawley CPAs /
finance – accounting



Kevin Holt
Gentry Locke /
legal



Jeff Merritt
Cox Communications /
technology



Mary Ann L. Miller
Bank of Boletourt /
finance – banking



Alicia Smith
F&S Building Innovations /
construction



Michael Waldvogel
Waldvogel Commercial Properties /
commercial real estate

“”
It's about getting a little bit of help from everybody.

— Page 18

“”
He was the mountains as far as I was concerned.

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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 42.

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Leaders in Our Spotlight

The 2022 FRONTList

By Tom Field

Who are the leaders, the movers and shakers, the “best of” and all those other accolades we ascribe to individuals who have performed in a noteworthy way over the past year or so? We keep a list of them at the FRONTOffice. All year long; and with each monthly edition. Here and now, we’re sharing our FRONTList.

Some clarification: We don’t always publish our FRONTList on a regular basis. Our readers can reasonably expect a presentation of business and community leaders in all our monthly magazine editions; and from time to time, we’ll assemble a list. Sometimes, we’ll list leaders at large (like this one), and other times we’ll show leaders within specific industries. But it’s never been a given that we feature these lineups in any particular annual schedule.

This year—this December 2022—we are compelled to do so.

It’s a remarkable time, yes? Years 2020, 2021, and a big chunk of 2022 have been impacted so much from the global pandemic, that we can’t help but see the contributions from all the pivoters and rebounders and survivors

and outright champions. Basketball terms notwithstanding, it’s been a March-Madness scramble of a scene since... well, March 2020.

Let’s get right to it, then, shall we? Here, we present our spotlight on the leaders over these past 22 months (March 2020—December 2022). And yes, it’s OUR list (not a reader poll or other campaign) curated from our news department by our coverage and from our observations. It’s selective and discriminating and yet, hardly comprehensive of so many other equally worthy contributors. We encourage you to respond with obvious folks you noticed we didn’t include this time. Or at least celebrate them. That’s the whole reason for having a FRONTList.

[FRONTList 2022 is presented by individual, alphabetically]

Nancy Howell Agee

CEO: Carilion Clinic

Agee seems to make our FRONTlist every time; but anyone, following any news over the past three years, knows about the remarkable operations of Carilion during the most intense time in the healthcare provider's full history. Agee's leadership of a "response team" and the work of over 13,000 employees was evident; and the battle against COVID-19 was conducted with military-like precision. One could point out imperfections (as with all healthcare systems); but Carilion Clinic's crisis management was outstanding.

Waynette Anderson

Owner/Promoter: Dr Pepper Park

The entertainment, experiential, performance businesses during the pandemic were all but shut down. Forced to shut down their operations, that is. Anderson refused to comply. She didn't refuse to comply with health and safety mandates; but she did not scale back the energy in running a business or go off and wait it out. If anything, she scaled up (even if the crowds had to be smaller at times). She continued River Rock Entertainment and her Dr Pepper Park venue (managing an incredible 54 events in just the past two years); she continued Sponsor Hounds, she worked in property management (GWA); and even launched a public speaking enterprise: Grace & Grit. Anderson not only makes our FRONTlist, she was recognized by about a half dozen other media outlets in multiple "best" categories and ways.

Robert "Bob" Archer

Chairman & CEO: Blue Ridge Beverage Company

One of the tenants of running a successful business is the imperative that you remain attentive to all your stakeholders. Well, at the same time Blue Ridge Beverage was protecting its own employees and operations due to the pandemic's devastating impact on distribution, a number of its own customers weren't able to survive. Archer says "one learns early on in a family business that you cannot do it alone." He credits the company's dedicated workforce, having the necessary skills and tools, and quality products and suppliers as the force (and longstanding characteristic) for BRB's resiliency.

Manmeet Bhatia

President & CEO: TMEIC Corporation Americas

The industrial equipment supplier and technology/automation solutions company in Salem, remained strong externally under Bhatia's tenure during the pandemic, doing business in over 126 countries. But internally, back at home, it created a TMEIC Giving program for employees and by employees that gives back to our local community through payroll deduction. The company graciously matched all employee donations and raised over \$1,509,240 for charities in the Roanoke Valley.



Waynette Anderson



Robert Archer



Manmeet Bhatia



Erin Burcham

Erin Burcham

President: Verge; Executive Director: Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology

Council Another leader who has shown up often in our business journal these past 22 months, Burcham was appointed president of a newly formed (January 2022) alliance of both the technology council (RBTC) and accelerator (RAMP), named Verge. On top of the new group and her announced position, she hit the ground running with several notable wins for our economy and tech sector; including her leadership role in large scale tech and biotech projects (such as the Roanoke Biotech Project—a \$25 million score for elevating R&D, and the Virginia Tech Back Better campaign).



Victor Caldwell

Victor Caldwell

Attorney and Co-Chair of the Board of Directors: Woods Rogers Vandeventer Black

We published an executive profile on Caldwell in March (2022); partly because he was appointed president of the Virginia Bar Association. All one has to do is scan the legal landscape of our Commonwealth to see that was a big deal. He also has an impressive story, resume, and is well known in the Roanoke Region. And all of this was added to his story when the 129-year old Woods Rogers merged with the 135-year old Vandeventer Black earlier this year, resulting in a powerhouse firm from two already-formidable practices.

Alan Fabian

CEO: LewisGale Medical Center

Market President : LewisGale Regional Health System (featured in FRONT: November 2022)



Alan Fabian

Gary Fezell

Owner: F&S Building Innovations; Build Smart Institute; Insulation Firestop Systems

With Fezell, we get a leader from more than one source. In June (2022) we featured his Build Smart Institute (a training service and response to the desperate need to fill construction jobs), which is an impressive “school” for learning the trades and obtaining certifications. Even more people know F&S though, a construction company that continues to grow (despite COVID) and build for both commercial and residential customers.

Heywood Fralin

Chairman: Medical Facilities of America and Retirement Unlimited Philanthropist

We could just say we know a UVA grad who’s on the board at Virginia Tech—and that alone would be a memorable accomplishment. Fralin, however, has too many contributions to Roanoke and the region to list. He’s helped numerous

organizations, companies, and enterprises that improve our communities in ways beyond measure (though certainly much of it has been quantified). His namesake is etched on the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, which most would agree is today's highest mark for our sustainable ecosystem. He's the very definition of a philanthropist; and most likely the icon for that designation in this entire part of the state.

Jason Hartman

CEO: Brown Edwards & Company

We received a number of press releases from outside sources about awards and leadership rankings from Roanoke-headquartered accounting firm Brown Edwards. Most recently, though, Hartman points to the acquisition of Mitchell Wiggling in Richmond, as that took Brown Edwards to 450 employees and "securing our spot as one of the top 75 firms in the U.S."

G. Lyn Hath, III

CEO: Bank of Botetourt

Under Hath's leadership, the Bank of Botetourt didn't just survive the pandemic—it thrived through it. Branches were opened and the financial institution assisted hundreds of businesses we know that were challenged, particularly on payroll. Hath (who was also recognized as a business leader and represented on our FRONTcover of the December 2017 edition) possesses a persona you expect—and want to expect—from a community bank president. He was elected to the Virginia Bankers Association's Board of Directors this year.

Michael Hemphill

Owner: Buzz for Good

Our FRONTcover model, Hemphill started his marketing and development support business for nonprofits right when COVID-19 hit. His story is available at buzz4good.com; but he's our FRONTlist leader because of the creative and noble strategies he culled to produce one of the best entrepreneurial pursuits we've covered. At the very time many would think there is no way to capitalize on community service organizations (who are always challenged and were often already struggling), Hemphill completely re-crafted an idea from Roanoke's AAF advertising club (Createathon) where collaboration is used to develop publicity and awareness and fundraising to bolster and completely upgrade select nonprofits. Specifically, his Buzz television show (on Blue Ridge PBS; third season), documentary, podcast, and other communications (from his journalism experience) serve as the main production to accomplish the upgrades and move organizations a big step up. The majority of funding comes from sponsors and intense, hard-earned connections. It's public service, indeed; but it's also a business, no question. Well-deserved of our spotlight.



Gary Feazell



Jason Hartman



Michael Hemphill



Joe Hoff

Joe Hoff

President & CEO : Friendship

Rather than hunker down and hope for the best during the crisis, Hoff says he is "proud of our team for navigating our way through a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic extremely well." The retirement community and senior services provider managed its comprehensive suite of services even during the high inflation and competitive job market. Under Hoff's leadership, the safety of both the staff and residents was the primary concern, and initiatives were enacted to ensure that attention.

Monica Monday

Managing Partner : Gentry Locke Attorneys

Monday oversaw the opening of Gentry Locke Consulting (2020), a full service public affairs, strategic communications, and marketing firm. During this period, the firm also expanded its office in Richmond from two attorneys to 20. Gentry Locke case load and attorney pool are newsmakers—in a good way.



Annette Patterson

Annette Patterson

Founder & President : The Advancement Foundation
(see separate story: page 16)

David Porterfield

CEO & CTO : Micro Harmonics Corporation

Porterfield says the high-frequency electronic control products his company designs and manufactures (in the historic town of Fincastle in Botetourt County of all places) is so superior "at the highest frequencies, they don't even have any global competitors." We've noticed a number of headlines about Micro Harmonics—even if we don't exactly understand the technology. Porterfield recently developed a new patent-pending product that will join the line of components that

POSTHUMOUS

Bonz Hart - Meridium

A number of notable business and community leaders passed away during the pandemic and over the last few years; but one leader who impacted our region in exceptional fashion is Bonz Hart, founder of Meridium, a utility/asset performance management software developer. His is one of those "started in my garage" stories that ultimately resulted in becoming a technology icon that also served as a major catalyst for developing our regional innovation ecosystem. Hart was an inspiration to entrepreneurs and business professionals of all stripes. His business employed around 500 people in Roanoke, expanded to offices internationally, and was purchased by GE Digital in 2016 for \$500 million. He retired in 2017, and passed away in September after battling pancreatic cancer. The Technology Council and other organizations and leaders celebrated his contributions to Roanoke and the region.

serve the scientific test and measurement sector, defense contractors, and telecommunications markets.

Quincy Randolph

Owner : RND Coffee

(his shop is a local favorite and he recently appeared on Food Network's "Beat Bobby Flay" television show)

Timothy Sands

President : Virginia Tech

To be candid, being the president of Virginia Tech would rather automatically qualify you as a leader, given the many contributions that one institution provides to our region; however, Sands is also on THIS FRONTList due to the opening of the new building at Fralin Biomedical Research Institute; the expanded enrollment at VT-Carilion School of Medicine; the improvements on campus in Blacksburg; the Town's Multi-Modal Transit Facility; and the freeze in tuition. On top of these achievements, the graduation rate rose (+5%), both gifts (+74%) and endowments increased (\$1.68 billion), as well as extramural research (\$368 million).

Susan Sink

Owner : Sinkland Farms

(recently featured on NBC; a stellar showcase for agritourism)

Mitch Stewart

Media Manager & Broadcaster : Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs

The first class delivery of news and everything you should know about our hockey team is why we selected Stewart as a leader. And the record right now? Worth cheering about. Fans and all stakeholders should celebrate along with the team, as the Rail Yard Dawgs made the President's Cup Final for the first time in franchise history. Off the ice, however,



Monica Monday



Timothy Sands

EMERITUS

We generally don't recognize retirements or emeritus positions—particularly in a FRONTList—but there have been a number of leaders of recent times since our last list who announced their exits. We're sure to overlook many of them; but here are a few who frequented our pages and contributed in remarkable fashion to our region.

Robin & Blaine Lewis (retailFRONT) *Fleet Feet*

Jill Loope (municipalFRONT) *Roanoke County Economic Development*

Mike Maxey (educationFRONT) *Roanoke College*

Mary Miller (technologyFRONT) *Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council / RAMP*

Jim Sears (cultureFRONT) *Center in the Square*

Joyce Waugh (organizationalFRONT) *Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce*



Mitch Stewart

Stewart grew the social media rankings substantially (Facebook and Twitter about 10%; Instagram at 20%) and record engagement (500,000 page impressions). The organization performed community service with its “Do Good Days” campaign, volunteered, and organized school visits and programs throughout the year.

Daniel Summerlin, III

President: Woods Rogers Vanderverter Black
(featured in FRONT: September 2022; he was at the realm during the major and historic merger)

JD Sutphin

Owner: Big Lick Entertainment

If you attend any public celebration in the Roanoke Region, chances are high it’s brought to you by Sutphin. Also a comic book store co-owner/operator and in his band, Low Low Chariot; we’re recognizing his tenacity to pivot and upscale non-event revenue streams (during the restrictions), as he expanded the marketing and consulting side of his expertise in promoting and producing. “We expanded ten-fold,” he says, “working with large organizations, businesses, and nonprofits to grow their reach and impact.”



