

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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Q99's Dick Daniels

Radford Nursing

Salem's Chris Dorsey

Carter's Cabinet Shop

TAP Leadership
Change

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THIS BUSINESS OF PICKLE- BALL



Patrick Franco
PlayHardscapes



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

A solid education, job skills, affordable childcare. Three building blocks to a better future. In this issue two nonprofits are in the spotlight, TAP and Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, for the work they do to lift people up. TAP has a new President and CEO, while Goodwill is building a high school for adults who never graduated. We'll also learn more about the new City Manager in Salem, and how Radford University is taking its nursing program to the next level.

Dick Daniels is celebrating 35 years in the radio business at Q99 and is also profiled in this issue and yes, the pickleball craze that has become all the rage and led to a boom in court construction (think oversized ping pong tables with wiffleballs) also gets its spotlight. A little something for everyone perhaps. Happy reading.

Tom Field
Publisher

Gene Marrano
Editor

““”

You can see a leader. — Page 61

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DEPARTMENTS

- 18 Q99's Dick Daniels**
by Gene Marrano
- 24 Radford Nursing**
by Jennifer Poff Cooper
- 30 Salem's Chris Dorsey**
by Aila Boyd
- 34 Carter's Cabinet Shop**
by Dan Smith
- 60 TAP Leadership Change**
by Gene Marrano

PERSPECTIVES

- 22 Financial Figures**
by Michael Shelton
- 28 Best Job Ever**
by Jennifer Leake
- 32 Small Business Tool Kit**
by Sam Sokolove
- 33 Real Estate Matters**
by Frazier Hughes
- 38 Lead By Example**
by Carrie Cousins

REVIEWS & OPINIONS

- 40 There's Something Happening Here**
by Gene Marrano
- 41 On Tap from the Pub**
by Tom Field
- 42 Letters**
- 44 Reviews**

FRONTLINES

- 46 FRONT'n About**
- 54 Career FRONT**
- 56 FRONT Notes**

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LEAD STORY PAGE 8

This Business of PICKLEBALL

By Tom Field



“ ”
You can see the difference you make. — Page 30

FRONTcover photograph of Patrick Franco by Tom Field.



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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.

2024 CONTRIBUTORS



Carrie Cousins



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Gene Marrano



Michael Shelton



Dan Smith

““
We create...
kingdoms
of fun.

— Page 17

““
Leaders who
are transparent,
empathetic, and
approachable
inspire trust.

— Page 29



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on each contributor
are provided on Page 52.

““
It can be lonely
at the top. — Page 32

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Tom Field

This Business of PICKLEBALL

By Tom Field

"We're an athletic family. We just wanted something for the kids to do."

That's what one of Patrick Franco's customers said when deciding to put in a pickleball court at his home.

That statement sort of capsulizes the frenzy behind the recreational sport with the funny name. Some parents deal out UNO or Phase 10 cards at the kitchen table to entertain their adult kids; others—install pickleball courts. Courts that cost anywhere from a



Submitted

few thousand dollars to \$75,000 or more, depending on the extras.

Ahh... pickleball. What can we say?

Call it a trend. Call it a phenomenon. But there's no denying it's exploding all over—and in the last three years in our market, it has taken over a number of private and public venues.

There's a notion that pickleball (a variation or

Local business leader and tennis player, Bart Wilner, was instrumental in converting tennis courts to pickleball at Virginia Western Community College



Tom Field



Jeff Rossini



Patrick Franco

crossover, if you will, that's been described as a sport that combines tennis and ping pong) is a recreation for older folks. Indeed, it is. Because there's less chance for injury (though injuries DO happen) and it's a bit easier to play in its full, intended fashion, than tennis. But the demographics are widening. It turns out, young people love it, too.

On the business side of this recreational explosion are the individuals and companies that service the game and its players. Here in our market, that mostly involves contractors who construct or install or refit the courts.

Pickleball courts are similar to tennis courts, but more compact. And without that difference, players can't really play the game. They need pickleball court dimensions, the lines and markings, the slightly



Tom Field

Harry, 79, challenges you to a game (at Roanoke's Garst Mill Park)

lowered net, and of course, the racket and balls designed for the tighter game.

To fill that need and distinction, in comes companies like this one that Patrick Franco and Jeff Rossini run: Play Hardscapes. The business is brand new, though Franco and Rossini have worked together in similar enterprises for many years.

They're the only two employees; but call in their established subs and other suppliers as needed and depending on the scope of the project.

Play Hardscapes loves promoting its proprietary product line of tiles that are used to build a pickleball court "to order." The co-owners say the tile system "lasts longer; it's easier on the joints; and it's great for recreational use." The courts look great, too (pick your



Tom Field

Cindy sports her Roanoke Valley Pickleball shirt



color, or stick with blue); but Franco and Rossini admit the “pro pickleball players” usually insist on a solid hard surface.

Play Hardscapes describes its business as one that provides “athletic spaces” which covers a lot of recreation and entertainment for residential back yards (basketball courts, decorative and functional courtyards, multi-sports, etc.) and commercial rec-areas. But for pickleball, that usually means one of three solutions.

“We put in all new courts,” Franco says, “or we’ll put



"PICKLEBALL, ANYONE?"



Joseph home multi-court

Patrick Franco and Jeff Rossini are happy to share examples of their projects and customer experiences. One funny story is from the customer who is a major aficionado of tennis.

"So, he asks if we can do 'faint' lines," Rossini relays. "What he wanted, was a pickleball court, but he didn't want it to be obvious. In pickleball—well, on any court—a player usually wants strong and 'can't-miss' markings—but this individual considered pickleball to be a recreation for older people. He wanted to be able to play pickleball, but for appearance's sake... let's keep it looking like a tennis court."

To each his own preferences.

That pickle-phobic customer was unique. The reality is, pickleball no longer holds that stigma (even pro tennis players are in on the action). In fact, most racket sport fans would agree it's more of a status symbol to HAVE a pickleball court, today.

That's Tom Joseph's perspective.

The Botetourt resident who moved here from Florida recently, had Play Hardscapes construct a pickleball court at his home.

"Patrick and Jeff have done excellent work," Joseph says. "Right when we moved here, I thought this would be the time to put in the court, and we're happy with it."

The court was contracted before Joseph even moved in. The lot was sloped, but Play Hardscapes made it work. Though Joseph is looking forward to spring and finishing out the landscaping, the result is an impressive 50 x 30-square foot multi-sport court with a padded cement wall.

"This court is a great example of building a pickleball court for those interested in learning the sport, while also having something else for the rest of the family," Franco says.



Submitted

in a system over an existing slab, or we do coatings.” These jobs might average \$40,000--\$50,000 for a new court built from scratch—to around \$10,000 for one installed over a slab—to around \$5,000 for coating. Pro players usually prefer the coating, Franco says.

Although the business just officially started this year (January 1), the two co-owners aren't merely capitalizing on the pickleball trend. They worked together elsewhere, and then decided to jump.



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PUBLIC PICKLEBALL COURTS

So... where to play pickleball? If you don't have your own court or belong to a private club, here are some possibilities (as conveyed to us when we called Parks & Rec):

ROANOKE CITY

- Preston Park
- Belmont Park
- Eureka Park
- Fallon Park
- Fishburn Park
- Raleigh Court

ROANOKE COUNTY

- Waldron Park
- Ridgewood
- Oak Grove
- Garst Mill
- Greenridge Recreation Center

SALEM

- Oakey's
- Moyer Park (coming soon)

FRANKLIN COUNTY

- Essig Center (beside YMCA Rocky Mount)
- Mary Elizabeth Park
- Recreation Park on Sontag Road

BEDFORD COUNTY

- none

BLACKSBURG

- Old Blacksburg High School
- Blacksburg Recreation Center
- Westover Park

BOTETOURT COUNTY

- none ("we're hoping, soon, budget-pending")

CHRISTIANSBURG

- Christiansburg Recreation Center

CRAIG COUNTY

- none

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

- none (but see Blacksburg, Christiansburg)

RADFORD

- Bisset Park
- Radford Recreation Center

NOTES: List is likely incomplete (we've seen other pickleball courts); though these are "public" facilities, available times vary; schools and country clubs and other private venues have indoor / outdoor pickleball courts, but require reservations, fees, and/or memberships.

"We wanted to get something done," Franco says, succinctly. "We were working with a crew and didn't find it very productive; and felt like we could put our energy to our own benefit."

"We knew we could do a lot more if we did something together," Rossini chimes in.

The decision is already proving to be a good one. The business includes both residential and commercial projects, from manicured homes on the lake to community complexes and hotel properties.

"Our goal is to put in 13 new courts in our first year," Franco says. "And for re-coats and similar projects, it's really unlimited."

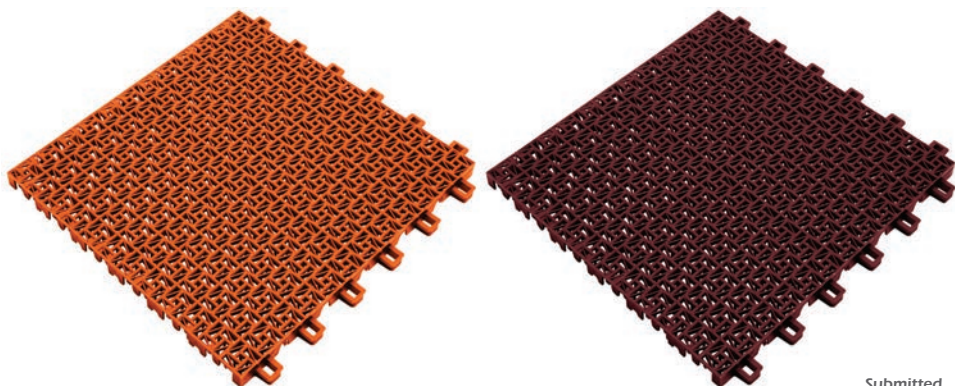


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Franco says the interest in pickleball continues to grow. He mentions a trampoline park in Christiansburg that intends to convert the facility to courts. That job confirms the sport is not just confined to older players; the trampoline park served young people predominantly. In Salem, the popular Moyer Sports Park complex currently under re-construction, will feature over a dozen pickleball courts.

“My journey into this industry started with a solid foundation in construction management and floor coatings,” says Franco. He says last year, he was approached by a sports tile manufacturer to manage

SnapSports tile in Virginia
Tech colors



Submitted

operations in the Roanoke market; but he decided he would rather extend services and include coatings as well.


