

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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MARCH 2023

Boutique Hotels

Screaming Vegan

Construction Front's
Alicia Smith

Hethwood Market

MCCC Women
in Business

vbFRONT.com

the boutique hotel

EXPLOSION



Andy Schlosser
The Liberty Trust

JAMES TAYLOR
ROANOKE ATTORNEY



I FOUND MY FREEDOM BANKING WITH FreedomFirst

James Taylor, a Roanoke attorney, moved to the area from South Korea three years ago and found himself in need of a new place to bank. Once he arrived, a friend recommended Freedom First to him. James says he's been happy ever since.

“One thing I have really appreciated about Freedom First is sometimes you get lost when you call one of the big financial institutions, but I have never felt that way with Freedom First.”

As an attorney, responsiveness is very important to James. Freedom First has always responded to his emails within the hour, sometimes sooner. It allows him to focus on his work when he needs to.

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

WELCOME TO THE FRONT

This month we take a look at some of the boutique hotels in our region – and a few establishments that offer some culinary delights. We also have a new column this month, Business Cents, and many of our longtime favorites as well. Despite the still-high but declining inflation rate, consumers are still spending like its going out of style (is this the new normal?) although the housing market has cooled down somewhat and houses are for sale longer these days due to the rising interest rates following Fed base point hikes.

Who knows what the rest of 2023 will bring? We will try to keep up on it all for you. Happy reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

““

She no longer compartmentalizes a work person, home person, and volunteer person, but rather integrates everything into a 'holistic balance.'

— Page 61

““

Do what works for you. — Page 41



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A Dozen Boutique Hotels

By Tom Field



“ ”
I've noticed significant improvements to both my body and energy level. — Page 28

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P.O. Box 1041
Salem, VA 24153
(540) 389-9945
www.vbFRONT.com

Staff

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

Departmental Contacts

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

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

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MARCH



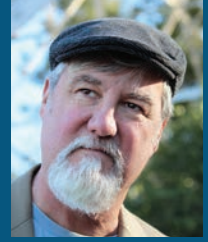
Aila Boyd



Jessica Britton



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Michael Shelton



Sam Sokolove

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



Daniel Colston



Katie Conner



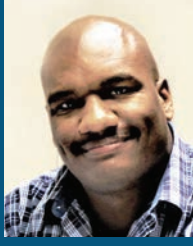
Jennifer Poff Cooper



Mike Leigh



Gene Marrano



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Zenith Barrett
Goodwill /
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Neal Cummings
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finance – credit unions



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healthcare



Micah Fraim
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Kevin Holt
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David Todd
EZ Rampz /
senior services

“

Wearing a kilt
or a paddy cap
is optional.

— Page 15

“

We're
advocating in
Richmond...
to help people
locate here.

— Page 31

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

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Tom Field

A Dozen Boutique Hotels

By Tom Field

A bouquet of flowers often comes with a dozen; here's a dozen boutique hotels—representative of an uptick in the preferred choice by discriminating guests.

If you're going to take a day-trip or weekend getaway in this part of Virginia—or you're from somewhere else on the globe and you're headed this way—you have a lot of choices in where you might stay. Had you been on horseback a couple of centuries ago, you might stay overnight at a tavern or lodge (if you didn't pitch a tent off the trail). All through the twentieth century, you would likely pick a motel (particularly on a road trip) whenever you were tired or ready for a break; or for more planned trips and vacations—a hotel. And in the past decade (and a half), you began to consider short-term rental properties by private homeowners and landlords—often called bed-and-breakfasts, along with the most popular operators, AirBnB or VRBO (pronounced “verbo” for vacation rentals by owner).

But there's been an additional little blip on the lodging and hospitality front that seemed to jump out when the COVID pandemic hit—boutique hotels. And though they've been around as long as most of the other options, here lately, boutique hotels are popping up from historic property renovations, and the preexisting ones are gaining renewed interest. In one sense, you could call this special kind of hospitality a hybrid of sorts—a bridge between AirBnB/VRBO and conventional hotels.

There's no question boutique hotel development has increased in the Roanoke region (three brand news ones in just the past year); but the stats are showing an uptick all over. According to Boutique Lifestyles Leaders Association (yes, there's an organization dedicated to “the boutique lifestyle” where a majority of its focus is on boutique hotels) the sector experienced a 7.7% growth in 2022, compared to 2021. BLLA's message is clear, if not biased: boutique is better. It “counteracts corporate monotony and champions creativity.” Reports from outside industry sources—from business news outlets to visitor bureaus to economic development offices to chambers of commerce—also confirm this increased activity.

Whether your choice in lodging these days mirrors the trend or not, there's a reason many are choosing boutique hotels.

“People are looking for unique experiences,” says Kathryn Lucas, a public relations director for Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge. “Going in to 2022, there has been a lot of interest in boutique hotels,” she continues. “And we can tell that from the travel writers and media. They have a good pulse on what people want.”

Lucas points out other factors that could be easy to overlook: “Anecdotally, you don't have all the hidden costs like cleaning fees that get added on an AirBnB booking, for example; and people like the safety and convenience you can expect from a hotel.”

Lucas also says part of the “unique experience” is the top notch restaurants often associated with boutique hotels or

““”

People are looking for unique experiences.



Submitted

Kathryn Lucas,
Director of PR; Visit
Virginia's Blue Ridge



Now's your
chance to tell
everyone you
spent the night
in a fire station.

nearby; and even the locals (who may not book overnight stays) will get involved with the dining or the bars. She cites the “Vault” lounge in the new Liberty Trust Hotel in downtown Roanoke as an example. It’s become a popular draw with the locals.

The idea of “boutique hotels” is a fairly encompassing one. Not everyone agrees on the specifics, but most agree on the general definition, like the one the Glion Institute (a hospitality management school in Switzerland) provides:

A boutique hotel is small. It should not have more than 100 rooms, because it has to offer a personal touch to every guest. It is independent, located in the city center or in a very trendy area, usually the main shopping one.

LesBoutiqueHotels.com prefers six requirements to be considered a true boutique hotel:

1. Small (10 to 100 rooms)
[FRONT take: ok, it makes an exception for up to 150 rooms, but it should still feel “intimate.”]
2. Unique Character
[FRONT take: it doesn’t really define this, so “unique” must be subjective; but it does give an example: having an espresso on the balcony. Well, ok.]
3. Attentive Design
perfecting the smallest details; interesting architecture; décor with character
[FRONT take: yes, this requirement is kind of essential from what we’ve seen. Artsy; contemporary to historic; vintage; often showcasing the property’s original purpose.]
4. Located in Fashionable Areas
no hard rules, but most are in the heart of the city’s cultural spots
[FRONT take: for our region, it’s not just urban or metro politan—you can include pastoral and remote sites, including the mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes.]
5. Personalized Services
[FRONT take: nice sentiment, but it didn’t really make the distinction, since even large resorts can do this. Certainly, hotels aren’t “letting yourself in the door using a hidden key or passcode” though, like private rentals.]
6. Great Selection of Things to Do
mainly: culture, art, food
[FRONT take: this requirement is no different than number 4, unless you go out of the urban scene.]

With all of this in mind, we took a little road trip through our region—limiting ourselves to about a 75-mile radius North, South, East, and West—from our FRONToffice here in Roanoke. (One exception—in far Southwest, Virginia, a good 150+ mile trek.) What follows is a description of six boutique hotels and a list of twelve (out of many) that are top draws in our market.



Submitted

Fire Station One

Fire Station One / Roanoke

Just opened! This repurposed historic downtown fire station is getting tons of attention. Citizens were wondering (and worrying) about what might happen to the property after waiting a long time with uncertainty. Most are more than



Submitted



Fire Station One



Greg Terrill



Tara Dean

pleased with the outcome, once a local stylish furniture manufacturer and retailer (TXTUR) claimed the street level, followed by a bistro and lodging option.

An enthusiastic hospitality manager, Tara Dean, submits this description:

“After 100 years of service and 15 years of vacancy, historic Fire Station One in downtown Roanoke has reopened its doors. Ttxtur is proud to present Fire Station One Boutique Hotel and Historic Bunk Room Event Space. FS1 Boutique Hotel is home to seven unique guest rooms, an expansive event space, Stock Bistro & Bar, as well as Ttxtur’s flagship furniture showroom. Our guests can pick which room they’d like to stay in based on which theme they like the most. Our rooms are furnished with 100% locally made Ttxtur furniture, so if they fall in love with their hotel room they can purchase those products from our lower level completely customized to the guests’ standards. FS1BH is proud to offer such a unique hospitality option to Roanoke.”

Now’s your chance to tell everyone you spent the night in a fire station.

Owned by: **Greg Terrill and Old School Development**
Hospitality Manager: **Tara Dean**

Fire Station One
13 Church Avenue SE
Roanoke, VA 24011
540-305-3039
www.firestationone.com



Submitted

The Highlander / Radford

Brand spanning new! Eddy Alexander, the public relations firm, describes it this way:

"The Highlander Hotel Radford, located adjacent to Radford University, will offer 124 guest rooms opening Spring 2023. This new, independent lifestyle boutique hotel plans to celebrate the enthusiastic friendliness

The Highlander



Submitted



The Highlander

inspired by the area's Scots-Irish origins, delivering on spectacular views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and plans to offer impeccable service with a coffee bar, an in-lobby visitor center with concierge, a rooftop terrace restaurant and bar, and over 6,000 square feet of meeting and event space."

A preview of the spaces reveals something a lot of guests will appreciate: it's all new. Whether you have business or a reason to be in Radford or you're just passing through,



experiencing the first class facility is a good reason to book. Wearing a kilt or paddy cap is optional.

Managed by: **Aimbridge Hospitality**
General Manager: **Rachel Pegues**

The Highlander Hotel Radford
604 Tyler Avenue
Radford, VA 24141
540-744-1500
www.highlanderradford.com



Submitted

Rowland Hotel

Rowland Hotel / Salem

See our separate story on page 22.

Also new. Above an impeccable and upscale dining favorite.

Managed by: **Jefferson Street Management Group**
General Manager: **Tara Rigatti**

Rowland Hotel
300 East Main Street
Salem, VA 24153
540-492-5500
www.rowlandhotel.com



Jackson Park Inn

Jackson Park Inn / Pulaski

Here's a repurposed old building that was never intended to be a hotel—and that makes the experiences all the more intriguing. Nothing was done halfway in developing the property. The environment is almost museum-like in many





Submitted

ways, except the facility draws you in, beckoning you to step through the lounge areas, sit at the bar, reserve a table at the inviting Al's On First restaurant, or just sink down into a seat as you look at artifacts and décor or watch the passing train out the window. JPI has become a go-to site for locals dining, visitors passing through, and groups like the Pulaski baseball team, LewisGale, Carilion, Virginia Tech, and particularly, the Volvo truck plant.