JD Sutphin

Brandy Tabor

*VP, Real Estate & Risk Management:
Goodwill Industries of the Valleys*

Tabor is recognized for her development of a comprehensive plan that encompasses real estate, facilities, safety, and risk management for Goodwill. This management came in handy with the recent big announcement about the complete revitalization campaign for the current Goodwill campus to a “Melrose Plaza” that includes a grocery store, bank, fitness center, and education/career center. (See our FRONT’n About on page 47)



Brandy Tabor

Greg Terrill

CEO : Txtur

(opened up new outlet as tenant in Roanoke’s historic Fire Station #1; an exciting downtown development)

Sean Turk

Owner : Olde Salem Brewing Co

(main brewpub on Salem’s Main street keeps growing; and opened a satellite location on the Roanoke City Market)

Ed Walker

Developer

Walker has been in FRONT many times over the years; but the announcement of the repurposing of the old Valleydale meat processing plant built in 1936 in Salem to a high-end,


Other FRONTLeaders (alphabetical)



Submitted

Abby Verdillo Hamilton (on right) accepts The Cabel Brand Hope Award.

- Bill Aden** / Developer (Real Estate FRONT)
- Sam Darby** / Glenn Feldmann (LegalFRONT)
- Michael Friedlander** / Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (HealthcareFRONT)
- Michael Fleming** / outgoing TORC CEO (TechnologyFRONT)
- John Garland** / Developer (DevelopmentFRONT)
- Robert Gourdie** / Tiny Cargo (TechnologyFRONT)
- Donale Graul** / The Branch Group (ConstructionFRONT)
- Abby Verdillo Hamilton** / United Way of Roanoke Valley (Community Service FRONT)
- Mary Dana Hinton** / Hollins University (EducationFRONT)
- Prabhat Jain** / Virginia Transformer (ManufacturingFRONT)
- Elizabeth McClanahan** / Virginia Tech Foundation (EducationFRONT)
- Marc Nelson** / Roanoke County Economic Development (MunicipalFRONT)
- Drew Parker** / Carter Machinery (ConstructionFRONT)
- Kat Pascal** / Farmbugesa (ServiceFRONT)
- Jonathon Pate** / Awful Arthurs (ServiceFRONT)
- Frank Shushok** / Roanoke College (EducationFRONT)
- Isabel Thornton** / Restoration Housing (DevelopmentFRONT)
- Ryan Waters** / Bridgewater Marina (RecreationFRONT)
- Amy White** / Virginia Western Community College-STEM (EducationFRONT)
- Neil Wilkin, Jr** / Optical Cable Corp (TechnologyFRONT)
- Dale Wilkinson** / Wilkinson Group (Real Estate FRONT)

resort-style, 300 apartment complex is celebration-worthy for economic development. The \$50 million project (with co-principal Joe Thompson) should be underway as of this publication with a projected completion date for 2025, even as Walker (no stranger to big projects) admits it's "my most challenging project to date." 

Blue Ridge
MUSHROOM COMPANY

Ridge Mushroom Company is growing gourmet and medicinal mushrooms for both fresh consumption and dried supplement manufacture. They will help bring a variety of mushrooms to all Virginia through availability in stores and restaurants from Charlottesville to Nanoke and more. By utilizing e-commerce, they will provide home-grow mushroom blades for the interested home mycologist.

will begin operation at VIC and primarily need space for growing mushrooms, use of the central kitchen, the food lab for developing products, and space for drying and processing and packaging products.

EARTHMAGIC
RECYCLING

Earth Magic Recycling is a woman-owned startup and small-scale manufacturing company that recycles glass jars and produces products from the waste for sale. Earth Magic Recycling grinds the bottles, from jagged edges, into varying sizes of sand. Earth Magic Recycling and its recycled sand can be used in a variety of applications, from coating, terrazzo substrates, to even aggregate for small concrete applications.

Earth Magic products will create two new jobs and double its domestic revenues from \$50,000 to \$100,000 in the first three years at the Collective. They are looking to make VIC a hub for recycling.

ELECTRIC
IRIS

Electric Iris 3D manufactures after-market accessories for popular table-top poultry Turner trays allow small-scale farmers to improve the hatch rate of the eggs of several types of poultry. **Risers** allow customers to keep recently hatched chicks inside the tray until the lid is removed and add the height needed for hatchlings or other tall hat **dividers** will allow farmers to identify chicks bred for particular attributes immediately hatch and keep them separate from other chicks.

Our products are available with or without a **smart hydrometer** for remote monitoring via a smartphone app.



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 - Retail
- PHASE II**
- 10 lot

Submitted
Anne Patterson at new Innovation Accelerator site in Buena Vista

“It’s resiliency.”

By Tom Field

After more than 800 alumni over an eight-year run of a popular entrepreneurial business competition, the founder shares insight.

I had to know.

This month, we’re publishing our FRONTList 2022: Business Leaders. Annette Patterson’s Gauntlet Business Competition, an entrepreneurial prepping program through The Advancement Foundation continues to expand its reach in major ways as it prepares to deploy its ninth class (February 7th, 2023). What a good time to ask her if she’s noticed any similarities among the alumni who placed or won the competitions or turned out extraordinarily successful

ventures after participating in the program.

She did. She does.

“It’s resiliency,” Annette Patterson said. “And grit, which is a little different.”

Patterson cited an experience from way back in the 1980s when she was in a short-term business class in Florida that brought in entrepreneurs from all over, in all kinds of enterprises.

“That still sticks with me,” she says, about

listening to the case studies. “The people who were successful—all of them—were able to withstand the downside of things that naturally occur when you’re starting a business. Failure is not an option; and they are constantly looking forward.”

Patterson said learning that in her twenties still applies today. And nowhere is that more obvious than for a person running a business-building enterprise like The Advancement Foundation (which we have reported on numerous times since 2014). In its own words, TAF is “a nonprofit founded in 2007 that works with economic and community development organizations to support an entrepreneurial ecosystem.”

“Our whole society tells us you need to know what you’re going to do in life,” Patterson continues, but that mindset is not going to serve you as well as “keeping an open mind” if you’re going to run your own business. Much of her organization and the Gauntlet Business Competition is about “creating a culture to test, to figure things out,” she says.

“I get goosebumps every year. I see the magic right in front of me.”

In addition to fostering that mindset of exploration when pursuing opportunities, another huge component of Patterson’s program is collaboration. (She was shown with Tinker-Toys on a previous cover of this magazine due to her impressive ability to make connections.)

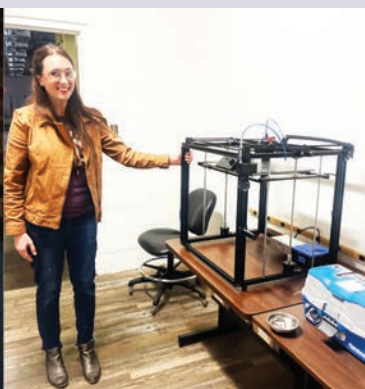
“We can bring everybody to the table, we can be the connector.” Patterson talks of



Annette Patterson making connections on the FRONT cover; September 2017 edition.

creating “the pathway” for entrepreneurs; and that’s necessary to “foster all kinds of businesses.” Certainly, that collaboration includes matching up resources—from capital funding sources to operations to developers and communities and municipalities to higher education to mentors and advisors to producers, staffing and talent. But there’s another collaboration that has proven to be effective: fellow participants in the Gauntlet program itself.

There’s no better referral or endorsement than from the Gauntlet’s participants and



Gauntlet winners with resiliency include Richard Mansell, Natalie Ashton, and Andy Bishop, Jason Bishop, Barry Robertson of Twin Creeks Brewing.

alumni. There is a discernable comradery and outright spirit of friendship and cheerleading that might be more evident compared to many conventional business support programs. The program has produced a lot of success stories; and indeed each one included resiliency in the formula.

Patterson's own operations had to be resilient, open to change, and ready to pivot—particularly when the pandemic hit.

"We had 170 participants and six classes in different areas when Friday the 13th hit [and the mandate to halt in-person sessions]." Patterson said she didn't know much about virtual meetings; but by tapping into her army of young people who were proficient in the technology, the program was converted virtually overnight to the Zoom format. All 170 "students" had to be re-engaged in a totally different way; while the campaign kept on rolling. Patterson admits she was surprised to discover the virtual format actually generated unexpected benefits.

Patterson cites a simple premise that has served the mission well: "It's about getting a little bit of help from everybody." And when asked about specific alumni that mark accomplishments she's especially proud of, it was all I could do to restrain it to three:

An associate pastor, a homesteader, three guys in a garage

"Richard Mansell—who you reported on in the FRONT—is a compelling story," Patterson starts. (In fact, we reported on all three of these examples. Big surprise, right?) "He's an assistant pastor who came to us with what he considered to be—a hobby. Today, his company, IVO, took his invention (a wireless power solution called Capacitive Based Aerial Transmission) and electronics components and systems to multi-industry applications for companies like GE Healthcare and NASA. Patterson estimates his business is valued at \$10 million.


Natalie Ashton is another remarkable story that Patterson loves to describe.

"She tied for first place in our competition this year. She's developed egg trays for homesteaders and people who want to raise chickens" but can't always be there. Essentially a smart incubator system, Ashton basically started with 3D printers and marketed on Etsy; and today, Patterson says the business has "tons of potential," including upgrading to injection mold production and possibly developing her own incubator.

And then there's Twin Creeks Brewing Company, which holds a special place in Patterson's heart due to the way that startup contributed to a measureable revitalization of the Town of Vinton. Patterson said when she attended the opening (2016) it was difficult to find parking—a problem that hadn't really plagued Vinton at that time. "It like a real-life 'Cheers' in downtown Vinton now," she says. The Gauntlet facilitated Andy Bishop, Jason Bishop, and Barry Robertson for the big step between home-brewing and the brewery in downtown Vinton (also now at Explore Park). Patterson hints at another new idea from Twin Creeks that may soon be revealed.

Patterson says she has a passion for the rural and outlying areas in our region. She's in Buena Vista during this interview, preparing to launch the newest Innovation Accelerator in a repurposed 40,000 square-foot manufacturing plant. TAF's "Biz Nation" footprint currently includes three major regions (Shenandoah, Greater Roanoke-Alleghany, Southside) serving about 36 counties, with both a physical and virtual network. She says a goal is to expand the "network, ecosystem, tribe" (she uses all three terms interchangeably) to ten more communities by her tenth anniversary (in 2024).

Patterson wants to remind individuals who are pursuing an entrepreneurial venture—whether a new startup, expansion, scaling, or diversification—that the next class (#9) is coming up soon; and applications are already available online at theadvancementfoundation.org.

Resiliency is highly suggested. 



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CARILION CLINIC



BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:

In case you haven't heard, there is a mental health crisis happening in the U.S.

Workplace well-being


According to a recent survey by Johns Hopkins, the percentage of people who report serious psychological distress has increased from 3.9% in 2018 to 13.6% in 2022. And for 18–29-year-olds, it's even worse at 25%.

The crisis has gotten so bad, the U.S. Surgeon General has made "Workplace Well-Being" one of his five current priorities. With a mission to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of our nation, the U.S. Surgeon General's office will communicate scientific information and encourage nation-wide action on public health issues. For this crisis, they released a framework for workplace mental health and well-being.

The framework provides a plan to help organizations become "engines of well-being" and is centered on five essentials:

- **Work-Life Harmony.** Providing more autonomy over how work is done, making schedules as flexible as possible, and respecting the boundary between work and non-work time.
- **Mattering at Work.** Providing a living wage, engaging workers in decisions, building a culture of gratitude and recognition, and connecting individual work with the organizational mission.
- **Opportunity for Growth.** Offering quality training, education, and mentoring, fostering equitable pathways for advancement, and ensuring relevant and reciprocal feedback.
- **Protection from Harm.** Ensuring workplace physical and psychological safety, enabling adequate rest, and operationalizing DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility) policies and programs.
- **Connection and Community.** Cultivating trusted relationships, creating cultures of inclusion and belonging, and fostering collaboration and teamwork.

The framework is excellent and provides good guidance and reference material on how an organization can improve mental health based on these essentials. And the benefits don't stop there. Improving workplace mental health also improves productivity, creativity, engagement, and retention.

It is my belief that most successful organizations consider employee well-being a foundational core value. Using this framework is one way to help leaders enhance this core value throughout their company. 

For more information, go to: hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-well-being/

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

What's the right entity to choose for your business?

Understanding what the different entity options provide is a good place to start. With that information, you can move forward knowing what you're in for.

Sole Proprietor

This can be a good option to choose when you provide a service in your name, have a hobby business on the side or don't expect to have liability concerns. It only requires a local business license, with costs starting at \$50-\$100, based on annual sales.

You can get a DBA (Doing Business As) even if the business is your name. Most banks will ask for one to open a business bank account. The filing fee for this in Roanoke is \$10.