“That experience sparked the creation of Play Hardscapes. We’ve since partnered with SnapSports—a top-tier modular tile producer, and Mapel—renowned for their floor coatings, to cater to the growing demand for quality courts in the Roanoke Valley.”

With Rossini’s industrial sales background, it’s easy to separate the two skill sets for the new business, having Franco’s attention more on the project site and Rossini’s attention on the project development. However, that’s not the case right now.

“We lay tiles, paint lines, and share laughs.” The two work all aspects of the business.

And they clearly enjoy the gig.

Rossini says the mission is to do a great job and be proud of the results.

“We create not just spaces, but sanctuaries; not just courts, but kingdoms of fun.” 

THIS JUST IN



Performance Pickleball Roanoke (PPBROA) is here; and it is developing a facility with ten state-of-the-art indoor pickleball courts in the existing Spectrum Sports Academy building (adjacent to the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport). “We have been eager to bring world-class pickleball to the Roanoke Valley,” says PPB COO and co-owner Jon Laaser. Local team Roanoke Ruckus is a partner in the venture. Ruckus co-founder Tyler Reburn says, “the interest in pickleball is booming in our area; with new players finding their way into the sport every day. [This new facility] destination is what Roanoke has been craving!”





Gene Marrano photos

35 years and counting Q99's Dick Daniels

By Gene Marrano

Today's hits, yesterday's favorites is the station's catchphrase; the long time Q99 morning show host fits nicely with that description and says being local helps keep radio relevant.

Dick Daniels (that's a stage name, but the one most people know him as, so we'll go with that), says, "radio is all I really wanted to do. When I was a kid I wanted to be a deejay." While attending James Madison University he got a parttime gig as an intern, spinning records at a Staunton radio station (his communications professor was also the general manager there) and the die was cast. He eventually went to work fulltime job as a nighttime paid DJ at G93 while finishing his senior year at JMU. "It was awesome, I loved it."

After two years there post-JMU Daniels wanted to try a larger market; he sent out

some aircheck tapes (no mp3's back then) and Q99 hired him in February 1989, 35-plus years ago. First it was weekend shifts and some production work and by May 1989 he was on the morning show on for Q99 (WSLQ 99.1).

Well before all of that that at age 12 Daniels, who grew up in Fredericksburg, would play deejay in his bedroom, using a microphone, tape recorder and a record player, introducing a song and then holding the mic up to the record player speaker, doing "little mini radio shows way back in the day." He spent nights in the basement listening to AM radio when it was still largely the king of the airwaves,



"Dick and Dave"

not just for talk but for music as well.

He didn't expect to stay in the Roanoke Valley (Q99 was originally based in Salem before relocating to the new Wheeler headquarters on Electric Road in the Tanglewood area, now home to seven diverse radio stations.) Bigger markets were in his plans, "but I just fell in love with Virginia's Blue Ridge," and the rest is history: "and I married the market as they say." The technology has changed from tape and records to digital; wearing his Program Director hat he also lines up the songs for every morning show, interspersed with various on air contests that he and co-host David Page play with listeners who call in.

Daniels is especially proud that in this age of digital voice tracking that can be synchronized

to the next song in the queue, he has done a live Christmas morning show on the air every year since joining the Wheeler Broadcasting family (now Wheeler Media). That's 35 years of bringing Christmas music and maybe a little joy into listener's lives as they unwrap presents, prepare the holiday meal or maybe just sip an eggnog as they listen to Daniels go solo between 6 and 10am. "It all started back in 1989. We didn't have any automation, so you had to have a person here 24/7. I was the new hire."

After a few years it started to become "the thing," and Daniels says he gets some really nice calls and Christmas song requests from listeners as he takes control of the board on December 25 – and more calls than on any other day "by far. People seem to enjoy it





and the tradition has continued." Q99 starts playing nothing by Christmas holiday music in early November every year. "Whenever I retire ... I still want to come in and do the Christmas show."


There's much more competition these days as audiences consume music on other platforms, like Spotify and Pandora for example. "It's a challenge to stay relevant." Being "live and local," and caring about the community has helped build a rapport with listeners, "an emotional connection." Q99 remains a consistent Top 5 finisher in the Spring and Fall ratings periods, with a strong signal and towers that carries the station into Lynchburg and other regional markets. Daniels is not sure if he would encourage young people to get into the business at this point but believes an internship is a great way to test the water. "I still think it's a viable entity in localities. Nothing can match local radio with live local people that can offer local information and help out local organizations. I still think that is a very viable thing."

Community events and the 12-hour Miracle Day Radiothon that raises money every year for Children's Miracle Network (the funds raised stay local) are other career highlights. The Radiothon has raised close to \$3 million over the past 21 years.

Daniels welcomed David Page to the Q99

morning show 21 years ago as his co-host and sidekick. "We hit it off beautifully right out of the gate. We're like brothers, we know each other really well." They even finish each other's sentences. "It happens very naturally for us," in what Daniels calls, "a professional marriage." And no huge arguments during all that time either, something Page confirms as well.

Page went to a broadcasting school after his ten years in the Army (he was a radio jock while serving as well) and first spent time professionally in Wilmington, Delaware. A position came up at Q99 and sister station WSLC where he did newscasts. After a stint in Raleigh, Daniels called him and said he wanted a morning show partner. It's a total of 27 years now for the duo, who along with other local celebrities are now being immortalized together in a painting.

"He's wholly dedicated – there's nobody better in the business at super-serving listeners than Dick," says Page. "In everything we do [he asks] where's the listener benefit? Why are we going to do this from the listener point of view?" That goes for contests, bits they do on the air, etc. As far as an ego? "He doesn't have one." Page calls his on-air partner "a very instinctual person." It's pretty simple: "we still just love doing what we do," concludes Dick Daniels. 

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FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
Be confident... even if our elections are not.

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

Ballot to balance sheet: mitigating risks for small businesses during an election year

Small businesses are no strangers to navigating uncertainty, but an election year brings a unique set of challenges and opportunities. As political campaigns unfold, policies shift, and public sentiment fluctuates, small businesses must be vigilant in managing risks to safeguard their operations and capitalize on emerging opportunities. With careful planning and proactive risk management strategies in place, small businesses can navigate the challenges of an election year with resilience and confidence. Let's explore key strategies for small businesses to effectively navigate risk management during an election year.

Monitor Policy Changes: Elections often bring about changes in government policies and regulations that can impact various aspects of business operations, including taxes, healthcare, trade, and environmental regulations. Small businesses must stay informed about proposed policy changes and assess the potential implications for their industry and specific business activities. Engaging with industry associations, monitoring news updates, and consulting with legal or regulatory experts can help small businesses anticipate and prepare for policy changes that may affect their operations.


Diversify Revenue Streams: Economic uncertainty during an election year can impact consumer confidence and spending habits. Small businesses can manage revenue fluctuations by diversifying their product offerings, target markets, and revenue streams. By venturing into new markets, introducing complementary products or services, and fostering relationships with various customer segments, small businesses can lessen reliance on any one market or customer base.

Manage Financial Risks: During an election year, economic volatility and market fluctuations may threaten small businesses with financial risks like cash flow disruptions and currency fluctuations. To mitigate these risks, small businesses should prioritize cautious financial management, including budgeting, cash flow forecasting, and prudent debt management. Establishing contingency plans, maintaining cash reserves, and securing financing options can provide financial flexibility to navigate unexpected challenges.

Protect Against Cybersecurity Threats: Election years are often accompanied by increased cybersecurity risks, including phishing attacks, data breaches, and ransomware threats. Small businesses must prioritize cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive information, customer data, and business operations from cyber threats. Implementing robust

cybersecurity protocols, conducting regular security audits, and providing employee training on cybersecurity best practices can help small businesses enhance their resilience to cyber threats during an election year.

Maintain Strong Customer Relationships: Uncertainty during an election year can heighten consumer anxiety and market volatility. Small businesses can mitigate the risk of losing customers by maintaining strong relationships with their customer base. Exceptional service, transparent communication regarding election-related impacts, and customer feedback contribute to trust and loyalty in small businesses.

Small businesses must prioritize risk management to navigate election year uncertainty. Monitoring policy changes, diversifying revenue, managing finances, safeguarding against cyber threats, and nurturing customer relationships are vital. With thorough preparation and proactive risk management, small businesses can overcome election year challenges with resilience. 



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Radford University photos

From ‘School of’ to ‘College of’

Radford University turns up the spotlight on its nursing program

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

“It’s been a long time coming” is a phrase Wendy Downey, D.N.P. and Interim Dean of the Radford University College of Nursing, hears about standing up the nursing program as its own college.

Now in its fiftieth year of graduating nurses, Radford University (RU) is demonstrating its dedication to developing the health care workforce in the region, the commonwealth, and the nation with the elevation of the program and commensurate provision of resources.

With the largest nursing shortage in recent history, said Downey, Radford University plans to make a difference by enrolling more students and growing its nursing program. This requires a large financial commitment by the university.

“It is not an inexpensive program to run,” said Downey.

She said the transition from School of Nursing to College of Nursing has been smooth. In 2021, nursing split from the Waldron College of Health and Human Services to become its own program. Even so, the independent academic unit was as big as its previous college home. To become the College of Nursing, there was a process: nursing faculty was the first to vote, then the administrative leadership, then the Board of Visitors. Finally, there was a six-month long SCHEV (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia) approval process. Beginning January 15, it became the first College of Nursing in Virginia.

Radford University is marketing the change with minimal cost, Downey said. Media interest has helped significantly. Some signage and papers needed updating, but most changes have been digital. Social media has been the best way to connect with alumni, who are the College's biggest supporters and have requested swag with the new imprint.

"It's about relationships and connections," said Downey.

Radford University Carilion (RUC) in Roanoke is impacted as well. There is confusion, Downey said, about how the two campuses fit together. RUC is a site of Radford University. Also, RU is expanding its physical space for nursing education and active learning, with all of the upper division of nursing now located at the Roanoke Higher Education Center.

Another new College of Nursing initiative is a community advisory board comprised of representatives from all major health care institutions locally. This body provides feedback on curriculum, skills nurses need in the workforce, and gaps they are seeing. Resulting changes help aspiring nurses transition more rapidly and smoothly to the workplace. An example, Downey said, is an increased focus on interpersonal communication.

These health care partnerships are critical. Undergraduates gain experience by doing clinical rotations at every



Wendy Downey

facility in the area. Carilion has made a "big investment" by providing technology and equipment for both learning locations, as well as by opening up their non-patient computer system for training purposes.

