

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 179
AUGUST 2023

Agriculture Lineup:

Childress Farm

Beaver Dam Farm

Best Practices

VT's AgriBiz

Plus:

Salem Red Sox

Best Bosses

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My Favorite Boss



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Marketing
Communications



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VP of Business Banking



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Virginia's Department of Consumer and Agriculture Services reports that agriculture remains the Commonwealth's largest private industry, with an economic impact of more than 82 billion dollars annually, employing around 380,000 every year. We dig into the Ag world a bit in this issue to take a look at the sector on a few different levels – including agritourism and teaching this business in college.

Long time area sportswriter and Hall of Famer Doug Doughty (you know the name) is back with a story on how the new ownership group for the Salem Red Sox has worked out this season. We've also got two terrific guest commentaries on various aspects of running a business. Caution: you might learn something new. Isn't that what it's always about? Happy reading.

Tom Field
Publisher

Gene Marrano
Editor

““

Every minute a worker must adhere to some administrative edict from management is a minute that worker is not providing a product or service to a customer. — Page 20

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“We share the same success stories. — Page 60

LEAD STORY PAGE 8

Best Bosses

By Dan Smith



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AUGUST



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Jennifer Leake



Mike Leigh



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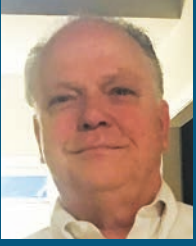


Michael Shelton

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.

2023 CONTRIBUTORS



Doug Doughty



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Gene Marrano



Anne Millehan



Shawn Nowlin



Dan Smith



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finance – credit unions



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legal



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technology



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



Alicia Smith
F&S Building Innovations /
construction



David Todd
EZ Rampz /
senior services

“You're never going to get where it's perfect, so we're always going to work to improve.”

— Page 22

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

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Blog: morefront.blogspot.com



Kimberly Bratic, our FRONTcover model and one of our interviewees, said this photoshoot setup—hammer and all—felt natural... she was currently moving into a new house. A “proud mother of three” (mid-to-late teenagers), Bratic has worked as a marketing and communications professional for 25 years. A co-founder of Girls Rock Roanoke, she says Roanoke is a great place to be. “There are so many things to do; and the list keeps growing.”

Best Bosses

By Dan Smith

We are what we are because we learned from people who became important to us.

Tom Field

The fortunate among us have had memorable bosses or mentors who came along at important junctures in our careers and helped form us. We asked 20 professionals in a wide range

of endeavors in the region to name their best boss or mentor and tell us why they are considered so highly by them. Here are the results.

Andrea Brunais

New River Valley artist and writer

I was a veteran journalist before taking a corporate job. My sharp, thoughtful new boss saw that I needed civilizing. Journalists are marvelous people, but newsrooms are chaotic. Someone might jump on a desk to make a point, or a balled-up candy wrapper might come flying over your head. Egos are big. Communication is blunt. Thanks to coaching from my boss, **Melissa Mackey**, I soon said, "How might we approach this differently?" instead of, "Are you insane?" Or "What outside expertise might be needed?" instead of, "I wouldn't trust so-and-so to pour piss out of a boot without instructions on the heel." I was thankful that she instilled in me a modicum of diplomacy. (I no longer had to duck because some yahoo was throwing things.)



Submitted

Andrea Brunais

Ken Ferris

Founder of three technology companies in the region

Dick Popp, who was hired as President of FiberCom in 1987, probably helped me most. He had been a senior executive at a couple of large companies. While I had a solid engineering background, Dick taught me to fully understand the company's financials and how to get the most benefit from them by looking at and assessing the metrics and trends. His mentoring gave me a solid financial background that I used when I started Millennia Systems as well as other businesses I was involved in since 2000. During these years I found that a number of CFOs that I worked with were great at cranking out the numbers but often didn't use metrics or trends and thus didn't fully understand the appropriate actions to take if the numbers were not good.



Submitted

Ken Ferris

Kimberly Bratic

Marketing Communications

Cal Johnson, the former President/CEO of the YMCA of the Roanoke Valley (now the YMCA of Virginia's Blue Ridge), is my best boss and a life-long mentor. He is an exceptional people-first leader. He taught me much about leadership communication—specifically, setting a framework for a project, setting benchmarks and expectations. When something got off track, he empowered folks to fix it. He taught me how to lay out a clear argument to win support from board members, colleagues, leaders and more. As a perfectionist, he taught me to know when to let go and know when to call on others for support. He is thoughtful, respectful, emotionally intelligent and all around one of the best humans I know.



Submitted

Kimberly Bratic



Sheree Scarborough



Amanda Cockrell



Submitted

Bob Schmucker



Submitted

John Carlin

Amanda Cockrell

Hollins University professor

In a thousand different ways, my boss and mentor has been the late **Richard Dillard**. He hired me to run the Hollins children's literature program when I didn't know anything about the job. He backed me up in everything and gradually gave me my head as I learned. The same thing happened when he hired me as managing editor of *The Hollins Critic*. He was endlessly kind, endlessly encouraging, funny as hell, and I was never afraid to ask him anything or to confess when I screwed up. We had one memorable issue when, [in an essay a name was misspelled because of a software problem] ... Richard took full blame for it [although] we had both proofread it.

Bob Schmucker

Executive at Optical Cable in Roanoke

My favorite boss goes back to early in my Air Force career in 1981. Colonel **Malcolm F. Bolton** was a fighter pilot, my wing commander and the epitome of a leader, the kind that people would follow to the gates of hell. He taught me that leadership and management are very different and that has stayed with me. As a manager, I've led diverse teams of engineers and support personnel by listening to all team members, empowering them to make decisions and always making sure they got full credit for good results. If things don't go as well, it was my failure to lead. I believe in personal accountability.

John Carlin

WSLS-TV news anchor

Jack Ruzak was a veteran photographer at WTVR in Richmond when I joined the team there as a reporter in 1984, as green as they come. At the time I thought the goal was only to cover the fire, the accident, or the Board of Supervisors meeting. But, as we rode around in the news van or chatted over the occasional beer, Jack kept prompting me to look for stories that really mattered to people where they live, and to use the amazing video he could shoot to convey the emotion or importance of a given situation. As Jack used to say, "The story isn't at the meeting." To this day, I carry that philosophy.

Devin Tobin

Chief operating officer at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery

Roberta Tinch, was the Chief Operating Officer at Spotsylvania Regional Medical Center when I was completing my administrative residency. Roberta was confident, poised, and expertly balanced the challenges of being a new mother and influential executive. She continually provided me with the opportunity to see all aspects of our organization, challenging me to take ownership of large projects and initiatives. She provided real-time candid feedback and helped me to outline a career path that would help me reach my short- and long-term goals. She was recently recognized by Modern Healthcare as a Top 25 Emerging Leader for 2023 and I could not think of someone more deserving.



Devin Tobin

Submitted

Noelle Lane

Elementary school teacher

Eric Fisher, the principal of Preston Park is the most trustworthy person and best boss I have ever worked for. He is the captain of a ship that has been sailing tumultuous waters from things like Covid, student trauma, and the interesting dynamics of being a predominantly EL [English Learner] school. He has only ever shown compassion and understanding towards all he has encountered. There are so many times I know what his week has looked like that I just know he must feel flustered, but he calmly carries on and I suspect he will for many years more. He is also a great poet, friend, and mentor.



Noelle Lane

Submitted

Eric Fitzpatrick

Artist

My favorite mentors have all been painters. At Tech, I was an art major for the short time that Joni Pienkowski was teaching. She was the perfect professor, in that she had no ego, and yet could paint in any style imaginable. She taught us a "no limits" approach (i.e. paint anything you want in any medium you want. The only thing required is that you feel a passionate connection with what you are creating). That principle has been my compass ever since.



Eric Fitzpatrick

Submitted



Submitted

Dan Casey

Dan Casey

Roanoke Times Metro columnist

Stu Samuels was city editor of The (Annapolis) Capital when I was there, 1987-1994. It was an afternoon daily. Stu had a masters from UVa and was a Vietnam vet. He was stingy with praise but when he bestowed it you knew you'd worked a journalistic miracle. I would've followed the devil to Hell to get a good story for Stu.



Submitted

Samantha Steidle

Samantha Steidle

Radford University

Walker Nelms, my first boss at the American Red Cross, showed me what great leadership looks like in a non-profit organization. He had a remarkable ability to remove barriers and he focused on what mattered, while maintaining a sense of humor and making even the difficult days feel fun. **Tommy Ball** of Yellow Book was a great, tough boss who channeled extreme adversity for professional success. At Virginia Western Community College, President **Robert Sandel** always balanced humor, responsibility, and kindness and **Carole Tarrant** taught me the value of leading with policy language over emotion.



Submitted

Kris Tilley-Lubbs

Kris Tilley-Lubbs

Retired college professor

I returned to the university for a Ph.D. at age 52, 33 years after getting my master's in Spanish Literature. As a Ph.D. student, then professor of education, I was expected to write traditional scientific research. I tried, but I found it to be boring, which was reflected in my writing. A trusted colleague/mentor, **Jim Garrison**, told me I needed to follow my bliss, my heart, my passion, and write the narratives that I loved writing and did well. Without that colleague, I would have left the university and not enjoyed 22 years at Virginia Tech.

“ ”

...follow my bliss, my heart, my passion...

Pete Peters

Vinton Town manager

Jerry Burgess, the retired Botetourt County Manager, is a West Point grad and his leadership style is a direct representation of his experiences and training while attending the prestigious institution. I was fortunate to work for Jerry for eight years and while I didn't recognize it at the time, he was teaching, coaching, and challenging me from Day One. Jerry was quick to make a decision, brief and direct, although I never left a room with him and didn't know my responsibility. Jerry was meticulous about doing it right, even if it was more difficult and the outcome should always look intentional. I learned to speak with controlled enthusiasm, take ownership, give abundant praise, and to be respectful.

Joel Yonts

CEO and Lead Scientist at Secure Robotics.ai

Rick Caro had one rule, "No assholes." Rick was the Chief Information Officer for Advance Auto Parts and my boss. At the time, I found his rule humorous but was somewhat dismissive of its powerful effect on the organization. What I experienced while serving as their Chief Information Security Officer was a leadership team of peers and supporting managers that looked out for one another and backbiting was not only frowned upon, but it was also a quick way to get prompted to customer. After traveling and working with many Fortune 500 companies, I realize the value and appreciate the tone that Rick set from the top.

Tom Gerdy

Owner of Gerdy Construction Company and Habitat for Humanity leader

I am my favorite/only boss. I let me work whenever I want to. I let me work even when I don't want to. It is not all a bed of roses; there are some thorns. When I call in sick, I know I am lying. I tried to fire myself once, but I showed up the next day, anyway.

“ ”
I tried to fire myself once.



Submitted

Pete Peters



Submitted

Joel Yonts



Submitted

Tom Gerdy



Submitted

Sandy Murray

Sandy Murray

Building Specialists marketing director

I continue to be amazed at the work **Bob Fetzer** does in our community. He is past Social Security age and still working non-stop. Bob is as concerned and knowledgeable about the Roanoke Valley as he is for his own company. He has sat on multiple boards of directors and raised funds for an unbelievable number of organizations. He started Building Specialists 49 years ago and is marketing savvy, which I appreciate. He knows you have to spend money to make money. And he loves a good party.