Selling a product for profit can add additional tax issues, so consider securing an EIN. Cost \$0. A Sales Tax Certificate of Registration is required to collect sales tax. Pay attention to filing deadlines.

Single Member LLC

Some believe this provides an extra layer of legal protection, but the veil shielding your personal assets can be pierced pretty easily. It's handled the same as a sole proprietorship from a tax standpoint.

Partnership

This includes multi-member LLCs, which is very different from a single member LLC. Filing tax returns gets more complicated with this entity. While Sole Proprietorships and Single Member LLCs file on the personal return, multi-member LLCs must file a separate return for the company.


S-Corp

The S-Corp has additional tax advantages but also requires additional compliance, which brings additional costs. This is a flow-through entity so any profit or loss gets added or deducted off of your personal tax return. You are, however, required to file a separate return for the S-Corp entity.

C-Corp

This has its own compliance items and its own tax return, but is not a flow through like the others. The corporation itself pays for the taxes. If there's a taxable obligation it's charged at whatever the corporate tax rate is at that time.

A C-Corp provides flexibility in how you manage profit. You can do it through shareholders or dividends or owner's distributions and more. The tax return is more complicated, so costlier.

There's a lot to consider in choosing the right business entity for you. Don't just do what someone at a networking event suggests. Learn the pros and cons. Hopefully this will help get you started. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Deciding on how to best set your business up for the long-term can get confusing. Often everyone's an expert on what you should do without bothering to ask questions about your particular circumstances.

Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at Michael@360WealthConsulting.com



Stephanie Stuckey

Pecan logs and an iconic brand: pivoting from law to manufacturing at mid-career

By Gene Marrano

“When an opportunity comes your way take it – providing you have the passion,” says Stephanie Stuckey.

You may remember traveling by car across country, stopping at those roadside shops with the turquoise roofs – Stuckey’s. Home of the famous pecan log rolls and other pecan delights. Most of those stores are gone now but Stuckey’s lives on and in fact is making a comeback with a repurposing of how it goes to market. It’s a story about losing control of a family legacy, gaining it back and then moving ahead.

It’s also the story of Stephanie Stuckey, who bought back the company started by her grandfather W.S. Stuckey Senior in 1937 in Eastman, Georgia, and sold in 1964. Eventually the Stuckey’s roadside oasis chain grew to over 350 stores before going into decline. Then the family bought it back and Stephanie Stuckey is leading the charge. She told her story recently at Roanoke College. “A Journey in Entrepreneurial Innovation: Stuckey’s Leadership – Then and Now.” The Pi Lambda Phi fraternity and the college’s Center for Leadership and Entrepreneurial Innovation sponsored the event.

Stephanie became the CEO of Stuckey’s after purchasing it in 2019, when “it was six figures in debt at that point and a complete dumpster fire,” she chuckles. The remaining 13 original Stuckey’s locations are not owned by the family but operate under a licensing deal. 68 stores in all operate that way, most a store within a convenience store that also sell Stuckey’s products by paying what she calls a modest fee. Still, it left the company in debt. Her goal: “to completely reinvent how we’re going to drive revenue and gross [sales] for this company.” Learning how to pivot – a big buzz word nowadays.

Stephanie Stuckey didn’t set out to ride her family’s coattails. She received undergraduate and law degrees at the University of Georgia. Stuckey was a trial lawyer, was elected to seven terms as a Georgia State Representative, ran an environmental non-profit law firm, was Director of Sustainability for the City of Atlanta and taught law at her alma mater.

Then the opportunity to take the controls and reinvigorate the famous company her grandfather created presented itself.

That pivot involved purchasing a manufacturing facility that produces the famous pecan snacks and candies using American-made, Georgia grown produce. All packaging is now made onshore as well. Supply chain issues learned during the pandemic about relying on slightly cheaper packaging from China led to that change. "More and more people want to support their communities. I love saying we're American made, we source from local farmers." Now almost 5000 stores nationally carry Stuckey's-branded products, harkening back to its earlier glory days. "Our growth has been over 750 percent," she noted a few hours before she took to the stage at Roanoke College in October. "We are now profitable."


Her talk at the Center for Leadership and Entrepreneurial Innovation was about pivoting, whether it's in business or in other circumstances where external forces have led to that. "How to navigate those life changes." Just what she did, with no real business background previously as an attorney and elected politician. "I never thought I would be running my family's business." Stuckey read her grandfather's papers to get started, figuring out how W.S. did it without a business degree either.

What she learned: when you have hard times, accept that change is necessary, "but you embrace it." Her grandfather did it, by shuttering his stores when the Interstate highway system came to pass and bypassed the Stuckey's along state roads, rebuilding near the new interstates that crisscrossed the country, while other chains failed because

they did not make that pivot or couldn't afford to. "He used that as an opportunity to build his brand stronger." A partnership with Texaco to sell their gas helped jump start that rebranding. W.S. also scaled up his pecan product manufacturing to remain profitable – and to actually grow.

Fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem like what the Roanoke and New River Valleys strive to do as part of the effort to retain and attract talent – and new companies – is a work in progress for Stuckey's as well, looking to expand its own manufacturing base in order to keep scaling up. She's looking for localities where there are "pockets of opportunities in cities and towns that are embracing entrepreneurs. More businesses are looking for places that are embracing an entrepreneurial infrastructure and ecosystem."

It's also more than tax credits and opportunity zones, it is about the workforce. Can a locality help businesses grow and thrive by having a strong, skilled workforce at the ready? An educational infrastructure is at the core of that ecosystem says Stuckey. Roanoke College is "an incredible resource," and communities where startups thrive have good technical schools, community colleges, even high school programs with career tracks.

"Be willing to embrace the changes in your life," says Stephanie Stuckey, remembering some leaner moments after the takeover when Ramen noodles was the dinner option, when she was buying clothes at thrift stores - and drove an older car bought on Craig's List. "When an opportunity comes your way take it – providing you have the passion. Really dig deep within yourself and understand why you are doing what you're doing ... and what motivates you." 



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Life gives us lots of opportunities to be and do whatever we want. What are you missing out on? Is there something that you have always dreamed of doing? It's not too late to live your dreams and try to do something different. Age does not matter.


Dusty Baker at 73 just won his first World Series as a manager and his managerial career as a whole has spanned four different decades since it began in 1993! He had to start somewhere. That is 29 years of not giving up when a lot of people would.

Some have success sooner than others, but you will never know unless you take action. Fear holds most of us back. I know it does for me. I was so scared to go back and take my real estate exam I waited a year to go back and take it.

You see I am not a good test taker, but I can sell. I walked out of the real estate exam the first time crying with flashbacks of high school failing many of my exams and crying, while trying to do my math homework with my stepdad.

At that time in 2017 I was the salesperson of the year at Berglund Luxury, so I was fooled by the success there. I was telling myself, "You are doing well here, why go back and take the exam?" I knew deep down inside I did not need to give up. And I didn't. I went back and passed after failing five times. I am now one of the top realtors at Keller Williams.

When I started I had little to no money and was scared as hell. I just started taking action and calling my sphere. It all began to unfold. Things fell into place. Unbelievable? Believable.

You may not be Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, or Elon Musk but then again, maybe you are. Is something fooling you from living your dreams and being a great entrepreneur? You will never know unless you act. Remember this quote by Dale Carnegie: "Take a chance! All life is a chance. The man who goes farthest is generally the one who is willing to do and dare." 

“Some have success sooner than others, but you will never know unless you take action.”

REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:

(Definition) a person who organizes and operates a business or businesses, taking on greater than normal financial risks in order to do so. As in, "many entrepreneurs see potential in this market"

Frazier Hughes is with Keller Williams Realty. Reach him at frazierhughes@gmail.com

Quit your job? Sure, why the heck not?

OK here goes ... Quit your job! Ta-dah! Now I'm not necessarily advocating for you to march into your boss' office on New Year's Day and give your two weeks' notice. You can do that if you're mentally prepared for what's next, but it's more about that little voice in the back of your head that thinks about a different career or new opportunity. Let's go ahead and let that little voice be heard. You'll be happy that you did.

You know how I know this? I quit MY job this year ... For 20 years I was the host of the Mornin' Thang on K92, and while I loved the creative output and ability to be part of a community, that little voice in the back of my head wanted more. It wanted to run a business, be my own boss, and use my skills in a way that could empower other small businesses to grow and thrive. I started The JPG Agency in 2019 as a side hustle, but as things grew, I could see that now was the time to take the plunge to try to turn that into the main hustle.

Was that a scary decision to make? Absolutely! Heck, I'm still fairly terrified and wondering what I'm doing with my life at least twice a week, but sometimes we need to scare ourselves a little bit. Most of my working life I made the "safe" choice ... took the opportunity presented to me, hunkered down, and stayed.

And I think that's what the majority of us do. The unknown is super scary. What if it doesn't work? What if I regret my decision? Those are valid questions that run through our heads, but the reality is we will never know the answers until we actually take a chance.

I'm pretty sure most people don't look back on their lives and think, "Boy I sure am glad I never took any risks and always chose the safe path!" Instead, they tend to regret the risks they DIDN'T take and spend the rest of their lives wondering what could've been. Don't do it! If you have career goals and dreams, now is the time to start working toward them. You don't have to quit your job tomorrow, but you can start working toward a day when maybe you can. Good luck. 🍀

“If you have career goals and dreams, now is the time to start working toward them.”

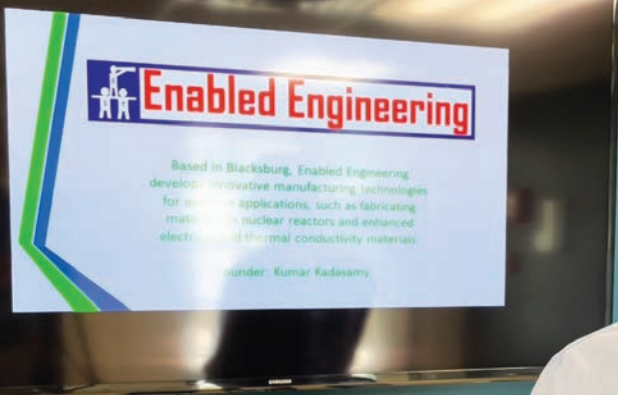


TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

Executive Summary:
Since it's the end of the year and invariably we all start questioning our existence as soon as Auld Lang Syne hits the speakers on New Year's Eve, I figured I'd give some advice as we look to 2023. Plus, we're getting all "entrepreneur" in this month's issue, so it seemed to fit.

Zack Jackson is co-founder of The JPG Agency small business creative firm. Reach him at zack@thejpgagency.com.



Submitted

Cohort member Kumar Kandasamy of Enabled Engineering

RAMPing up for cooperation and growth

By Nanette Levin

Changes abound in the technology sector regionally. This includes a bigger focus on collaboration among groups. There are a number that provide assistance to start ups and existing businesses. RAMP, like other supporting agencies in the area, has experienced staff changes and additions.



Lisa Garcia

Lisa Garcia was promoted on July 1 to the position of Director of RAMP and also serves as Vice President for Entrepreneurial Development at Verge. She's encouraged by cooperative efforts and looking forward to the unveiling of upcoming projects. "There's a lot of entities now that are being brought together under one roof that have all been working together for years and years," she says. While the formal merging includes RBTC, Verge and RAMP, many have been and will continue to be involved, including VWCC, the City of Roanoke and others.

RAMP was established in Roanoke City in 2017. The concept, building, and associated resources came into being with funding from GO Virginia, the City of Roanoke and Virginia Western Community College. Through 2021, the entity has supported 31 startups (see sidebar). The latest cohort is scheduled to graduate in December of 2022.



RAMP

Sarah Spotswood

“The support I feel we now have going after funding has been so awesome,” states Sarah Spotswood, Managing Director of RAMP. “You can really feel the support of the community.” She also cites the big vision of Erin Burcham, President of Verge and Executive Director of RTBC, and the collaboration that’s been going with her and Garcia for ideas about where the RAMP program can grow as inspiring.

The local entrepreneur ecosystem

Garcia is excited about how the added downtown infrastructure is helping spur growth. “It’s really pretty vibrant,” she says.