"It eases the transition," Downey said, and allows new nurses to spend more time with patients.

Also changing the equation are student success programs. Now, high achieving freshmen can be admitted directly into nursing instead of waiting until sophomore year to apply. This relieves anxiety for



daleville
town center

Summer Never Sounded So Good



Fuzzy Logic May 4



Red Dirt Revolution May 10



Mellen Cougar May 17



students and parents, said Downey. The Nursing Living Learning Community allows students to “live, study, and take classes together,” and “immerses students in nursing from the day they come to Radford,” she said.

The College of Nursing includes two of the most advanced level Clinical Simulation Centers in Virginia, one on campus in Radford and one at the Roanoke Higher Education Center. Both were developed, through public and private funds, to address the nursing shortage and explore alternatives for clinical education for students, according to a press release. These centers rival those of any large institution with greater funding, said Downey, and allow students to practice being nurses in a safe environment.

Historically, nursing at Radford University has been highly regarded. Downey said she has health care executives call to ask for RU nursing graduates because these nurses do not have to be trained. The program is ranked as the Top Nursing Program in Virginia by allnurses.com and registerednursing.org. In 2022-23, Radford conferred 258 nursing degrees, the second-highest total among Virginia


public institutions, according to a press release.

When asked why RU’s nursing program has been so successful, Downey quickly answered: its faculty. She said the dedicated faculty are “able to convey information and do it in a caring manner.” There are no graduate teaching assistants, so faculty know students personally.

Downey added that nursing programs across the state have been “blessed” by a governor with an interest in the field (because of a family member who is a nurse). The resulting state budgets allow schools to pay nursing faculty with salaries closer to what they would earn in practice.

The College of Nursing has 1,200 students in four programs and eleven tracks, with 71 faculty and staff, and a budget of roughly \$6 million.

Downey said that nursing deans across the country have contacted her to learn how their programs, too, can become Colleges of Nursing.

Said Downey, “This has put Radford University on a national stage.” 

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BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:

The most common challenge I hear today is: "How to find people I need?"

Jennifer is a seasoned Certified Management Consultant (CMC®) with over 30 years of business and consulting experience. She is a certified trusted advisor in the areas of employee assessments, engagement, and emotional intelligence. She offers ideas and best practices to help you hire the right people, engage employees, and lead effectively to enhance workplace performance and drive overall business success.

The value of satisfied employees

An often-underutilized resource for new talent is satisfied employees. They are invaluable assets when recruiting because their satisfaction with their job and the company translates into positive word-of-mouth, which not only attracts candidates, but can significantly influence potential candidates' perceptions and decisions.

- Satisfied employees **serve as brand ambassadors** when they speak highly of their employer to friends, family, and professional networks. When they share positive experiences about their work environment, company culture, benefits, and growth opportunities, they attract potential candidates who value and trust your current employees.
- Satisfied employees **contribute to a positive employer brand.** In today's competitive job market, candidates often research companies extensively before applying or accepting a job offer. A strong employer brand, built on positive employee experiences and testimonials, differentiates you from your competitors. Employees who openly express job satisfaction make your company more appealing to prospective candidates.
- Satisfied employees may **participate in your recruitment process** by referring qualified candidates from their networks, friends, or acquaintances. Employee referrals are highly regarded by recruiters and hiring managers due to their typically high-quality candidates and faster recruitment cycles. Satisfied employees refer candidates because they genuinely believe in the company and want to share its benefits with others.
- Satisfied employees **contribute to higher retention rates.** Employees who are content with their jobs are less likely to leave voluntarily. A stable, satisfied workforce sends a positive signal to potential candidates, indicating that the organization values its employees and fosters an environment for long-term growth and success.

What are the top 3 actions to create a great workplace and foster job satisfaction?

1. **Build a Strong Organizational Culture:** Culture is not just a set of values plastered on the walls but is deeply ingrained in the actions and behaviors of every employee, from the CEO to the interns. Companies with exceptional cultures prioritize transparency, open communication, and trust. Employees feel empowered to voice their opinions, share ideas, and contribute to the company's success. Foster innovation and creativity so teams with diverse viewpoints collaborate to solve complex problems.

2. Provide Opportunities for Growth and Development:

A great workplace is committed to the continuous learning and growth of employees. Great workplaces encourage employees to set ambitious goals and provide the support and resources necessary to achieve them. They offer regular performance appraisals with clear pathways for career advancement and recognize and reward employees for their contributions.

3. Develop Effective Leaders and Managers: Leaders who are transparent, empathetic, and approachable inspire trust and confidence among employees. Effective managers provide clear direction, constructive feedback, and support to their teams. They empower employees to take ownership of their work, make decisions, and collaborate effectively with their colleagues. 🌱

Need ideas to strengthen your culture, help employees with more feedback and goals, or looking to grow management skills? Contact me at 540-420-1004 or email me at Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com.



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City of Salem

Chris Dorsey

“You can see the difference you make.”

Dorsey brings love of local government to Salem city manager role

By Aila Boyd

Seasoned local government official Chris Dorsey assumed the reins in the City of Salem in early January following the November retirement of Jay Taliaferro, who served in the role for roughly four years.

While growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, Chris Dorsey gained an appreciation for government. A defining moment for him was the 1976 Bicentennial, which occurred while he was in 8th grade. “With that, I developed a keen interest in civics and how government worked,” he remembers.

That interest impacted his decision to major in political science/public administration at the University of Tennessee, as well as his desire to obtain a master’s in public administration. An internship in community development with the city of Memphis while in graduate school is what set him on the local government path.

He parlayed that internship into a long career with the city, working his way through the ranks over the next 18 years. His final role at his time of departure in 2005 was as the city’s budget manager, which gave him oversight over a \$500 million-dollar operating budget and a \$300-million capital improvement budget.

“Going through that, I got to learn about every department within the city,” he said. “I learned all about how the fire department works, police, public works, personnel, general services, libraries, health department—all these different things.”

The background he established in the budget manager role placed him in a strong position to start looking for city manager/town manager positions. His first manager position was in Red Bank, Tennessee.

“When you’re a city manager, you can see the difference you make in cities. It means a lot to be able to go through a city and say these sidewalks on the main street, I helped get grants to put those in,” he said. “City managers, we aren’t here to take the credit, we’re here just to be able to see the differences that we’re able to make in the city that we’re in.”

Additional manager roles followed in Tennessee in Signal Mountain, Sparta and East Ridge.

Dorsey came across the Salem position as part of a job search. Although he had passed through the city on I-81 a couple of times a year for decades on his way to Richmond to see his sister, he knew very little about the city. "During the interview, I said I would drive by here, but I never knew the richness of the things that were in Salem without getting off the interstate," he said.

Dorsey is required to live within the city, so he is currently leasing a townhouse with the goal of purchasing a home next year once he gets a better feel for the city.

His background is what appealed to the Salem City Council, according to Mayor Renee Turk. "Chris's extensive finance and budget preparation background and his local government experience were impressive from the beginning," she said. "His outgoing personality and good sense of humor, along with his belief that employees should be valued and appreciated, and that they are every organization's greatest asset really hit home for me."

With a population of around 25,000, Dorsey said Salem is comparative to the other cities he's led. "That's about what I've had in the suburbs of Chattanooga. It's very similar in size, but the big difference is the makeup of how the city operates," he explained.


Despite his lengthy background, he's had to adjust to the way local government works in Virginia. "Trying to figure out the pieces of the puzzle has been what's been interesting

in the first couple of months," he said. "In Tennessee, the cities are like towns in Virginia. The city is part of the county, which is part of the state. This is a lot more involved. I never had a property assessor or a treasurer or a commonwealth attorney."

Upon assuming the role, he set about getting to know various department heads and employees. As part of his effort to wrap his arms around the way the city operates, he's spent a considerable amount of time meeting with various department heads and employees.

His efforts seem to have paid off in terms of getting buy-in on his leadership, given the response from Rob Light, the assistant city manager. "Chris truly has hit the ground running in his first couple of months," he said. "He has immersed himself in engaging our community, city departments and employees. While Chris is extremely knowledgeable in all aspects of local government, I have been equally impressed with his leadership style based on communication and collaboration."

Tommy Miller, director of economic development, added that Dorsey has "brought lively energy, thoughtful engagement and shown strong leadership."

In looking ahead, Dorsey plans to focus his energy on three areas of focus, including construction projects related to Main Street and bridges, fostering a good relationship with Roanoke College and the updating of the city's comprehensive plan. 



Councilman Hunter Holliday, Chris Dorsey, Mayor Renee Turk, Councilman Randy Foley



SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Sam Sokolove

Executive Summary:
The executive director was sobbing. It can be lonely at the top.

Sam Sokolove is a Senior Consultant for Building Beloved Communities LLC.

Leadership means not always being liked

I had concluded an internal communication assessment of a progressive advocacy organization and shared feedback with the CEO, who was described by staff as reactive, inconsistent, and haughty. Despite their sincere efforts to create a collaborative staff environment in which all voices were valued, the CEO was devastated to hear their approach seemed only to have created resentment and unhappiness amongst subordinates- and they were angrily unwilling to accept the findings.


Although this same person was also described as a visionary and passionate expert on the issues their agency addressed, it was clear that their managerial and communication style wasn't winning any friends inside the agency they had built.

Leadership almost always requires making difficult decisions and navigating complex interpersonal relationships. As a result, one of the harsh realities of being a leader is that it often means not being liked by everyone, especially staff. This truth can be complicated for nonprofit leaders who usually see the long hours and modest financial rewards as a tradeoff for the social impact of their work. However, when instead of recognition and appreciation, the result is intense criticism; it can be an excruciating realization.

The key for leaders is to focus on the long-term vision and mission of the organization, even if it means making unpopular decisions in the short term. This requires a thick skin, an unwavering sense of purpose, and the ability to communicate effectively with stakeholders at all levels.

Influential leaders must also be willing to listen to feedback, even when it is difficult to hear. While the CEO, in this case, was initially resistant to the findings of the communication assessment, it is essential for leaders to receptively use such feedback as an opportunity for growth and improvement. Executive coaching can be particularly effective in helping leaders develop the skills and mindset necessary to utilize feedback constructively and make fundamental changes in how they communicate with their team members. In the immortal words of LeBron James: "I like criticism. It makes you strong."

Executive coaching can provide CEOs a safe space to explore their leadership challenges, gain new perspectives, and develop strategies for addressing criticism. Coaches can help CEOs identify their strengths and weaknesses and become more resilient and adaptable.