Submitted

Jane Gabrielle

Jane Gabrielle

Artist and entertainer

Shirley Thomas, former owner of the Iroquois Club, taught me the importance of knowing and maintaining a relationship with the media. She taught me about the "spin" and billed [our band] Radar Rose as "from the D.C. area" before we moved here because it drew more people if we weren't from here. She taught me about "fighting the establishment." ASCAP and BMI counted seats in a restaurant and based payment for use of music on that, (assuming) you always drew a full house. Shirley fought that by showcasing original music and daring them to charge her. She understood she could be a great nightclub, but to survive, she had to commit to a duality of a reliable "meat and 3" for lunch for the downtown workers. Killer food! Really, so much more.



Submitted

Libby Patterson

Libby Patterson

Owner of The Hemp Mill

I have been blessed with many mentors and the guidance of other strong women in business. I was born into a family full of strong mentors and business owners. Founder **Debbie Custer** and I met in 2018 when I joined the Hemp Mill team part time while studying for my master's in clinical counseling. I quickly fell in love with the work and deep connections between customers and staff. In May of 2022 I had been working as an outpatient trauma counselor when Debbie asked me to become her apprentice, devising a plan for "apprenticeship to ownership." Debbie was ready to retire and wanted the Hemp Mill to stay under the guidance of another woman. Debbie has guided me through the process of becoming a business owner. A person who uses the wisdom life has brought to encourage the success of others is a mentor.

Jay Foster

Founder, CEO of Flex Metrics

Dave Goff had a remarkable way of communicating clearly and directly. I never saw him get flustered. He was a terrific teacher who used metaphors and stories to teach life lessons. He said a good engineer or scientist never assumes anything and shared a story from "Star Trek" where a character was asked, "What color is that house on the hill?" The reply: "This side of the house is purple." Thirty-plus years ago he inspired me. I hope to pass his lessons in wisdom and professionalism on to others in his honor.

Pete Eshelman

Director of Roanoke Outside

Gene Nervo, retired Marine colonel and founder of Wilderness Adventure at Eagle Landing, helped me build a solid foundation on which I continue to develop my leadership skills. When I was fresh out of college, The Colonel, as we called him, introduced me to the concept of emotional intelligence long before EQ became a mainstream term. Most people wouldn't think a Marine colonel would lead with empathy, but the ability to understand my emotions and put myself in someone else's shoes is a skill he taught me that I will never forget.

Cathy Cash Greenberg

Former director, Madison School of Healthcare

I had the same brilliant, compassionate, and supportive boss/mentor in different careers, working in advertising with **Walter Rugaber**, former President and Publisher for The Roanoke Times and President of Landmark Publishing, in planning when he was interim president of Hollins University, and when he founded the Center for Regional Strategies. He was erudite, inspirational, and committed to the newspaper and its community. After his retirement, he led Hollins and I followed. His unassuming, easygoing demeanor and willingness to listen elevated the school. I marvel at his ability to coalesce a disparate group of graduate students and university employees into a highly productive team. 📖

“ ”

...willingness to listen...



Submitted

Jay Foster



Submitted

Pete Eshelman



Submitted

Cathy Cash Greenberg



Jennifer Poff Cooper

Cultivating the Farming Life - Family Style

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Farming has long been a family thing through ups and down for the Childresses in NRV

Childress Family Enterprises, Inc., has a storied history. The farming operation in Montgomery County goes back decades, according to President Floyd Childress III. (His brother, Charles, and son, Michael, own the business with him.) That doesn't mean that the Childresses don't operate with the most updated techniques and tools, though.

It all started with Childress's grandfather, a livestock broker who lost most everything in the Depression. With money Childress's father was able to send home from his military salary during World War II – plus his poker winnings – the family started buying land.

"We accumulated a sizeable land base when land wasn't expensive," said Childress.

Childress graduated from Virginia Tech in

1976 with a major in animal science and a minor in dairy science, having also been in the Corps of Cadets. Growing up on the farm, he had a passion for agriculture. But he also had notions of being an Army officer. So, he served in active duty military for a period, during which he met and married his wife. At the time, there weren't options for serving in the Army without being separated from a spouse, so Childress changed his mind and reverted to active reserves, in which he served until 1984. That meant farming became his vocation, and he has been at it full-time for 44 years.

Childress has experienced his share of successes and failures. The biggest success, to his mind, is that they have held the family business together and are still farming. Part of that success is that Michael chose

to come back and farm. He graduated from Virginia Tech, where he studied dairy science and agronomy. Michael at first left to work for Monsanto. In 2012, though, he decided he was tired of researching farming and “wanted to do it for real,” said Childress.

Adoption of agricultural technology has been a win as well. In a far cry from the simple tractors of yester-year, today the Childresses use GPS technology on today’s equipment. To wit: There is auto-steer to make the application of chemicals and nutrients more accurate, and map applications that help them manage their work in the fields.

The Childresses are constantly learning and assimilating new knowledge about soil, animals, and other aspects of farming. Mitigating diseases and managing the reproductive cycle of cattle are just a couple of examples.

But farming is not for the faint of heart, as there are many challenges. In addition to being physically demanding, it is mentally demanding. Childress said farmers are prone to depression and too many take their lives because of aspects out of their control, such as weather. “Depression is an insidious thing,” he said. Financial challenges exist as well. Childress said, “We carry more debt than I’d like.”

In the face of such obstacles, how have the Childresses been successful? Floyd Childress said it’s an “unwillingness to give up, a desire to persevere.” In addition is the recognition

“A LOT OF IRONS IN THE FIRE”

If you think that farmers are one-note, think again. Below is a list of Childress Family Enterprises’ endeavors.

- Beef cattle – primary enterprise
- Calf backgrounding business – provide cattle farm-raised feed, then sell in tractor-trailer loads
- Custom calf backgrounding for a farmer in Floyd
- Cash grain business – sell for silage
- Smaller stock operation – cattle feed on grass, which is cheaper, in spring and summer
- Wheat – specialty crop of hard red winter wheat, which sells at a premium for bread making
- Oats to feed young cattle
- Hay to feed cattle
- Custom farming operations – extra corn grown for specific customers

that “my father and grandfather worked hard to give their descendants something special.” He also points to his eternal optimism, a “this too shall pass” mentality.

“I am a man who loves what he does,” said Childress.

And he plans to do it as long as he is able. He hopes his grandson will come into the business someday, though he has not ruled out bringing in an outside partner. Childress said that “vibrant vocational agriculture

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Jennifer Poff Cooper

Floyd Childress III and grandson Jacob Childress

programs” make young people aware of farming opportunities, and that Virginia Tech is a “valuable resource” for filling the ag pipeline (*see related story in this issue*).

Childress would tell new farmers to “be willing and ready to learn, to soak up as much as you can, and put that to work.” Also, “don’t be afraid to try new things and fail.” Farming may not be as financially rewarding as some lines of work, but it is “important work that benefits everybody.”


The overall state of agriculture has changed greatly during Childress’s time as a farmer. He touts farmers’ greater respect for both cattle (humane handling of livestock) and people (no more days of itinerant “farm hands” earning a pittance). There are still young people who want careers in agriculture, Childress said, but farmers are learning they must make employment desirable and pay living wages. Locally, agriculture is “more diverse than ever before, and that’s a good thing,” said Childress.

Dairy used to be a tremendous part of agriculture in Montgomery County, but there are very few dairies compared to 40-50 years ago. “Dairy is not as lucrative

if not done on a large scale,” he said. Now, there are more beef cattle.

There are fewer full-time farmers as people opt for steady sources of income, with benefits, to lessen the risks inherent in farming. In some cases, succeeding generations simply haven’t felt the desire to continue farming (*see author’s note*).

New to the agriculture scene is marketing products directly to consumers, at farmers’ markets or by selling shares of beef cattle. There are more specialty farms, such as vineyards, and more produce farming, like “pick-your-own” patches. Agri-tourism is also growing.

As to the future of agriculture, Childress feels large commercial farms like his will be “outliers” as it is increasingly difficult to afford land and farm labor. Childress is confident agriculture won’t go away, though. “It is essential to our economy and our existence,” he said. Floyd Childress added with a laugh, “It is reassuring that all of us like to eat three times a day.” 

Author’s note: *Some of the land Childress works is my family’s farm, and we are grateful to him for caring for it.*

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Cost of bureaucracy

I recently saw an RFP (Request for Proposal) from a state agency that was looking for coaching and assessment services. As the owner of a company that provides these services, I reviewed the opportunity and quickly decided not to pursue it. Despite having the ability to effectively provide the requested services, it wasn't worth my time to submit the required proposal.

I understand why government must be impartial in selecting vendors, but why does an RFP need a cover page, a main document, five exhibits and four appendixes? Seriously, this RFP had 11 documents to follow before submitting a proposal, and that doesn't include a "pre-proposal conference," a Q&A document, and a future process with a committee of folks who need months to review all the proposals. Sheesh!

If a private company regularly did this, it would be out of business. Yet private companies also suffer from bureaucratic and inefficient processes that are less obvious.


An organization makes money (or supports its citizens) by providing value-adding services and products. The employees that are building the products and providing the services are doing "value-added work." Any task that an organization asks these employees to conduct that does not directly contribute to the product or service they are providing is wasteful.

For example, I recently heard about a construction company whose management was frustrated that their field employees were not submitting timely expense reports. The leadership wanted ideas to hold their employees accountable. This is the wrong way to address this issue.

Instead, the leadership should be asking why the expense reports were late instead of blaming employee motivation. Even better, they should examine if expense reports are needed at all! I can almost guarantee that their expense report process was probably too cumbersome for a construction worker who only wanted to get the job done.

Every minute a worker must adhere to some administrative edict from management is a minute that worker is not providing a product or service to a customer.

Reports. Paperwork. Email. Meetings. Ugh! These items and activities are sometimes needed, but many are ineffective and time-wasting.

An organization that clearly understands which of their processes are value-adding and strives to reduce all other activities that distract from them will be more responsive, efficient, and profitable. And, just as important, the employees will be more motivated and engaged because their time is not being wasted. 

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Government has the reputation of being bureaucratic and inefficient. Unfortunately, the reputation is well-deserved.

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
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The power couple: accounting + marketing

Marketing should be viewed as an investment with your budgeting rather than a flexible, non-essential cost. With all investments, you want to plan strategically to avoid lost resources like time, money, and possibly brand reputation. Though not all businesses will be able to view marketing costs as “fixed,” partnering with your accountant creates success.

Don't throw your money against the wall like spaghetti, hoping it will stick. Create a fiscally responsible strategy for your business. Businesses walk the line of overspending and underspending, usually due to the lack of communication between marketing and accounting. The Small Business Association suggests marketing budgets be 10-12% of gross revenue. There's plenty of advice on the percentage you should spend on marketing, but it really isn't that cut and dry. You need to be analyzing customer acquisition costs and customer lead costs. Your goals need to be clear and measurable. Knowing your business means knowing your customers and knowing your numbers.

Each business will have its own unique factors to consider. The point being, there's numbers from all angles to consider and the numbers needed to analyze your marketing investment directly correlates with your accounting. If you can start to see these numbers, then you can visualize how your dedicated marketing budget is not quite as simple as choosing a percentage of your revenue.