Plans within the next two years include a startup studio as a community resource designed to complement to RAMP. Garcia envisions the space will not only be an ideal opportunity for certain RAMP graduates, but also a possible perk for future cohort participants. This is being done in partnership with J Labs (Johnson & Johnson) Biotech Innovation. It will include a wet lab and dry space in downtown Roanoke and involve high-end equipment of a quality caliber currently unavailable for companies preparing to launch. Garcia equates this to a new farmer having all the necessary capital to buy what’s needed to start a farm instead of

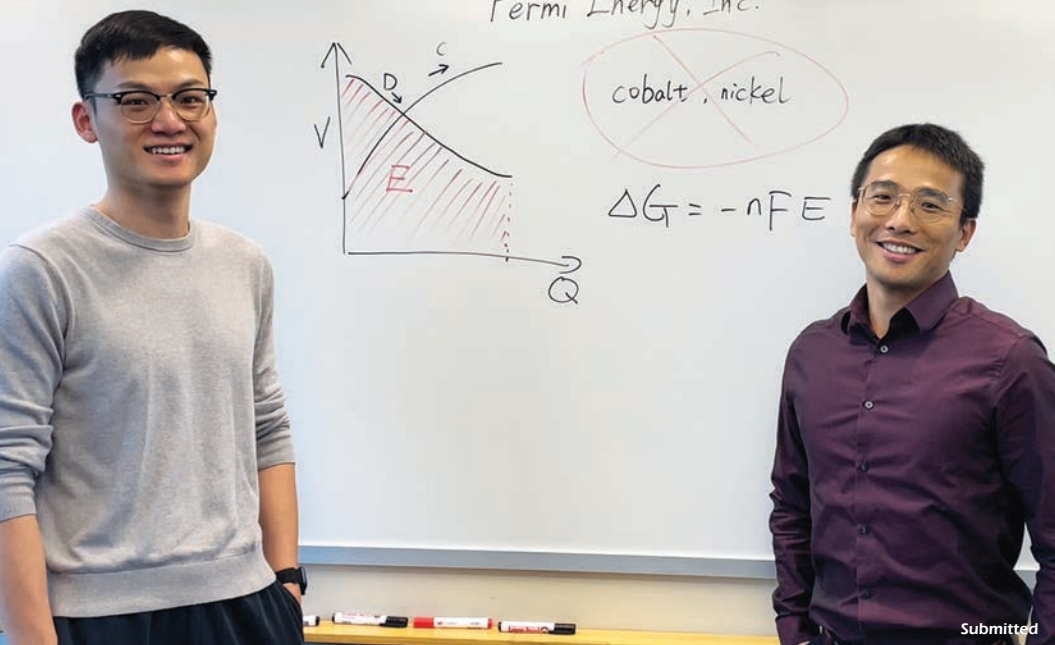
RAMP'S CURRENT COHORT

- Dot Solutions, LLC | Sal Ferlise & Emily Sweet: Dot Solutions LLC, aka Dot Drives, is an internet-based donor engagement software application that was specifically designed for a startup to mid-sized nonprofit.
- Enabled Engineering | Kumar Kandasamy: Based in Blacksburg, Enabled Engineering develops innovative manufacturing technologies for extreme applications, such as fabricating materials in nuclear reactors and enhanced electrical and thermal conductivity materials.
- Fermi Energy, Inc. | Feng Lin & Zhengrui Xu: Founded by a team of battery scientists and engineers at Virginia Tech, Fermi Energy is developing fundamentally disruptive cathode technologies to help create the U.S. supply chain of battery manufacturing.
- Kenkashi Microbes | Cassie Wilson & Jason Anderson: Kenkashi Microbes delivers a full range of microbial benefits, from compost boosts to direct microbial and micronutrient application for plant health and resiliency.
- Qentoros | Michael Miller & Jessica Gilbertie: Qentoros is developing a biologic therapeutic to treat a variety of infectious and/or inflammatory conditions in animals and humans. The biologic is based on blood products and has demonstrated efficacy in treating a number of veterinary patient conditions that did not improve with normal antibiotic treatment.

depending on investments made in land and equipment over generations of ownership.

RAMP has also been working with the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC for a number of years, says Garcia. This includes a current program with the Fralin Fellows. Participants sit in on a bootcamp at RAMP, then give pitches that are the end product of this class. The initiative is intended for students who are interested in an entrepreneurial path and includes supporting any who want to continue.

Garcia cites the many hands that are driving



Co-hort member Fermi Energy, Inc. Feng Lin (R) & Zhengrui Xu

the entrepreneurial ecosystem in our region. This includes leadership at Fralin, Roanoke City, Economic Development agencies, VT Corporate Research Center, RTBC, RAMP, Verge, and others. The merging of Verge, RTBC and RAMP created one board that allows for up to 40 people. “It’s rare that a person on the Board is there in name only,” Garcia says. She praises the helpful nature of community leaders and their willingness to provide answers when asked. This isn’t just characteristic of the merged BOD (Board of Directors), but also a wide variety of stakeholders in the technology sector.

While the RAMP building is located in Roanoke City, it serves a regional area including Roanoke Valley, the New River Valley and Lynchburg. Garcia is grateful for the support of the VICP (Virginia Innovation Corp Partnership) over the years. This has included hosting or sponsoring many of RAMP’s events and being partners and supporters at the federal level with funding and other requests.

RAMP’s current cohort

I think this is our biggest cohort since COVID,” states Spotswood. “It’s exciting for RAMP with things going somewhat back

to normal.” She admits there are still some hybrid approaches in place but is energized by the return of many face-to-face activities.

“It’s a great group of people,” says Garcia. “We have a really diverse array of technology. They like each other.” She’s most excited about the energy and dedication the fall cohort group brings to RAMP and their respective business ventures.

A 2021 \$1 million Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant enabled RAMP to expand from its traditional one cohort annually approach to two. “That’s a lot,” says Garcia, “because all of those things you’re doing with companies is a pretty big lift.” Life and health science will be a focus for at least one of the two annual cohorts as much as possible, Garcia notes.

Applications for the 2023 spring cohort will start being accepted before the end of 2022, with a likely closing date in February.

New staff scene at RAMP

Garcia replaced retired Founding Director Mary Miller this summer. In addition, Spotswood was promoted to Managing Director in July 2022. Jessica

Dunn was hired as Administrative Coordinator.

Spotswood has been with RAMP/RBTC for almost four years. She started with RAMP in January 2019 as an AmeriCorps volunteer. Spotswood grew up in a family of entrepreneurs, so she has a passion for helping startups. Her Managing Director role entails overseeing the day-to-day operations of RAMP. This includes behind-the-scenes program planning, budgeting, and making sure the current cohort and alumni have access to the things they need. She also works to help supply partner needs. One of her goals is to grow “exit- RAMP,” the alumni focused programming arm, into a future key resource that’s something larger than it’s been in the past.


Dunn has taken over management of the Gill Memorial Building. “That’s been a huge help and a heavy lift,” says Spotswood. She also works on day-to-day needs of the cohorts and connects startups to different resources and individuals. “She keeps our team focused on top of things and keeps our team running smoothly,” states Spotswood.

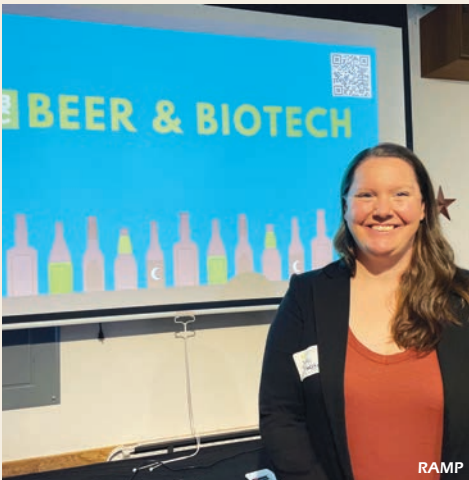
A lot of encouraging developments are happening in the technology sector. There are more hires in the works for RAMP. Garcia notes the Verge team has recently doubled in size. “One of our alumni was acquired last week,” shares Spotswood. “That was their goal. It’s a



Jessica Dunn

big success. [How] can we help them in the process?”

RAMP and other area technology focused support groups are designing a future to be flexible and collaborative in accommodating entrepreneurial growth. Many are coming forward to help support this effort. This is creating a conduit for growth that includes the incubator working in tandem with the RBTC and Verge to help craft solutions for next stage needs. Answers are being developed for tomorrow - with collaborative conversations around today’s questions. 



Co-hort member Jessica Gilbertie - Qentoros



Demo Day - Sarah Snider BEAM Diagnostics



Building connections for today, tomorrow & beyond

As 2022 comes to a close and I reflect on the past year, I'm most proud of our focus on ensuring the opportunities presented by our increasingly connected world, including access to education, healthcare services, and employment opportunities, are accessible to all in Roanoke. Whether it be through private investment or public-private partnership, it's clear Cox is committed to promoting digital equity.

For example, we partnered with Roanoke County to extend broadband services to far-reaching areas of the County, including 109 residences on Bent Mountain and more than 700 rural residences overall will have access to Cox services as a result.

Additionally, we connected more than 3,000 customers in Roanoke to low-cost broadband just this year through Connect2Compete, ConnectAssist and Straight Up Internet service. And, as partners of the federal government's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), we're not only ensuring digital equity for households of all economic statuses, but in many cases, we're also providing the service at no cost to the customer. Even better, this year we doubled download speeds for these low-cost internet products to 100 Mbps.

We also announced a multibillion-dollar infrastructure investment which, over the next several years, will help us build a 10-Gigabit-capable, fiber network that will power the next generation of internet users. Expanded fiber-to-the-home connections, combined with breakthrough enhancements to DOCSIS 4.0 technology (our broadband delivery system), will deliver multi-Gig, symmetrical speeds to both residential and business customers.

No doubt the Roanoke Valley is poised for growth, and you can count on Cox to do whatever it takes to deliver all the bandwidth you need today and to be here as a provider of choice for decades to come.

I look forward to connecting with you in the new year!

Jeff Merritt
Vice President, Roanoke Operations



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Gene Marrano



Courtesy photo



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Number 6 for Restoration Housing >

Restoration Housing, the non-profit that restores older dilapidated houses and turns them into affordable multi-unit housing, has cut the ribbon on its sixth completed project. Executive director **Isabel Thornton** says the home on Stewart Avenue Southeast in Roanoke is already occupied by two families: “there’s a 68 percent rental rate in Southeast. A lot of it is substandard. We wanted to offer a quality alternative because of this need. The city has seen it and is starting to fund more rentals. When I first started home funds weren’t going towards rentals, only towards home ownership.”

Restoration Housing invested around \$300,000 in the Stewart Avenue house project, but grants, donations and historic tax credits helped to fully subsidize the

remodeling of a two-story house, well over a century old. While her husband Lucas Thornton (Hist:Re Partners) is focused on building brand new apartment units in downtown Roanoke where the old Campbell Court bus station used to be, Isabel Thornton and her Restoration Housing non-profit has been turning neglected older housing stock into affordable multi-unit rental properties. “We feel good about it – but we only did two [properties] in a year. It’s definitely not solving the problem, but I do feel good about meeting a need in some capacity, and also reducing blight and vacancies.” Thornton estimated the Stewart Avenue property had been vacant for at least six years. A first-time \$28,000 grant from the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (via a \$2 million federal grant they received) also helped subsidize the restoration of the 100-year-old-plus home. RVARC says they look to provide grants to dozens of other affordable housing projects in its coverage area.



Submitted photos



Construction careers a focus at new Kids Square interactive exhibit >

After a month of soft openings, **The Construction Zone at Kids Square** in downtown Roanoke has launched at **Center in the Square**. The **Branch Group** and **Carter Machinery** have teamed up for construction-related exhibits where kids can also operate a mini-excavator, a dump truck and use tools to build a "house." **Felicia Branham** is the Kids Square executive director: "we've

had people come from Lynchburg to experience our construction exhibit. We believe reaching children in their earliest years not only helps them develop cognitive and physical skills that they need to succeed, but also inspires a lifelong enthusiasm for career [options]."

The Construction Zone will also go on the road in a smaller format to local schools, where it will be linked to STEM-related concepts. Branham says one goal is to improve perceptions about careers in the skilled trades. The Branch Group and Carter Machinery collaborated with Kids Square and helped put together the Construction Zone exhibit.



RBTC photos

Erin Burcham



Taylor Spellman



Katie Conner

Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council now has a staff of three

By Nanette Levin

Small but mighty: the RBTC adds staff as it plans to do its own version of scaling up.

Six months after being named the executive director of Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC) in June of 2021, Erin Burcham was selected to become president of Verge (an alliance that includes the RAMP business accelerator and the Valleys Innovation Council) concurrently. Taylor Spellman was brought on to RBTC in February of 2022 as associate director. The latest hire, Katie Connor, filled the position of technology talent strategist in October of 2022. These position shifts and hires reflect the growing focus on serving technology companies in our area, along with an increasing priority on collaboration among the groups that do.

"Katie is coming from Virginia Tourism

Corporation and has a great background in placemaking for our region," says Burcham. "She really understands the region and what it took to brand the area to bring people here, to get the right type of people to come to the area, to bring jobs and to fill jobs." Burcham indicates she'll be creating regional outreach campaigns to attract workers while working with existing local companies and higher education institutions to maintain talent.

Conner's role is a new one, designed to put greater focus on building GO Virginia Region 2 and RBTC member company talent strategies. In other words, her charge is to



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develop ideas and initiatives to better attract and retain technology talent.