Ultimately, leadership is about serving the organization's and its stakeholders' needs. By keeping their "eyes on the prize" and maintaining consistent and clear communication without obsessing over personalities, leaders can feel more secure in their role and create lasting impact, even if it means not always being the most liked person in the room. 


Don't wait for the rate!

A few of my listings in January, February, and March (Q1) tell the story: Branderwood in Cave Spring had 24 showings. Moncap near Poages Mill had six and a half a day after it was just listed. Timberidge in Vinton had the same all had multiple offers and one waived the home inspection. Not to mention I wrote an offer for one of my clients who was interested in buying a home on Pomeroy in Northwest Roanoke . We went up against 9 offers = and we came in second because we would not waive the home inspection, which I always suggest.

I have heard from many people that they will wait for the rates to drop. Did we get spoiled with the 3% rate? Yes, we did. In fact, that rate may never return. According to Federal Reserve data, the sub-3% 30-year mortgage rates of late 2020 and early 2021 were record rates. Record rates don't usually happen often, but that could be a good thing, too. For example, buyers haven't paid record high 18%-plus mortgage rates since 1981 which my 81 year old father at that time talks about when he bought a townhouse and says we have it good today with our rates, and they are not that bad.

It's forecasted we may see rates in the 5% range in early 2025 or even sooner. According to MarketWatch, analysts with Fannie Mae and the Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) both project that rates will fall going into this year and throughout next year.

So why wait to buy? Don't. You will always have equity in real estate. Every year home values go up, not down. Just check Roanoke City's tax assessment and compare it to last year. They may not be 100% correct but I can tell you any property you buy today will go up in value unless you pay too much for it.

If you wait for the rate to drop, you will go up against more offers on homes. You will have stiffer competition. Can you compete? The home has to appraise for your asking price. Cash is king if that works for you, but I also know you are not a fan of having to compete against 5-10 other offers, So don't wait for the rate. 



REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:

I am in the trenches listing every neighborhood and the market is hot.

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

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Dan Smith photos

Legacy and Innovation: Crafting the Future

By Dan Smith

Lee Ann Carter-Monsour will no longer be in charge at her noteworthy Roanoke cabinet shop, but it passes into good hands.

After more than 70 years of having a family member in the front office, the respected and admired Carter's Cabinet Shop in Roanoke has a new owner/operator. After more than 70 years of having a family member in the front office, the well-regarded Carter's Cabinet Shop in Roanoke is looking at a future of innovation.

In early March the company's employees threw a sizeable retirement bash for Lee Ann Carter-Monsour, who, at 75, has run the business founded by her adoptive father for the past 40 years. Her executive office is now occupied by Duane Saufley, a 15-year building professional, who bought the shop in

2021. His D.C. Saufley General Contractor business remains separate officially, but they will work together. Lee Ann remained as an advisor for 3.5 years.

Russell Carter, Lee Ann's dad, founded the cabinet shop in 1953 in the basement of his substantial home in the Williamson Road area, leaving his job as a furniture maker. His wife, Brownie, was also deeply involved in helping to run the company. Their young, adopted daughter began working in the business at 6, and by the age of 12, she was answering the company's phone. At 13, she did payroll before taking a break for homework. At 20, she had a full-time job at the shop and has always worked in administration.



Lee Ann Carter-Monsour stands in front of a projected image of her parents.

At 35, she took over the entire business.

“My dad always said I needed to learn to make cabinets, but I said, ‘You don’t have to know how to make a car in order to sell one,’” says Lee Ann. “I did have to know wood, how the cabinets are put together, how it has evolved over the

years.” Much of the work today is done by computer, she emphasizes.

She was married to the late Don Monsour for 31 years, but he was not involved in the cabinet shop. He was in the building business and in convenience markets. The cabinet shop, says Lee Ann, “is my baby.”

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Lee Ann Carter-Monsour and Duane Saufley in the cabinet shop's construction area.

Lee Ann and Duane Saufley, whose business is based in Callaway, met through their shared banker. Lee Ann was looking to sell and Saufley was looking to diversify his construction business. Theirs was a partnership made in heaven, they insist.

His business is custom construction, and the cabinet shop expands its reach, he says. "This is a way to grow and add an aspect of the business we didn't

have. We built cabinets, but not the way Carter's does it. This will help with custom homes and remodels." The two companies split 35 employees.

The new reach—potentially into other states—of Saufley's businesses will likely be good for his family, wife Paige and his children, Bailey and Lola.

"We got along from Day 1," says Lee Ann. When they finished the deal,



Carter's Cabinet Shop has grown from the basement of a mid-sized Roanoke home to a 12,000-square-foot business. The original home business is to the left.




Carter's Cabinet Shop employee Joe Halpin puts together a cabinet.

Saufley "said I could work here as long as I want." Both of their companies have a substantial number of veteran employees, which makes the transition considerably smoother, says Saufley. "Our people and their families have always been important to us."

Saufley doesn't plan major change to the business model, he says. "The basics will stay the same. We will try

to grow and expand our markets and we want to be more visible, do more marketing. People don't walk in here, so the internet is important. But the core values won't change."

He says that because of the internet, people "know more [about cabinetry] and they are more educated about what they want. There is so much out there, so many options. And we are the experts in the field." 

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SCAN ME



LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Carrie Cousins

Executive Summary:
Don't get reckless with video meetings; you're projecting, whether you want to or not.

What message are you sending on Zoom?

Recently a job candidate came to the interview, and I never saw his face.

In another instance, someone was wearing a hoodie (hood up no less) during a meeting with people from multiple companies.

And in a one-on-one meeting, the other person chomped an apple while we talked social media strategy.

All of these meetings were online and beg the question: What message are you sending during Zoom/Teams/Google meetings? Do we live in a work culture so casual that body language can be disregarded?

Regardless of the reason, you are sending the wrong message to the person on the other side of the screen. No matter how much zoom fatigue you may be experiencing, it's time to turn the cameras back on, dress professionally (at least from the waist up), and make virtual eye contact.

These things tell everyone you are meeting with that they are important and you care about what they have to say. And if you don't ... then why are you having the meeting in the first place?

Here are some of the unintended messages you might be sending.

- Camera off:
I'm not paying attention to what's going on here.
- Improper or casual dress: You aren't important to me.
- Eating or having food/drink on camera: I'm bored.
- Pets on camera:
I was too lazy to close the door.
- Turn around and talk to someone else:
They are more important than you.
- Entering the meeting late:
Your time does not matter to me.



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Here are some messages you should try to send:

- Blurred background: I'm working from home or a busy office today and don't want to create distractions.
- Unblurred background: I value authenticity and trust you in my space.
- Proper positioning: I took the time to prepare for this meeting by aligning my camera.
- Maintain eye contact (look at the camera while speaking and while others are speaking to you): I value your thoughts and time.
- Mute strategically: I understand there are distractions and noise in my space and I'm trying to keep those to a minimum.

Because video meetings can be efficient and make it easy to communicate with clients all over the world, they are unlikely to go away.

But you must be present and treat video calls with the same care that you would if you were meeting in person. Otherwise, you might end up like that candidate who didn't turn on his camera – unappreciated and unemployed. 



You must be present... [as] if you were meeting in person.

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SERCAP turns 55 as its mission expands

An organization many have never heard of that focuses on water systems in rural communities and for low-income families is celebrating its 55th anniversary. The Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project serves seven states in the southeast, including Virginia, focused on smaller rural communities water treatment facilities and water distribution systems. Seeing other needs SERCAP over the years has branched out to offer small business loans, lead hazard reduction programs and community development. Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project resource manager Laura Rawlings: “[in Floyd] we built ten houses, either we built new, or we go in and rehab houses. There was a project in Floyd that was built with Community Block Development grants. We get in with these other partners [including TAP] and pull it all together.”

SERCAP will hold its Water is Life! Reception and Banquet reception at Hotel Roanoke on April 4, tickets are on sale now (sercap.org). The non-profit receives federal community development funding, but also raises discretionary funding that allows for more leeway as to who gets their help.

“Maybe we’ve got this person ... destitute, but they don’t quite meet the eligibility requirement in that grant. SERCAP has historically has scrimped and [gotten] pennies to fill these gaps, because either the grant goes away, or we don’t get full funding.” The Water is Life! Gala is a money raiser for the Annual Fund, where Rawlings, with a long career in the development and non-profit world, was brought in recently to pump up the volume.

The Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project has even reached beyond more rural southwest Virginia regions into Roanoke - issuing a small business loan so a mental wellness studio could set up water lines, meters and a fire hydrant on a bigger property as it expanded - and assisting Blind House Brewery on Salem Avenue with water issues before its launch. Water is also about business says Rawlings, an economic driver and also means more affordable housing, when a community has a modern water system and treatment facilities. “If those communities do not have a wastewater facility or running water, businesses are not going to come,” warns Rawlings, “they can’t. You have to have the infrastructure. By us coming in and helping, absolutely – it’s a true economic development driver.” 

THERE'S
SOMETHING
HAPPENING
HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

Water is life, yes, it can also be the lifeblood to improved economic health.



Carl's rehabbed home in Floyd SERCAP



Image capture from VA511 traffic cam

Is this you, coming up? Watch Out!

If you drive I-81, watch out!

The construction and road crews are extra heavy right now. That's great news for the much-needed expansion and widening of our Interstate 81, particularly between Exit 137 and Exit 141. I happen to live in a place where my only way out is to drive under one of three bridges, whichever direction I go. All of them are under construction right now; and every day, I get to see the progress. What a job. If I had to guess, I think the bridge at Exit 137 (Wildwood Road, Salem) will be completed first; but overall, I'd say the three bridges are around the middle stage of construction. The crews at this minute (mid-March) are the busiest I've seen; most of them working on the median between northbound and southbound roads all throughout that five-mile stretch.

Many of us think of the road and bridge work as an inconvenience. It is. But every single time I drive underneath or get on or off the ramp, or drive that Salem stretch, I'm reminded how dangerous this work really is. Think about it. One wrong move, the smallest error, spells disaster or death. Vehicles of all shapes, sizes, and speeds are barreling past men and women, in some cases, just a few feet away. One little slip of the steering wheel, one little bump up against another vehicle or barrier or rail or shoulder, one dropped piece of material or equipment near the line, one slight misstep or trip of a worker—all of these actions that can easily happen—could kill.

For those of us who commute or use I-81 almost daily, the risk of an accident increases; but of course, wrecks happen all the time, including those by an out-of-state driver passing through.