Your accountant should then be able to utilize marketing costs for planned tax deductions. There are tax laws designed to help businesses grow with new customers and retain existing customers by deducting expenses that are ordinary and necessary. “An ordinary expense is one that is common and accepted in the industry. A necessary expense is one that is helpful and appropriate for the trade or business. An expense does not have to be indispensable to be considered necessary.” (irs.gov)

Allow your finances to work for your business. When your accounting team and your marketing team work together, they can provide measurable information such as: return on investment (ROI), growth percentages, average sale amount, conversion rate, leads needed, and how much you are able to spend vs. how much you should spend. Hopefully, you will find yourself on the planned path leading to extra funds to better invest elsewhere. 

“You need to be analyzing customer acquisition costs...



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Increasing brand awareness and customer acquisition are essential to the success of any company. How do you plan your growth and create realistic expectations, while also spending your money wisely?

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



Courtesy photos

Agritourism in Full Bloom

Beaver Dam Farm Sunflower Festival— A Testament to the Viability of Agritourism

By Aila Boyd

Little did Candace Monaghan know when the idea of holding a small festival centered around the sunflower on her family's more than a century old farm came to her in 2016 that she was planting the seed for what would become an enduring regional event.

The first year of the Beaver Dam Farm Sunflower Festival in Buchanan exceeded her expectations when 1,600 people showed up to the one-day event even though she was just hoping for 300 visitors. Now, the festival attracts 20,000 visitors annually from throughout the region to Buchanan.

After running the festival for five years, Monaghan decided to enter The Gauntlet, a regional business program and competition, to try to propel the business to the next level. She certainly accomplished her goal by winning it in 2021.

The exposure received from the win, she said, kept the momentum around the festival going. The billboard included in her award package specifically proved

useful and helped open her eyes to the powerful impact advertising could have on the business.

Additionally, the cash she received was used to enhance the festival experience with an interactive app, www.bdfs.com, that visitors can use to identify insects that are on the sunflowers. The app also has a map and history of the farm.

Even though the festival has continued to grow in popularity in recent years, Monaghan isn't content to rest on her laurels. "You're never going to get to where it's perfect, so we're always going to work to improve things from the year before," she said.

Despite going to the festival for the novelty of being on a farm, visitors

expect a certain level of comfort, she explained. Because of that, she has worked to make the farm more welcoming, specifically through the addition of shade areas, including an awning on the barn and tents, fans and misting stations.

An additional day of live music will be added to this year's festival, which was aided in part by a \$20,000 grant she received earlier this year from the Virginia Tourism Corporation Regional Marketing program.

Monaghan isn't just relying on the festival to keep the farm going, but rather continues to diversify. After continued inquiries about using the farm as a wedding venue, she decided to move forward with the idea. "We really only use the barn during festival season...we thought we could renovate it to make it work for weddings. The view up there sells itself," she said. As part of their decision to renovate the barn, she and her husband decided to go ahead and buy the land from a family member. Gracely Hill already has bookings for next year despite only opening in April.

The venue is a combination of her two children's middle names. Both of the children, aged 14 and 16, are intimately involved in the running of things. "To involve them in the process has been great," Monaghan said.

She's also developed multiple uses for



Candace Monaghan

the sunflowers. She sells individual flowers at the festival and bundles of them to florists. As for the seeds, she sells packets that can be planted and 20-pound bags for birdseed.

Monaghan's bet that people would be willing to schlep to rural Buchanan is part of a growing agritourism trend.

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She describes it as “bringing people to your farm and letting them experience agricultural practices.”

She views the pivot she helped her farm make starting eight years ago as being vital to ensuring its ongoing legacy. She acknowledges that the decision to close the farm’s dairy facilities after 92 years was difficult. “No one wanted to have to do that, but it was either the possibility of someone coming and taking it or transforming to a new role to still keep it,” she said. A shift to raising beef cattle was also part of the transition the farm underwent. “You’ve got to do what’s best for your farm and your family.”

More recently, she’s started building up the lure of the farm. Visitors can walk around an old grain bin that has been set up to tell the history of the farm, going from 1900 to the present day. Milking equipment from the farm’s days as a dairy producer are also set up, along with a tomato label from when it was a cannery.


Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Khari Ryder, who is himself a farmer, observed Monaghan has taken an innovative approach to ensuring the survival of her family farm, and as a result has cemented the festival as a Botetourt County staple.

“It seems a lot of people are going back

to the soil. That, especially with Botetourt County’s rural perspective, will bring people in who want to visit and see how things are done,” he said.

The larger economic impact of the festival is hard to ignore. Last year, the 109 vendors who attended the festival sold \$365,000 worth of goods. “We’re pretty excited that we can help small, family-owned businesses,” Monaghan said. Many of the vendors are locals. She anticipates this year’s festival will have the most vendors yet, with roughly 115 expected to attend.

“Botetourt County’s history and identity is very much connected with agriculture. And, we are blessed to have several agritourism destinations here in Botetourt, like Martin Farms, Virginia Mountain Vineyards, Blue Ridge Mountain Vineyard, Stoney Brook Vineyards, the Beaver Dam Sunflower Festival, the Fall Festival & Country Store at Jeter Farm, and Ikenberry Orchards & Country Store, just to name a few,” Ken McFadyen, Botetourt’s director of economic development, said.

The county said the annual economic impact of agritourism on the county is well over \$1 million, McFadyen adding that the industry adds to the county’s quality of life and attractiveness as a tourist destination within Virginia’s Blue Ridge. 

Top Things To Look For in a Cell Phone Plan

When shopping for a cell phone plan, you want to get the best value for your money. Sure, you don't want to pay too much. But given the important roles that mobile phones play in our day to day lives, you need to select a plan that fits your life.

Before you sign up for a new cell phone plan, here are some important things to consider:

1. Network Reliability

It's important to be able to reach people and get online when you want. Check the carrier's coverage map to make sure it provides the best service in a big enough area for your needs. Cox Mobile, for example, offers the industry standard of 5G services where available and 4G LTE on all devices across the country.

2. Data Options

When it comes to data, one size definitely doesn't fit all. Cox Mobile offers two data plans — a "Pay as You Gig" version that adapts to your data needs and a "Gig Unlimited" option — both using its 5G network and including unlimited talk and text. You can change your data plan at any time as your usage changes and always switch back.

3. Mobile Hotspots

Mobile hotspots allow you to connect to wifi when you're at home or on the go. It's a good way to save on data, because you're tapping the network, instead of your own plan. Cox offers 4 million of these hotspots, thanks to our extensive network.

4. Devices

A good cell phone plan is useless if you don't have a good phone to take advantage of it. Cox lets you bring your own device and also offers the latest Samsung Galaxy and iPhones.

Ready to make a switch? Cox Mobile is now available to our customers in Roanoke. Explore plans and devices online or visit us at our new retail store located at 1414 Towne Square Blvd, NW (corner of Towne Square Blvd and Rutgers St).

“We're proud to keep our customers connected no matter which service they choose from us, as long as we're making their lives easier and driving innovation right into the palm of their hands. The addition of the Cox Mobile platform is built from the ground-up with our customers in mind, and we look forward to driving even deeper connections across the Roanoke Valley.”



Jeff Merritt
Market Vice President,
Cox Roanoke



Your people system #3: lead well

Creating a **Best Job EVER company culture** hinges on Employee Engagement, and only works when a 3-part system is used: **HIRE RIGHT, ENGAGE EMPLOYEES** and **LEAD WELL**. Skip one of the parts, and engagement is difficult. This column offers more on the final and third part: **LEAD WELL**.

Research shows that over 57% of employees leave a company because of their boss. Lack of communication and a poor company culture are leading causes. Great bosses foster employee engagement and retention because they connect with, build respect with, and develop employees who produce. The results are less turnover, greater performance, and more profits in their business - the outcomes of a Best Job EVER culture.

When employees are asked what makes a great boss, they cite the following:

- Provides clear expectations
- Fosters relationships and team-building
- Offers growth and development opportunities
- Recognizes and rewards
- Promotes work-life balance
- Leads by example

The list above requires regular feedback and starts with clear expectations. While 96% of employees report they want feedback, only 1 in 4 companies provide it, usually in the form of a **Performance Appraisal**. Leaders often are untrained and hate to do them, while employees dread it, finding them painful, inaccurate, and ineffective. Because of these feelings, and to accomplish the bullet points above, I advocate replacing the traditional Performance Appraisal with **Job Expectations**.

1. Compared to Performance Appraisal, Job Expectations gives a more positive impression. The negative connotation of the former often causes anxiety and fear.
2. Job expectations are proactive. Armed with this, you know what you are recruiting for. You share them with candidates during interviews. You then onboard new employees with these clear expectations. You guide and manage employees to these expectations. Performance Appraisals are retrospective; Job Expectations are more of a compass for future desired outcomes and success.
3. Job Expectations have specific behaviors to the job and can be customized to an employee. Performance Appraisals often have vague terminology such as "team player" or "positive attitude." Neither the manager nor the employee understands the specifics that contribute to a rating of

BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake


Executive Summary:

Great bosses foster employee engagement and retention because they connect with, build respect with, and develop employees who produce.

Jennifer Leake CMC® is an expert in employee assessment, Emotional Intelligence, and founder of the Best Job EVER company culture system. When you HIRE RIGHT, ENGAGE EMPLOYEES, and LEAD WELL, the results are greater performance by employees, and more revenue and profits for your company.

meets or exceeds expectations ... or even worse, what is unacceptable or below expectations. Hence the more subjective rating that employees often disagree with.

4. Performance Appraisals are done once or twice a year. Job Expectations result in regular discussions that promote ongoing communication and feedback, real-time growth, and a more agile and adaptable workforce.

To support my mission of Job Expectations in the workplace, I am offering a complimentary virtual session on the topic. To learn more about the concept and how you can create your own, simply scan the QR code in this column for more information. 



...over 57% of employees leave a company because of their boss.



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All Photos courtesy of DCR

Harvest time on a Virginia farm

Agriculture's Best Practices

Virginia farms look to boost productivity and profitability

By Gene Marrano

It's not a new program, but there's more money than ever available to Virginia farmers that keep their land and adjacent water sources cleaner.

The Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share program (VACS) is ready to dole out \$124.6 million in state funds for fiscal year 2024 to farmers – up to \$300,000 per recipient. What's the catch? Those farmers have to adopt best management practices

that keep nutrients, sediment and waste out of streams and rivers that adjoin their land. Many are one time awards – say for fencing erected to keep cattle out of the river, while for other ongoing projects or new ones that funding may be available again.



James Martin

VACS lists more than 70 best management practices that are eligible for funding, including the planting of cover crops to reduce erosion, nutrient management plans, streamside tree or grass buffers, livestock stream-exclusion funding and alternative water systems for livestock. Once again as in the last fiscal year the amount of money available for the program is being called record-breaking. It's certainly not new and has been around since the mid 80's.

The Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) works with the Commonwealth's 47 soil and water conservation districts, directly with those farmers, providing technical assistance and distributing funds from the VACS program.



Planting trees or grass strips between farmland and streams can reduce soil loss from wind and water erosion — and provide the farmer a long-term soil rental income, as well.

DCR director Matthew Wells says its all about implementing “valuable practices on their operations that improve both their bottom lines and the state’s natural resources.”

James Martin, the Division Director of the Division of Soil and Water Conservation for DCR, says the ultimate goal is to improve water quality in Virginia streams and rivers – and ultimately in the Chesapeake Bay - by enlisting the farming sector in that battle. “It’s a water quality focused program but many of the practices ... have benefits to farmers as well.”