She comes from the Partnership Marketing Division with the Virginia Tourism Corporation, where she was a development specialist who worked with tourism industry partners throughout Virginia. Conner is currently enrolled in an MBA program at Longwood University and has a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication from Radford University. She brings 15 years of experience in hospitality, finance, event planning and marketing to the RBTC as she assumes this role.

"I'm very excited," says Spellman. "The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council has existed for quite some time, and I think the technology council as a whole is eager to support our tech companies. This is a really perfect way to compliment the region and our partners as they strive to find high paying jobs. I'm thrilled to have Katie on board. The RBTC exists to support our members and right now talent is a top priority for them."

Burcham explains that the technology workforce RBTC is developing with the Conner hire is designed to be a spoke off the regional economic development organizations talent program hubs. She sees her staff as boots on the ground for the technology sector. This includes working with the Roanoke Regional Partnership and Onward New River Valley as the technology talent experts. "We are complimenting what the regional economic development

companies are doing with tech and biotech related (companies) to help growth the sectors from a talent stance."

Conner's salary is funded through the Roanoke Biotech Project with money coming through the City of Roanoke. "It's part of a big project with the city and state," Burcham says. "The conversations that I'm already having with our member companies and our higher education institutions supports why this position was created, the demand for it and the opportunity to grow," says Conner, who resides in Botetourt County with her husband and dogs.

"We have evaluated all the resources in the region and we're looking at programming that fills gaps, trying not to duplicate but compliment and work collaboratively with different organizations," Burcham asserts.

RBTC is the only technology council associated with an accelerator in the Commonwealth of Virginia (see related article in this issue on RAMP). While other areas may have incubators and member-based organizations standing on their own, none have both under one portfolio. "We have one big overarching agenda in the innovation space," states Burcham. "We're talking about how we can realistically support innovation from multiple angles." This includes Virginia Tech, Carilion, regional economic development, workforce development boards, community colleges, higher education and more. "Everybody's really working well together." 



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WELLNESS

By Jen Grassler

Executive Summary:
much like Rudolph and his little red nose, curiosity can be the perfect light, leading us to where we want to go.

Jen Grassler, LMT is the owner of Overland Therapeutic Massage located in the Cave Spring area. She focuses on body alignment by utilizing the Myoskeletal approach to bodywork. overlandmassage@outlook.com

Curiosity-the gift that keeps on giving

As we inch closer to the end of one year and the beginning of another, we have a special opportunity to revisit our past decisions, accomplishments and challenges and determine for ourselves what new courses of action we wish to take for an even brighter new year.

Curiosity is a magical little present. It makes you want to get up in the morning. It encourages learning and growth. It sparks conversation, questioning and new beginnings. Often it can lead us into the unknown and fills us with both excitement and healthy nervousness. It can ask us to step beyond our self-imposed limitations and dig deep so we can really see what we're made of. It can take the mundane and re-gift it into something unfamiliar and awe-inspiring. Curiosity can take us from mediocrity in life to something more.

Everyone can get into patterns at work and at home. All of us can create systems of ease and expectation in order to get through our days as stress free and efficiently as possible. That can be a good thing for sure, but when these systems create the inability to adapt to what life throws at us, continually has us repeat a stagnant approach to our business services or home life, and produces uninspiring and impersonal interactions with people, a little curiosity might just be what Santa ordered to turn things around.

Curiosity can be used to prompt honest introspection of where we are in life and in business. Take stock of what is and isn't working. Then, seek out additional knowledge in areas you determine could use an infusion of new life and growth. Take a class, seek guidance from colleagues, gather feedback from clients, read a book, join a professional development or social networking group. The opportunities for self-improvement and better business success are endless. Be willing to step out of your comfort zone, release the things that no longer serve you and embrace the new and unfamiliar. Get curious. Be bold. Take action.

The best thing about curiosity is that it can inspire others. As you embrace learning, continued self-discovery and personal and professional development, you will find that you can begin seeing the endless road of possibilities laid out before you. Taking the reins and steering purposely in life can be the inspiration someone else needs to accomplish their own set of goals. So, take the time, do the work and send out the light of curiosity this season... it will make the world a little brighter place for everyone. 📖

Would being an Entrepreneur be your BEST JOB EVER?


What does it take to be an entrepreneur? The most successful entrepreneurs have a clear focus and are highly disciplined. They know what they want to achieve, and they have a plan to achieve it. They are also creative, determined, and have a strong work ethic – all needed to help overcome challenges and turn business ideas into reality. They have skills such as financial management, marketing, and sales. Being a good communicator is also key, helping to share the vision with others and build a strong support team.

Key traits of successful entrepreneurs:

1. **Passion:** You need to be passionate about your business idea and driven to see it through.
2. **Resilience:** Entrepreneurship is not always easy, with setbacks and challenges along the way. It's important to be resilient and bounce back from tough times.
3. **Adaptability:** The ability to adapt and change your business plans according to market conditions is crucial.
4. **Risk taking:** This doesn't mean being reckless, but it does mean being open to new opportunities and embracing change.
5. **Innovation:** Successful entrepreneurs are always thinking of new ways to do things.
6. **Determination:** Building a successful business from scratch takes determination and a strong work ethic. You need to be willing to put in long hours and grind it out.
7. **People skills:** You'll deal with many different people – from customers and clients to suppliers and employees. Good people skills are important to build strong relationships.
8. **Focus:** Doing too many things at once often makes you spread yourself too thin, leading to mistakes and missed opportunities.
9. **Discipline:** Stick to your business plan and stay on track. Failure to do so makes it difficult to achieve goals and can ultimately lead to giving up.

Test yourself with these three questions: Am I organized and self-motivated? Am I disciplined enough to stick to a schedule and get work done? Can I handle stress and setbacks? If you answered "NO" to any of these questions, entrepreneurship may not be for you.

Some Final Tips

1. **Be in an industry you're passionate about.** If you're not excited about what you're doing, it will be very difficult to succeed.
2. **Be prepared to sacrifice.** You'll likely have to give up nights and weekends to get your business off the ground.
3. **Be patient.** It takes time to build a successful business, so don't get discouraged if things don't happen overnight.
4. **Get help when you need it.** Don't try to do everything yourself. Delegate tasks to others, and don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. 



BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:
*Being your own boss –
 Best Job EVER ...
 or Worst Nightmare?*

Jennifer Leake CMC® is a workplace consultant, podcaster, and certified assessment expert. Want to know if you've got the traits to be an entrepreneur? Email Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com to learn how to get your personal entrepreneur traits assessment.

Miller strives to cultivate presence in Salem

By Aila Boyd

Having been on the job for a little more than seven months, Salem's new director of economic development, Tommy Miller, feels he is settling into the job nicely.

Tommy Miller characterizes the time since taking on his new job as being a "whirlwind." He moved to downtown Salem from Richmond, having most recently been a senior business investment manager at the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. After working at the partnership, as well as in Orange County as economic development director before that, Miller said he felt well-equipped to breathe new life into Salem's economic development efforts.

"At the state level, there was a lot of engagement with leadership at Fortune 50 companies to small startup businesses. It really provides a good understanding of where we can maybe step in or I can point them toward resource providers that can take them to the next level," Miller said of his experience. Despite Salem not being his first rodeo, Miller had his work cut out for him. One of the challenges that attracted him to the city is that it's "apples to oranges" compared to Orange County (no pun intended one presumes) given the fact that the city has a small footprint and is fully built out.

"The transition is going good," he said. "It's been exciting and very fast paced."

Going into the job, Miller's first priority was to get to know his colleagues throughout the city, as well as the local business community. By "getting out there and meeting with the business community and letting them know that there is a representative here at the city to help in any way we can for their future success," he said he's able to demonstrate that someone in the city is focused on economic development after going more than a year without someone in the position. So far, he reports he has met with leaders from the majority of Salem's businesses.

Miller's efforts to make himself visible seem to be paying off. "It's been a little overwhelming. I'm really excited by the response I've been getting. Folks are really happy and excited that someone is here in the office. They're reenergized to work with the city and our office," he said. "I want to keep that momentum going." Miller's boss, Salem City Manager Jay Taliaferro, agrees. "Tommy has worked hard to build relationships and develop trust with our existing businesses and industries in Salem," he said. "The outreach effort he has made in the community and regionally has been critical. People are now familiar with who he is and what skills he has to offer, and that familiarity will benefit Salem greatly as we move forward."

An area of focus for Miller has been working to continue the momentum in the downtown area, which is comprised of a large number of small businesses. "We want to make sure the restaurants



Courtesy of City of Salem

Tommy Miller

and stores that are there continue to prosper, but we hope to continue to add to the amenities and businesses that are downtown," he explained. Sidewalk improvements, he said, have been helpful for many of those businesses. "Supporting individuals that are trying to start a new business is of interest to me."

He's also been working to find new uses for empty buildings, including former manufacturing facilities. "There's a lot of potential adaptive reuse that needs to be looked at around the city," he said. A major economic development win for both Salem and Miller came towards the end of October when a \$50 million upscale apartment project was announced at the former Valleydale Meat Packing and Processing plant, which has set vacant for more than a decade. Once complete, Salem will have an additional 300 housing units. "This agreement highlights the benefits of working with local developers who share short-term and long-term strategies that will benefit the community during construction and long after completion," Miller said at the time.

The former GE building, he said, is another facility he'd like to see redeveloped. "It's a more modern industrial building. I'd really like to see some success with a new user with, if not all of it, some portions of the building," he said. Mayor Renee Turk seems to be pleased with the city's hiring of Miller. "The positive energy, unique knowledge, and caring personality that Tommy brings to the



Courtesy of Aila Boyd

Tommy Miller writes down notes during an economic development strategic planning session with members of the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce in October at the Salem Civic Center.

Economic Development Director's position will be evident in the successful results that will be seen in Salem in the months and years to come. We are thrilled to have him as an integral part of our City Staff as Salem continues to move forward," she said.

Going forward, Miller will be working to develop a strategic plan for his department, which it has been without. His goal is to release the plan during the first quarter of 2023. In October, strategic planning sessions were held with a number of stakeholders, including members of the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce. As part of the sessions, Miller received input on such topics as marketing efforts, business climate, real estate and workforce. "We want to see Salem, and the region as a whole, succeed," Miller said. 📌

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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

Let's just admit it; it's time to replace old leaders and old thinking, right?

Hating—or loving—on seniors

Do you know what would be really cool for me to do? To stand up and say it's time to get rid of all the old white guys who have been calling the shots for... well—forever. (At least in this country.)

I am turning the big 6-0 next month. It would show how I'm not self-serving and trying to protect my own interest. In fact, I know such a proclamation would be "really cool" because all the hip guys my age are doing it. The truly enlightened old white guys are admitting we screwed things up. The confessions are admirable and receiving applause and standing ovations.

Well, you can sit down.

Yeah, in this case, you can get off my lawn. You'll want to hold your applause.

I'll recuse myself from the popular idea that change is best and will only come by reshuffling the demographics of the ones who have been in charge.

As it turns out, you see, I'm convinced ageism is discrimination just like all the other forms of discrimination. Simply put, all the other demographics, age-race-ethnic-gender-creed or otherwise, are equally competent at screwing things up.

Let me clarify something, though. I couldn't care less if all nine justices on the Supreme Court were women. I'm fine if every member of Congress was black. If the entire government of my state was comprised of non-binary, let it be. If the board of an organization is all 20-year olds, bravo. Although the historical record may show it might not be the best idea to have zero or unbalanced diversity on any governing entity; diversity in and of itself is no panacea.

- We don't need more women in politics.
We need competent politicians.
- We don't need more people of color in our law enforcement.
We need competent LEOs.
- We don't need more religious persuasions in our military.
We need competent soldiers.
- We don't need more sexual orientations on school boards.
We need competent board members.
- We don't need more young people running businesses.
We need competent business owners.

Of course, we'll debate what "competency" is, too. But at least that argument won't have merit based on age-race-ethnic-gender-creed. And that's the key: merit.

When you strip it all down and just consider merit; a ton of perspective changes. You can actually feel change in the wind. You'll realize simpler truths, like being convinced your own three young adult daughters can make better decisions than a 70-year old career politician. An old white guy.

continued on Page 43

Are you really doing what you want to do at this point in your career?


There's been a push in recent years to cast a wider net for teachers, with fewer starting out with education as a career goal. One man who made the switch offers some advice in his new book. *From the Boardroom to the Classroom - Quitting Corporate for More Purpose* is the work of author Stephen Skripak, who left 25 years behind in the corporate world to teach business at Virginia Tech. (It was reviewed in VBF last month.)

Now retired from Virginia Tech as well, Skripak says his book is about that journey and "the culture differences between industry and academia, and the challenges of a second career. Finding [a career] that matches what you were designed to do." It took Skripak, who came from "the mean streets of New Jersey," as he puts it, several decades to realize what he really wanted to do with his life.