It's important to not let our guard down. Drive as alert as possible. Don't tailgate. Don't speed and don't impede the flow. And here's a big one right now: don't pass or change lanes when the line is solid. The solid line is there for a reason. No lane change!

continued on Page 42



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By **Tom Field**

Executive Summary:
Highway, bridge, and road workers need us to be attentive.

Letters

Just some thanks

Just wanted to let you know we got our copy of the magazine today and we really like it and appreciate you taking the time and interest to write this piece about Blue Ridge Design Build [FRONT; March 2024]. We are very proud of our team and the rebranding and glad you were able to showcase it as well as you did!

Logan & BRDB Team
Blacksburg

Thank you very much for featuring VFP [FRONT; March 2024]. The article and cover photo are both outstanding. Much appreciated.

Scott File, VFP
Roanoke

Thank you so much for lecturing our class about

the inner workings of resumes. You helped me so much in editing mine!

Zoe Jones
Roanoke College

Thank you for taking the time to come by and discuss with us about your insights into the publishing industry.

Jacon Phillips
Roanoke College

Thanks for your tips! Loved the hat BTW.

Sarah Tucker
Roanoke College

Correction

Donna Rose has worked for VFP since October 2000; our FRONTcover story included an incorrect date [FRONT; March 2024].

Send us your feedback in a letter with name and where you live – good or bad: news@vbfrent.com




The solid line is
there for a reason.
No lane change!

Field / On Tap

from Page 41

My pal, Ken Lanford of Lanford Brothers bridge and construction firm, is always bringing up this issue of highway worker safety. The Lanford family even established a memorial scholarship program to honor those who died while working to improve our roads. That's the sad part of the business.

Our local musician (with a similar name), Erin Lunsford, just shared a tune, "Watch Out for Deer" that captures that warning we're always saying at our house, when our family and friends are leaving. I'm not even sure I remember all the times my cars have been hit by deer on Wildwood Road.

I'll just leave it at that for all us drivers:
Watch out! 



I married the market. — Page 19

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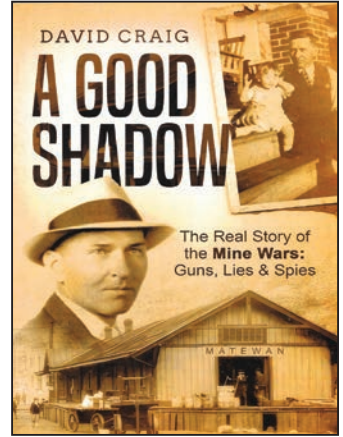
““ You don't have to know how to make a car in order to sell one. — Page 35

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Coal Wars: the real story

When David Craig began researching what became *A Good Shadow* several years ago, the idea was to get the family history right. Stories about the Craig family's involvement in the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars of the early 1920s (including Matewan) thumped through family gatherings, but some of those tales were taller than others. He set out to get them right ... and wound up with a substantial book that gives you a balanced look at an American tragedy. And a lot of surprises.

Craig, who grew up in Radford and now lives on Virginia's coast, is a retired CEO with boundless curiosity and energy, but he is a rookie writer. You'd never know that unless you asked him, however, because the structure and prose of this 232-page beauty is addicting.

Craig smothers some of the myths of the war (the "air force" bombing, for example, involved two bi-planes and a couple of bombs; many of the miners didn't want unions because they were paid well). There are a lot of shades of gray in the real story, though none in the legends. Craig has done his homework and come up with an important, readable book that adds to the history—a sad chapter—of these mountains and their people.

—Dan Smith

Compiled from the best

What a find! *Fourteen Days* (The Authors Guild Foundation; 2024) is edited by Margaret Atwood and Douglas Preston and features stories by 36 celebrated contemporary fiction authors. If I just listed the names, that alone would be

enough for you to run out and snag this book. But I'll go ahead and let you know it's about residents in a rundown apartment building in Lower Manhattan during the 2020 Pandemic. Each resident story is told by a different author, but we don't know who the author is (until you look at the "contributors cheat-sheet" at the end). I'm compelled to reveal a few authors to prove this little literary project was a good idea: Cassara; Eggers; Grisham; Jacob; Lyons; Ng; Randall; Stine; Turow; Wang; Winslow; Wolitzer.

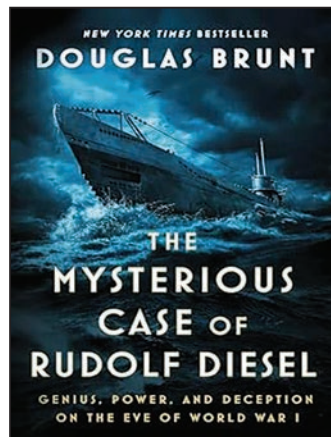
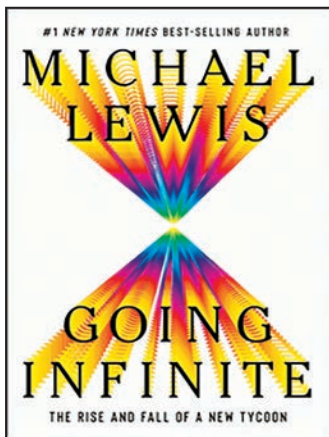
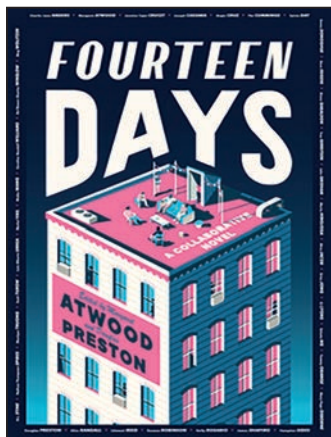
Okay, it is a find; however... I have to admit: I'd still prefer to read each author individually. You can tell by the lack of dialogue that this project is a compilation of assignments. The characters—some, more interesting than others—speak in soliloquies, which is a bit annoying and unrealistic. Therefore, any interaction comes across forced, assembled by the editors in an attempt to make the book work. Still, there are good stories.

Do you think you can tell who the author is when reading each character's story? No peeking at the answers! Come on; play fair... it's more fun when you don't know for sure.

—Tom Field

Shady Crypto King

I'm still not sure if I really grasp what it is or how cryptocurrency really works, even after reading *Going Infinite: The Rise And Fall Of A New Tycoon* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2023) by Michael Lewis. He admits as much in a footnote as well. As defined on Wikipedia: *cryptocurrency, or crypto is a digital currency designed to work as a medium of exchange through a computer network that is not reliant on any central authority,*



such as a government or bank, to uphold or maintain it. Individual coin ownership records are stored in a digital ledger. Um, okay. I do know that Bitcoin, the most widely known cryptocurrency, has boomed again lately, and that U.S. regulators and even the Supreme Court are struggling with how to put guard rails on the crypto market.

All that aside, author Michael Lewis (*Moneyball*, *The Big Short*, *The Premonition*, etc.) offers a dizzying tale of the mop-topped, socially awkward, somewhat disorganized, wild-spending, reckless Sam Bankman-Fried, a thirty-something who at times didn't know where his FTX cryptocurrency trading transactions were stashed, what he had hired people for, and where his permanent headquarters would be, bouncing from Hong Kong to the Bahamas (avoiding the lack of regulation in the U.S.), designing extravagant office buildings that would never see a groundbreaking, etc. Eventually FTX—which had plastered its logo on Major League Baseball umpire and NBA's Miami Heat uniforms in exchange for hefty sponsorship fees—went broke, left employees in the lurch and Bankman-Fried in prison, convicted of fraud, money laundering etc. A wild and somewhat confusing ride, and a good first glimpse by master non-fiction storyteller Michael Lewis, into the crypto world that may be here to stay after all.

—Gene Marrano

Ever hear of this industrial pioneer?

Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison ... and Rudolf Diesel? The last name may give you a hint. Rudolf Diesel grew up in poverty in Paris and overcame significant obstacles to develop the heavy duty industrial engine that bears his name. It helped revolutionize manufacturing,

the maritime industry and the heavy duty automotive world. Diesel, who crossed paths with the likes of Edison, Winston Churchill, Adolphus Busch and the Nobel (as in Prize) Family, saw his engine as a way to help the working poor level the playing field industry-wise. But then he drew the enmity of John D. Rockefeller, who had major oil field interests and was behind the gasoline engine for autos, and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, who was not happy about Rudolf Diesel licensing his technology that made it easier to power battleships and submarines for other nations; Wilhelm wanted exclusive rights to the technology.

The Mysterious Case of Rudolf Diesel: Genius, Power and Deception on the Eve of World War 1 by Thomas Brunt (Atria Books, 2023) lays it all out nicely, as the world charged head on into the industrial age. Then one night in 1913 while crossing the English Channel, Rudolf Diesel, by then a millionaire from licensing fees worldwide, went missing from the passenger boat he was traveling on. His coat and hat were neatly stowed on a deck chair. He had put many of his affairs in order shortly before that trip. So ... was it suicide as most surmised? Was it foul play at the hands of those who didn't want his engine technology to succeed worldwide? The press had a field day at the time. A good read about a true pioneer many have never heard of even though most know what a "diesel engine," is.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Dan Smith** is a freelance journalist, author, and founding editor of FRONT; **Tom Field** is a creative director and FRONT publisher; **Gene Marrano** is a veteran news reporter and editor of FRONT.



Speaking of pickleball >

PickleRoll was one of the vendors at the Greater Roanoke Home & Garden Show at Roanoke's Berglund Center in mid-February. The Knoxville-based company provides mobility solutions for temporary, semi-permanent, and permanent courts in 4x4-foot squares. Bill Francis (Charlotte) and Tonja Altice (local) demonstrate the fun.



Downtown office space notes >

Developer **Lucas Thornton** has hit the pause button on a planned office building tower at the former **Valley Metro Campbell Court** bus station, due to a declining need for office space in downtown Roanoke. Like other cities across the U.S. since the pandemic – including New York for example – many are still working remotely without coming back to the physical office. That space instead will open this summer as a pocket park, complete with turf, landscaping, furniture, a stage, and artwork.

Thornton says he and his **Hist;Re Partners** firm expects to build that office tower within the next 1-3 years, if market conditions improve. The current occupancy rate for downtown offices stands at 86% according to commercial realtor Poe & Cronk – down 3% since 2021. However, a 5-story apartment building at the old Campbell Court named **The Bower** will be available to tenants as of this May, with three retail spots open on the ground floor.