Such as making sure fertilizers applied in the field stay there to help improve crop yields by not running off after a rain into a nearby waterway. Farmers must first contact their local soil and water conservation district, which may cover one or several counties, where a local board of directors approves the projects. “In most cases they have existing



Nutrient management plans ensure that crops across the entire acreage get only the nutrients plants will actually use. Each plan **is tailored to each farm’s specific needs.**

relationships with these farmers,” notes Martin, who had been Virginia’s Chesapeake Bay Program Manager at DEQ before assuming this role with DCR almost two years ago. In his previous position with DEQ, Martin says they did see evidence that best practices put in place in part by the VACS program were making “significant,” positive impact on Chesapeake Bay water quality, with less runoff from fertilizers winding up in streams and rivers evident during regular testing.

After filing an application DCR provides technical assistance on site to evaluate which best practices make sense and are best suited for VACS program funding. Its generally a reimbursement process, once an approved project that demonstrates best practices have been implemented up to \$300,000 may come back to the farmer. Usually that award will cover 50 to 75% of what was spent to implement those changes. Some of those best practices – like cover

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Installing livestock fencing along waterways creates a long-term improvement to the farm's infrastructure.




Alternative livestock watering systems such as this one on Farmer Albert McGee's ranch provide clean water and keep animals from gathering in streams to drink.

crops (a non-cash crop that can also increase soil organic matter) – may be eligible annually, others, like installing a livestock fence, may be a one-time occurrence. It is a cost sharing program that doesn't cover implementation of best practices 100%, meaning "every farmer has skin in the game," says Martin.

Many farmers in Virginia have participated in the decades-old VACS program at one point or another, but "some are still learning about it," says Martin, adding that DCR has incentive programs as well to bring past users of the program back for another project. Like a maintenance payment to keep their livestock exclusion fence along the river at the edge of property in good shape. One change this year – the paperwork has been simplified for VACS applicants. "We've also

added a tremendous amount of flexibility to the program over the years," says Martin, in an effort to attract more farmers. DCR also listens to feedback on what obstacles are stopping more from taking part and looks to make tweaks where possible.

There are also new incentives in place for smaller cattle operations, and more districts this fiscal year can take advantage of a one-time "Whole Farm Approach" program to offset costs associated with nutrient management and cover crop practices. There are around 40,000 farms large and small in Virginia notes Martin. He encourages more of them to find out how they can secure a piece of that \$124.6 million available in the new fiscal year. (see www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/swcnds for more information) 

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Gene Marrano

Galen cuts the ribbon >

The **Galen College of Nursing** held a ribbon cutting in late June at their new 34,000 sq. ft. campus on Electric Road in southwest Roanoke County, which the college opened earlier this year in partnership with HCA Virginia Health System and LewisGale Medical Center. **Alan Fabian**, marketing president for LewisGale, says this facility help will ensure the future of nursing is strong. "The Galen demographic average for students is late 20's and 30's. When we think about that we think about the youth in our community and the ability to train them to be nurses ... for a longer period of time."

Deonte Dance, who currently works at Lewis Gale in an administrative role, says Galen gives him the opportunity to help people by becoming a nurse. "My family is rich with medical professionals, [my] cousin is a doctor. I've always wanted to go about

doing this and Galen has really provided a good opportunity for me to pursue that." Galen has recently welcomed a new class of 70 first year students to its new campus in the former All State Insurance building on electric road in Roanoke County.

Kimberly Brown, Associate Dean with Galen College of Roanoke, says the partnership with HCA Virginia Health System (which has a small stake in the Galen system (now at 15 campuses nationwide) allows students to receive clinical training through LewisGale clinics, and some faculty will come from Lewis Gale. "We have a two-year associate's degree in nursing that yields an RN and an LPN-RN bridge program for people that are currently licensed as RPN's." Fabian says investing in nursing talent is critical. "In our region we absolutely have a nursing shortage – throughout the entire southwest Virginia [region.]" The campus features multiple skill labs and mannequins that simulate real-life patients.



Gene Marrano



Good Sam Center for Caring gets sizable financial boost >

Construction is already underway for Roanoke's first inpatient hospice house—**Good Samaritan Hospice's Center for Caring** on Cove Road in northwest Roanoke. The Center will have 16 patient rooms, family meeting rooms, as well as a chapel and gardens. Though work has begun, Good Sam staff say they're still not quite at their \$5 million goal for the project, but they are getting closer. **Alan Ronk**, President and CEO of the **Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia**, says it wasn't hard for his organization to come to the decision to donate \$500,000: "I will share with you that this program and this project flew through our process at lightning speed." Ronk recalled the special care his own father

received in hospice about twenty years ago.

The grant is the largest award to any single project in the Foundation's 35-year history. The new Center for Caring aims to provide specialized end-of-life care for patients and their families. **Betsy Whitney**, Chief Philanthropy Officer of Good Samaritan Hospice, says the goal is to bridge a gap in the Valley's healthcare infrastructure: "there is not one within two hours of the Roanoke Valley. In North Carolina for instance has almost one [inpatient hospice center] in every county. We're starting in Southwest Virginia and proud to be the first." The Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia donation of \$500,000 brings Good Sam to more than halfway towards their \$5 million goal for the 30,000 sq. ft. center, which will also provide office space for their staff. *Group photo L-R Michelle Eberly, Alan Ronk (Community Foundation), Aaron Housh and Betsy Whitney (Good Sam).*



VT photos

AgriBiz at VT

Virginia Tech offers expanded options for agribusiness majors

By Shawn Nowlin

Virginia Tech ranks among the top ten institutions in America for agriculture degrees.

Said rankings from the National Science Foundation are based on various sources, including the number of graduates, student debt and additional factors. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences annually graduates approximately 800 seniors across 17 majors.

This year's school and departmental outstanding seniors were Mia Bostic and Henry Adkins (Agricultural and applied economics), Carly Campbell and Zack Morris (Agricultural, leadership and

community education), Tessa Wannenburg (Agricultural technology), Maria Dorodnitsyna (Biochemistry), McKenna Helder (Food science and technology), Noah Stallard (Human nutrition, foods and exercise), Jenna Marston and Katie Kirkpatrick (School of Animal Sciences) as well as Tex Naughton-Rockwell and Jillian Burgan (School of Plant and Environmental Sciences).

Determined, bright and focused individuals like the aforementioned names are uniquely positioned to start the next chapter of their



Mia Bostic



Henry Adkins



Dr. Dixie Watts Dalton



Dr. Olga Massa

lives. “Having the opportunity to be an undergraduate research assistant has been an honor and privilege. I worked alongside the Department of Forestry, where we acted on policy and implemented it across the state. It was immensely gratifying. I am taking a gap year to pursue world travel and work part-time as a manager for a local company,” Bostic said.

Adkins, who will now complete his master’s in applied economics, said, “this past summer, I interned for Dairy Farmers of America, the largest dairy cooperative in the U.S., working in risk management. This helped provide me with valuable insight into professionalism and work ethic in an office.”

The Bachelor of Science in agribusiness offers two undergraduate majors – agribusiness management and veterinary business management. The former allows students to pursue an area of specialization within areas such as agronomy and horticulture while the latter allows students to complete the science coursework required for entry into veterinary college. Agribusiness is just one of the Bachelor of Science degrees that can be obtained from the Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics.

Dr. Dixie Watts Dalton started as a Virginia Tech faculty member in July 1993. She initially worked in a position that focused on teaching undergraduate agribusiness classes. In her capacity role today, she develops curriculum, teaches and recruits students. Her colleague, Dr. Olga Massa, joined the Virginia Tech family eight years ago.


“People often don’t realize the breadth and depth of the agribusiness industry. Starting with the many products and services that farmers require as inputs to the production process, it also includes everything that must happen to an agricultural commodity, to

transform it from a raw product on a farm to a finished food, fiber or fuel product desired by consumers,” Massa said.

Explained Dalton, “While certain aspects of agribusiness have remained constant through the years, technological advancements will continue to evolve, and the importance of data analytics will continue to grow. This means that employment opportunities will continue to expand. We prepare our students for both traditional and emerging trends in agribusiness.”

Farming usually comes to mind when people think of agriculture, but it includes much more. Six U.S. Senators – John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.), Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Todd Young (R-Ind.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) and Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) – recently introduced a bill to expand community college offerings in agriculture education. If fully implemented, the bipartisan bill would authorize funding for community college workforce education, training and research programs.

Imperative to adding more talent in the Ag field is motivating more students to pursue a degree. At the same time, Dalton and Massa are the first to say that the field is not for everyone. “The bachelor’s degree in agribusiness prepares students to enter one of the largest industries in the world that people literally cannot live without: food, fiber and fuel. The degree allows students to concentrate on agricultural finance, farm and agribusiness management, marketing and risk management,” Dalton said.

Since earning their degree, some members of the Class of ’23 have decided to work as a consultant, some will further their education and others will embark on a different life journey. See more: www.vt.edu/academics/majors/agribusiness.html or onlinems.aaec.vt.edu. 



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
*Our publisher gets
in on the "Best
Bosses" feature.*

Astute, not aloof

For most of my adult life, I've worked for myself. So, if I don't like the boss, I have only myself to blame.

But I did have several "two-year-or fewer" assignments with real employers and real supervisors. I either reported directly to the boss, or one C-level down. In our feature on Best Bosses, I noticed most respondents were able to quickly identify a favorite boss—even if they had a lot of jobs.

It made me think. I guess I'm in the same boat. Most of my bosses were ok. A few (three?) were not good at all (and those provided as useful lessons as the good or average ones).

But one did stand out.

Larry Bernath was brought into a Roanoke-based engineering and manufacturing company as a ringer of sorts. Hired for the specific purpose of improving the business—in that most important operation of sales and marketing. In fact, I had heard through the grapevine that the "purpose" was specific to the point where the president-owner-founder had an objective to hit a revenue milestone that was quite aggressive—near impossible.

These "conditions" bring me back to Larry.

My entrance—his hiring of me—was a rough start. Larry described that I would be coming in to replace a beloved employee. EVERYBODY loved her. But he was building a "new department," and I might feel the heat of disfavor for a while (since he just fired her).


He was right.

I was 25 years old; I needed a job; and I wanted something in advertising. So, though I was excited to get this "marketing coordinator" position, indeed I felt some animosity from my brand new fellow employees.

Larry also said that roughness would wear off. And he was right about that, too. I ended up making some of the best work friends a guy could have.

How Larry handled that initial trouble was the same characteristic that made him a good boss. He had his own plate full; but he treated my work there like it affected him and was just as critical to his performance.

There are numerous examples of Larry's attentiveness; but in short, he cared for his charges. Many bosses can be aloof to employees who they see as having their own tasks that are separate from the overall management. These bosses can't get involved in the details of every employee; they have their own workload, after all.

But a really good boss is astute, gives that attention, earns loads of respect, and ultimately serves the business well beyond bossy duties. 