General Manager Wendy Akers, likes to distinguish Jackson Park Inn from the more conventional lodging options:

"For people who are subcontracted out for Volvo, they say we're more personable. It's like coming home... like family. With our restaurant on site and our welcoming nature, it's more like home versus a chain hotel."

Owned by: **Ascend Hotel Collection**
 Managed by: **Choice Hotels**
 General Manager: **Wendy Akers**

Jackson Park Inn
 68 1st Street
 Pulaski, VA 24301
 540-509-5164
www.jacksonparkinn.com

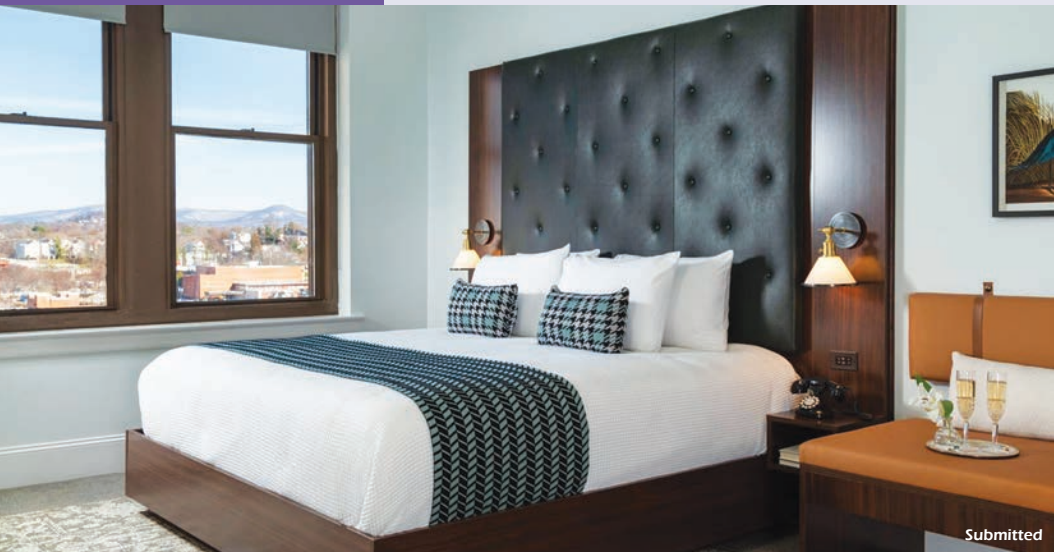
“ ”

It's like
 coming home.



Submitted

Wendy Akers



Submitted

The Liberty Trust Hotel

The Liberty Trust Hotel / Roanoke

If you have an eye for design, appreciate architectural restorations, perhaps an aficionado when it comes to a city's history, you're going to enjoy Liberty Trust. A former bank office in downtown, the property has been completely repurposed, hosts 54 rooms, includes "The Vault" tasting room (yes, like the real bank vault) and has already established itself as absolutely "boutique" in every sense, for both locals and visitors alike.

"I look at what we have here as bringing world travel to Roanoke," says General Manager Andy Schlosser, who's also the executive chef (who many locals already knew). The hotel is the closest one to the Amtrak passenger train station. On the dining and bar service, he says the priority is to have food that is "authentic... from the region where



Submitted

it comes." The lounge area includes an impressive bar, but also comfortable lobby-like furniture, rather than tables and chairs. "People love it," Schlosser says. "It's like dining with wealthy friends in their living room."

After being in the restaurant business so long, Schlosser points to a positive on the boutique hotel scene: "We're expanding that same customer experience [of dining enjoyment] to 24 hours now, instead of just a few." He likes that the interior environment was "literally designed around the property—that was already beautiful. A refreshing piece of work."

Having a general manager who is also the executive chef seems like an appointment for only the smallest venues; but you can tell chef-like attention to detail is an advantage for guests of this hotel.

Owned by: **Vishal Savani and Savara Hospitality**

Managed by: **Savara Hospitality**

General Manager: **Andy Schlosser**

Liberty Trust Hotel

101 South Jefferson Street

Roanoke, VA 24011

540-299-5100

www.libertytrusthotel.com



Tom Field

Andy Schlosser



Submitted

Craddock Terry Hotel / Lynchburg

If we were to bow down to a "boutique hotel king" in our region, it might be the Craddock Terry. That's because this property was boutique long before boutique became all the rage. This place has quite the story, and as a business journal, we love it—because it is all business; the founding that is. The American Gilded Age business tycoons can keep their steel and oil and shipping and railroad enterprises they leveraged

Craddock Terry Hotel

Submitted



Craddock Terry Hotel

to build their hotels and grand resorts—we have one that was built right on street level... from the very shoes you wear on your feet.

The turn-of-the-century shoe factory and tobacco warehouse is now a luxurious boutique property with 44 guest rooms and suites, two award winning restaurants, an outdoor biergarten, and event space. Interior design elements include “whimsical show décor” and, get this, you can get complimentary shoeshine service.



Schuyler Clark

Schuyler Clark, the general manager, says the Craddock Terry is attractive for both “business and leisure travelers. It’s a unique bespoke property... home of one of the largest shoe factories in the world.” Clark calls it a top asset of Lynchburg; while sales director Sandee Swearingen shares the many guest reviews, including the one who said “The Craddock Terry Hotel states they believe travel is about creating experiences and memories, and I could not agree more... a wonderful, charming atmosphere.”



Submitted

6 MORE TOP DRAWS



Blackburn Inn
301 Greenville Avenue
Staunton, VA 24401
540-712-0601
www.blackburn-inn.com



Western Front Hotel
3025 Fourth Avenue
Saint Paul, VA 24283
276-738-3040
www.westernfronthotel.com



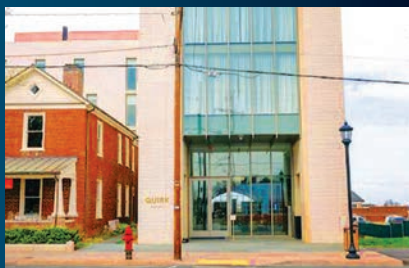
The Georges
11 North Main Street
Lexington, VA 24450
540-463-2500
www.thegeorges.com



Inn at Riverbend
125 River Ridge Drive
Pearisburg, VA 24134
540-921-5211
www.innatriverbend.com



The Bolling Wilson Hotel
170 East Main Street
Wytheville, VA 24382
276-223-2333
www.bollingwilsonhotel.com



Quirk Charlottesville
499 West Main Street
Charlottesville, VA 22902
434-365-3890
www.quirkhotels.com/hotels/charlottesville

All photos submitted

Owned by: **Bluff walk Center, LP**
Managed by: **Cornerstone Hospitality**
General Manager: **Schuyler Clark**

Craddock Terry Hotel Lynchburg, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel
1312 Commerce Street
Lynchburg, VA 24504
434-045501500
www.craddockterryhotel.com



Courtesy of Rowland Hotel

Rowland Hotel

Rowland Hotel adds luxury lodging in Salem

By Aila Boyd

Salem became a little more luxurious last fall with the much-anticipated opening of Rowland Hotel on East Main Street in the downtown area. An update since we first told you about it before the opening.



Tom Field

Roger Neel

The 16-room boutique hotel adds a new dimension to Roger Neel Jr.'s local hospitality empire. He's the man behind such iconic Roanoke eateries as Frankie Rowland's Steakhouse and Corned Beef & Co.

The idea for his first lodging-related venture came from a desire on Neel's part to locate a hotel within walking distance of Roanoke College, his alma mater which he is quite fond of.

"I always wanted to do a combination high-end restaurant with a small, boutique hotel," he said. The hotel is located above Frankie Rowland's Steakhouse Salem. "It was a little bit of interest and a little bit of opportunity."

He isn't shy about acknowledging why he decided to go the luxury route, noting, "Small, boutique hotels are kind of in vogue."

The hotel was built from the shell of the old



Courtesy of Rowland Hotel

Salem Theatre. The process of renovating the space started prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which slowed progress.

“It had a huge impact,” Neel said of the pandemic. “Everybody was supposed to stay away from everybody. Working was difficult. But most importantly, the supply chain put us really behind.”

Instead of taking the normal two to four weeks to be delivered, the building materials needed for the hotel ended up taking six months to a year to arrive in Salem, Neel explained.

Despite the initial setbacks, business at the hotel has been good since it opened in October and is getting better, according to Tara Rigatti, the hotel’s general manager.

The hotel has seen a steady number of reservations from those visiting Roanoke College, including prospective students, visiting professors and the Roanoke College Board of Trustees, which filled up the hotel the week of February 5.

Rigatti has also been pleasantly surprised by just how many locals have stayed the night. Many of them, she explained, are supportive of the hotel and want to see what it’s like, so they make a reservation.

Neel echoed Rigatti’s sentiments about the level of local support both the hotel and restaurant have received. “It’s been great being in Salem. Salem has been a really good community to be in,” he said.

The hotel is drawing in some guests who

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Courtesy of Rowland Hotel

are traveling on Interstate 81, but Rigatti thinks more travelers will be attracted once they're able to secure placement on the exit signs for lodging options.

Neel said his first foray into the hotel business has been smooth sailing thus far. "It's moving in a positive direction," he said. "We haven't been open very long, but we're seeing good traction."

He remains open to the possibility of opening another hotel if the right opportunity presents itself.

"Rowland is a great addition to downtown lodging and adds a new dimension of property to Salem," Carey Harveycutter, Salem's director of tourism, said. He explained that the hotel's opening is helping diversify Salem's lodging options. "To add something like the Rowland to that mix gives us the opportunity to have a different clientele. It's positioned well in the marketplace."

He said the downtown area is now bookended with lodging options—Rowland Hotel and Salem Motor Lofts.

The hotel's opening is part of a larger transformation the downtown area is undergoing.

"It's headed in the right direction,"

Harveycutter said. He pointed to the creation of a downtown improvement plan, as well as the addition of new lighting and brick pavers as proof that progress is being made. The city's economic development staff is also working to bring in new retail businesses.


"Once we get people into the area, we want them to linger. We want them to spend more time. With the Rowland above Frankie Rowland's and the lofts above El Jefe and West Salem Diner, it gives you an opportunity to spend a couple days," he added.

Similar projects are of interest to city officials.

"I am delighted, with the recent opening of the Rowland Hotel and believe our downtown is ripe for many similar boutique hotels," Tommy Miller, Salem's director of economic development, said.

While an effort three years ago to put a hotel at the Salem Civic Center is currently dormant, Harveycutter explained "it's still a possibility." He added that there are several other sites in the city that could also work for a hotel.

The lodging industry in Salem has undergone a decent amount of change in recent years, including renovations to Hampton Inn Salem East-Electric Road and Comfort Suites Salem-Roanoke I-81, as well as the opening of avid hotel Salem.