The Bower will be leased by **Allegheny Partners**, which says of the apartment building, offering 1–2-bedroom units: "We have a dedicated co-working area where you can find inspiration and focus. Want to stay fit? Our large private gym is fully equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. And for our furry friends, we have a dog washing station and even a turf area for them to play and stretch their legs."



Here comes Wawa >

The Pennsylvania-based convenience store chain **Wawa** has signed a lease with Rosedale developer T.P.B. Enterprises, LLC, and is moving forward with plans to open a fuel center and convenience store on a 1.9-acre outparcel at the signalized corner of Graves Mill Road and the newly opened Rosedale Boulevard in Lynchburg.

The exact timing for the store opening has yet to be announced, plans are fully approved, and construction will begin imminently, according to Clay Taylor and Wyatt Poats with Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer, who represented T.P.B. Enterprises in lease negotiations. The Wawa at Rosedale is slated to be the first store open in the Lynchburg market. Despite some local resident protestations, Botetourt County recently approved a Wawa slated for Roanoke Road/US 220 in the Daleville area.



Roanoke County Art Center facelift >

The **Brambleton Recreation Center** in southwest Roanoke County has long offered pottery, painting, and other arts classes inside the former school, but the **Art Studio** there has now been renovated. **Alex North** is the Marketing and Administrative Coordinator for Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism: "It's a space for us to program and have community events, [to offer] hands on experience to learn for the first time, or for enthusiasts who want to come and enjoy that space. It was a chance for us to reorganize and repurpose that space."

New creative biz >

Heather O'Bryan, a sometimes-actor fond of colorful hair dyes, has taken the plunge and gone into business for herself. **Heather O'Bryan Freelance Creative** is the name (same on Facebook too); she says "my passion is small business – especially microbusinesses. I am a microbusiness." O'Bryan plans to work with smaller companies, helping them move up to the next level when it comes to things like social media; she'll also write newsletters – "or anything that they need but are not sure how to accomplish."



Micro business owners are often so busy trying to stay afloat and grow their company they miss out on a crucial factor – how to market it effectively, to cast a wider net to potential customers. "They [often] don't have time to do the ideation that it needs, to do something more creative on Instagram or Facebook. "Brainstorming ideas to get more eyes on their business," says O'Bryan of what she offers.



New foodie startup option >

The **LEAP Kitchen**—a shared commercial kitchen space for entrepreneurial and community purposes in Roanoke's West End neighborhood—has hired a new manager, chef **Jeff Bland**, and is actively seeking new members (to coincide with recent improvements). Currently, LEAP Kitchen serves coffee roasters (Asher's Coffee Beans), cookie bakers (By the Dozen), nonprofits (House of Bread), meal prep businesses (Meal Prep by Tish), caterers (Hamm's Fine Foods, Southern Sisters Desserts), and more (Smoke in Chimneys, Sycamore Snacks). Several successful Roanoke food businesses got their start in the LEAP Kitchen, including Queen's Vegan Cafe food truck, RND Coffee, and Kind Baking Co. LEAP (Local Environmental Agriculture Project) is a Roanoke-based nonprofit founded in 2009.



Submitted

Ring, ring, 110 >

Citizens Cooperative in Floyd celebrates its 110th anniversary this year. The communications utility (initially a phone company now offering voice, video, data) held a celebration open house on Feb. 28 and recognized its now more than 70 employees.



Ian Price

Repurposed for a good cause >

The old Apple Valley Motel in southwest Roanoke County has come back to life as **Suites by TLOT**, an extended-stay motel for those in need of shelter, including, but not limited to individuals experiencing homelessness. Guests are required to pay for their stay, which is expected to be for a limited period of time. The former Apple Valley Motel, located at 5063 Franklin Road in Roanoke, can accommodate approximately 30 people in 19 individual suites.



Top o' tha marnin,' Moneta >

All Things Irish has opened in downtown Moneta. A ribbon-cutting was held in February for the boutique retail merchant in the Smith Mountain Lake community; and its grand opening was March 16. Owner **Eileen Mary McMahon** claims 2nd generation Irish-American lineage (from New York); as the website beckons, "Visit Ireland without the Plane Ride."



Sleep safe, little one >

Volunteers with "Sleep in Heavenly Peace" build wooden beds for children who need "a safe, secure, comfortable place to lay their heads." On March 2, a group built 40 beds in about three hours in a "40-Bed Build" challenge in Salem. The wood for the beds was pre-cut but had to be sanded smooth, assembled, screwed together, stained and branded with the "SHP" logo.



Dan Smith

Stumping at the Donkey >

Abigail Spanberger, the U.S. House of Representatives member from the 7th District was in Roanoke—at the Sweet Donkey coffee shop—making her case to succeed Gov. Glen Youngkin, who is ineligible for a second straight run. Spanberger is the first woman to represent the 7th District and the first Democrat to represent it since 1968. She would be Virginia's first female governor. The Virginia native is a former CIA case officer, a graduate of the University of Virginia and holder of an MBA.



Gene Marrano

A bridge to Wasena >

By May demolition of the 85-year-old **Wasena Bridge** that connects to the old Southwest Roanoke demolition will get underway. At a ceremonial groundbreaking in late February Roanoke City Councilman **Peter Volosin** said supporting Wasena businesses during the two years alternative ways for many to reach Wasena is an imperative: "we want to make sure these businesses are able to continue to thrive. Making sure [motorists] know where the detours are, going over the Grandin Road bridge or the Franklin Road bridge, making your way back to the Wasena area. We've also done a lot of community engagement with the businesses; they'll be signage up that says these businesses are open." Volosin recalled the community engagement process the city undertook when the Franklin Road bridge to Old Southwest was torn down and replaced in 2019.

The new Wasena Bridge will not only carry all sorts of vehicles between two Roanoke neighborhoods - it will also be very pedestrian-friendly says City Manager **Bob Cowell**, with wider sidewalks, bike lanes and benches where pedestrians can take a break and enjoy the view. That previous bridge replaced another outdated structure and cost \$330,000; the new Wasena span to old Southwest has a \$50 million price tag. Cowell said \$10 million from VDOT helped make it possible, after at least 5 years of planning.

CONTRIBUTORS

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

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjpp91@gmail.com]

Carrie Cousins is the Director of Digital Marketing at LeadPoint Digital in Roanoke. For 15+ years, she has helped businesses tell their stories and get better results online with practical digital marketing strategies. She also an active leader in AAF, serving on the local and district boards, and is an adjunct professor at Virginia Tech.

Dan Dowdy is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading services (proofingprof.net). 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]

Micah Frain 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.frain.cpa/blog and is frequently interviewed as a business financial expert in national media channels. [micahfrain@fraincpa.com]

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

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

Jennifer Leake is a seasoned Certified Management Consultant (CMC®) with over 30 years of business and consulting experience. She is a certified trusted advisor in the areas of employee assessments, engagement, and emotional intelligence. She offers ideas and best practices to help you hire the right people, engage employees, and lead effectively to enhance workplace performance and drive overall business success. [Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com]

Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. "Best one on one interview" award from Associated Press of the Virginias for his interview with former Roanoke County Chief of Police Howard Hall. [gmarrano@cox.net]

Jeff Merritt is vice president of Roanoke

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

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.

Meg Reed is the vice president of business banking at Freedom First Credit Union. With 25 years of banking experience, she ensures present and future Business Members are equipped to grow their business while helping them financially succeed; catering a financial plan to take the business to the next level. Reed views every business "like a zebra—no two businesses have the same stripes. What may work for one, may not work for the next." [mareed@freedomfirst.com]

Michael Shelton is a Registered Financial Consultant, tax specialist, and owner of 360 Wealth Consultants. His firm specializes in providing retirement planning and wealth preservation strategies for business owners and astute individuals. What really has the locals excited, though,

is his groundbreaking, proprietary software, designed to streamline accounting and wealth planning for business owners of medical practices, real estate properties, and construction industry businesses. [Michael@360WealthConsulting.com]

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

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

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]

Nicholas Vaassen is a graphic designer with 27 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]



Submitted

A bus to McAfee >

With the Route 311-Catawba Road trailhead parking lot for the popular **McAfee Knob** hike expected to be closed all year as a pedestrian bridge is built over the roadway, **Roanoke County** transit planner **Paula Benke** says expanding the McAfee Knob shuttle stops to include **Longwood Park** and **South Broad Street** in **Salem** as of March 1 provides more parking options for hikers. Benke says the county (which rebranded itself several years ago by putting the Knob in its official logo) realizes that some will try to avoid the ten-dollar roundtrip shuttle fee and park along Old Catawba Road near the closed trailhead lot: "VDOT did do a survey late last year and went down Old Catawba Road; they did place signs where you can and cannot park legally and safely."

Additional support from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation is funding the two new shuttle stops, as part of an agreement with the private local shuttle carrier Ride Source, which also serves Hollins University students and the Peaks of Otter. The first weekend for the expanded shuttle also saw through-hikers passing through the area as they tackle more than 2000 miles of the Appalachian Trail reserve the shuttle (which can be done online the McAfee Knob website) so they could come into the heart of Salem says Benke: "we were getting them to the exit 140 Park and Ride [on I-81] but its still a good jaunt into Salem, to get to a grocery store, a hotel, a place to get your haircut – whatever resources you're looking to replenish. Adding these two stops gives them that availability."

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

FINANCIAL FRONT



Brooks

Lee Brooks, CFP®, CRPC® has joined The Myrias Group—a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. at the office at 3130 Chaparral Drive, Building B, Suite 204, Roanoke, VA 24018.



Tillman

Garrett Tillman has joined Farm Credit of the Virginias in operations support. The lending cooperative serves Virginia, West Virginia, and western Maryland, and Tillman will be

based in the Roanoke branch, but serving the entire three-state territory's loan processing efforts. He brings previous experience both in branch management and in operations at other lending institutions.

LEGAL FRONT



Monday

Gentry Locke announced that **Monica Monday**, Chair of the firm's executive board and head of the Appeals and Critical Issues team, has been honored in the inaugural class of the 2024 Circle of Excellence by Virginia Lawyers Weekly, given to past *Virginia Lawyers Weekly* Influential Women of Law recipients who have sustained a great level of achievement

and record of leadership. This inaugural class of Circle of Excellence honorees includes 5 women throughout Virginia who are inspiring and accomplished leaders, serve as mentors to others, and contribute significant time and effort to volunteerism and/or pro bono initiatives. For three decades, Monday has advocated for her clients in Virginia's state and federal appellate courts, handling a wide range of cases from commercial disputes to healthcare, property, personal injury, local government matters, and domestic relations.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Kannan

Richard Kannan has been appointed Chief Financial Officer at Torc

Robotics in Blacksburg, a subsidiary of Daimler Truck. Kannan had served as interim CFO since August. Before joining Torc, he worked for General Electric; he has a bachelor's in business administration from the University of North Carolina.