What to make of “Threads”

The reports are stark and alarming for Elon Musk and the *Twitter* microblogging app since he spent something like 43 billion dollars to purchase it - after first taking up some massive loans to do that, he's now having trouble paying the rent. *CNN* reported last month that revenues were down about 50 percent and many advertisers have left the platform since the Musk takeover. Some are leery he will take the guard rails off what can be posted to the app (hate speech, misinformation etc.) The tech whiz, also in charge of Tesla and SpaceX, is apparently trying to make the switch to more of a subscription model, where people would pay for those blue “verified” checkmarks, and away from an ad-based service. That has gone over like the proverbial lead balloon.

Enter *Threads*, a Twitter-like new app from Mark Zuckerberg and the folks at Meta, a shot across the bow at Musk. Many businesses use Twitter as part of their social media marketing/awareness campaign, along with Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, maybe Pinterest and probably some others I'm not even aware of.

Will Threads be around long enough to be something your business (or personal users for that matter) should take on? It did register 100 million users within the first five days and probably many more by the time you read this. It's supposedly easy to sign on to from an Instagram account that many have in place already, and the plan is that if not now then soon it can be tied to all Meta platforms, including WhatsApp (I think I spelled that right).

Mike Horning, an associate professor of multimedia journalism at Virginia Tech's School of Communication, says, “Threads will have to meet ... three challenges,” in order to remain viable and relative. It has to fill some new niche with certain types of users or demographics (Tik Tok, now used by even the New York Yankees to promote their team, filled a music sharing niche at its outset.) A new app like Threads has to build a critical mass of followers that makes it a compelling for people to go there. It would seem Threads is off to a good start.

The third challenge is “buy-in on the part of advertisers,” Horning wrote recently. “All social media apps rely on advertising, and if Meta can articulate to advertisers how this app provides added value to them, then they will likely invest in the app. If that isn't clear to advertisers, then the app will be short lived.” That ad revenue – or lack of it at this point – is hurting Twitter. Musk has already laid off thousands of employees – too many in departments like compliance, some say. So, is Threads right for Twitter users as an alternative or another social media app must-have? Time may tell. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Meta aims for Twitter with new social media app. Does our business need to climb on board yet?



GUEST COMMENTARY

By Anne Millehan

Executive Summary:
Another take on the coaching topic we featured last month.

Using a Business Coach to the best advantage

As a business coach, I prioritize creating a safe and supportive environment where clients feel heard and understood and new clients should expect no less from their coaches. I let the clients lead the conversation, allowing them to discuss their agenda and goals. I actively listen for key discussion points and ask in-depth questions to help them make self-discoveries and find solutions that work best for them. This client-centered approach fosters receptiveness and empowers clients to take ownership of their development.

Quality business coaches should tailor their consultative approach to the most important issues affecting business. Generally, I'll start a partnership by jointly identifying the potential value areas most impactful to the client. Some of the key areas that I often focus on include:

- **Execution strategies:** Helping businesses identify where to allocate their time, money, and energy to align with their mission and maximize return on investment.
- **Leadership and management:** Assisting small businesses in developing effective leadership skills, team building, delegation, and overall organizational development.
- **Communication and time management:** Enhancing clients' communication and interpersonal skills to improve relationships with employees, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. Additionally, helping them manage their time more efficiently.
- **Systems and processes:** Guiding entrepreneurs in developing streamlined operational systems and processes that increase productivity and enhance customer satisfaction.
- **Goal setting and accountability:** Working with clients to set SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) and holding them accountable for their progress.

Once a focus area is identified, we'll discuss the client's issues and opportunities within that area. Every client has unique needs, and the issues they seek help with can vary. Some common areas where clients often require assistance include:

- **Time management and prioritization:** Clients often seek guidance in managing their time effectively, setting priorities, and overcoming challenges related to time constraints.
- **Business strategy and decision-making:** Many clients require support in developing or refining their business strategies, making informed decisions, and navigating challenges in their industry or market.


- **Leadership and team development:** Clients often seek help in improving their leadership skills, building effective teams, resolving conflicts, and creating a positive work culture.
- **Sales and marketing:** small businesses often need guidance in enhancing their sales and marketing efforts, attracting and retaining customers, and increasing their market presence.

Once a client's focus area and opportunity are identified, it's important for the business coach to take a collaborative approach in tailoring recommendations for the client's specific situation and goals. Some general recommendations that I often make include:

- **Setting clear goals:** Encouraging clients to define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals to provide clarity and direction.
- **Developing effective communication skills:** Emphasizing the importance of active listening, clear and concise communication, and adapting communication styles to different stakeholders.
- **Implementing efficient systems and processes:** Assisting clients in identifying areas for process improvement, implementing streamlined systems, and utilizing technology to increase efficiency.
- **Building strong relationships:** Encouraging clients to focus on building positive relationships with employees, customers, suppliers, and other key stakeholders to foster collaboration and long-term success.
- **Continuous learning and professional development:** Supporting clients in staying updated with industry trends, acquiring new skills, and seeking opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Every client is unique, and there's no one size fits all solution. A client's lifestyle, schedule, and other factors all influence a client's customized action plan.

To assess these and other relevant issues, I typically begin with a free discovery consultation. This initial session allows me to meet the client and determine if we are a good fit for working together. During this consultation, I gain a better understanding of their goals, challenges, and opportunities.

If I believe I have the necessary coaching skills to support them, we proceed. However, if their needs require a different set of coaching skills, I may refer them to another business coach who specializes in that area. The discovery consultation is a valuable opportunity to align client expectations and assess how I can best support their specific needs. 



A client's lifestyle, schedule, and other factors all influence a customized action plan.



GUEST COMMENTARY

By Carrie Poff

Executive Summary:

A local contractor shares advice for homeowners when having work done onsite.

Homeowner tips when hiring a professional contractor

Summer is upon us, and we are spending more time outside. While soaking up that essential Vitamin D, we stroll through our yards and take note of many things: which perennials have returned, which trees need trimming, there are driveways to reseal, siding to pressure wash, and gutters to replace. There's always work to be done, and curb appeal is an important element to many, especially when getting ready to buy or sell a home.


There are some projects we can tackle ourselves, but (setting our egos aside) there are some jobs that we need to hire a professional for. There are several factors that help a homeowner decide which contractor to hire, such as job scheduling and cost, but there are more important factors that many people overlook when hiring.

When getting an estimate for your project, here are some things to consider:

- 1) Get several estimates**, but don't always pick the cheapest. You get what you pay for. A higher cost is associated with higher overhead, which covers proper insurance, employee benefits, salaries and wages, regular maintenance on vehicles and equipment, a business license, and experience.
- 2) Don't pay until the job is complete.** Often times, this is how people get swindled. In the winter months it may be more common to get this request as the workload is less and companies have a more difficult time making ends meet. Still and yet, it's okay to tell whomever you hire that you're not comfortable paying until the job is done to your satisfaction.
- 3) Always request a Certificate of Insurance.** Did you know that in Virginia, a company that has three or more employees is required to carry workers compensation? It's okay to ask how many employees the contractor has, and to always request this proof. If you hire a company that doesn't have the proper insurances in place and damage occurs to either people or personal property, the liability can fall on you. Protect yourself.
- 4) Hire locally.** If you need more work done in the future or if a problem arises, they will be easier to work with.
- 5) Manage yard debris.** If having yardwork done, please know that companies can't leave vegetation debris on the curb. You, as the homeowner, are allowed to move said debris to the curb, but your municipality has the

right to refuse to pick it up if money was exchanged in creating that debris. If you create lawn debris on your own, feel free to set this out for bulk pickup.

- 6) **Check references.** There are a lot of fly-by-night companies that pop up that might look good on paper, but if they don't have references online (think Google, Yelp, BBB, social media), then you ought to be wary.
- 7) **Get something in writing.** A handshake might work for some, but when your property and money are on the line, the lack of a contract could be a deal breaker. Before you sign, make sure the work is described exactly how you want it done. Some companies will say they don't need to add all of the details, but you can still insist on it being done this way. Emails and paper trails can protect you if work is not done to your liking.
- 8) **Be patient.** Summer is a very busy season for many contractors, and depending on their workload, the weather, and staffing issues, it is best to take a deep breath and know that even if you're not next in line, your project is important, and you will be taken care of. Flexibility is key to not letting your project stress you out.
- 9) **Stay safe.** While contractors appreciate your willingness to help, they have an obligation to keep you safe. Feel free to grab a lawn chair, some ear plugs, if necessary, a cold drink, and then watch from a safe distance!

Do your due diligence and vet who you hire. Make sure they are bona-fide and that you are protected. Here's to a summer of favorable weather, beautiful yards, protected property owners, and reasonable expectations. 

““
If you hire a company that doesn't have the proper insurances in place and damage occurs to either people or personal property, the liability can fall on you.



Do you due diligence and vet who you hire.

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.

Funny man tells all

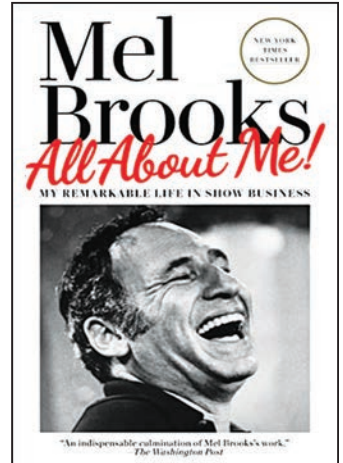
Either you're a Mel Brooks fan or you are not. I am, was, especially during his hey day that started with *The Producers* movie and continued into the 1970's with *Blazing Saddles*, *Young Frankenstein* (my favorite), *High Anxiety* (an ode to Hitchcock) and the ingenious *Silent Movie*, where the only word spoken – "No!" – was uttered by the famous French mime, Marcel Marceau. The kid from Brooklyn who started out life as Melvin Kaminsky first came to prominence as a writer for Sid Caesar's TV shows (and on other projects in the 50's, working with the likes of Neil and Danny Simon, Lucille Kallen, Howie Morris, Larry Gelbart (of M*A*S*H fame later on) et al. Then it was teaming up with Carl Reiner for The 2000 Year Old Man records and live appearances.

He met and collaborated with his future wife, Anne Bancroft. Brought Gene Wilder to prominence and enlisted the likes of Harvey Korman and Dom DeLuise as trusty sidekicks. It's all told in loving and funny detail by Mel Brooks. He became a Broadway producer and even wrote music for the hit stage version of *The Producers*, with Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane in the lead roles. The memoir is *Mel Brooks. All About Me! My Remarkable Life in Show Business* (Ballantine Books, 2021, the paperback was released recently.) Now in his nineties and presumably still funny, Brooks fans – and those who just like movie comedies - will just eat it up.

—Gene Marrano

What parents?

So, here I am, reading yet another novel set in Appalachia. This one, *All The Forgivenesses* (Scognamiglio; 2019) by Elizabeth Hardinger, provides much of the hardscrabble life many of us have seen in those vintage black-and-white



photographs—particularly in the early 1900s. Our follow-along narrator, from early childhood to adulthood, shares her pain in a matter-of-fact fashion that evokes grand heaps of dirty rural pity (which is the one reaction she will have none of).