Many can identify with that feeling, maybe pushed towards college and a job path early on, not realizing what really makes a person feel fulfilled in their work life. "Finding more purposes in a second career than maybe you found in the first [one]," he notes. It's tough to make that leap, especially if one leads a comfortable lifestyle supported by a career that may not be entirely satisfying; Skripak says he got plenty of phone calls over the years from people expressing that same thought.

Some of those folks in their 30's, 40's and even their 50's thought that becoming an educator might be what they really wanted to do, but they weren't sure how to go about it – and they wrestled with the salary differences as well, "which are pretty stark. But I do think that there are a lot of people that are looking for more purpose."

His own appetite for eventually becoming a professor at Virginia Tech began with one of his instructors in graduate school at Purdue who had done the same thing Skripak eventually embarked on – that professor had left industry and a marketing career for Fortune 100 companies behind to teach, coming back to campus in his 50's. "His classes were just completely different than all of the lifelong academics; he challenged us in a way that other professors didn't. He just brought a perspective that completely changed the game of what I was used to in business classrooms."

A perspective that Stephen Skripak also brought to his students after he left the corporate world for Virginia Tech. Food for thought perhaps, for others who have spent many years as a Salary Man – or Salary Woman - and now want to pass what they have learned along as an educator. Find *From the Boardroom to the Classroom - Quitting Corporate for More Purpose* on Amazon. 



Stephen Skripak

Submitted



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Paying it forward - teaching others what you've learned.

CONTRIBUTORS

Aila Boyd is a Roanoke-based writer and educator. She writes both locally and nationally for a number of publications. As an educator, she teaches English to college students. Her MFA in writing is from Lindenwood University. [ailaaboym93@gmail.com]

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. [coopjerp91@gmail.com]

Neal Cummings is senior vice president, commercial lending at Freedom First Credit Union. He brings over 25 years of experience in commercial and retail banking, commercial real estate lending, and small business development. The Commercial Lending team at FFCU provides local underwriting and personalized services that benefit a variety of individuals, operating businesses, and non-profit organizations.

Michelle Darby is Vice President, Marketing & Communications at Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. A graduate of Roanoke College, she previously served in executive roles at United Way of Roanoke Valley and the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce. She has developed marketing and communication strategies for over 15 years, emphasizing productivity and measurable results.

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

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

Christopher Finley is the Director of Marketing and Public Relations for LewisGale Regional Health System. He leads the marketing and communications functions for 44 HCA Virginia Health System-owned patient care facilities, including four hospitals, two freestanding ERs, two regional cancer centers, and affiliations with both employed and independent physicians. Since 2004, he has also served as an adjunct professor for the School of Communication at Radford University where he earned his master's in corporate communications. [christopher.finley@hcahealthcare.com]

Micah Fram is a top-referred Certified Public Accountant and business finance strategist who is well-connected in the regional business community and nationally recognized. Publisher of The Little Big Small Business Book, he also publishes a blog at www.fram.cpa/blog and is frequently interviewed as a business financial expert in national media channels. [micahfram@framcpa.com]

Jen Grassler, LMT is the owner of Overland Therapeutic Massage located in the Cave Spring area. She focuses on body alignment by utilizing the Myoskeletal approach to bodywork. [overlandmassage@outlook.com]

Kevin Holt is a partner at Gentry Locke's Roanoke office where he has worked since 1998. His specialty practice area is commercial, real estate, intellectual property, and ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act) litigation. He enjoys supporting and attending games of his two sports-active daughters and enjoys traveling (visiting 27 countries and 38 states).

Frazier Hughes was recruited by the CEO of Keller Williams Realty after being named 2017 salesman of the year at Berglund Luxury of Roanoke. He also hosts The Roanoke Real Estate Podcast, is Dale Carnegie Trained, a former radio personality, and is a Social Media Influencer. [frazierhughescom@gmail.com]

Zack Jackson is the host of the K92 Mornin' Thang radio show on WXLK and co-founder of The JPG Agency, a freelance marketing and creative consulting department for small businesses. He can

be reached at [zack@thejpgagency.com]

Jennifer Leake is an expert in employee assessments and their use to better select, engage and lead employees. Jennifer has over 20 years of assessment experience and is certified in multiple assessments, including Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement tools.

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

Nanette Levin is a senior correspondent for FRONT business journal and the Wordsmith of Roanoke. When she's not creating marketing copy for owners of B2B and B2C professional services firms or ghostwriting & 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 WFIR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. He also now hosts and co-produces "Business Matters" on Blue Ridge PBS. [gmarrano@cox.net]

Jeff Merritt is vice president of Roanoke operations for Cox in Virginia. He is responsible for leading employees and the day-to-day operations across the Roanoke market. He holds leadership roles in a variety of organizations including Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia, Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, and Virginia Cable Telecommunications Association. He resides in Roanoke with his wife and two children.

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 and two children.

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@360WealthConsulting.com]

Alicia Smith is vice president of F&S Building Innovations in Roanoke. She grew up in the construction business and has served in multiple capacities, currently managing all sales, design, production and marketing of the residential division. She's also the president of Build Smart Institute and serves on several boards, community and church organizations. Alicia enjoys lake-life living and fun times with her family (husband and two daughters) and friends.

Nicholas Vaassen is a graphic designer with 20 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]

Michael Waldvogel is the president and chief executive officer of Waldvogel Commercial Properties, founding it in 2004. With three decades of commercial real estate experience, he was also the founding principal of Waldvogel, Poe & Cronk, a business development director for the Better Business Bureau, and executive director of the Downtown Business League. He is active in a number of business, professional, trade, and service organizations, and is an outdoor enthusiast and runner.


Field / On Tap

from Page 40

And the clerk at your grocery store says something that makes you realize he's got a better head on his shoulders than our last two presidents combined.

No single demographic can run anything better than any other demographic. Established or forced multicultural, diversified bodies will manage no better than homogenous bodies.

Okay, there's one exception: the Danes.*
Those people really know how to get things done.

**The Folketing is mostly old white guys—but it's changing; so don't get your knickers in a bind! (Multiple sources rank Denmark as the most productive society in the world.)* 

“”
In this case, you can
get off my lawn.



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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.



Virtuosity on stage

I never knew much about the late Doc Watson, the Appalachian troubadour who played acoustic guitar and other instruments, putting his unique stamp on old time ballads, gospel, blues and a wide variety of traditional roots music. But Watson, blind since infancy, influenced several generations of musicians and songwriters, and a handful of those who had played with him were on stage at Jefferson Center last month for the debut of a program called Doc Watson at 100, which was also a fundraiser for Friends of the Blue Ridge.

T. Michael Coleman, Jack Lawrence, Jack Hinshelwood and Wayne Henderson – also a renowned guitar maker – were all dazzling during solo and group performances during Doc Watson at 100, who was actually born in 1923. The program will also tour at several other locations early next year in the greater region and for fans of the music genre(s) Watson embraced it may be well worth the trip. “He was the mountains as far as I was concerned,” said T. Michael Coleman of Arthel “Doc” Watson, who lived in Tennessee, North Carolina and then southwest Virginia near the end of his life. A stunning night of musicianship and stories about Doc Watson that helped draw the audience closer to the legend they were celebrating.

—Gene Marrano

Battling the opioid industry

American Cartel: Inside The Battle To Bring Down The Opioid Industry (12/Hachette Book Group, 2022) is a page-turning, but often frustrating tale as the DEA and then an army of lawyers aim to make the culpability of the drug companies

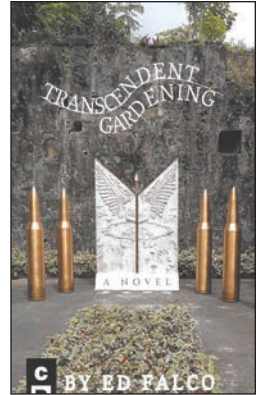
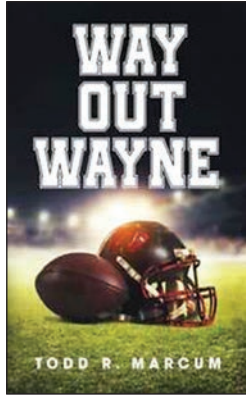
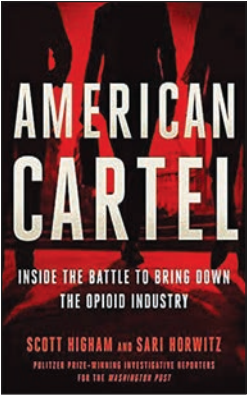
evident when it comes to the staggering toll of the opioid crisis in America. Who are members of the opioid cartel? In this chronicle of greed and profits over human lives, authors Scott Higham and Sari Horwitz identify the bad actors: a handful of legal opioid drug manufacturers, a small group of major wholesale distributors who looked the other way when pill mills in Florida, West Virginia and elsewhere placed wildly disproportionate orders for opioid pills. Not to mention major retail chains like Walgreen's and CVS.

The cartel often skirted the rules set in place by the DEA on reporting irregular size orders and tried to claim it wasn't their job to monitor those orders or where they were going, once they began to be hauled into depositions and courts. The good news is that many of these cartel members wound up settling out of court and while hundreds of millions of dollars – or billions – won't bring overdosed loved ones back from the dead the money finally squeezed out of those responsible to a large extent for America's addiction problem will go towards treatment and prevention programs. Let's hope that works.

—Gene Marrano

Local author sneak peeks

The semi-retired Co-Founder of Access Advertising & Public Relations, Todd Marcum, has written his first book - a novel based on his formative years growing up in Wayne, West Virginia. *Way Out Wayne* revolves around a high school football team looking to win a state title: “a fictional high school football team, everything's going great, they look like they're lined up to win the state championship and then a bizarre thing happens to one of their



star players. It throws his life into chaos, throws the town into chaos. I would say it's kind of *Dazed and Confused* meets *Friday Night Lights*. Its fun, genuine, and I hope its written with a lot of love." Marcum says *Way Out Wayne* is a family-friendly novel suitable for teenagers.

Meanwhile a local realtor, active in Roanoke's theatre community, has a surprising new claim to fame. Stevie Holcomb didn't know what would happen when she created the Facebook Group, "My House, Not My Cat." But after a couple of years—and submissions from all over the world—Holcomb was contacted by Smith Street Books to put together her new book, *This is Not My Cat*: "it's a compilation of stories from the Facebook group I started ... but its also some new material. Definitely a really sweet gift book to give a cat fancier for Christmas. If you like cats or like humor – these cats are hilarious. They just walk right in and plop down on somebody's bed and take a nap." Along with the new stories, Holcomb and her publishers have added photos and graphics to the stories of cats infiltrating the lives of unsuspecting humans. *This is Not My Cat* is available online for the cat friend in your life.

—Gene Marrano

Falco: Reliving the Trauma

Virginia Tech English professor Ed Falco, a New York Times best-selling author for "The Family Corleone") is one of this region's very real literary treasures, responsible for numerous novels, as well as short story and poetry collections. His work is consistently gripping and original.

It is certainly that with his newest novel, *Transcendent Gardening* (CR Press, 2022),

an intimate look at gun violence in a country not yet willing to examine this fatal weakness in its structure. Ed's newest effort is a remarkable and unapologetically anti-gun study, set in a small town in the mountains of Georgia. It revolves around troubled gardener with playwriting aspirations, Angel, whose family life is at its nadir.

He is recently divorced from a woman who has made a healthy and happy re-adjustment, deepening Angel's distress. Likewise, his daughter has become a social media entrepreneur of standing. Divorce is difficult at best, but when one partner (and child) outshines the other and proves the old bromide that "living well is the best revenge," unthinkable trouble can brew. As it does in this fine treatment by one of our better writers.

Ed's explanation for this wonder of a book is telling: "... writing about violence is a way to vicariously engage with trauma; that creating a horror on the page is simultaneously a way of escaping it by thinking it through and maybe deepening understanding, or maybe simply saying whatever it is you have to say about it as a writer.

"That feels like an honest answer to why I would want to write a novel about a mass shooting, after having lived through one here at Virginia Tech. The engagement with trauma is my reason for writing; the possibility of creating understanding, of saying something worthwhile, is why I hope the writing has value for others."

—Dan Smith

The reviewers: **Gene Marrano** is a veteran news journalist and editor of FRONT; **Dan Smith** is a former editor of FRONT.



Inside important as outside >

Christopher Finley, senior marketing director for **LewisGale Regional Health System** addressed the Blue Ridge Chapter of PRSA (Public Relations) at Roanoke's Shenandoah Club on Oct. 27, where he described an internal communications program that rivals many organizations' complete marketing programs. Making the point that internal communications establishes culture as well as improves employee engagement, Finley showcased a myriad of tactics, including a "huddle card" that quickly presents the top five important facts; "mission moment" videos and other recognition activities that build rapport; and a "town hall" format event where management engages Q&A-type sessions in an open environment. Along with supporting the organizational brand, Finley's internal communication program operates under its own brand: "We Show Up." PRSA hosts regular events where PR, PIO, CMO, and other communications professionals share approaches and successes.