SERVICE FRONT



Stephens

Oakey's announced the licensure of **Asia Stephens** as a Funeral Director in the Commonwealth of Virginia to serve Oakey's families throughout the Roanoke Valley. Stephens, who began her career with Oakey's in 2019, attended North Cross School and is a graduate of Staunton River High School and Emory and Henry College with a

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Bachelor of Arts degree. She is available to service families at all five Oakey's Roanoke Valley chapels.

NONPROFIT FRONT



Penn

Angela Penn has been announced as the next CEO & President of TAP, effective March 1 upon the retirement of Annette Lewis. Penn has worked in housing development for over a decade, starting with the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority. She served TAP as vice president of for economic and real estate development and director of its housing and community development. Penn, who holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from

James Madison University and an MBA from Radford University, is a member of the City of Roanoke Planning Commission; Alpha Kappa Sorority; Roanoke Valley Chapter of Jack and Jill of America; served as the 2013 co-chair of the United Way of Roanoke Valley President's Circle; and recently completed LEAD VIRGINIA's seven-class program focused on social capital.

HopeTree Family Services has appointed **Maggie Cox** as Director of Family Centered Treatment (FCT). She will be responsible for growing the FCT program and its reach across Virginia through collaborative



Cox

work with the different Departments of Social Services, CSA localities, and referring organizations. Cox, who has ten years of experience in the child welfare system in the public and private sectors, has a Master of Arts in Human Services Counseling from Liberty University, and has worked for Pulaski County Department of Social Services as well as Intercept Health as a Treatment Foster Care Supervisor, and has volunteered with Big

Brothers Big Sisters of America.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

The Town of Vinton has hired **Mandy Adkins** as Director of Cultural Placemaking and Events, overseeing operations of the Department of Community Programs. Adkins previously served from 2014 through 2020 as Director of Youth and Community Programs for San Antonio Sports, and since January 2021 has served as the Director of Parks and Recreation in Botetourt County.

Compiled by Tom Field and Gene Marrano

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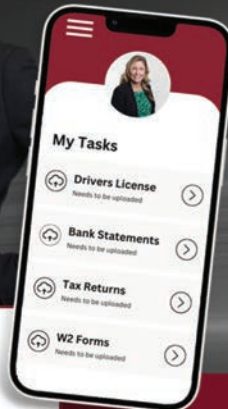
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EO, EO, it's off to work we go

The **United Way of Southwest Virginia** is establishing a new workforce development nonprofit program called EO (Endless Opportunity). The new program takes over what was the UWSV's \$10 million suite of grant-funded workforce programs that included Ignite Career Expo, Rural Summit, Ready Regions, and a separate \$23 million Regional Workforce and Child Development Hub in Abingdon. The transition is expected to take around six months. UWSV serves the counties of Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe, and the cities of Bristol, Galax, Norton, and Radford.

Traffic up on Parkway

The National Park Service reports 16.7 million visits to the **Blue Ridge Parkway** in 2023—an increase of 1 million visits to the Blue Ridge Parkway (+6%) over 2022. You can see stats at www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/visitor-use-statistics-dashboard.htm

Wealth management team ranked

The **Myrias Group** (private wealth advisory practice with Ameriprise Financial in Roanoke) was listed in the

"Best-in-State Wealth Management Teams" by Forbes. The Myrias Group was selected based on best practices and other categories, and is led by Stewart Barnes, Andy Huggins, and John Everson. Offices are in Roanoke, Richmond, Harrisonburg, Winchester, and Martinsburg, WV. The office has served the Roanoke community since 1984.

Luna stretching

Roanoke-based fiber optic company **Luna Innovations Inc.** is acquiring Silixa, another fiber optic company in the United Kingdom. The purchase included business lines in carbon capture and monitoring and additional opportunities in defense and mining industries. The deal is funded in part by a \$50 million investment from NYC firm, White Hat Capital.

Sunny Patrick

Fairy Stone Solar—a 12-megawatt solar farm (powers about 2,000 homes)—has been approved for development by Patrick County; the proposed utility site, operated by Arlington-based Energex Renewables, is located on 211-acres southeast of the town of Stuart.

Our regional advertising awards

AAF Roanoke ad club held its annual ADDY Awards on March 2 at Hotel Roanoke. Among

the winners were: **Virginia Tech Dining Services** (Best in Show); **Branch Group** (Best of Print); **Cry** (Best of Electronic); **Uncork-it** (Best of Digital); **Red Velocity** (Mosaic diversity); **Buzz4Good** (Judges' Choice); and **Bill O'Connor** (Silver Medal, lifetime achievement).

Goodwill Hill City

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys opened a new store location at 19325 Forest Road in Lynchburg. The new Forest store features more than 12,000 square feet of shopping space along with a convenient, covered drop-off donation center.

VTCSOM honors Lacks

The **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine** (VTCSOM) renamed its VTC Dean's Council Diversity Excellence in Medicine Endowed Scholarship to the Henrietta Lacks Excellence in Medicine Scholarship. The change says VTCSOM "underscores the school's commitment to fostering inclusivity in the medical field and recognizing the enduring contributions of the Henrietta Lacks to science and medicine." Lacks, a Black woman, was born in Roanoke in 1920. She was diagnosed and treated for cervical cancer at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore and died on Oct. 4, 1951, not knowing her cells were taken by her doctor

for research. The story of her "immortal cells," known as HeLa cells, and their significant role in supporting more than 70 years of worldwide medical discoveries was not widely known by the public until recent years.

Lacks' story has become a symbol of the untold contributions of marginalized communities to the field of medicine and an historic marker of an era in which patient consent and privacy were not part of the canon of medical ethics. "It is fitting for us to honor Mrs. Lacks and her role in medicine by reducing the financial barriers to medical students who come from backgrounds that our underrepresented in medicine," said **Lee Learman**, dean of the medical school.

Affordable housing loans

More than \$129 million in Affordable and Special Needs Housing loans has been announced for 78 projects across the Commonwealth. The recommended projects will create and preserve 5,358 total units for low-income and extremely low-income households. "By keeping homes affordable and available, we are cultivating economic growth, strengthening our communities and laying the foundation for a thriving Virginia," said Governor **Glenn Youngkin**.

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) administers the Affordable

and Special Needs Housing (ASNH) loans. Landmark Asset Services will receive \$2.1 million for development of the Rivermont School Apartments in Covington; two grants totaling \$1.4 million are tickets for Lynchburg.

Floyd grant to boost business growth

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) is awarding a \$2.7 million grant to the Economic Development Authority of **Floyd County**, for roadway and wastewater infrastructure improvements to support business growth. The grant will provide the infrastructure needed to support Phase 2 development of the Floyd Regional Commerce Center. This EDA investment will be matched with \$680,000 in local funds. "This grant will greatly benefit the residents of Floyd County by enhancing the transportation Infrastructure," said Governor Glenn

Youngkin. "I look forward to the improvements this grant will bring to the region, especially when the second phase of the Floyd Regional Commerce Center is completed."

Main Street grants

\$1.5 million in Mixed Use on Main Street (MUMS) state funding is targeted for three projects in southwest Virginia. The projects will transform a vacant property located in **Hopewell's** Downtown Historic District, add eight market rate apartments in **Pulaski** and renovate the Gospel Armory and Past Time Antique buildings into 12 apartments and two retail spaces in the town of **Marion**.

Cool IT

Modine, a manufacturer of thermal management solutions, will invest \$18.1 million to expand its Rockbridge County operation to increase capacity for the production of data center cooling equipment. The project

Have an announcement about your business?

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

will create 211 new jobs. "Virginia continues to be the epicenter for the data center industry, which makes it the perfect location for Modine to expand manufacturing capacity," said Governor Youngkin. "Modine's increased production of data center cooling equipment will meet the growing demand of this vital sector in the Commonwealth."

RC gets down to business

When you think about **Roanoke College**, Liberal Arts might be top of mind, since that's how the private school in Salem is billed - but there are three new business-related majors arriving this Fall. Marketing, Finance and a combination of Finance & Economics

- the three new majors that will debut with the Fall semester. Dr. **Alice Kassens** is the John S. Shannon Professor of Economics at Roanoke College - about the latter: "a lot of these students that major in economics and then do finance go on to become financial analysts etc., so we wanted to put together a major that pulled the courses from economics and finance that set students up for these career paths.

That new combination major will take students just 13 courses to get through - which is more typical that the 17 it would have taken them previously: "these are the classes that are really important for them to have. Besides streamlining it ... that means they also have more freedom to study other things, which

Notable Transactions

sponsored by covenantreal.com

- **Seven Duplexes** on Eastern Ave Roanoke sold to private investor
- **Wawa** gas station/convenience store to be developed on Graves Mill Rd and Rosedale Blvd in Lynchburg
- **101 Campbell Ave Roanoke** 3-story downtown building sold
- **ECC Contracting** leased Ashlawn Warehouse on Railroad Ave Roanoke
- **Rodeo Thrift and Alejandro's** leased retail spaces at North Market Village, Williamson Rd Roanoke
- **ATCS PLC** leased office space at The Brownstone, Main St Blacksburg

SOURCES: commercial real estate firms; municipal records; FRONTnews feeds

is what a liberal arts education is supposed to be about.” Roanoke College has also announced a guaranteed admission path to William & Mary’s Master of Accounting and Master of Business Analytics programs for eligible students - with a guaranteed minimum scholarship of \$7500.

Roanoke County expanding broadband

Roanoke County extended the deadline for its broadband survey into late February as the county wanted to hear from more residents so it can improve internet access. When Roanoke County did a similar survey in 2019 it showed 30 percent of households did not have access to broadband services. The county used that information to secure \$12 million in grants to provide services to more than 1800 households. Madeline Handlon, assistant to Roanoke County Administrator Richard Caywood, says they hope to use the results from the current survey in the same way. “With that data we’re able to work with internet [last mile] providers, to work on grant applications and seek out providers with federal and state grant funding – and also local funding – so we can provide the services of broadband.”