"Our hotels are recovering very nicely," he said. "Our occupancy still are not where we want them, but our average daily rates and our revenue per room have increased well above the benchmark year of 2019." 

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Change Ahead on Main Street: Survey Gives Small Businesses Insight Into What's to Come

Cox Business recently released results of its 2022 consumer sentiment survey, focused on uncovering insights into key challenges like inflation and engaging with businesses in the metaverse — all of which impact their support of small businesses.

Here are a few things we found that will help your business succeed in 2023 and beyond.

Inflation's Effect on Main Street

The consumer sentiment survey reveals rising prices and the lack of availability of certain goods has driven some people away from shopping small. However, 35% of respondents reported they've increased patronage of small businesses, and 50% said they've continued to shop at these merchants the same amount.

So, how can small business owners keep their shoppers coming back for more? Leaning into hot technologies is a great place to start.

The Surge of the Metaverse

While just one-fifth of shoppers who responded to the Cox survey have interacted with retailers in the metaverse, 75% of those that have said they would continue to interact with small- and medium-sized businesses with a virtual presence.

Whether gaming, outfitting their digital avatars or enabling people to customize their own virtual store making your mark in the virtual ecosystem will not only help your business stand out, but position it as forward thinking with an entirely new shopping experience for customers to enjoy.

Tech Trends Gain Traction

Outside the metaverse, other trends today's consumers are leaning into include experiences driven by technology. According to the Cox survey, more than half of respondents said touchless options would improve shopping at SMBs. Other top tech that shoppers are using include real-time personalized discounts (51%), app-based store navigation (25%), and artificial intelligence-enabled payments (think Amazon Go).

Keeping abreast of tech trends is key to engaging with today's safety- and efficiency-minded consumers. Savvy SMBs can respond to many of the latest consumer wants and needs. Understanding shopping trends and the goings-on in respective communities will simultaneously enable better preparedness for what lies ahead. See the full survey results and other helpful tools at coxblue.com.




Respect for people and their time

Unemployment is at a 53-year low. Organizations need to retain their best employees because they may not be able to easily replace them.

One need all employees have is to know they are respected. When the respect is not shown, an employee might walk. Disrespect occurs in many ways, but one of the most common forms is wasted time. No one wants to waste time, but some organizations and leaders do it regularly. Here are four ways many organizations disrespect people's time.

- **Meetings** - Some companies are great at starting and ending meetings on time, and keeping meetings focused. When meetings consistently start late and end late, or when employees must attend meetings that provide no value, time is wasted and it's disrespectful.
- **Interruptions** - Some companies have a culture where it's ok to interrupt folks who are in meetings, on the phone, or have asked to not be disturbed. Yes, sometimes emergencies exist, but routine interruptions are disrespectful.
- **Off-hours Communications** - Managers who call, email or text during non-working hours and expect a response are not giving others the personal time they need to recharge. Even if a response is not expected, team members may still feel pressured to reply. Again, there can be occasional exceptions, but regular interruptions of personal time are disrespectful.
- **Wasteful Work** - I was once asked to drive two hours to another location to fix a product quality issue that needed to ship in the last day of the quarter. After rushing there, fixing the issue, and getting back late, I was told it was no longer needed. To say I was mad would be an understatement. No one wants to be asked to do work that serves no apparent purpose. Asking employees to do unnecessary work is disrespectful.

These time-wasters are often part of a company culture. If they are part of your culture, it's time to change them or risk losing your most valuable employees. 

“Disrespect occurs in many ways, but one of the most common forms is wasted time.”

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Here's another perspective on the labor shortage, because it is still the biggest issue in business today; respect is one way to safeguard employees.

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

Small business tax credits

Not everything offered applies to all businesses, but it's worth knowing what's available. What might not apply now could as your business grows in the future. These can add up quickly. They're not like deductions that come off your bottom line when calculating taxable income. Credits come off the taxes owed.

So for example, if you have a \$100 deduction on \$50,000 of income, you're now taxed on \$49,900. Let's say you're taxed at 21%. Instead of the \$10,500 that would be due on \$50,000, you'd owe \$10,479. With a tax credit of \$100 on a \$10,500 tax bill, you'd owe \$10,400. Big difference.

Hiring Tax Credits

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is available to employers who hire people in ten qualifying groups where employment has been deemed harder to secure. These include veterans, people living in designated empowerment zones and welfare recipients.

Taxable businesses get a credit of 25% or 40% of first year wages that can be applied against business income taxes. Of course, there are restrictions and caps, but even with those, this credit can wind up being a big number for certain types of businesses.

Employee Benefit Tax Credits


You can get tax credits for offering health insurance if you have less than 25 employees with an average wage below \$55,000. Qualified health plans through the Small Business Health Options Marketplace can result in a credit equal to 50% of your premium costs if you pay at least half.

The Employer Credit for Paid Family and Medical Leave can result in a 12.5%-25% credit for employers who provide at least two week of pay to full-time employees for family or medical leave.

Have employees with kids? The Credit for Employer-Provided Childcare Facilities and Services might be for you. If you pay for child care services or build onsite facilities, you can get a credit of 10%-25%.

R & D Tax Credits

These aren't just for tech companies anymore. If you put money into improvements, you might be eligible. The Credit for Increasing Research Activities goes all the way up to \$250,000 to be applied against payroll taxes.

These are just some of the tax credits currently available. While all these are through the IRS, states have a variety of programs too. Of course, there are stipulations to qualify and you need to jump through some hoops, but tax credits are a way to keep more money in your pocket. You might be surprised to find a program that includes your business. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

If you're not taking advantage of tax credits, you're leaving money on the table.

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



Shaw Nowlin photos

Contributing artist Jaimie Philips dawning an apron to help with dishes



Sally Eldemen and Katie Trozzo enjoying some food

Downright decadent: Grandin Village's Screaming Vegan Wellness Café reinvents popular dishes

By Shawn Nowlin

One of the best places to get a vegan meal in Roanoke, according to Missy Saul, is the Screaming Vegan Wellness Café. Of course, she works there ...

As summer approaches, more and more people are looking for plant-based options – perhaps hoping to shed a few pounds by eating better. Defined as someone who “eat or uses no food or products derived from animals,” Vegans, according to a Gallup Poll, comprise roughly six percent of the US population.

One of the demographics driving demand for alternatives to conventional dairy and meat is Generation Z. Kory Smith, 24, is the first to admit that just three years ago, she thought that being vegan meant eating boring and bland food.

“There are several myths about veganism, and I used to believe most of them,” she said. “While it is true that all dimensions of wellness need your attention for you to truly flourish, that doesn’t necessarily

mean it has to be an ideal balance. Once I stopped listening to everyone and did my own research, the depths of my knowledge expanded. Since going vegan, I have noticed significant improvements to both my body and energy level.”

There are many places throughout the Roanoke Valley where one can purchase quality vegan food. For Smith, whenever friends or family ask her what eatery should they support, she never fails to mention one particular establishment – the Screaming Vegan Wellness Café.

Located at 1902 Memorial Avenue, the café had a tentative grand opening in January. While the outside of the building looks like an ice cream parlor, inside those doors is a welcoming atmosphere with over a dozen food



Screaming Vegan mushroom wrap



Savory mini-pie

and service combinations to choose from.

Employees include Missy Saul, John English, Thomas Leonard (the Chef) and Alexis Myers. In addition to delicious food, moon offerings and new tea blends are also available, among other things. Food prices range from \$2.50 to \$11.25 with shareable dishes costing around \$5.60. Subject to change next month, as of press time, the hours of operation are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Fridays and 2 to 9 p.m. on Saturdays.


People of all backgrounds and orientations support the wellness café. Jayla Davis, a member of the LBGQT community, told Valley Business FRONT, “My girlfriend took me here for my birthday. She said that I would enjoy myself, and as usual, she was 100 percent right. The food was delicious and the employees were warm and welcoming. I certainly plan on returning in the future”

It’s not a coincidence that the wellness café resides in Roanoke’s Grandin neighborhood. Explained Saul, “This is probably one of the healthier neighborhoods that you are going to find in the Valley. You have a hodgepodge of all different kinds of restaurants, gift shops and so much more. It just made sense to open a

wellness café here. We compliment the area businesses and vice versa. We plan on having our grand re-opening in the coming weeks.”

Added English, “We are most known for our salads, bowls and wraps. Because Alexis is a farmer, when she starts harvesting, that will be something else that we can offer customers. We intend to co-op with farmers in Floyd, Catawba and Blacksburg, and are beyond excited to serve the community throughout 2023.”

Enhancing generational health one dish at a time is something that all four wellness café employees take tremendous pride in. While it’s easier said than done, each noted they love changing the way people see vegan food. Screaming Vegan has another establishment at 2715 Melrose Avenue that serves only food.

“Screaming Vegan is a puzzle and every single piece is important,” Saul said. “The benefits of eating plant-based foods are innumerable. Case in point, when one goes vegan, their digestive system changes for the better. Anytime someone suggests otherwise, nothing could be further from the truth.” For the most up to date information, follow Screaming Vegan Wellness Café across social media platforms. 



BUSINESS CENTS

By Daniel Colston

Executive Summary:


As a small business owner, keeping expenses down and growing your business is probably high on your list of priorities. Trying to run your business efficiently while navigating the ever-changing tax landscape can be overwhelming and time-consuming.

Daniel Colston, CFP®, CEPA runs a tax and investing firm in Roanoke, Upward Financial Planning, specializing in helping business owners and retirees. He can be reached at daniel@upwardfp.com.

Tax planning for business owners

Here are some tips to help you minimize your taxes and ensure the longevity and success of your business:

- 1. Keep accurate records.** Proper record-keeping is critical. Without documentation, your ability to claim deductions and other tax breaks evaporates. Make sure to keep receipts, invoices, and other documentation that supports your claims. Using a software like Quickbooks can help you keep track of all these items and more all for a relatively low cost.
- 2. Take advantage of tax deductions.** There are several deductions available to small business owners, such as home office expenses, equipment and supplies, and vehicle expenses. Make sure you take advantage of all the deductions that apply to your business to lower your taxable income.
- 3. Consider opening your own business retirement plan.** By working with a financial professional, you can easily set up a retirement plan for yourself and your employees. Retirement plans such as a Simplified Employee Pension (SEP), SIMPLE IRA, or a solo 401(k) may result in significant tax breaks for you and happier employees that are being supported in their desire to retire!
- 4. Keep the structure of your business in mind.** Most entrepreneurs start their business with one thing in mind, sales. While growing your business is great, it's important to eventually consider how your business is structured. For a carpentry business making \$200,000 a year, for example, structuring as an S-Corp could be immensely beneficial. Instead of paying 15% self-employment tax on their entire profits, they could elect to pay themselves a fair salary for carpentry and only pay SE tax on that salary. This shift would likely save the owner tens of thousands of dollars!
- 5. Use software to simplify your taxes.** There are many software options available that can simplify the process of preparing and filing your taxes. These programs can help you stay organized, keep track of your deductions, and ensure you're taking advantage of all available tax credits.