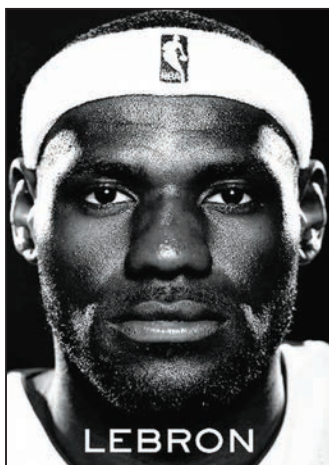
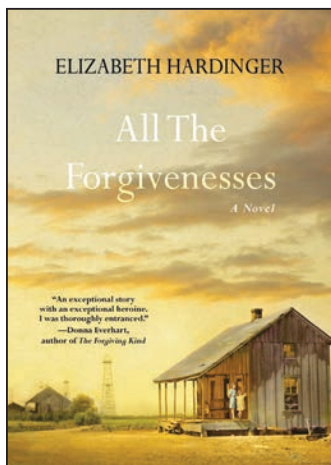
The novel strikes me in the gut mostly in one respect: that role of parenthood that folks get—whether they want it or not—and how so many screw it all up in the worst ways possible. I'm reminded how fortunate a body is who had at least one reasonably functioning, even semi-fractionally responsible parent. So many children, regardless of the setting and time period, have suffered from parents who were (are) ill-equipped, incapable, mentally-physically-economically-spiritually-or perhaps even biologically unsuitable for the job. Blessings become curses from the moment these babies arrive; and it's a wonder the whole world has not gone mad from the terrible conditioning.

Irresponsible parents have always been my top demographic of intolerance. I'm not sure I'll ever be able to overcome my discrimination there. This novel didn't help on that regard; but it did make me scratch my head why a mother or father couldn't at least raise their flesh and blood with the same care they gave their common barn animals—poverty notwithstanding. There are a few specs of hope in *Forgivenesses*; hardly enough to relieve your gut-wrenching. Here's one you can read and weep.

—Tom Field

Lebron under the microscope

Author Jeff Benedict is a phenomenal writer, having penned 17 non-fiction books, often



bestsellers, including one on Tiger Woods, another on quarterback Steve Young. His *Little Pink House*, about an eminent domain case of a homeowner fighting developers and the town that wanted her gone was riveting. (I interviewed Jeff Benedict in person for that one when he was teaching at Southern Virginia University in Buena Vista; he lives in Connecticut now). His latest is simply entitled *LeBron* (Avid Reader Press, 2013), a look at the remarkable life and basketball career of LeBron James. From an early age, living in an impoverished household without his father for most of it, and with a mother he loved dearly battling substance abuse, James seized on his extraordinary talent to play basketball as his way out. At the same time he became a loving and attentive father at an early age; his son Bronny could be in National Basketball Association a year or two down the road.

King James went straight to the NBA from high school, first to the Cleveland Cavaliers just 40 miles or so from his beloved hometown of Akron. From early on as a pro he recognized the power of the media, Hollywood and making connections; he got investing tips from Warren Buffett and surrounded himself with childhood friends who grew professionally and personally as he did. Even some NBA people put off by missteps like the live televised “Decision” to jump from Cleveland to the Miami Heat – where James led his team to four Finals appearances and two titles – will gain a good deal of respect for a man who at age 38 is still one of the top players in the league, now with the LA Lakers. Masterful storytelling from Jeff Benedict – and you don’t have to be a huge basketball fan to enjoy *LeBron*. There’s plenty of business savvy here as well,

for a man now worth a reported billion dollars.

—Gene Marrano

Un-unsubscribable

Here’s a review NOT about a work of art, and NOT about the art gallery (okay, maybe a little). It’s about... an email. Downtown Roanoke’s The Little Gallery (right on the farmers’ market) sends out regular emails—like a lot of businesses. And like a lot of emails, I don’t recall subscribing or how I got on the list.

But I just can’t unsubscribe.

It’s just a little thing; but I love how The Little Gallery shoots out its announcements about the latest “new artist” in house. They’re often local, or regional. And it’s a short and sweet teaser-preview of the artist’s work. Many times (most? always?) the artwork has some regional flair or appeal (like our own mountains or east-coast, mid-Atlantic locales) and it’s a delight looking at each artist’s unique interpretations. In fact, it’s like taking a little mini-tour in the gallery itself. Only a few seconds long. It’s certainly an encouraging invitation. The Little Gallery (not as little as a lot of eclectic little artsy merchants you run across in downtowns) also features décor, like lamps and such. But this little “touring presentation of selected artists” in its ongoing little email... well, it’s a nice way to start your day.

—Tom Field

The reviewers: **Tom Field** is a creative director and publishes FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is a news correspondent on radio and editor of FRONT.



Roanoke's Greenway closer to finish >

Roanoke Parks and Recreation and the Roanoke Valley Greenways Commission held a ribbon cutting late last month to celebrate the opening of a new section of Roanoke River Greenway, at the Bridge Street Trailhead parking lot in the Norwich neighborhood. The new 1-mile stretch starts at the Norfolk Southern Materials Yard, crossing the Roanoke River via a 270-foot pedestrian bridge, the longest bridge in the greenway network. The section then continues along the river to the Bridge Street Trailhead. In total, this contiguous stretch of Roanoke River Greenway is now just over 12-miles, running from the Cook Avenue Trailhead in the City of Salem to the Bennington Trailhead in Southeast Roanoke.



Yo ho, pirates storm me lake >

Scallywags (and nice folks alike) gathered en masse for the **Smith Mountain Lake 10th Annual Pirate Days** at the Crazy Horse Marina the middle weekend of June. Despite the sweltering temperature, around 100 vendors showed their wares and food, singers and dancers performed, canons were fired, and full pirate garb adorned fun-seekers of all demographics. The affair also features a water battle with boats decked out like pirate ships.



Gene Marrano



Camp Carilion offers career options >

Carilion Clinic, Radford University Carilion, and the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC teamed up early this summer to give local teenagers hands-on learning opportunities, employing mannequins in many cases to perform tasks they would as a medical professional. **Cora Houston**, a rising senior at Franklin County High School, says seeing the nurses in action at "Camp Carilion" has helped solidify her dreams of becoming a Pediatric Cardiologist: "seeing them work in teams at something that they truly love inspires me to keep going and to really get to a point in my life where I want to teach others. Knowing that they love what they do and are so passionate about it really gives me that extra boost to keep going."



Gene Marrano



Madness on the strip >

The annual **Star City Motor Madness** held recently included an all-comers cruise down **Williamson Road** on a Friday night, and then a vintage juried car show that draws hundreds of people (if not more) to check out rides dating back 100 years in a few cases. Many are from the muscle car era in the 60's and 70's, or those gaudy fin and chrome models popular from the 50's. Proceeds from entry fees and sponsorships benefits the **Virginia Museum of Transportation**, where **Mendy Flynn** is the executive director: "Star City Motor Madness brings people from all over the country. You see some really rare and unique cars. It triggers a lot of memories. Great visibility for [the museum]."



LG gets L2 Trauma >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem announced that the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Health (VDH) State Health Commissioner has designated the hospital as a Level II Trauma Center. LewisGale Medical Center began its pursuit of Level II trauma status in spring 2022 in response to the area's need for enhanced levels of comprehensive emergency service. The announcement follows VDH's recent reverification of its sister facility, LewisGale Hospital Montgomery, in Blacksburg as a Level III Trauma Center after a rigorous on-site survey with zero deficiencies. The facility has maintained this accreditation for 31 years.

"Recovery is greatly increased when a severely injured patient receives care at a designated trauma center within the first hour of injury," said **Jaromir Kohout**, MD, trauma medical director at LewisGale Medical Center. Carilion Clinic remains the only level one trauma center in the region.



PLAY Roanoke climbing >

A donation from **Roanoke Parks Foundation** has enabled **PLAY Roanoke** to purchase a portable climbing tower. The Roanoke Parks Foundation was formed in 2022 with the mission to "support the City of Roanoke's Parks and Recreation Department by raising funds, accepting gifts, and providing other resources." The Roanoke Parks Foundation has now raised sufficient matching funds for Roanoke Parks and Recreation (PLAY Roanoke) to purchase a portable climbing tower. Beyond various summer camps, PLAY Roanoke staff plan to utilize the climbing tower at events in Elmwood Park, the Roanoke GO Outside Festival, and other pop-up locations. "This is a great first project for the Foundation because it allows our Department to offer programs across the City," said **Patrick Boas**, Recreation Manager for Roanoke Parks and Recreation. Across the country, Parks and Recreation Departments comparable to Roanoke typically receive around 4-6% of their annual City budget, while Roanoke Parks and Recreation receives less than 2% of the City of Roanoke budget.



Courtesy photo

Fish tales >

The Orvis retail store in downtown Roanoke on Campbell Avenue that sells outdoor equipment and clothing also gives free fly fishing lessons each summer. In late June, a group of would-be fly fishermen get some pointers. Orvis also has a fulfillment warehouse in Roanoke.



Courtesy photos



Breakfast in Blacksburg >

Eggs Up Grill, a growing breakfast, brunch and lunch franchise concept based in South Carolina, will open a new restaurant this Fall in **Blacksburg** this fall at 1340 South Main Street in the **Gables Shopping Center**. There are several other Eggs Up locations in Virginia with more being planned. The Blacksburg restaurant is owned by the husband-and-wife team **Darren and Samantha Gilreath**, who relocated to Newport (New River Valley) after first purchasing Darren's family legacy Christmas tree farm - Joe's Trees. This the first Eggs Up Grill in Southwest Virginia. The Gilreaths moved to the area after lengthy careers in the railroad industry in Kentucky. Samantha is currently a local schoolteacher and Darren is the third generation to run the Christmas tree farm his family founded in 1962.

"Right away, we loved the atmosphere and food at Eggs Up Grill and felt it was so inviting and down to Earth," said Samantha Gilreath. "Blacksburg needed a breakfast spot with a great atmosphere where you can spend time with friends and family who are visiting, or just locals who want to gather over the best breakfast, brunch and lunch in town." The couple also plans to support local charitable organizations and youth sports programs. Eggs Up Grill caters and has a menu featuring breakfast favorites like eggs, grits, home fries, biscuits and gravy and muffins. Salads and sandwiches are available for catered lunch.



Tom Field



Rooftop appreciation >

The second annual **Freedom First Cocktail Classic** was held at downtown Roanoke's Center in the Square Rooftop on July 8. Also sponsored by **HSH Insurance**, the event celebrates the best of local business, like **Brady's Distillery**, who prepared craft cocktails to the appreciative attendees, along with music, delectable food and beverages, a hand rolled cigar station, and auction—where proceeds benefitted **Roanoke Veteran Outreach**. There was also a reminder on the rooftop venue for the upcoming **Six & Sky** panoramic seafood, steak, and spirits restaurant that is planned for a mid-Autumn opening.



Gene Marrano



New lodging springs up in ROCO >

The construction business in the Roanoke area is apparently booming. That's according to **Christina Patel**, the Regional Director of Operations for **Woodspring Suites**, which has cut the ribbon on its extended stay hotel just off I-581 at Peters Creek Road in Roanoke County: "we are designed for the construction workers, traveling nurses, relocation. This market was in need of a brand new extended stay." Patel said last month that 40 percent of the first month bookings since Woodspring opened in May have come from construction-related companies. Each suite is equipped with a full kitchen; there's a large 24-hour laundry room and on-site exercise equipment as well, "and it's all secured entrances," added Patel. Members of the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce helped celebrate the hotel's opening.



Gene Marrano



Down by the river >

As part of an effort to get more people out on the **Roanoke River** every summer another group float was held last month. Participants brought their own tubes, inflatable or kayaks, or rented them from outfitters like **Roanoke Mountain Adventures** right along the river.