TAF gets ARC boost >

The Advancement Foundation based in Vinton was awarded a \$700,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to transform critical areas of a 38,000 square foot former manufacturing facility in Buena Vista into a model for agribusiness acceleration. Several businesses are already located there (including a glass recycling company profiled in a recent issue). The facility was purchased through initial funding from Virginia Housing Development Authority and investment by Go Virginia for Region 8 Go to provide commercialization services of scalable agribusinesses. The Virginia Innovation Accelerator is already home to a handful of "agri-business" startups. **Annette Patterson** is President of the Advancement Foundation, which also conducts the annual Gauntlet competition: "we're actually seeking five more companies that have products they think could potentially scale [up], and we want to provide services, space and opportunity for them to do just that."

The ARC grant will be used to improve the capacity of the Accelerator by building a commercial kitchen and installing ADA entryways and bathrooms. "[It] will lead to 50 full time and 26 part time jobs" says Patterson. The Virginia Innovation Accelerator is located just off of Interstates 81 and 64 in downtown Buena Vista. "The City of Buena Vista and the greater region are poised for economic growth with a strong industrial base, multiple institutions of higher education, and a desire to succeed," said Kristina Ramsey, Director of Economic Development.

"The Virginia Innovation Accelerator complements these assets." Patterson says the Virginia Innovation Accelerator and the jobs its tenants may create can be a template for similar initiatives in the Advancement Foundation coverage area.





Tom Field

NW community campus announced >

The **Goodwill Industries of the Valleys** main location in Roanoke championed and hosted a new and major initiative that was announced for Roanoke and the Northwest community specifically on Nov. 1. The project—a significant collaboration between Goodwill, Roanoke City, Northwest Roanoke Food Access Initiative, residents and advocates, Roanoke College, LEAP, United Way, Freedom First Credit Union and others—involves a complete repurposing of the property to build a “Melrose Plaza.” **Richmond Vincent**, Goodwill CEO described how the development project answers how Northwest prioritizes a much-needed grocery store (Market on Melrose), a bank, a wellness center, and an educational/career center (Excel)... by getting all four in this new Goodwill Campus.

A sizeable crowd attended the announcement, with history, details, and celebrations shared by Goodwill’s **Zenith Barrett**, **Matt Churchill**, **Vincent**, Northwest community advocates **Jordan Bell**, **Mr. Chubb**, **Marion Ware**, **Natasha Saunders**, and Mayor **Sherman Lea**.



Submitted by SMLRCC

SML Chili Fest picks winners >

The team from **Susan Balderson - State Farm Insurance** claimed the top prize at the 19th Annual **Smith Mountain Lake Fall Chili and Craft Festival**, which took place at Bridgewater Plaza early last month. Balderson’s team won first place for Best Chili in blind judging, which was conducted by a member panel on the stage at Mango’s Bar & Grill. The award was determined based on taste, consistency, aroma, color and bite, according to **Erin Stanley**, Events Director for the Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber, which organizes the annual festival. Smokin’ on the Lake took second place while Lake Haven Trailer Park finished third. Lake Haven also won the Showmanship Award for the third straight year, decorating their booth in bright pink and wearing matching T-shirts. Drifter’s was the winner of the People’s Choice Award for best-tasting chili.



Tom Field

Fincastle says Boo! >

Muddy Squirrel—a Botetourt-based adventure and experiences operator—hosted the **Fincastle Historic Ghost Walk** over the Halloween weekend. The sold-out event involved **Historic Fincastle Inc, Botetourt County Historical Society and Museum, and Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce**. Tour guides **Debbi Nemec, Tim Snyder, Suzanne Cronise, and Norma Barrett** escorted folks around the town and sites (including historic buildings and graveyards) whereupon stories were shared by “spirits” **Tony and Felicia Georgetti** (Buried Alive); **Kathleen Cornelison** (Ragman); **Terry Tucker** (Eliza Figgat), and **Lynn Bolton and Karen Beasley** (Early Cabin).



Gene Marrano

Captain Carilion to the rescue >

November was Family Literacy Month and **Carilion Children's** helped kick things off with a book fair for its patients at the Tanglewood Mall outpatient center, partnering with Reach Out and Read and Star City Reads, giving out books to young patients. Local author and playwright **Nancy Ruth Patterson** has just released a book - *Captain Carilion* - that is not for sale but will be given to young Carilion patients: “I dreamed up *Captain Carilion* as a way of introducing children to a character that can help their stay at the hospital or the doctor’s office be even more comfortable. I like to think he did it. Local artist **Anne Glover** illustrated *Captain Carilion*.



Safe space secured >

Hope Tree Family Services held a ribbon cutting on campus at the Titmus Cottage in Salem on Nov. 10—a new option for temporary emergency housing for displaced children. President and CEO **John Morris** thanked the community resources and collaborators that contributed to the development, including Molina Healthcare (\$40,000 check shown); Elevation Church; social services from City of Roanoke and Roanoke County; and naming the Hope Tree grounds crew, who oversaw the build out of a new roof, windows, carpeting, rooms and furnishings, hygiene products, food, snacks, games, and televisions. The facility will be able to house children right away (mid-November), CAO **Lisa Clause** announced. Morris reminded attendees how traumatic it can be when a child is displaced; and this campaign collaboration will “ensure that those children who need a safe place to stay can find one as soon as possible.”



Carilion expanding footprint at Tanglewood >

Carilion Clinic will move its mental health outpatient services from South Jefferson Street near the hospital to Tanglewood Mall, utilizing 37,000 square feet of empty storefront on two floors - adjacent to the Carilion Children's facility at the former JC Penney store. Dr **Robert Trestman** is Carilion's senior vice-president and Chair of the Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Department: “the experience has been phenomenal at Carilion Children’s, the number of people and families coming here. It’s been remarkably positive.” A ten-million-dollar renovation project will take place at the new Tanglewood site before an expected opening in late summer 2023. The announcement fits with Roanoke County plans for the Tanglewood area says Board of Supervisors Vice-Chair **Jason Peters**: “this is something we envisioned with the County since 2016. You’re seeing the growth in outparcels on [Route] 419, the Tanglewood Center. Two more restaurants [Popeye’s and Chili’s] shortly. Carilion is helping to generate that economic activity on this property.”

Positive presentation >

BOCO Talks—a series presented by **Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce**—invites business, organizational, community leaders to share their stories. **JD Sutphin** of **Big Lick Entertainment** shared his “why” and “Positive Thinking = Positive Results” message, derived from his cousin, Anthony. He described his background, his business startup (going solo after attending a Roanoke Experience Conference) and expanding operations that now include a multifaceted event and marketing business, a **Big Lick Comics** retailer, **The Woodland Place** event venue, and a musician in **The Low Low Chariot**.



LewisGale NICU finally underway >

Officials with **LewisGale Medical Center** held a groundbreaking ceremony last month to celebrate construction on a new Level II Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), also called a special care nursery at the facility. Featuring 3,000 square foot, the state-of-the-art NICU will feature six bassinets with the space to expand as needed. On-site board-certified neonatologists will treat medically fragile pre-term and full-term newborns with complications to include breathing issues, infection, feeding issues, growth support, withdrawal support, temperature stabilization, and any maternal health concerns that potentially require pre-term delivery 24/7.

The 11 year-plus battle to obtain a Certificate of Public Need from the General Assembly is now behind them. Dr. **John Harding** is the Director of Mother-Baby services at LewisGale: “you get a fair percentage of [infants] that need that little extra boost. Then to separate mom and baby [which had to go to the Carilion NICU] is such a significant issue. Having this in our facility – as well as the folks across town – I think just provides the best care for the Roanoke Valley.” Carilion Clinic had opposed the LewisGale Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit for years, saying it had more than enough capacity to meet those needs. The NICU in Salem should open by early next summer. Also on hand was State Senator **David Sutterlein**, who championed the LewisGale NICU, finally getting it through the General Assembly after several failed votes to obtain the Certificate of Public Need.

“After a long 12-year journey [which] I did watch from afar, today’s groundbreaking is another significant milestone in our pursuit to better meet the growing needs in the Roanoke Valley,” said Alan Fabian, LewisGale Regional Health System market president. “Opening a NICU is another example of our pledge to expanding our women’s and children’s services to meet the needs of our growing community.”



Friendship fights inflation for employees >

Friendship Retirement Community is giving back to team members during the holidays to help with inflation, when it comes to the current prices of groceries, gas and cost of living, by offering nearly \$400,000 in bonus incentives by the end of the year. "Providing team members with extra compensation during this time is one way we can help them have a healthy work-life balance while they build a meaningful career at Friendship," said Vice President of Human Resources and Corporate Compliance **Angela Hughes**. "It is important that we reward the hard work and dedication of our Friendship team during this holiday season," said President and Chief Executive Officer **Joe Hoff**. "We value every team member and their role in providing quality care to our residents."



Women's care at LewisGale Montgomery >

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has announced plans to expand the delivery of women's care services at the hospital as well as an additional \$1 million in capital improvements at the facility during the opening of its newly renovated Women's Center canopy entrance. The hospital recently completed construction on the entrance. "For many women, having a baby is their first experience in a hospital. We see obstetrics as a way to introduce these mothers and their families to the HCA Healthcare way of patient care," said **Devin Tobin**, LewisGale Hospital Montgomery chief operating officer. The hospital is also adding midwifery services for women who desire less medical intervention during low-risk pregnancy, labor, and birth using a nurse-midwife supported by Ob/Gyn physicians.



Care Colloquium tackles caregiving issues >

On day one of **The Care Colloquium** at Hotel Roanoke last month, a three-day summit on long term family caregiving, the keynote speaker morning was family caregiving consultant **Amy Goyer**, who shared her own experiences about caregiving as her parents aged, how it affected her work-life balance and the financial implications: "I learn a lot about what's going on. I interface with caregivers every day, so I have the opportunity to share that. [The Care Colloquium] is a collaboration, coming up with new, realistic and helpful and relevant ideas on how to support caregivers."

Roanoke-based **Eldercare Solutions** organized the Care Colloquium; CEO **Kimberly Whiter** wrote a series of stories this past year for Valley Business FRONT about the family caregiving crisis and how the employers can ease that burden for their valued employees. Amy Goyer (who also consults with AARP on the issue) left The Care Colloquium early to appear on NBC's Today show morning to talk about caregiving.



Scary repurposing >

Center in the Square's Blue Ridge Nightmares haunted house that set up shop in a 9th Street Southeast warehouse space was back for a second year in October, a fundraiser for the arts hub that used paid actors and a wildly imaginative set designed by Hollywood and TV veteran **Anthony Giordano**, who now resides in Roanoke. He is currently working on sets for the new season of *The Walking Dead*. Halloween weekend saw huge crowds that had to wait hours in some cases for the chance to be scared as they wandered through the sprawling "town" that also features local artifacts – like the old Mick or Mack storefront. Center in the Square also rents the space out for events at other times of the year. Those waiting in line outside were kept entertained by a fire-breathing performer and fiery baton twirler.

FRONT'n Abouts compiled by Tom Field and Gene Marrano.

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

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EDUCATION FRONT



Van Aken

Eileen Van Aken, Virginia Tech professor and department head in the College of Engineering's Grado Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering, is president-elect for the Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers (IISE). Van Aken is a three-time Hokie, earning her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in industrial engineering in 1988, 1991, and 1995. The Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers, according to its website, is the world's largest professional society dedicated solely to the support of the industrial engineering profession

and individuals involved with improving quality and productivity.



Van Aken

Hollins University has announced the appointment of **Anita B. Walton** as vice president for institutional advancement. She will develop and lead Hollins' philanthropic priorities and activities and promote engagement with alumnae/i and friends of the university. Walton comes to Hollins from Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) in North Carolina, where she has served as vice chancellor for university advancement and executive director of the ECSU Foundation, Inc., since March 2020.

Thomas Archibald, an associate



Archibald

professor and Virginia Cooperative Extension specialist in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, has been named executive director of the Center for International Research, Education, and Development (CIRED) at Virginia Tech. He has significant experience working in Africa, beginning with his service as an environmental education volunteer with Peace Corps Gabon. The Center for International Research, Education, and Development, part of Outreach and International Affairs, oversees a significant portion of the university's international research.

Mcleod Enterprises, which operates the



Morris

HoneyTree Early Learning Centers, welcomes **Nick Morris** as the Human Resources and Talent Acquisition Director. Morris will oversee the Human Resources Department.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Poindexter

Roanoke County has appointed **Michael Poindexter** as the next Chief of Police effective January 1, following what it calls a nationwide search.

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Poindexter has been acting as Assistant Chief of Police for the department since April of this year, and has spent 28 years as Police Commander, Police Sergeant, and Police Officer in the County. He becomes the fourth Chief of Police since the Roanoke County Police Department was created in 1990, and its first Back Chief of Police.