Jeff Center addresses city over capital needs

There are still events left on the 2023-24 season

schedule at **Jefferson Center**. Meanwhile behind the scenes executive director **Cyrus Pace** is working to forge a new relationship with the Jeff Center’s landlord - the City of Roanoke: “what might be possible for the short term needs with surplus [city budget] funding conversation is happening among city council and the city manager’s office, and then this broader conversation about how do we structure a new relationship with the City of Roanoke that is inclusive of that long term capital support.”

Short term, says Pace, the 100-year-old Jefferson center - a former high school - needs \$250,000 worth of upgrades for fire code issues, security, HVAC and other patron safety issues. Long term, Pace says, it’s a \$5 to \$6 million dollar overhaul they cannot afford under the current lease, which was deeply discounted by the city for the renovated former high school, but which then held the Jefferson Center responsible for all repairs.

Consumers upbeat in latest RC survey

The monthly U.S. Consumer Confidence report took a dip, but in the Commonwealth respondents to another survey are feeling a bit more bullish. Dr **Alice Kassens** with the Institute for Policy and Opinion Research at **Roanoke College** calls it one of the biggest spikes they’ve ever recorded since launching the

quarterly Consumer Sentiment in 2011 - after polling 703 Virginians statewide Consumer Sentiment jumped more than 7 points in the first quarter of 2024: “70 percent of total spending in the economy roughly is by us – consumers – and if we’re feeling optimistic about today and the future we’re more likely to spend, versus if we’re concerned about losing our jobs or a pending recession.” More respondents feel good about the economy; fewer Virginians believe the next few years will mean recession and high unemployment according to the Roanoke College statewide phone and online survey.

Gas up

Roanoke Gas is seeking a rate increase, asking state regulators to approve a hike that would add around \$4 per month for the average customer. The company got approval for a rate increase in 2022 that became effective in 2023.

5 Points Music Sanctuary’s building

5 Points Music Sanctuary, located in Roanoke’s Old Southwest neighborhood, is working to buy the former church it calls home. Executive Director **Tyler Godsey** says last year they worked out a deal to put down a downpayment on the building. He adds that they are working to make several large payments this year to pay off the balance.

“I hope to put down a hundred grand towards that purchase. Our goal again is to ride this out for another year and finalize our closing on the building at the end of the year.”

Godsey, who is hearing impaired as are his children, says the money will come from donations, event sponsors and people and organizations that rent the Sanctuary for special events. He adds their mission remains as always - to celebrate sound and serve as a platform to promote and support music therapy, hearing loss advocacy, and accessibility efforts. One good sign: 10 of the first 11 concerts at 5 Points Music Sanctuary sold out in 2024.

Evans Spring plan finally approved

After a number of public hearings, several votes and pushback from many members of the northwest **Roanoke City** neighborhood, the Evans Spring Master Plan was finally approved last month by a 4 to 3 vote, after an ordinance second reading. Mayor **Sherman Lea** when the vote was over: “there are a lot of things behind us, but this is where we’re going forward. When people talk about legacy and urban renewal – this is not urban renewal, this is something to help keep Roanoke moving forward.”

If and when the 100-plus acre mostly wooded Evans Spring property

across from Valley View Mall comes up for rezoning so developers can build there, city leaders vowed they will work with local residents on that step. The plan calls for mixed use development with around 700 living spaces and retail options that lean towards a neighborhood feel, as well as preservation of wetlands and green space.

Atlantic Union-AMNB merger moves ahead

The merger transaction announced last year between **Atlantic Union** and **American National Bank & Trust** is expected to close April 1. Atlantic Union Bank CEO **John Asbury** says local American National Bank customers will enjoy the return of Saturday banking hours and other services: “more offerings on the wealth management side, more offerings in terms of home mortgages, construction lending, etc. One of the biggest points of differentiation will be on the business side; for the business customer we have extensive treasure management services. We have a far

larger balance sheet, and our lending capacity is greater.”

American National Bank & Trust absorbed Roanoke-based Hometown Bank several years ago; its customers will still be able to use their AMNB debit cards and checking accounts after April 1. Some branches of both banks will be consolidated for efficiency. That will not happen until May 28 when the rebranding takes place and American National Bank customers are onboarded to the Atlantic Union system.

5 Points Creative’s PRSA wins

5Points Creative, a Roanoke creative agency, is the recipient of two awards from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) for their work on the Valley Metro Third Street Station Grand Opening and the Good Samaritan Hospice 2023 Creative Campaign.

The Valley Metro Third Street Station Grand Opening, a project dedicated to enhancing public transportation and community connectivity,

has been honored with the Gold Summit Award. The Good Samaritan Hospice 2023 Creative Campaign has also been acknowledged with the Silver Summit Award. The campaign communicates the hospice center’s mission and impact on the local community. (An in-patient hospice center and staff/volunteer offices are under construction. Funds are still needed towards that build.)

Project Outside awards grants

A number of local trails and greenways will see some improvements with the help of the **Roanoke Outdoor Foundation**. Project Outside is the name of their program that is funding a total of 9 projects with their \$25,000 grant this year. While that averages to just under \$2800 per project, **Pete Eschelmann**, Director of the Roanoke Outdoor Foundation, says the small amounts distributed make a big difference. Grant applications before the awards totaled \$90,000 in requests. “We wish we had more money to allocate and that’s

something that we continue to work towards. That definitely demonstrates that we have an abundance of outdoor assets and that also people are out there using them and impacting them. It demonstrates the need to make sure we are adequately taking care of what we have.” 60 percent of annual Project Outside allocations goes towards maintenance of existing projects, 25 percent goes to new infrastructure and 15 percent goes toward organizational support.

The Roanoke Outdoor Foundation, an arm of the **Roanoke Regional Partnership**, hosts events including the GO Fest outdoor festival every Fall. Eschelmann says proceeds from beer sales at the festival are an example of how they raise funds that allow for these projects to happen. Since its launch Project Outside has raised \$175,000 for the maintenance and development of outdoor assets, and the support of related organizations and businesses.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field

““ So... was it suicide? Foul play?

— Page 45

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Angela Penn



Annette Lewis

TAP photos

A changing of the guard at TAP

By Gene Marrano

“We stayed true to our mission. Never changing our mission.”

That’s true says Annette Lewis, who retired from Total Action for Progress (TAP) on March 1. But resources for the largely federal funded non-profit giant (a 20 million-plus annual budget) changes, administrations change and with that sometimes comes a change in philosophy she noted in an interview the week she stepped down after 35 years with what started out as Total Against Poverty. “However, we still do the things that help struggling families get on their feet.”

For the last nine years Lewis was the President and CEO, succeeding Ted Edlich. TAP was created during the Civil Rights movement in the 60’s. Lewis started as a summer youth counselor after leaving a

job with Allstate, wanting to put her degree in social work to better use.

That help for struggling families includes housing assistance, weatherstripping lower-income homes, access to job training and childcare via programs like Head Start, which TAP runs in Roanoke and she says was the first desegregated school in the city. All of the building blocks to creating a better, more stable life. Regarding the name change – is progress being made in the war on poverty? “Most definitely. We’ve always been about progress.” Lewis labels TAP as a Community Action Agency. She says it was Edlich many years ago who decided they would not be focused on emergency assistance but would help people be more

forward looking. Its about human, community and economic development instead adds Lewis.


TAP helped get the checkoff box removed in Roanoke from job applications that asked if they had committed “any crime.” That helps people at least get their foot in the door, notes Lewis. Ban the box they called that campaign. Still some employers in the area turn their noses up at qualified applicants who made “bad decisions,” but did their time. “We all deserve a second chance. TAP is all about second chances.”

TAP spinoffs include what is now the Feeding Southwest Virginia food bank, and LOA – the Local Office on Aging, which started as a TAP senior citizens club says Lewis. SERCAP (see column elsewhere in this issue) was a water demonstration project under the auspices of TAP, and now works to improve access to clean water in the southeast U.S. It’s important as well to work in concert with other Roanoke area non-profits also looking to lift people up: “we do not believe in duplicating services,” notes Lewis, [and] we can’t do it all. I’m very proud of the partnerships.”

Lewis passed the baton to Angela Penn, a TAP senior vice president and twenty year veteran of the community action agency. Much of Penn’s focus has been on affordable housing, like her previous tenure with the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority. Lewis says what TAP does for families is “very complex,” and having someone like Penn to step in to her role is as close to seamless as possible: “you can

see a leader. [She’s done] an amazing job.” The board of directors agreed and promoted Penn from within.

“Having a base in community action does help understanding the lay of the land,” Penn agrees, noting the in-house succession from Edlich to Lewis to her. She calls her predecessor “a phenomenal leader, [like] her ability to build relationships at all levels – breaking down silos.” That means with local partners and others across the Commonwealth says Penn. The Community Action Partnership Network she labels it. Lewis allowed Penn to shadow her as well, learning how Lewis strove to take care of the internal team at TAP, supporting them because, “day in and day out they are implementing these programs.”

Like Lewis, Penn says addressing the needs of the whole family is at the core of TAP’s mission, as they help people “move towards economic independence,” at the agency she now oversees. TAP partners with the city to land bank blighted properties, looking for developers interested in taking those rehab projects on, turning blight into affordable single family and multifamily homes. Housing continues to be an issue and Penn says TAP is connected with other providers on what the future might look like. Agencies like Renovation Alliance, Roanoke City’s Healthy Homes initiative and the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center. “We’re all starting to really work together more closely, looking at making sure that the current housing stock that we have we can help [become] owner occupied.” 

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Beliveau Farm 33	First Fridays 19
Berryfield 43	Fraim Crawley & Co CPA 61
Blacksburg Partnership / Fork & Cork... 37	Freedom First Credit Union 2
Brown Edwards 5	Member One Federal Credit Union 23
Carilion Clinic..... 21	Ridge View Bank BC
Covenant Real Estate Services 57	VCOM 39
Cox 27	Virginia Business Systems 63
	Virginia Mountain Mortgage..... 54-55

“ ”
 He is a rookie writer... You'd never know that. — Page 44

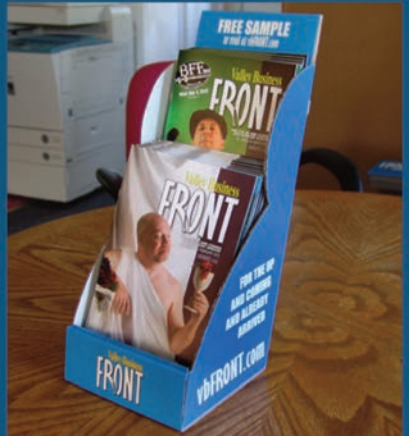
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