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

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Clayton

Jason Clayton

recently joined the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council as Technology Talent Strategist. Prior to joining RBTC, he helped develop internship and work-based learning initiatives at multiple universities throughout the Southeast and upper Midwest, at private and public institutions.

EDUCATION FRONT

Ferrum College has welcomed **Dr. Joseph Han** as the new vice president of Finance and Chief Operations Officer. Han brings over 30 years of experience leading administrative, business, and operations



Han

departments of higher education institutions in numerous states.



Greenberg

Virginia Tech Foundation Inc., (VTF) which manages the endowment and real estate portfolio of Virginia Tech, has named **David Greenberg** as chief investment officer. Greenberg will oversee the investments within the endowment as part of VTF's drive to grow the value of the asset base. He will establish operations and expand the investment team in Richmond. Greenberg

comes to VTF from the California Endowment, where he served as chief investment officer of the \$4 billion Los Angeles-based foundation. In this role, he led an eight-person team in managing a diversified portfolio of public and private market investments.



Havens

Havens brings experience spanning industries from health care and biotech to manufacturing and tech startups. Her most recent roles include serving as an executive coach at Amazon. Havens was also the founding leader of Carilion Clinic's Institute for Leadership Effectiveness.



Cox

Carrie Cox has been named senior director for auxiliary services for the Division of Auxiliary and Business Services at Virginia Tech. In her previous position, Cox served as the deputy commandant of cadets for the Citizen-Leader Track in the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets.

Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business has appointed **Jennifer Havens** as the new director of the Center for Business Analytics.



Brogan

Albert Brogan, CPA, has joined The Community

WELLNESS FRONT

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Health Center of the New River Valley (CHCNRV) as the new Chief Financial Officer (CFO). He brings a background in finance and experience in executive leadership roles. As Controller at Cogar Manufacturing, Brogan had leadership in Accounting, Financial Planning and Analysis, Information Technology, and Human Resources functions for multiple physical and remote sites.



Wood

The Community Health Center of the New River Valley also announces that **Dr. S. Alexander Wood** will join its staff in the Dublin office as Lead Dentist. In addition to seeing patients, Dr. Wood will also oversee the new dental residency program. Dr. Wood earned

Have a career announcement?

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

his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Ventola

The Franklin County Library Board has hired **Rebecca Ventola** as the new Director for the Franklin County Library system. She comes to the Franklin County Library system with nearly twenty years of library experience, most recently serving as the Divisional Youth

Librarian for the Roanoke County Library system. The Franklin County native holds an undergraduate degree in Business Education from Virginia Tech as well as a Master's degree in Elementary Education from Emporia State University (Emporia, KS) and a Master's degree in Library Science from Wayne State University (Detroit, MI).

NON-PROFIT FRONT

HopeTree Family Services, a Salem-based provider of mental and behavioral health services, has appointed **Jessie Woods** as Chief Compliance Officer. She is responsible for the agency's



Woods

compliance, risk, quality, and privacy efforts to include compliance with HIPAA laws. In addition, Woods oversees HopeTree's accreditation processes and the performance, training, and outcomes of the Electronic Health Record. Woods has previously served as Chief Executive Officer for the YMCA of Pulaski County, and also spent nearly 15 years at Family Preservation Services, beginning work as a Therapeutic Day Treatment Counselor



CONTRIBUTORS

Zenith Barrett is the Vice President of Business and Community Engagement for Goodwill Industries® of the Valleys in Roanoke. She has been with Goodwill for eight years. She holds a Masters in Public Administration from Columbus State University and a Bachelors of Science in Psychology from Virginia State University. Zenith is a native of Massachusetts and lives in Roanoke with her husband, Richard and daughter, Lauren.

Aila Boyd serves as the editor of "The Fincastle Herald" and "The Vinton Messenger" and coordinates social media for the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce. She holds an MFA in writing from Lindenwood University.

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjp91@gmail.com]

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.

Doug Doughty is retired after spending 45 years at the Roanoke Times. After graduation from UVA in 1974, he was hired as a hockey beat reporter by the Roanoke Times. Many of his early assignments involved covering the Salem Pirates Class A baseball team when he witnessed — and later wrote about — the death of Alfredo Edmead in a collision with one of his Pirates teammates. Doughty later became the UVA beat reporter, covering football, golf, lacrosse and a host of other sports, including the Cavaliers baseball team when it won the NCAA championship with one of his sons on the team. Doug Doughty is also a member of the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame. [doughtysports@aol.com]

Dan Dowdy is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The

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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]

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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).

Jennifer Leake CMC® is an expert in employee assessment, Emotional Intelligence, and founder of the Best Job EVER company culture system. When you HIRE RIGHT, ENGAGE EMPLOYEES, and LEAD WELL, the results are greater performance by employees, and more revenue and profits for your company.

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

Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of

Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. "Best one on one interview" award from Associated Press of the Virginias for his interview with former Roanoke County Chief of Police Howard Hall. [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.

Anne Millehan is the owner of Millehan Coaching & Consulting in Roanoke. She is a certified coach and has worked with small and large businesses since 2017. She is a coach for Virginia Tech's Leadership Academy program and has worked with Virginia Western Community College as an adjunct instructor for the Career and Corporate Training Center. She is a local and national speaker and in 2020 was awarded the International Coaches Federation Ignite Initiative, the Power of Coaching. [annemillehan@gmail.com]

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.

Shawn Nowlin is an award-winning writer, photographer and content creator. In addition to the Roanoke Tribune, his byline has also appeared in ColorsVA Magazine and the Salem Times Register, among other publications. Born and raised in Roanoke, Virginia, Shawn is a proud product of the Star City. [shawnnowlin1989@aol.com]

Carrie Poff is the owner and CEO of Brown Hound Tree Service. She is also a mother of two slightly feral children, a part-time

artist, and a small business advocate. [cp.brownhoundtreeservice@gmail.com]

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

Dan Smith is a veteran journalist and member of the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame, a winner of numerous press association awards, the Small Business Journalist of the Year, two Perry F. Kendig Awards and the Arts Council of the Blue Ridge's Literary Award. He is author of eight books, including the recent novels "NEWS!" and "CLOG." [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

David Todd is the owner and president of EZ Rampz / Mobility Solutions, based in Roanoke, and serving Virginia and North Carolina primarily; but also nationally. The business rents, sells, installs, and services products that resolve mobility issues, including walkways, ramps, stair glides, platforms, lifts, chairs, grab bars, etc. He's a graduate of Virginia Tech, married with three children.

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]

at Critzer Elementary School in Pulaski.

Warm Hearth Village in Blacksburg has welcomed **Andy Jones** as the new Administrator for Kroontje Health Care Center. He



Jones

is a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator (LNHA) who has worked in healthcare management in Southwest Virginia for more than 15 years. Jones earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in Business

Management with a minor in Psychology from Clemson University.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

“ I advocate replacing the Performance Appraisal with Job Expectations. — Page 26

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*Planning award
in BOCO*

Botetourt County won the 2023 Holzheimer Economic Development Award by the American Planning Association (APS) Virginia Chapter for its Gateway Crossing Overlay. A part of the County's original 2017 Comprehensive Plan, the zoning tool showed a transformation of the area into a mixed-use community that includes residential and business structures and enhanced bicycle and pedestrian connections as it connects Interstate 81, US Rte 220, US Rte 11, and the Appalachian Trail. The award noted the urban design even as it protects the environmental and rural amenities that characterize Botetourt County.

*Secular Society to
the rescue for VCT*

The **Secular Society** based in the New River Valley is providing matching funds for **Virginia Children Theatre's** "The Show Must Go On" fundraiser. Funds will go to support the mainstage productions for the upcoming 2023-2024 Season. VCT lost a significant amount of money last year to finish in the red. Managing Director, Jeanne Bollendorf says The Secular Society has pledged a matching investment in VCT for \$50,000 as a 2:1 match. Virginia Children's Theatre is focused on raising \$100,000 between now and August 2024 and The Secular Society will donate \$50,000 over the next year. Rising production, labor, and

materials costs, audience numbers not returning to pre-pandemic levels, and the end of government funding have all threatened Roanoke-based VCT's mainstage productions for the upcoming season notes Bollendorf. With this investment from The Secular Society, she says VCT is making plans to mount three productions for the 2023-2024 season.

*Planning award
in ROCO*

Roanoke County's Geographic Information System (GIS) and Planning Departments have been recognized with Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties (NACo), honoring "innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents." Roanoke County's Communication and Information Technology Department won four awards: GIS Activity Dashboards, GIS Automation for Potential Economic Development, Glo Fiber Illumination, and Legislative Redistricting. Roanoke County developed GIS automation for potential economic development after several requests.

The Glo Fiber Illumination (Construction) Areas Application displays the growth of fiber-based broadband internet within the County and the Town of Vinton. Roanoke County's Planning Department won an award for the McAfee Knob Trailhead Shuttle. McAfee Knob is the most photographed

location along the National Park Service's Appalachian National Scenic Trail (Appalachian Trail). Visitation has tripled over the past decade, leading to significant challenges to manage hiker (and parking) demand along Route 311. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) awarded Roanoke County Demonstration Program funding in 2022 to operate the McAfee Knob Trailhead Shuttle to transport hikers from the Interstate 81 Exit 140 Park and Ride located in Roanoke County to the McAfee Knob trailhead parking lot in Catawba.

*High marks for VA
accelerator initiative*

Virginia has been ranked No.1 in the U.S. for Customized Workforce Training in the 19th-annual Business Facilities State Rankings Report, advancing the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program from the No. 2 spot in 2022 and 2021. Business Facilities is a national publication corporate site selectors and economic development professionals. "We know that for Virginia to truly be best-in-class, we must offer the talent to attract and retain businesses across varying industries and regions," said Secretary of Commerce and Trade **Caren Merrick**.

The Virginia Talent Accelerator Program is a workforce initiative created by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) in collaboration with the Virginia Community

College System and other higher education partners, with funding support from the Governor's administration and the Virginia General Assembly.

Big chips money

Virginia Tech has been awarded \$500,000 for the research of advanced semiconductor chip design and fabrication. Funded through the National Science Foundation's Advanced Chip Engineering Design and Fabrication program in partnership with the National Science and Technology Council of Taiwan's Department of Engineering and Technologies, this award will support collaborations between U.S. and Taiwan-based researchers on the design and fabrication of innovative semiconductor chips using the advanced processes available in Taiwan's semiconductor foundries.

*RAMP Fall cohort
applications open
through August 12*

The **Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP)** business incubator in-residence program for Fall 2023 will be geared toward Health and Life Science companies. It offers \$20,000 in equity-free funding, 1:1 expert mentoring, access to industry experts, 12 weeks of intense curriculum and free office space with high-speed internet access. There is also three

additional years of ongoing support through Exit RAMP. See ramp.com to apply.

Noodling in The 'Burg

Noodles & Company, a national fast-casual brand serving globally inspired noodle dishes made fresh to order, has opened its first location in Christiansburg at 2531 Market Street NE. The chain claims to serve the fast casual industry's first tortelloni and new chef-curated salads, along with noodle dishes from around the world, along with a rewards program for guests, delivery and a dine-in restaurant.