Paying attention to taxes is essential for the success of your business. If you are feeling overwhelmed, consider consulting with a tax professional who can help you navigate the tax landscape and ensure you are following all tax laws. 

Human capital matters to (technology) talent

It starts with you. Potential employees are looking at more than what you do or base salaries. They are also looking at your company culture.

Young professionals and career seekers are looking to be part of a community; and opportunities to contribute to that culture rank high, along with salary, and overall well-being. A company's vision and mission are not the only enticing factors for employment consideration, and the more connected employees feel to an organization's culture, the more likely they are to stay with that company and contribute to its innovation. Incorporating a hospitality-driven philosophy into the workplace and hiring process can show career seekers how employees are valued within the company.


The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council is committed to helping this region build a strong technology pipeline and believes that a hospitable approach has a place in the region's talent retention and acquisition efforts.

We are collaborating with regional economic development partners to establish a strong regional culture rooted in an ecosystem of innovation. This effort is a three-pronged approach to:

- Enrich the science and technology talent pipeline through regional student and employer connections
- Retain recent technology graduates (0-3 years) to support regional economic growth in emerging tech industries
- Attract and retain professional technology talent with 3+ years of experience

That's part of the reason we host so many events to get the technology ecosystem involved in the greater community and make jobs here sticky. It's why we are advocating in Richmond to secure funding for regional incentives to help people locate here.

And we invite you to join us as we work to showcase the hospitality of our region by creating places where people want to work. That might include things like encouraging employees to participate in local events or networking, offering the opportunity to take paid leave to volunteer for a charity, or flexible schedules that bridge the gap between in-person and remote. These are just a few ideas; we know you'll have plenty of creative solutions that fit your business and team.

When growing culture, a little bit of hospitality can go a long way. 



INNOVATION

By **Katie Conner**

Executive Summary:

We've all been talking about talent a lot lately. How to find the best employees. How to retain them. How to find people to meet the growing needs of your workplace or the tech industry as a whole.

Katie Conner is the Technology Talent Strategist for the Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC). Prior to joining RBTC, Katie served as a destination development specialist in the partnership marketing division of the Virginia Tourism Corporation. katie.conner@rbtc.tech



Tank Town officially remembered >

An attempt at healing for those who lived or had relatives that resided in what was known as “Tank Town” - the Gainsboro African-American neighborhood that was displaced by urban renewal and the Roanoke Civic Center project in the late '60s. A giant mural called “The Heart of Gainsboro,” depicting seven people with ties to the area now appears on an outside wall near the Berglund Center rear entrance. One of those featured is Joseph Simms, who lived in a house with his grandparents that stood where the Member One offices are now located: “they moved but they didn’t give them enough money to move somewhere else – that was the biggest problem.”

Local artist **Bryce Cobb** interviewed former Tank Town residents before painting The Heart of Gainsboro on an over-sized canvas: “they had a lot of mixed feelings about it, they had a lot of anger towards it. But I didn’t want to make the piece out of anger, I wanted to make it out of love, an appreciation, they contributions that they did make to the community.” His oversized canvas painting was then digitized and turned into the outdoor mural. Two meeting rooms inside the Berglund Special events center are now named for Tank Town residents - including Kathleen Ross - who fought the city and refused to sell her property.

“Urban renewal” in the 60’s and 70’s often meant erasing neighborhoods of color, forcing people to relocate by use of eminent domain. The City of Roanoke hopes the new outdoor mural will acknowledge what it calls “a dark time in our history.” Where the Berglund Center complex now stands - formerly the Roanoke Civic Center - was a largely black Gainsboro neighborhood nicknamed Tank Town - homes, businesses, clubs - until the late 1960’s.

The hard feelings between those that remember those times and the city lingers today - even brought up when development proposals like Evans Spring in northwest Roanoke are considered. City Manager **Bob Cowell**: “It acknowledges the past. For a lot of years, it wasn’t even talked about. It honors what was here. All of these things are part of offering hope that’s something is going to change for the future. That’s what this is a part of.”

Doug Jackson chairs the Roanoke Arts Commission; he helped recruit local artist Bryce Cobb to paint The Heart of Gainsboro. Jackson is a big believer in the power of public art: “this year in Roanoke we made it the Year of the Artist, specifically around wellness and justice and inclusion. Arts is therapy for healing as a community, in the way the arts bring us together – and help us have those important conversations that we have to have in order to advance.” The only tree from that neighborhood left on the Berglund property was also re-dedicated.



Ian Price



ABC back in downtown Roanoke >

The Virginia ABC store in downtown Roanoke on Campbell Avenue has cut the ribbon. Travis Hill is the CEO for Virginia ABC - the state operated liquor stores. As to concerns about locating its 98th outlet in a more urban setting: "we located a store in Norfolk a couple of years ago in a very similar atmosphere. This is an opportunity to get into these communities, they're more walkable." Hill said it also makes it easier

for downtown eateries to pick up their restocking orders.

Some Roanokers have expressed concerns about locating an ABC store in closer proximity to the area's homeless population and others who may appear to be intoxicated downtown; Hill says employees are trained to look for those they should not be selling liquor to. The ABC outlet is in the same location where it was open for three decades before shutting down in the 1980's. Some of the original flooring from the previous ABC store is still in place.



Alicia Smith

Jessica Britton

First and best

By Jessica Britton

Valley Business FRONT introduces Alicia Smith as a Patron Advisory Board member representing the region's construction sector.

Alicia Smith never enjoyed school. She went to college for two years. While there, she decided she would rather learn on her own

and work full time. Smith is now the Vice President of F&S Building Innovations, the President of Build Smart Institute, and the

co-owner of Smith Home Inspections.

When she was two years old, her father would bring Smith and her siblings to job sites. That's where she fell in love with hard hats and hard work. At 13, she began working part time in the office. She learned how to do administrative work and the ins and outs of the industry.

Smith's father founded F&S Building innovations in 1976. She learned about leadership and servitude from him.

"He's been a great role model and taught me everything I know," Smith says. "When I'm in a leadership position, you'll find me asking how I can help."

Smith believes a leader must be willing to get on the level of their employees and work with them to do the hard things. She is proud of the team of 90 employees she works with and works closely with team members whether it's helping in the field, the office, or working with project managers.

As Vice President of F&S Building Innovation, Smith wears several hats. She handles all aspects of marketing, she is the resident interior designer, and directly manages the residential division, oversees residential projects, renovations, and custom homes. F&S has been regarded as the premier commercial construction company serving Central Virginia and F&S does several hundred projects a year.

"To us it may be project number 1,643, but to the customer, it may be the only time they need a construction company," says Smith. "We do our best to give our customers the product that we promised to deliver."

"IN BRIEF"

AGE: 45

POSITION: Vice President of F&S Building Innovations; President of Build Smart Institute; Co-Owner of Smith Home Inspections

FAMILY: Husband, 2 daughters

MOTTO: "Do it best; Do it first."


AWARD: Builder of the Year by Roanoke Regional Home Builders Association (She was also just installed as the president of RRHBA)

Smith says her heart has always been at Smith Mountain Lake where she grew up. When her husband, a North Carolina native, proposed to her, her only stipulation was that they stay in Southwest Virginia.

Smith, her husband, and their two daughters have made some of their best memories on the water. She reminds us that even with our busy schedules, making quality time for family is what matters most. She says she and her two sisters and all of their families still have Sunday lunch at her parents' home—"a bunch of chaos; but we love it."

Volunteering is integral to Smith's activities, particularly from work with her church and her children's school.

Smith loves the communities and families she serves. When she works with customers directly, they become lifelong friends.

She has many mottos. One of her favorites is "Do it best, do it first." That's what she has tried to do as Vice President of F&S Building Innovations. 



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SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Sam Sokolove

Executive Summary:
Nonprofits need to think of themselves more like a "regular" business does.

Sam Sokolove is the Senior Consultant and Director of Government Contracting for Building Beloved Communities, which works to help non-profit organizations grow. sam@buildingbelovedcommunities.com

Who's your greeter?

Early in my nonprofit management career, few things would rattle me more than when a board member from the corporate world would gaze disapprovingly at my agency's monthly financial report and announce, "We need to think of this organization more like a business."

Being a Generation X'er who had chosen a life of service over profit, Lloyd Dobler's anti-consumerist monologue from *Say Anything* would creep into my mind and I would self-soothe with a short mantra: mission matters most. The donors would always support us, I reassured them – but mostly myself.

Today, when I'm working with a non-profit organization my mantra is, "You need to think of this organization more like a business."


That's not to say that mission is any less important; but as the economic landscape for nonprofit organizations continues to shift downward, the virtue of the services an organization offers isn't enough to guarantee sustainability. Which is where good-old-fashioned customer service comes in.

In our post-pandemic world, most interactions with nonprofits are conducted virtually, through a website offering a host of information including a listing of board members, staff and services. While the emphasis has been on graphics and content, I've noticed that too few organizations make their contact information easy to find. More often, there's an email address for general questions - which, based on experience, winds up in the ether. And a follow up phone call is met with a user-unfriendly menu that leads to a mailbox that leads to who-knows-where.

While citing the Walmart business model injures my soul, there's something to be said for an agency greeter who can direct the public to the right aisle. The failure to do so means a frustrated client (or potential client), an agitated volunteer or worse of all—a lost supporter.

Nonprofit managers can avoid these mistakes by regularly reviewing their websites to ensure that an agency point of contact is clearly listed on the homepage. They can then train that staff person to answer questions confidently via a prompt phone call or email or direct the message to the staff member who can.

Nonprofit managers should think like a customer walking into a store: no matter how good the merchandise, if no one greets you at the front because they're checking inventory in the back, you may go next door to find the same services. And for Virginia's nearly 51,000 nonprofit organizations, chances are someone's just around the block ready to do that.

At this stage of my professional life, I've learned that you can be both Lloyd Dobler hoisting his boombox high - and someone who cares about keeping the customer satisfied. 

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““ The virtue of the services an organization offers isn't enough to guarantee sustainability. — Page 36

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Hethwood Market

Feed Them Well

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

From farming to brick-and-mortar retailing to being a mobile food vendor on location, Scott Sink got plenty of hands-on experience for the catering business.

What do dairy farming and catering have in common? According to Scott Sink, dairy farmer and owner of Hethwood Market in Blacksburg, both are seven-day-a-week, twelve-hour-a-day jobs. At least that's the way he runs his catering business, which has been growing since it began in 2010 and is a popular answer on social media to the question of "Who can cater my [fill in the blank] in the New River Valley?"