Livingston

The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors has hired **Amanda Livingston** as the new Executive Director. Livingston is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island as a Communications Major. Her career has spanned both real estate space

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and the corporate world, including Jackson Hewitt Tax Service, where she was a divisional Vice President. "I enjoyed translating needs, issues, and ideas into effective strategies and action plans," says Livingston.

Development Specialist. Stanley will work closely with the business community to bolster economic growth, assist in technical small business development, and provide external communication on

various services and projects of the Town. Prior to coming to the Town, Stanley most recently served as the Economic Development Specialist in Roanoke County.

Compiled by Gene Marrano



Stanley

The Town of Vinton has appointed **Marshall Stanley** as the new Economic

“” They wrestled with the salary differences... which are pretty stark. — Page 41



Funds for farmers

Farm Credit of the Virginias (FCV), a lending cooperative that serves Virginia, West Virginia and western Maryland, has awarded \$100,000 in grants to eligible charitable organizations through the newly established Farm Credit of the Virginias' Charitable Contributions Fund. Included on that list was the Craig County Land Lab, the Rotary Club of Rocky Mount – 'Moo' Crew Program, the Wythe County Extension – Virginia Beef Leadership Institute. The was established in 2022 to build stronger partnerships with organizations that preserve and promote farmers and families in the rural communities they serve. The new program offers two sizes of grant opportunities which eligible organizations were encouraged to apply

for based on need and scope of project. Applications were accepted for grants to fund smaller projects under \$5,000 and larger initiatives under \$25,000.

Affordable housing grants

The Commonwealth has awarded a total of \$60 million in Housing Opportunity Tax Credits (HOTC) to investors developing affordable rental housing throughout Virginia. The HOTC program originated in 2021 through legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly; with revisions made to the program in 2022. Virginia Housing, the state's housing finance agency, was chosen to award up to \$60 million in HOTC. "The funds allocated to the state tax credits for rental

housing are key in revitalizing our neighborhoods and providing more affordable housing options for our workforce," said Secretary of Commerce and Trade Caren Merrick.

Tech program gets slice of big allocation

The College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech is part of a \$60 million, five-year grant led by The Nature Conservancy for a project titled "Expanding Agroforestry Production and Markets for Producer Profitability and Climate Stabilization." The project aims to advance agroforestry across the eastern United States and Hawaii and is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

through the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Partnership Initiative. Virginia Tech will receive \$2.25 million of the grant for regional efforts to help mid-Atlantic and Appalachian farmers increase the use of agroforestry and reap the economic, social, and environmental benefits. Agroforestry is a form of "climate-smart" agriculture that integrates trees, shrubs, crops, and livestock into a single farming system.

Women's Foundation grants

The Roanoke Women's Foundation has announced the largest annual total of grants in its 18-year history. Nine organizations received a combined total of \$378,000. The 2022 recipients include: Apple Ridge Farm - \$30,000 toward its academic summer camp, serving



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low-income, inner-city youth; Floyd Community Center for the Arts - \$30,000 toward facility improvements and equipment to expand its programming capability; HopeTree Family Services - \$30,000 toward increased security systems for its campus in Salem. Also: Roanoke Higher Education Center Foundation – \$50,000 toward creation of a Career and Workforce Training Center for assistance to its graduates as they enter or return to the workforce; Roanoke Valley Speech and Hearing Center - \$71,000 toward improvement of its

Roanoke building's accessibility to meet the needs of patrons; Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center - \$50,000 toward purchase of equipment to provide critical care for injured native wild animals and YMCA of Virginia's Blue Ridge - \$40,000 toward expanding its pilot afterschool initiative designed to enhance learning and living skills of Roanoke City middle school students.

RWF president, MaryJean Levin says, "after two years of COVID constraints, our membership of generous women has increased

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substantially, allowing us to provide increased support for more projects than ever before in a single year. It is especially satisfying that we are able to fund such diverse needs throughout our local communities. These awards bring our 18-year total of contributions to \$4,889,500 given to 72 nonprofits for

implementation of 90 projects."

Careers going solar

New River Community College recently received state approval to offer a new training program for those interested in becoming a solar technician. Students will be trained

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to assemble, set up, and maintain rooftop or other systems that convert sunlight into energy. Program completers will also earn the Solar Hands-On Installation Network of Excellence (SHINE) credential. NRCC's solar technician program was developed in response to regional labor needs, collaborating with local business and industry to determine training and credentials that would benefit businesses and potential employees. The program will be administered by NRCC's workforce development office as one of its Fast-Forward offerings, which are low-cost, short-term training programs that prepare students for in-demand careers. Additional funds are also available to help offset training costs. The program is slated to begin in summer 2023.

Wired 'Noke

The Center for Digital Government has announced the winners of the 2022 Digital Cities Survey, recognizing cities utilizing technology to

strengthen cybersecurity, enhance transparency and digital equity, plan for the future of work, and more. The City of Roanoke placed 7th in the 75,000-124,999 population category and has been recognized as a top 10 Digital City for more than 20 years.

Childcare business expansion

Children's Nest Learning Center - Hollins has broken ground to expand their campus in Roanoke County. The center is currently permitted to offer 105 childcare slots at their existing facility but will add over 150 new slots with the expansion, by developing an adjacent parcel with a 7,000 square foot facility for daycare and afterschool programs and a splash pad for water recreation. This project is an estimated \$2.5 million investment, creating 15 new jobs.

Annual Preservation Foundation Awards

The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation

presented 12 Kegley Preservation Awards at its annual meeting last month, covering a wide of restored buildings, programs and individual accomplishments that were recognized by the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation. Among them were the Melrose-Rugby Neighborhood entrance signage in northwest Roanoke, Historic Fire Station No. 1 on Church Avenue for Adaptive Reuse & Stewardship (it is now a TxTur furniture showroom, a boutique hotel and a bistro) and the Liberty Trust boutique hotel (a former bank and office building). Also honored were heritage education programs at the Salem Museum, at Roanoke College, the Virginia Room at the Roanoke City library main branch and retired Center in the Square president Jim Sears, for his promotion of the adaptive reuse of older properties in downtown Roanoke into spaces for the arts and for apartments.

"Recognition of people, programs and projects that help to promote

good stewardship and preservation of these resources is an important part of achieving the mission of the Foundation," explained Alison Blanton, Awards Committee co-chair. They are named in honor of George Kegley, a founding member of the Foundation and Awards Committee Chair for many years before passing away earlier this year.

LewisGale cancer program accredited

The American College of Surgeons (ACS) Commission on Cancer (CoC), has granted three-year accreditation to the Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute at LewisGale Medical Center and LewisGale Hospital Pulaski. To earn CoC accreditation, a cancer program must meet 34 quality care standards, be evaluated every three years, and maintain levels of excellence in the delivery of comprehensive patient-centered care. LewisGale Hospital Pulaski has held ASC CoC accreditation since

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Costly in many ways

In conjunction with Virginia Commonwealth University, the Virginia Department of Health has assembled an "opioid cost calculator" to measure the overall impact of the opioid epidemic in Virginia, using a variety of metrics. Lauren Yerkes

is a senior epidemiologist with the Virginia Department of Health: we recognize the economic burden it really does impact Virginia workers, families, businesses and local and state government. We hope that this calculator will help to inform and also help engage people in preventing opioid addiction and overdose."

Visit costofvirginiaaddiction.com to see how the opioid epidemic impacts specific localities in the Commonwealth. The overall statewide impact using 2020 data

was \$3.5 billion, the bulk of that due to a loss of productivity. Virginia Commonwealth University analyzed data sent by the VDH and other agencies in arriving at that number. "The estimates don't include the value of lives lost, which are absolutely measureless," says Yerkes.

SBDC launches veterans networking site

The Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center has launched VetBiz, a program to support

military veteran business owners by providing networking and exposure to potential customers who would like to support them by patronizing their businesses. The SBDC has also launched VetBizVirginia.org, a website where local veteran business owners can register their company – and those looking to shop at veteran-owned firms can look for opportunities to do just that.

Compiled by
Gene Marrano

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Terri Welch

Indomitable Entrepreneurial Spirit

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

About 90% of start-ups fail in the first year, according to multiple business sources. Terri Welch, owner of Wine Lady Enterprises, LLC, has beat the odds – three times over.

Terri Welch’s company does business as Wine & Design, Christiansburg; WineShop at Home with Terri the Wine Lady; and Paint ‘n Fun Ceramics. She began her businesses in 2011 with WineShop at Home, an existing company that organizes in-home wine tastings hosted by their trained consultants. “It’s the Tupperware of wine,” she said.

It gave Welch the entrepreneurial “bug” to own a brick-and-mortar store, and she happened to be at the right place at the right time to make that happen. Welch had enjoyed girls’ nights out as a customer of Wine & Design, a business that hosts group painting classes along with wine tasting. But when she called to book a private party in 2016, she was told the Christiansburg business was closing. Welch offered to buy the local franchise instead.

Similarly, in 2021, she learned that the paint-your-own ceramics shop in New River Valley Mall was closing. She visited the store to pick up sale pieces and left owning the business. “It was like a smack in the face,” she said of the idea.

Welch has reimaged that enterprise by adding a kiln (so that plates, cups, and bowls would

actually be usable) and a pottery wheel. In the past year, she quadrupled the previous \$5,000 per month in sales of Paint ‘n Fun Ceramics, her only individually owned business.

One reason Welch became an entrepreneur was because she needed flexibility after she gained custody of her toddler grandchildren. The need persists as she is now sandwiched between teen kids and an aging mother. Welch’s background is “eclectic,” including the real estate and funeral industries. She said, “It took me till age fifty to find out what I wanted to be when I grow up.”

Welch said she used to be “the kid who would hide my art from my parents so it wouldn’t go on the refrigerator.” Now, she has developed a passion for art. She learned by watching for a year the local artists she hired to teach classes at Wine & Design. With ceramics, she just “started playing with it” and feels that was a benefit because she can see the designs from a non-expert customer perspective, keeping it simple while still creating beautiful things.

Welch used multiple resources to get her businesses up and running. With Wine & Design, she walked into a situation where the owner

had to sell, plus the inventory such as paint and canvas was low-cost. She went to a bank, took out a small loan, and paid it back within a year. For a year-and-a-half, Welch plowed all of the proceeds back into the business and took no salary.

Paint 'n Fun Ceramics was a different story, as she had to purchase a large variety of inventory to satisfy clientele, as well as expensive equipment like the kiln. The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce connected her with a Small Business Administration loan for this venture. The market for Welch's businesses varies: "Art doesn't have an age limit."

She runs Art Buzz Kids for young children (ages 5-12) and is trying a new after-school ceramics program for teens (ages 12-17). Wine & Design's target audience is women ages 35-55, but Welch is seeing more husbands coming in for date nights with their wives. Being an entrepreneur certainly has had its challenges. "I have tripped a bunch," Welch said.

With Wine & Design, there was a steep learning curve because Welch had never run a brick-and-mortar business before. She had to learn about things like accounting and how to write a business plan. She said access to Chamber resources was invaluable. Of course, the pandemic was a huge hurdle. Welch managed by holding virtual Wine & Design parties in the New River Valley, and then corporate asked her to teach virtually across the country.

Welch has gleaned enough experience to offer advice to budding entrepreneurs. Always be prepared, she said. She experienced shock when the artists she had hired from the universities graduated and moved on, so now she always keeps artist teachers in the pipeline. In fact, one of the successes Welch is most proud of is having mentored students coming from art programs, teaching them the confidence to market themselves and their art as they go out into the world.

Flexibility is important: "Be willing to pivot," she said. For example, marketing has been trial and error. "I threw a lot of things at the wall to see what would stick," she said. She has settled on vehicles that provide her good return on investment: Invest for Success through the Chamber; local radio ads; Peach Jar, an electronic vehicle to communicate

HELP FOR STARTUPS: IT'S OUT THERE



Steve Baffuto

Steve Baffuto, President and CEO of The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, said that post-pandemic, more people are venturing out to start businesses. Side gigs are especially becoming more common. What differentiates start-ups that fail from those that succeed?


Baffuto posited that, in addition to doing a good job, building trust with the customers is key. Forming relationships, networking, and being active in the community are all part of that. "You have to give to get," he said.

Taking advantage is existing programs is also important. When potential small business owners approach him, Baffuto first directs them to the Small Business Development Center in Roanoke, which "helps businesses start from the very beginning."

The Chamber also offers myriad resources. It holds monthly programs on topics of interest to small businesses, such as cybersecurity and recruiting, and member financial institutions are willing to help small businesses. The Chamber organizes referral groups where businesses meet weekly to network; those relationships have resulted in \$4 million in business-to-business transactions this year.

-Jennifer Poff Cooper

with parents using approved ads through the school system; and social media, particularly Instagram and Facebook.

Welch said that community involvement is also essential for small business owners. "Do it because it fills your soul," she said, "but you'll find that it comes back to you ten-fold." 

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