New Castle gets grant for Farmer's Market

The town of **New Castle** has received a \$50,000 grant from T-Mobile as one of the company's 25 new Hometown Grant recipients. The cash infusion will help New Castle build a covered colonnade pavilion at the **Craig County Farmers Market**, for local merchants and farmers

to sell goods, and for the community to use as an entertainment venue and gathering space.

C. Jordan Labiosa, Chairman, Craig County Economic Development Authority, says, "the Craig County Farmers Market will serve as a catalyst for economic growth, attracting visitors and creating job opportunities within our community. It will showcase the diversity and richness of our local producers and provide a unique shopping experience for residents and visitors alike." A groundbreaking ceremony was held in late June.

SPHL Champion Dawgs announce 2023-24 schedule

The **Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs** have announced their full schedule for the 2023-2024 season, with the promotional schedule to be announced at a later date. Each SPHL team will host 28 home games and travel to 28 road games throughout the regular season. Opening Night is scheduled for Friday,

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October 20 against Fayetteville. Single game tickets and single game parking passes will go on sale starting Wednesday, September 20 at the Berglund Center box office and online. Season tickets, flex packages, and group tickets are on sale now through the Dawgs front office.

Commonwealth admin & board appointees

Governor **Glenn Youngkin** has announced additional administration and board appointments. Dr. **Megan Seibel** of Roanoke, Manager, Mountain View Farm & Vineyard (Virginia Wine Board); **Kit Hale** of Roanoke, Principal Broker, MKB, REALTORS (Real Estate Board). Also, **Nadia Rogers** of Blacksburg, Professor of

Practice and Director of the Master of Accounting and Information Systems Program, Virginia Tech (Board of Accountancy); **Kimberly Beamer** of Roanoke, Attorney, Beamer Law, PLLC (State Air Pollution Control Board.)

VALET graduates

Eleven companies across the Commonwealth have graduated from the **Virginia Economic Development Partnership's (VEDP) Virginia Leaders in Export Trade (VALET)** program and 13 companies have joined the two-year program. VALET, which now has 375 graduated companies, assists Virginia exporters that have firmly established domestic operations and are committed to

international exporting as a growth strategy. Among the graduates is **ESS Technologies Inc.** from Montgomery County. Joining the next VALET cohort is Uttermost (Franklin County) and **Simmons Equipment Company** from Tazewell County.

More GO Virginia grants

More than \$2.9 million in **Growth and Opportunity for Virginia (GO Virginia)** grant awards have been issued for 8 projects statewide, for talent development, economic acceleration and regional industry growth. Projects will support skill-building initiatives, entrepreneurial endeavors and connecting talent with employment opportunities. In addition to the awarded GO Virginia funding, the eight awarded projects will leverage an additional \$6.1 million in local and non-state funding. Montgomery County, in partnership with the town of Christiansburg, will develop a business-ready, 35-acre industrial site in the **Falling**

Branch Corporate Park with its \$324,000 award. This site will be the only Tier 5 site in GO Virginia Region 2 and is designed to support firms in advanced manufacturing, life sciences and biotechnology, as well as logistics.

Wythe company gets grant to help expansion

Musser Biomass and Wood Products, a division of family-owned and -operated Musser Lumber Company, will invest \$7.5 million and create ten new, high-paying jobs to expand its operation in **Wythe County**. The expansion will more than double the production of dried hardwood chips and sawdust the company supplies to composite decking manufacturers, plastic extrusion companies, and BBQ and heating wood pellet companies. Musser Biomass and Wood Products will also significantly increase its purchase volumes of hardwood residuals from regional sawmills, which

will create a new market for this operational byproduct. A \$75,000 grant from the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund, which Wythe County will match with local funds. Local Delegate **Jeff Campbell** said, "this state grant, matched by local dollars, has far reaching impact beyond Wythe County and will have a true economic impact for Southwest Virginia."

Fishburn Perk may still happen

Roanoke City Council, after first voting it down, will vote on an amended plan that looks to bring a coffee shop – **Fishburn Perk** - to the old caretakers cottage in **Fishburn Park**. The new deal Roanoke city priority to purchase the property if developers ever sell it, along with extending the closing date on the purchase to September 30th and puts in writing that .6 acres will be used for a coffee shop and the other .5 will remain recreation and open space. Council Member

Peter Volosin, a "no" vote the first time around, applauded the latest proposal: "I believe that we have come up with what is the best compromise. There were things that weren't in the first contract ... [that have] been addressed." The proposed coffee shop has drawn opposition – and support - from local neighbors. Developers **Kari and Justin VanBlaricom** will resubmit a rezoning request that would go before the planning commission and city council in August.

NS jobs coming back to Roanoke?

Norfolk Southern used to be headquartered in Roanoke and has moved jobs out of the region for years - but the local NS workforce may be growing again says President and CEO **Alan Shaw**: "we've got a lot of customers that we serve in Roanoke. In fact, we're transferring some employees there right now because the economy is booming there." Shaw also says he wanted to improve

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Norfolk Southern's relationship with the city of Roanoke.

Federal funds for broadband expansion in the Commonwealth

More than \$1.4 billion - that's billion with a "B" - is headed to Virginia to help bring high-speed broadband internet access to all regions of

the Commonwealth - even in rural communities. Democratic US Senator **Mark Warner** commented on that funding, which originated from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act: "virtually no state in the country has done as well as Virginia in terms of accessing this broadband money from the infrastructure bill, which I was proud to be one

of the negotiators on. I knew both from my experience as Governor and former person in telecom that if you don't have high speed affordable broadband in your community at your home, you're not going to get a fair shot that every Virginia and every American deserves.

The infrastructure bill championed by

President Joe Biden squeaked through Congress mainly along party lines last year. The COVID pandemic that saw many forced to work remotely exposed major gaps in the country's broadband coverage - especially in rural communities.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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I am a man who loves what he does.

— Page 17



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Salem Red Sox

Changing of the Sox

Salem Red Sox: a change behind the scenes this season

By Doug Doughty

Salem's minor-league baseball team is still an affiliate of the Boston Red Sox, but off the field there's been a big change this season.

On March 25 this year, the Salem Red Sox reached an agreement with Diamond Baseball Holdings, an organization that is involved with a number of minor-league clubs. Red Sox general manager Allen Lawrence said he expected a smooth transition and that has been the case. "What they are doing to enhance the minor leagues through investment and technology will benefit Salem greatly," Lawrence said.

If having a Carolina League manager from Great Britain (with an appropriate accent to boot) has been new this year (Liam Carroll; see sidebar), so has Diamond Baseball Holdings, a transition from Fenway Sports

Group that lasted practically a year before it actually happened, and the acquisition was finalized.

"It's not uncommon by any means," Lawrence said. "Even before I was aware that Diamond Baseball may be looking at our team here in Salem, I was beginning to connect the dots, just seeing there was a company out there that was looking to purchase a lot of minor-league teams throughout the country.

"They were looking for teams that were owned by the major-league affiliate and they were focused on big brands. So, I'm thinking, 'Well, we're owned by a major-

SALEM'S 2023 MANAGER: NOT FROM THESE PARTS

Upon learning the background of new Salem Red Sox manager Liam Carroll, players might have wondered if they should have prepared for their new boss' British accent. Carroll, who is in his first season in Salem, has been involved in baseball in some capacity since 2004 and has been in the Red Sox organization since 2004. He played some minor league ball as an infielder early on.

When he spoke to the Roanoke Valley Sports Club in early April, Carroll was easy to understand, no issues with his dialect. "I think that was probably because of baseball," he said. "If I was talking to some English mates in a pub, it would revolve around [English] football. Here, in the states, it tends to revolve around baseball."

"I'd point to several things," he said at the Sports Club gathering about our National Pastime translating overseas. For starters, "the British baseball community is so passionate." Who knew? "In addition to major league baseball's efforts to grow the game globally over the last 20-30 years, we've been very fortunate to have some American coaches work for MLB in the UK who shaped my existence."

Shorter schedules in the United Kingdom is a challenge said Carroll. "Coaching them was just as good as anyone in the U.S. would get. They just didn't get to play as



Liam Carroll

many games. You're going to play a 20-30 game schedule in Britain, even in the top league. Maybe 30 games plus playoffs. Hopefully.

"There's a few travel-ball style outfits that have gotten the kids to play way more games domestically and also travel around Europe and get as many games as possible. I think it will take a number of years before we see [Europeans] anything remotely close to 70 or 80 games."

Carroll's background: His dad was born in Chicago and grew up in New York City. His "mum" is from England. His parents live in the UK – across the pond as they say. "Dad's older now," Carroll said. "I would love it if he and my mother could come over next season, perhaps, [if I'm] due to be back here in Salem for a second season. Would love to [see them] but it won't be the easiest trip."

league team and we're a Red Sox affiliate. That checks two of the boxes right there.'

"I was beginning to connect the dots that we may be a possibility for them." The average Salem baseball fan wouldn't know the difference.

"If we didn't make the announcement that we were just purchased, no one would ever know the difference," Lawrence continued. "We're still the Salem Red Sox. We still have the same people working here." The Sox

are still the Carolina League, Low-A affiliate of Boston. "The prices are still the same," Lawrence said. "From a fan standpoint, there is not one difference."

Salem has been affiliated with Boston's major league team since 2007 after being acquired by Fenway Sports Group, which owns the Boston Red Sox as well as NHL Pittsburgh Penguins, Liverpool F.C., and NASCAR's RFK Racing. "Fenway Sports was awesome," Lawrence continued. "I owe a lot to them." We're the only [team] they enjoyed a majority



Salem Red Sox

Allen Lawrence

Lawrence has fond memories of 16 years under the Fenway Sports banner. "They did a lot of great things and I'll be forever grateful for all the people I worked for and worked with. At Fenway Sports, I learned a tremendous amount and they provided a tremendous amount of opportunity." After Covid subsided however, it wasn't deemed as necessary for major-league teams to own their minor-league affiliates.


"I was aware that Diamond Baseball Holdings was looking to purchase a lot of teams," Lawrence said. "I could see the writing on the wall. I knew it was just going to be a matter of time. From our standpoint, [Diamond Baseball Holdings] are just more applicable to what we're doing here.

"Fenway Sports is just a huge brand. They own the Boston Red Sox and the Pittsburgh Penguins and Liverpool soccer over in England. And they're part of Rausch Fenway racing. Then, you have us, the Salem Red Sox, right? So, when you look at all those big names in there, we couldn't relate."

of. They brought a big name. To think that Fenway Sports and the Boston Red Sox would own a minor-league team in little, old Salem, Virginia is pretty remarkable."

At the time, the Red Sox' single-A affiliate was in California. "They wanted to move the team to the East Coast," Lawrence pointed out, "the way they wanted to do that was to buy the team [so they] could do whatever you wanted to. We were actually finishing out our agreement with the Houston Astros. The very first year, we were [still] a Houston affiliate - owned by the Boston Red Sox - and that was hard to explain to people. In 2009, when we became the Salem Red Sox, it started making a lot more sense."

That isn't the case now noted Lawrence. "We can relate to what Diamond Baseball Holdings has because they currently own 19 other minor-league baseball teams. Our office is consistently having Zoom calls with other leaders in our industry that work for Diamond Baseball.

"The resources we have are just more applicable. We share the same success stories, and we have the same problems. We can collectively figure out 'what can we do about it?' If we didn't announce [the ownership change] it, people would never know about it." That's music to the ears of long time Sox General Manager Allen Lawrence. 



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