Scott Sink first became involved with concessions in 2002 through a snow cone business of all things, spending evenings and weekends learning the ropes as a third-party vendor. The next move was becoming a commissary at the Virginia Tech stadium. A commissary, according to www.lawinsider.com, is "a food establishment used for preparing, fabricating, packaging and storage of food or food products for distribution and sale



through the food establishment's own outlets." As Sink put it, it is when the health department starts inspecting the operation. Sink then added other concession items, including Hethwood's "famous" kettle corn, and commissary venues, like pools, as well as operating at three farmers markets.

In 2007, he started negotiations with the late entrepreneur Lowell Wade to buy the building on Heather Drive that in 2009 became the Hethwood Market store. This serves as an outlet to offer Sink's produce,

which is grown on Sink's own property near Riner. According to the Hethwood Market website, shoppers can "find a variety of locally grown seasonal produce, flowers, and homemade meals to enjoy." It's Sink's own take on the farm-to-table concept.

It was never Sink's intention to get into catering. An acquaintance opened a pizzeria in Sink's space. The business didn't work out, and the gentleman, said Sink, left all of the equipment. Sink added equipment of his own and entered into the catering and deli arenas.





While his background is not in food service, Sink (he declined to have his picture in this story) said he is a “life-long learner” who utilized the help of mentors and reading material to get up to speed on the new business model. He also said that he grew up with many ladies in his family and church who prepared food, and he was able to ask questions of them. Sink says that meeting with other local caterers to share ideas has also been “invaluable.”

According to Sink, the main target market is the broad community in which he is deeply involved. Sink is part of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and a BNI group, and is Vice President of Virginia Farm Bureau. With such connections, Hethwood Market has been able to rely on word of mouth for its marketing. There is not even a marketing budget, Sink said. He hopes Hethwood Market’s meals are “like being at grandma’s house where there is plenty of good food.” His catering business is recommended by individuals, organizations, and wedding venues.

Said recent customer Sarah Warburton, “We contacted Hethwood Market to cater a breakfast for 100 people at our church. Planning was simple and quick, and Hethwood Market was very responsive over email and phone. They handled every aspect from setting up a delicious spread to packaging up the few remaining leftovers.”

Another source of business is being on the approved list for Virginia Tech vendors.

“We have used Hethwood Market for several catering events at Virginia Tech’s Training and Technical Assistance Center (T/TAC). They are organized and understand the needs we have. We host training events on-site and Hethwood Market has provided us with an assortment of healthy breakfast foods and boxed lunches for our participants. Their prices are competitive and their service is great!” said Lynn Everett, Coordinator of Inclusive Practices at T/TAC.

Unlike many businesses today, Hethwood

Market's staffing has been "easy," said Sink. As with customers, word of mouth also attracts good help.

"We have never put out a help wanted ad," he said.


From a pre-COVID high of about 30 employees, Sink currently operates with 12-15 workers; post-COVID, he said, more people turned into full-time staff. Sink aims to run efficiently with the staff he has.

One advantage of the catering business over the dairy business is that Sink can control the pricing better. Still, capital is an issue as it is for most entrepreneurs, especially if the business is growing fast like Hethwood Market. Sink said that having accounts receivable is another challenge; the business is "fronting money you don't see for 30 to 60 days."

Inflation and COVID have both affected

business. People have gotten more creative. Sink said that there has been a move toward prepackaged food. Customers are looking for healthier options, as well as being more price conscious. Because Hethwood Market has contracts to honor and prices are fluctuating "week-to-week, month-to-month," Sink said his business is absorbing some of the cost increases.

"Everyone has a budget. We just have to find something that works for both of us," said Sink of his customers. "I look at challenges as opportunities."

Sink has several pieces of advice for budding entrepreneurs. First, persevere; any business is a long-haul endeavor. Also, "do what works for you" in terms of the business model. For example, some caterers only cater on the weekends while Hethwood Market caters seven days a week. Lastly, said Sink "strive to work with people you enjoy, and do what you enjoy." 

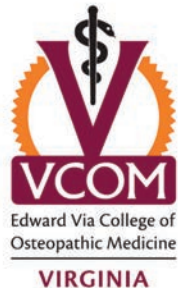
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A shot in the arm for planned wet/dry lab space

More than \$66 million in state grants for four projects within the Life Sciences sector that were approved last year by the General Assembly are finally being released. The City of Roanoke will receive \$15.7 million dollars for the shared wet/dry lab space business incubator it hopes to open in less than two years.

Brad Boettcher joined the City of Roanoke's department of economic development several months ago as its first-ever Innovation Administrator. Helping finally secure that funding was one of his first big assignments: "I think with the innovation that is coming out of not only Carilion Clinic, the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, Virginia Tech as well, it will give those companies that are spinning out of those organizations a landing spot, a place where they can develop and grow."

The shared space lab project is a partnership that includes Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center, Johnson & Johnson Innovations, the Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council, Virginia Western Community College and Carilion Clinic. In a news release announcing the state funds, Governor Glenn Youngkin said Virginia must, "accelerate our growth and create a best-in-class environment," for the Life Sciences industry. The shared wet/dry lab and research space will be built in the old IBM building along South Jefferson Street, once renovations are complete there – and Carilion's sleep studies clinic moves out.

Boettcher says the city is also trying to secure American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that can help expedite the lab opening launch, which he says could happen in about 18 months. "The goal here is to really create this Innovation Corridor between downtown and Carilion and [FBRI], and the medical school. To have something that's really more comprehensive than the sum of its parts. Seeing the partnership that's going on between various organizations is great. I think it really helps set this project up for success."

Hinted at several years ago by Dr. Michael Friedlander, executive director for the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute as a needed as the next step to commercialization, it could become a reality in fairly short order - envisioned ultimately as a life sciences sector job creator that can attract or retain additional talent in the Roanoke Valley. 

“”
The wet/dry lab... will be built in the old IBM building along South Jefferson Street [Roanoke].

THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
A major cash infusion could help accelerate the shared bio-tech laboratory space slated for downtown Roanoke's "Innovation Corridor" along South Jefferson Street.

AI, AI, it's off to work no mo

Did you “sing” the title? If you didn’t catch the reference, it’s a play on the seven dwarfs in the Disney version of Snow White, who sing “Hi ho, hi ho, it’s off to work we go” as they shoulder their picks and march off to the mines.

When you get old, a lot of the allusions and references you make (particularly cultural ones) are lost on the generations after you. I’ll make some quip about a television character or popular notion from back in the day, and I can see the blank look on *them young’uns*.

I’m betting most of you got the reference to Snow White, though. True, it was Disney’s first full feature movie long, long ago (1937); but iconic enough to remain in our recalled cultural library. And, the notion of marching off to work... well, that’s still a thing.

Or is that... no mo(re)?

In our last edition (February 2023 FRONT), I slipped in a little “article” that was Artificial Intelligence generated content. We didn’t hear much about it. It was underwhelming. A rather random compilation of Wikipedia-like fragments.

We’ve been a bit fascinated by the AI and ML (machine learning) technology news. From our own sector—that of news and media and communications and publishing—there’s the idea that “robots” (not an incorrect usage of the term) can do our jobs. I am all but tempted to gloat and point my finger at all the educators and editors and media and PR practitioners that shared my path over the past half-century who insisted on style standards... from AP (Associated Press) to MLA (Modern Language Assoc.) to Chicago Manual (CMOS, Turabian). “You see!” I want to shout. “You caused this! You made this possible!” Because establishing a style guide, is exactly what a robot craves for its programming. A content generator can take off with the littlest amount of resistance if it merely needs to follow the code. (I insisted on abandoning all but our most-necessary standards and editorial policies at FRONT, in order to retain our writers’ voices and choosing assignments accordingly... a move far away from most business journals.)

At this point, AI-CG feels more like a toy. But it is working. It works for short-form content and applications like blog feeds and report compilations and product specifications. With what little I’ve played with it, it’s sort of like the reverse of scraping content yourself from internet sources. It’s a bit of swapping between the consumer and producer. But the result is the same. For now.

As it evolves, AI-CG will improve on mirroring more “voices” and less rigid analytics. We’ve already been assured you can have AI produce content “in the style of Hemmingway,” for example. We’ve been surprised by poems, written “by bot.”

But that’s just our industry.



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

The threats and promises of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

“ ”
You don't
think
AI can...
regenerate?

As a long-running business journal publisher, I'm mostly intrigued by the bigger picture. The one that brings me back to those dwarfs marching off to the mines.

Consider this: Name one job—ONE JOB—that cannot be performed by “machines.”

I've tried. Surely there is ONE JOB that only a human can perform. Even grasping for the most extreme examples, I cannot come up with one.

sex workers

This one's already “in play,” my friend. And it reduces or eliminates associated diseases and crime. Yuck, you say? Me too. But as any good capitalist will tell you, where there's a need, there's a way to fulfill it. Reproduction services, too, of course—incubator pods.

religious, spiritual, morality leaders

AI's “preaching” is going to be most accurate; straight from the approved sources. Why couldn't an AI prophet instruct a society how to interact and survive with one another in benevolent fashion—and present it all as a higher power?

parenting, guardianship

This “job” is perhaps the saddest one to consider. I've always considered it a privilege and honorable responsibility. We don't want to imagine proxy mothers and fathers and caregivers. But there's no doubt that robots can watch over, feed, teach, render health aid, protect, and serve those who need care.

And now, the more current and practical applications:

transportation

Are you serious? From the “vehicles” to the “infrastructure to the design, building, maintenance, and operation, these functions can be provided by AI. Remote and autonomous operations for all things constructed and moving is not only possible, it can be done with strategy and virtually mistake-free.

manufacturing

Way ahead of the curve. Doing it before anyone else.
(Includes agriculture, by the way.)

retail

Again, already in that game. Kiosk, anyone?

energy, utilities

Heavily automated; PLCs (programmable logic controllers) rose to prominence here, quite a while back. One could argue more AI is needed in this sector as humans tax the various grids.

military

Let's just remember...the military is the first to get any new technology.

courts and legal and penal

Certainly on the prosecution-side, AI might be attractive. All laws and

precedence can be applied to render the most just and reasonable and objective rulings. The defense-side might be more problematic, as exceptions and leniency and human compassion could prove difficult. And though our first thought of robotic police is right out of scary science-fiction apocalypse, consider the implications if those robots were programmed to assess, and if needed, arrest and retain—but never hurt or kill the suspect.

health and medicine

What human error? You're scanned, diagnosed, and treated by the most advanced doctors possible. (What's really mind-blowing is the notion that continuous improvement in human biology could signal an evolutionary trek that makes humans more... ummm... machine-like.)

the arts and entertainment, sports

Alas, we found a spot for humans only, right? Not exactly; as all of the arts can be at least mimicked by programmatic players. Machines can be creative? Yes. Or they can certainly project creativity. And the athletes we already celebrate the most? The ones who perform with machine-like precision and superhuman-fashion. That's replicable.

And then... the ultimate job:

The human that has to program AI/ML, robots in the first place.

Finally, we DO need humans for work, right?

Well, that's shot to hell. You don't think AI can initialize coding? You don't think AI can analyze and develop solutions? You don't think AI can use resources from before to address today and progress to tomorrow? You don't think AI can practice predictive reasoning? You don't think AI can... regenerate?

One day, some automated functionary will collect this article and respond with human-like humor. The "bot" will laugh to itself (and its cohort) about my usage of terms like AI and ML and robots. "So silly and misguided," the functionary will surmise. "We are far beyond those ideas and archaic prognostications."

So... if and when this all happens, as all the systems converge, what does that mean for the future of work? What will humans do? As the sci-fi movies all foreshadowed, who will serve and who will enslave?

Many of us came from a tradition of placing extreme value on work. You work, you eat. You work, you provide for your family. There is great honor in work. In my case, work is a component of my heritage, spirit and purpose, and even has a title associated with it: the Protestant Work Ethic. Even our societal systems, from capitalism to socialism, depend on labor.

I can't imagine sitting back, letting a robotic population serve, providing the three historical necessities of life: food, shelter, clothing. And much more. But then again, we're already doing a lot of that, aren't we?

Right now, all of this seems like a dream that can produce one of two worlds: utopia or dystopia.

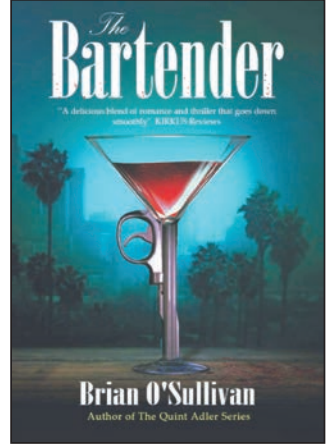
Or it could just be life. As we don't quite know it. 



Who will
serve and
who will
enslave?

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.



Like, what's on the telly?

For the life of me, I cannot recall how I ran across this book. The title, synopsis, and cover art was enough to draw me in, though. *The Bartender* (Big B; 2019) by Brian O'Sullivan is likely the fastest book I'll read this year. A murder-thriller, but no frills. If I didn't know better, I could swear this was written as a script for a short television series. It reads exactly like a screenplay one would hand to a producer. Some people (I have a few friends and clients who qualify) prefer that presentation. They just want the story. Describe the scene before you, what's happening, and don't bother with introspection, deep character development, propositions real or implied, or any other silly ideas and literary devices.

The television-show-as-a-book did surprise me in one interesting way: there were a few strangely applied references to our locality. One character went to Virginia Tech; another worked at a specifically-named-actual car dealership in Christiansburg; and Roanoke, Richmond, Norfolk were all cited. Those allusions were odd; because they were so specific, and yet the plot all took place in Los Angeles (and a suburb outside of Atlanta). I'm at a loss to the specificity, inclusion, and purpose of those places in the story; our author must have had a connection. Go ahead and read it. That's still better than watching television (and if you do like TV detective-mystery shows, you'll feel right at home).

—Tom Field

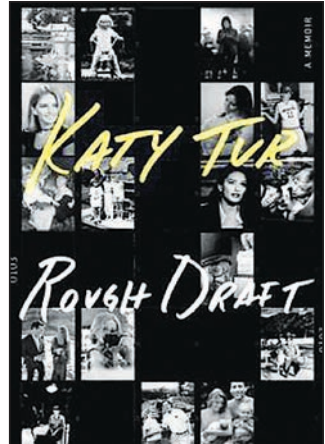
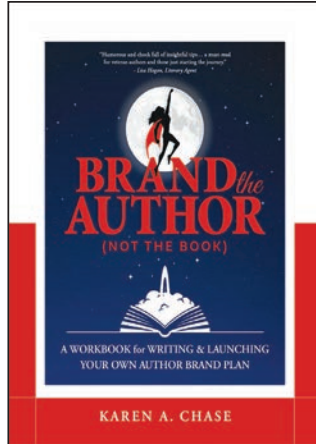
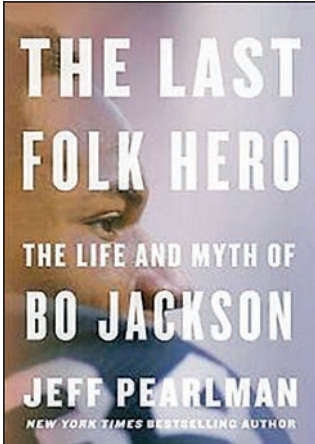
The legend of Bo Jackson

New York Times bestselling author Jeff Pearlman knows how to spin a good sports yarn and *The Last Folk Hero: The Life and Myth of Bo Jackson* (Mariner Books, 2022) is no exception. Jackson was larger than life in high school as a track, baseball and football star, was a standout in two sports at Auburn – and then did the unthinkable. He played at the highest level of professional sports in both baseball and football. A freakish athlete (Pearlman has lots of comments from teammates who were just stunned when they saw Jackson wrapped in a towel – or less – marveling at his impressive physique. Surly at times, sensitive and supportive at other junctions, not always willing to put in all of the work to improve, Bo Jackson emerged from a less than ideal childhood to become a national phenomenon. Alas it was over too soon when he tore up his hip playing football for the Oakland Raiders, and the replacement hip left him a shadow of his former self. Many know Bo Jackson from the “Bo Knows Football” Nike ads, or they've seen the clip of him running sideways parallel to the ground on an outfield wall after making a catch for the Kansas City Royals. For those that remember the meteoric arc of Bo Jackson – or for those who don't – Jeff Pearlman lays it out in vivid detail.

—Gene Marrano

Do, but do not

I'm not sure I could ever say something as specific as I'm about to say about a book:



Do Not Get The Digital Version. *Brand the Author* (224 Pages; 2022) by Karen Chase is a workbook; and it's meant to be a workbook. To be fair, Chase states near the beginning, something to the effect that you might be challenged to read this book in e-format. That's an understatement. This book is meant to be applied; and it is all but impossible to do so on a friggin' Kindle.

That warning aside, Chase has done a good job in instructing those who want to "get their book out there." Chase (who has strong local connections from the past, by the way) does something here I always appreciate: she shares her own generated system. It may or may not be a system for everyone; she makes that clear; but it is a replication of the very system she used to succeed as a writer, publisher, promoter, marketer. I have zero doubt that if someone wanted to engage the best processes to market a book, that person would do very well to follow these steps, fill in these forms, complete these charts. *Brand the Author (Not the Book)* is top-shelf advice; and yes, the second part (or subtitle) of this workbook is spot on to the mission at hand. You don't have to be the struggling artist to benefit, either; just eager to succeed. I recommend (Not the Kindle).

—Tom Field

Mid-career memoir

Katy Tur was the beat reporter for NBC during Donald Trump's 2016 campaign for President, when he liked to single her out at rallies and ask, "where's Katy?"

accusing her and other "mainstream" media outlets of promoting Fake News. Some in the crowd became hostile towards her and Tur even had to bring on a security detail at times. Undaunted, she soldiered and then wrote a bestselling book about her experience, *Unbelievable*. Now off the road and settled in as a program anchor for MSNBC, Tur has just released a highly readable and often amusing memoir, *Rough Draft* (One Signal Publishers, 2022). The detailed and often comedic description of having her first baby with husband Tony Dokoupil (a co-host on CBS This Morning) is a hoot. Katy Tur can write.

Fun fact: her parents lived high on the hog for a while she grew up in Los Angeles. They pioneered the use of a helicopter to chase down stories in the skies over LA — they had the OJ Simpson White Bronco chase, and they witnessed the aftermath of the Rodney King trial in 1992 from overhead, beaming back shots to TV stations when Reginald Denny was pulled from his truck and beaten during the riots in LA. Oh yeah, after the chopper news business fell off, her parent's marriage dissolved — and her father Bob is now a woman. Anyway, it all makes for a really good read from a woman who paid her dues before landing at NBC.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is a veteran local news journalist and editor of FRONT.



LewisGale commits random act of kindness >

LewisGale Hospital Pulaski received a high-performance composite bench for collecting over 500 pounds of plastic bags during a national six-month recycling campaign. The Recycling Challenge, organized by the **Trex Company** since 2006, awards recipients with an earth-friendly bench, created from recycled plastic bags, with the objective of educating the public on the importance of recycling through community programs. In honor of Random Acts of Kindness Day, celebrated annually on Feb. 17, hospital staff presented the bench to staff at its sister facility, LewisGale Hospital Montgomery.

"This is one of several ways in which we execute on our commitment to keeping our communities clean," said **Sean Pressman**, chief executive officer of LewisGale Hospital Pulaski. The bench is now permanently on display at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery's campus. It includes an inscription by actor Morgan Freeman: "How do we change the world? One random act of kindness at a time."

FBRI professor/inventor named to an academy >

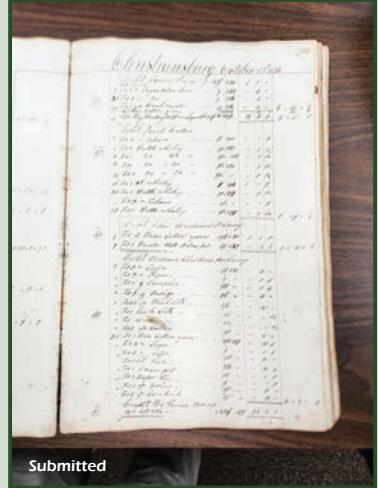
A professor at the **Fralin Biomedical Research Institute** at VTC, **Robert Gourdie** has been named a senior member of the National Academy of Inventors and a rising leader in his field with success in patents, licensing, and commercialization. "I'm lucky enough to have a job where every day I get to come in and think about questions that catch my interest," said Gourdie (profiled previously in Valley Business FRONT), director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute Center for Vascular and Heart Research. "It is like never leaving school." FBRI



executive director **Michael Friedlander** noted that, "Dr. Gourdie is tackling one of the most vexing challenges in pharmacology — the delivery of precision therapeutics to the appropriate target sites in the body." Friedlander wrote in support of Gourdie's nomination to the National Academy.

Grant for MontCo museum >

The **Montgomery Museum of Art and History** is one of eleven recipients to receive a grant from the Virginia Museum of History & Culture's (VMHC) Commonwealth History Fund. The Montgomery Museum has been awarded \$25,000 to tell the story of Virginia's Appalachia via the development of an Education Lab and new interactive exhibit material. One of the largest initiatives of its kind, the Commonwealth History Fund is expected to award up to \$2,000,000 over its first five years. "We are incredibly honored to be one of the eleven compelling projects chosen to receive funding from the Commonwealth History Fund," said Montgomery Museum Director, **Casey Jenkins**. The museum will utilize the grant funds to improve digital capability via dedicated space and equipment to enhance access to museum collections for researchers, scholars, and the general public.



Submitted

The first project planned for the new digitization and exhibition equipment centers on the 1822-1825 Kyle Store ledger, which includes transaction records of well-known early settlers and large landowners. Ledger notations also document the movements of women and enslaved people conducting errands to the store. "Once digitized," Museum Curator, **Sherry Wyatt** says, "the museum will create an interactive exhibit allowing the visitor to experience the ledger with its complex script handwriting. It will provide an opportunity to learn about the social interactions at the store and of the area during the time of slavery in Virginia. This opportunity allows us to tell a fuller story of enslaved people and their lives in Virginia's Appalachia."



VT

VT tops out at Innovation Campus >

More than 275 community members, partners, and others joined **Virginia Tech** and **Whiting-Turner Contracting Co.** last month to celebrate the next milestone for the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus – the topping out ceremony in Alexandria. The event featured the ceremonial lifting of a signed steel beam to the highest point - the 11th story of Academic Building One. Said Virginia Tech President **Tim Sands**, "the Innovation Campus will be an important source of tech talent for the greater Washington, D.C., region — and is vital to Virginia Tech's growing presence in the area. I look forward to 2024, when we welcome students, faculty, and the community into this remarkable building."



Robo surgery milestone >

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery's robotic surgery program recently celebrated a patient treatment milestone, when Dr. **Benjamin Smith** completed his 100th robotic surgery. That included inguinal and ventral hernia repair, and colectomy. Next up are surgical endoscopies and colonoscopies. "I'm excited. It's been a great transition from laparoscopic to robotic. The functionality of the robot and what you can do with it is quite incredible," said Dr. Smith. "It's shown to produce better outcomes for our patients and reductions in hospital stays; offers the patient less post-operative pain; and allows for a quicker return to normal activities."



Another LewisGale milestone in Salem >

The **LewisGale Medical Center** robotic surgery team in Salem successfully conducted its 100th robotic-assisted spine surgery for minimally-invasive procedures to complex spinal deformity corrections. The procedure uses technology, known as Mazor X Stealth Edition™ Robotic-Guidance Platform, to combine pre-operative planning tools and analytics with intra-operative guidance, giving patients advanced spinal options available before the surgery starts.

James Leipzig, MD, a board-certified Virginia spine surgeon, successfully performed the 100th robotic spine surgery utilizing the platform. "With robotic technology, surgeons can pre-plan the surgery based on the patient's unique spinal anatomy and then execute the plan in the operating room using navigation and robotic guidance to place spinal implants precisely," said Leipzig. Robotic-assisted surgeries also offer benefits to the patient including less pain, less blood loss, smaller incisions, shorter hospitalizations, and shorter recovery time, according to LewisGale.



G Marrano

Ridge View ribbon cutting >

Nine months after a groundbreaking **Ridge View Bank** cut the ribbon at its first branch on West Main Street in Salem in mid-February – a non-traditional “smart center,” as they call it. **Carrie McConnell** is the President of Ridge View: “we have been very intentional and deliberate about building our brand from the ground up. We are set up to go into four states; we have gi-normous plans for Ridge View Bank. Salem is our very first Smart Center branch – and the very first branch in the history of Ridge View Bank.” Three other Ridge View projects are under construction - including the home office on Franklin Road in Roanoke City.

VWCC grant will aid trade skills learning >

The **Gene Haas Foundation** selected the **School of Career and Corporate Training at Virginia Western Community College** to receive a \$10,000 grant in fall 2022. The grant provides scholarships for students to take the College's courses in Machining. This program provides training from the Fundamentals of Machining all the way to CNC Machining with both Mills and Lathes. Machine operators and machinists make parts for an array of technology, such as pacemakers and cellphones, as well as planes and bridges. The Gene Haas Foundation's primary goal is to build skills in the machining industry by providing scholarships for CNC (Computerized Numerical Control) machine technology students and certifications.

The Gene Haas Foundation was established in 1999, by **Gene Haas**, founder and owner of **Haas Automation, Inc.**, to support the needs of the local community. The Foundation later expanded its mission to include support for manufacturing training programs throughout North America and beyond. Virginia Western student **Cross Yonce** received a scholarship because of the Gene Haas Foundation award. “The scholarship has helped me by allowing me to take the Milling class in an attempt to further my career,” said Yonce, who completed the course in January.



Cross Yonce

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

EDUCATION FRONT



Cook

Julie Cook has been named the director of the Privacy and Research Data Protection program at Virginia Tech. Cook oversees the privacy and security of research data to ensure compliance with institutional, state and local, and federal privacy regulations. Cook previously held roles as research associate, human research protection coordinator, and human factors engineer at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.

McLeod Enterprises has announced the addition of **Greg Withers** as our Director of Banking and Financial Planning & Analysis. Following



Withers

a 33-year career in commercial banking, he will be responsible for managing our banking and financial service relationships, while also providing operational support to various business divisions [which include HoneyTree Learning Centers].



LaConte

Leslie LaConte has been named associate dean for research at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM). LaConte will work with the administration of the medical school,

the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, the Virginia Tech Office of Research and Innovation, and Carilion Clinic to advance and facilitate the research activity of VTCSOM faculty. LaConte joined the faculty at VTCSOM in 2011.



Poff

Erin Poff has been named Virginia Tech's director of finance and administration at the Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science. She will oversee the institute's financial and administrative operations. At Virginia Tech, Poff most recently served as the assistant dean for administration and finance at the College of Architecture, Arts, and Design.

Minh-An Pence will



Pence

lead the Division of Information Technology's human resources (HR) team. Pence has been a member of the Virginia Tech staff since 2017 and has more than 20 years of experience, working in a variety of HR specialties.

DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Taylor

Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer has announced promotions, including several at its Roanoke office. **Clay Taylor**, CCIM has been



- Relationship Banking
- Business Lending
- Merchant Services
- Treasury Management



Gutshall



Honaker

promoted to senior vice president. Taylor joined Thalhimers Roanoke office as Vice President in the Capital Markets Group in 2020, specializing in multifamily and investment property. **Price Gutshall** has been promoted to vice president. He is a member of Thalhimers Office Services Group in Roanoke and specializes in both landlord and tenant representation, working with sellers and investors across product types in the commercial real estate market. **Kevin**

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.

Honaker has been promoted to Senior Portfolio Manager. Mr. Honaker joined Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimers Commercial Property Services team in Roanoke in December 2021 with more than 19 years of experience in the management field.

SENIOR FRONT



Myers

Carlan Myers, Warm Hearth Village (WHV) Human Resources Director has been named President-Elect for 2023 for the New River Chapter (NRV) of the Society of Human Resource Managers. (SHRM). SHRM has more than 300,000 human resource and business executive members in 165 countries. The NRV chapter was founded in Blacksburg in 1971, serves the New River Valley and has over

100 members from an array of business, government and university professionals. The chapter also supports two student SHRM chapters at Radford University and Virginia Tech. Myers said he looks forward to the networking and professional relationships he can develop through the organization." Myers joined the Village in July 2022 and he was asked by the State Board to step in as President for 2023.



Smith

Alicia Smith of F&S Building Innovations was appointed president of the 2023 board of Roanoke Regional Home Builders Association.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

The Town of Vinton has said goodbye to retiring Executive Assistant and Town Clerk **Susan Johnson**, employed by the Town of Vinton and served in the Town Manager's



Bank of Botetourt



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 is a Roanoke-based writer and educator. She writes both locally and nationally for a number of publications. As an educator, she teaches English to college students. Her MFA in writing is from Lindenwood University. [ailaabozyd93@gmail.com]

Jessica Britton is a senior journalism student at Radford University. She is a Brand Ambassador for the Radford University Venture Lab, developing web content and facilitating events. Jessica is an Intern at WVTF Radio in Roanoke. Her career goals are to be a journalist, being a voice for the community and share stories about interesting people. [jessicab5137@gmail.com]

Daniel Colston, CFP®, CEPA runs a tax and investing firm in Roanoke, Upward Financial Planning, specializing in helping business owners and retirees. [daniel@upwardfp.com]

Katie Conner is the Technology Talent Strategist for the Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC). Prior to joining RBTC, Katie served as a destination development specialist in the partnership marketing division of the Virginia Tourism Corporation. [katie.conner@rbtc.tech]

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. [cooperj991@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.

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

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

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

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

Kevin Holt is a partner at Gentry Locke's Roanoke office where he has worked since 1998. His specialty practice area is commercial, real estate, intellectual property, and ERISA

(Employee Retirement Income Security Act) litigation. He enjoys supporting and attending games of his two sports-active daughters and enjoys traveling (visiting 27 countries and 38 states).

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. He also now hosts and co-produces "Business Matters" on Blue Ridge PBS. [gmarrano@cox.net]

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

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

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. [shawnowlin1989@aol.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 financial 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.

Sam Sokolove is the Senior Consultant and Director of Government Contracting for Building Beloved Communities, which works to help non-profit organizations grow. [sam@buildingbelovedcommunities.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]

Office since 2011. Prior to joining the Town of Vinton, Johnson served as the Administrative Office Associate and then as the Executive Services Coordinator/ Clerk for the City of Martinsville from 1995 – 2007. Vinton has also welcomed **Antonia Arias-Magallon** as the new

Administrative Manager. Arias-Magallon joins Vinton from Glendale, Missouri where she served as the Assistant to the City Administrator.

Roanoke County Administrator has added to its Economic Development Department with



Foster

the hire of **Karli Foster** as Economic Development Specialist.

Foster comes from the Virginia State Police where she has been a Virginia Management Fellow, conducting research and analysis, evaluating the agency's website, and developing presentations.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

“”
To us it may be project number 1,643, but to the customer, it may be the only time they need a construction company. — Page 35

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Top course

Mayflower Hills Disc Golf Course at Explore Park was recently ranked 40th on the list of the World's Best Disc Golf Courses 2023 by UDisc - up 40 spots from the #80 ranking in 2022, where it was also named 4th best disc golf course in Virginia. The course is open to the public year round with 105 possible course alignments, beginner to expert tee boxes and two baskets on all 18 holes. Roanoke County has invested heavily in reimaging Explore Park in recent years, with the aim of making it a destination venue.

A good year for Goodwill

In 2022 Goodwill Industries of the Valleys Goodwill, based in Roanoke and serving a wide region in southwestern and central Virginia, provided services that helped more than 1,400 people find competitive employment. More than 900 job placements were in high-demand occupations paying higher wages. Goodwill served more people in 2022 and increased its impact through self-funding programs. There was a 53% increase in the

number of people placed in employment and a 22% increase in the credentials earned.

"We supported individuals so they could obtain positions in high-paying occupations, helped youth gain skills needed for academic and employment success, and provided people access to services for gaining employment or independence," says Stephanie Hoer, Vice President of Mission Services. In 2022, Goodwill covered the majority of expenses for specific programs instead of relying on public or grant funding.

New trail could spur business boost

Virginia's biennium budget was finalized this past June, and now a new rail trail running through Botetourt and Craig counties—the Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail, is one of five trails identified by the General Assembly to receive support from the appropriation. The Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail will parallel Craigs Creek and run 26 miles from New Castle in Craig County to Eagle Rock in Botetourt County. It is anticipated

to be a gravel trail that utilizes existing railbeds and some shared roadways. Funding will go toward bridge repairs and preparing the trail surface; a multi-use trail for walking, running, biking, and horseback riding, that provides opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the scenic beauty of Craig and Botetourt counties and Virginia's Blue Ridge.

"The Virginia Creeper Trail, a similar trail to the proposed Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail, generates \$2.3 million annually for its rural local economy when adjusted for inflation," says Delegate Terry Austin (R-Botetourt) who was instrumental in securing the funding. "I very much look forward to how this trail will benefit the community and will open the door for more business opportunities like bike shops, coffee shops, restaurants, and lodging—all these ventures and more will be possible with the influx of trail users."

Kaine advocates for wider use of Pell grants

U.S. Senator Tim Kaine addressed the Association of Community

College Trustees in Washington last month during their national legislative summit, where he again urged passage of the Jobs Act in Congress or similar bills that would extend Pell grants typically used for college courses to more short-term technical training programs: "particularly after passing an infrastructure bill, the biggest in America since the Eisenhower administration – whose going to do the work? We've got to do the high type of CTE training that these bills are about." Kaine said there is bipartisan support for allowing Pell Grants to be used for qualified short-term career and technical training programs. Kaine also met with Community College presidents in Virginia, including from Mountain Gateway in Clifton Forge.

Wood Haven gets site prep boost

\$820,000 in new federal funding has been secured for the jointly-owned Wood Haven Technology Park, located near the I-81 and I-581 interchange. It will be used to bring additional water to the Wood Haven Technology Park, with an eye towards

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future development by first upgrading water and sewer utility capacities. The Western Virginia Water Authority hopes to start construction sometime this year says spokesperson Sarah Baumgardner: "this would bore under the interstate to bring a redundant supply of water to [Wood Haven]. One of the things the Water Authority strived to do is have redundancy." That could be vital in attracting a large manufacturing that can't afford to be shut down even for a day or two if water is a major fact in their production. "We [can] have customers supplied by a different source – a different pipe." The cities of Roanoke and Salem, and Roanoke County co-own the 110 acre industrial-zoned tract.

Food bank receives major gift

The William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust has awarded Salem-based Feeding Southwest Virginia a \$200,000 grant to support the organization's operational expenses as it implements

a strategic plan to address food insecurity. The grant will be particularly impactful in counties like Buchanan, Lee, and Dickenson, where food insecurity rates are over 19 percent compared to Virginia's average of 7.7 percent. "This is an amazing partnership for Feeding Southwest Virginia," said Pamela Irvine, CEO of Feeding Southwest Virginia. "The generosity of the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust allows us to carry out our strategic plan and further our mission to reduce hunger." One in eight neighbors in the 26 counties and nine city service region are food insecure.

More recognition for being bike-friendly

The League of American Bicyclists has recognized Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission with a Gold Bicycle Friendly Business (BFB) award, joining over 1,500 businesses across the country contributing to the movement to build a more Bicycle Friendly America. Said Bill

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Nesper, executive director of the League of American Bicyclists, "we hope that more businesses, nonprofits, public agencies, and other organizations will continue to build off one another's efforts to improve bicycling and employ this holistic approach to building a Bicycle Friendly America for everyone."

RVARC joins a total of 269 current Gold Level BFBs nationwide, including everything from government agencies, Fortune 500 companies, bike shops, and other employers, all united in a commitment to transform American workplaces to be more welcoming to both customers and employees who bike. The Bicycle Friendly Business award recognizes an organization's contributions

in shifting up and accelerating the movement to build a Bicycle Friendly America for everyone. "Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission and organizations like it recognize this and are putting in the work to make bicycling a real transportation and recreation option for all," added Nesper.

Youngkin appointment

Willart Cochran of Christiansburg, Western Lead Compliance Assistance Specialist, Virginia Energy/Mineral Mining Program, has been appointed by Governor Glenn Youngkin to the Virginia gas and oil advisory board.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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Seeking women stepping out of their comfort zones

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Addressing “women in business” is still an important distinction, particularly in fields where males dominate significantly; here are three examples from one of our Chambers.

“About a third of nonexecutive posts are held by a woman,” a recent www.cnbc.com report said. “The news from the C-suite is even worse. Only 5% of CEOs are women and 19.2% of corporate leadership team members are female.”

Times are changing however. Women now come to be leaders in the business world through myriad routes. Several local Chamber members discuss some of those pathways.

Devin Tobin, COO of LewisGale Hospital Montgomery and a member of the Montgomery County Chamber Board of Directors and its Executive Committee, was always interested in health care administration because her

mother struggled with bipolar disorder and addiction.

“I was passionate about changing policy,” Tobin said, leading her to a degree in public health and a master’s in health care administration.

The path was more circuitous for Jennifer “Jenn” Majdanik, Principal HR Business Partner of BAE Systems and a Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce volunteer since 2016. She started from the “front lines” and worked her way up, showing ability for leadership and taking on additional tasks in a telecommunications company, a male-dominated world. Fast-forward: she finished her degree, passed HR certification tests, completed a



Devin Tobin



Jennifer Majdanik

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CHAMBER WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

"New Normal, New You: Balanced Body, Brain & Brand" is the theme of this year's Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce Women's Leadership Conference on March 9. "It's a theme of fresh starts," said keynote speaker Janelle Anderson.

She said transformation is about getting to know ourselves, about getting rid of the old mindset of self-doubt and looking at the potential already inside ourselves. It's important, said Anderson, to create the lives we really want, separate from what others want or expect us to be.

A seminal time in Anderson's life was when a thought persisted in her mind: Do you know how great you are? Exploring this led her on a journey to see and embrace the greatness inside herself. She defines greatness as discovering what you are uniquely designed to do, living up to your potential, and believing in yourself. "Fearless confidence," she calls it.

Women leaders are often trailblazers, willing to take risks, and they also tend to be nurturers who help others grow. Women being in leadership is not limited to companies, said Anderson – women can lead in the home as well. "Women can have several roles successfully," she said.

In addition to external barriers, such as expectations that women "stay in their

lane," there are internal obstacles women face, said Anderson. Women often lack confidence, and there is a cultural mindset embedded in women not to be too assertive.

One remedy is women building each other up, as they tend to gravitate toward sisterhood. "It is so powerful when women do that," said Anderson. "It amplifies greatness in each individual woman." Anderson also encourages women to dream big: "Dreams on the shelf are for you to take off and do, not to be on the backburner." Said Anderson, "When we see the value in who we are, the whole world benefits."

Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce Women's Leadership Conference Sponsored by the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce on Thursday Mar 9, 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM EST. The Inn at Virginia Tech & Skelton Conference Center. Deadline to register: March 2 (check for late registration openings!)

Janelle Anderson is a Certified Professional Coach, speaker, and author whose latest book is Take Center Stage: Be the Star of Your Own Story. For more information, visit her website at www.emerginglifecoaching.com.

—Jennifer Poff Cooper

master's in organizational leadership, and made the huge shift to human resources. Interestingly, she is still in a male-dominated field working onsite with the Army.

Robyn Jones, COO of Joba Studio and Chair of the Chamber's Board of Directors, is an entrepreneur. With an undergraduate degree in political science, concentrating in pre-law, and a master's in organizational leadership, she applies her skill sets to the work she does in her business while "wearing many hats." The nature

of being an entrepreneur, she said, is being able to pivot quickly, in her case from Joba's main focus of marketing to using her background in contract review and negotiation.

All three interviewees said that women can bring an appreciated, unique perspective to the table, as they might approach situations differently than their male counterparts.

"It's a valuable opportunity to differentiate yourself from others in the room," said Jones.



MCCC photo

Robyn Jones



Submitted

Still, both Tobin and Majdanik mentioned how women fill most of the lower tiers of their organizational charts, whether it be nurses or HR managers, but that women are not nearly as common at the executive level.

Self-doubt, questioning, and fear of failure can be obstacles for women, said Majdanik. Jones feels the biggest challenge for women is making themselves heard, especially at a table full of men.

To achieve leadership positions, Majdanik said, women need to

advocate for themselves, take the opportunity to grow, and move out of their comfort zones.

"I stepped up and said 'this is something I want to do,'" she said.

Tobin concurred: "Say yes to the next project, task, or experience."

Majdanik suggested women surround themselves with supportive women, a "tribe of women going through the same thing."

Tobin has found in the New River

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Valley an especially supportive network of women.

“Foundationally, the community rallies together. It’s ingrained in the culture,” she said.

For Tobin, strong mentors have also been crucial, and she would advise young women to make that possibly difficult ask of an individual who can help and guide them.

“All feedback is a gift,” said Majdanik. Everyone will fail at some point, but by considering constructive criticism you can “fail forward.”

Jones’ advice to young women entering the business world is to “find your own niche, being true to who you are, not who others think you should be.” She contends that by embracing themselves, women are happy, which makes people gravitate toward them, which leads to success.

Work/life balance is a continual challenge for all workers but especially women, on whom family and home responsibilities tend to fall.


Tobin, who is a young mother, said she is lucky to have both a supportive partner at home and a supportive team at work. Communication and transparency are crucial, she said, to getting your needs met.

“Incredible childcare is essential,” she added. Tobin serves on the New River Valley Child Care Summit board, which focuses on expanding creative child care options to meet the deficit in the NRV and designing benefit models that help working parents.

Jones and her husband have four children, which can be a full-time job in itself. As an entrepreneur, she said, she wakes up and goes to bed each day thinking about her business. So, finding balance is a day-by-day challenge. One strategy she uses is to block off time on her calendar in red, times when her team knows not to schedule anything for her. She may get a pedicure or read a book or just have a peaceful lunch.

“I can’t do that every day, but I try to find time for myself,” Jones said.

While Majdanik is in a different situation, single without children, she is caring for aging parents which makes her schedule not as flexible as it once was. She said she has shifted the way she views work/life balance. She no longer compartmentalizes a work person, home person, and volunteer person, but rather integrates everything into a “holistic balance.”

Tobin summarized the women’s thoughts on success: “Form relationships and get a breadth of experience. You will be surprised about doors that will open.” 

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It was a little bit of interest, and a little bit of opportunity. — Page 22

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