

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 185

FEBRUARY 2024

Power Couples

Rupert Cutler

5 Points Creative

Culinary Olympics

JA's Workforce Path

VITAL Veterinarians

vbFRONT.com

also in this issue
Power Couples



Rupe!

Rupert Cutler
Outdoor Advocate

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

We have a rich edition for you this month.

February is often associated with chocolates and jewelry and roses and such... so why not mimic that richness in FRONT? To begin, we have our FRONTlist of "Power Couples." And that particular brand of richness is not just about money. It's about influence and impact and contribution and ultimately—service. Then, we continue that service by recognizing "Rupe"—a gentleman citizen of Roanoke who certainly added to the richness of our community. And of course, we have the riches of food (Culinary Olympics), commerce (an ad agency leader), and workforce development (from veterinarians to youth preparation). Because, you can't have riches without labor, right? Or at least that model—working to build our way—is how we've managed to grow what we have and who we are in Virginia's Blue Ridge.

It's good to be in FRONT; and it's worthy to pursue the riches that support that position.

Way better than the alternative.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

discover the medical school

inspired

by its mission



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vbFRONT.com

LEAD STORY PAGE 8

POWER COUPLES IN VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE

By Dan Smith



“ ”
Extra testing was needed in
the event of an outbreak. — Page 60

FRONTcover photograph of Rupert Cutler by Tom Field.



Incorporate technology into your small business

One of the keys to being a successful entrepreneur is constantly finding ways to upgrade your technology. Being tech-savvy is an essential element of managing and marketing your business. Here's a look at a few tools that will improve your small business overnight.

Cloud data management

If you run the kind of business that requires constant involvement from outside your traditional workspace – either working from home or checking in while travelling – then cloud computing might help meet your needs. By saving your files online, they're accessible from anywhere, whether you're logging on with a desktop, laptop, or smartphone. Moving to the cloud can also help you cut costs and simplify the way you organize your business.

Web development

Creating a website might seem like an enormous undertaking, but there are apps and free online tutorials out there that can make the process far easier. Your site is the first thing people see when they begin to research your company. You don't need to get overly flashy with fancy colors and graphics, but a site that looks clean and professional will take you a long way.

Mobile app development

If you want to make your business more accessible to consumers who are on the go and always engaged with their smartphones, a mobile app may be worthwhile. The exact function depends on your business but in general, app development is easier than ever.

Social media dashboards

If you're looking to grow your business, chances are you're using lots of social media tools. From X to Facebook to LinkedIn you might have trouble juggling all these networking sites, try using dashboard programs that compress everything in one place. This way, everything is easy to find, and you can control your message simply across all channels.

If you're not technologically inclined, all of these tools can seem overwhelming. Try to delve into technology bit by bit, to discover new ways it can help improve your business practices.

Your friends at Cox Business are always here to help review your current technology plan and identify solutions to meet your business needs. Connect with us at www.coxbusiness.com.

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FEBRUARY



Aila Boyd



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Frazier Hughes



Zack Jackson



Michael Shelton



Dan Smith

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



Jennifer Leake



Gene Marrano



Shawn Nowlin



Sam Sokolove



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technology



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Bank of Boletourt /
finance - banking



Meg Reed
Freedom First Credit Union /
finance—credit unions



Alicia Smith
F&S Building Innovations /
construction

“ ”

My goal...
is to get back
into the 40-
hour range.

— Page 28

“ ”

More
than 1,750
participants
from 67
countries
were slated
to participate
in this year's
Culinary
Olympics.

— Page 37

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

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

“ ”

They use that data for
their own bottom line,
not yours. — Page 31



Submitted

Iliana Sepulveda Aviles and Lenny Kolstad

POWER COUPLES IN VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE

By Dan Smith

Life partners often confine their relationships to the home, but power couples seek to influence more than their own lives. To the benefit of us all.

You're thinking about power couples and immediately the conversation turns to Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift, a football player and a singer. Right? Maybe.

But here in the Roanoke Valley our power couples are a little more realistically defined: the Agees, the Fralins, Kat and Jimmy, Diana and Mark, the Lawrences, the Mansfields, Katherine and Lana, Iliana and Lenny, the Leesons, the Cohens and dozens more.

Those couples and so many others are contributors to the quality of life in the Roanoke Valley professionally and personally. They give of their time and their fortune, and at work, they excel.

Nancy Agee, the president and CEO of Carilion, puts it succinctly: "I would say power is synonymous with accountability and responsibility." In a nutshell: Yep, that's about it.

Joe Cobb, Roanoke's vice mayor and a minister elaborates: "It is my belief that only love has the power to transform. Everything we seek to do is guided by this transformative power and the ability to uplift and empower everyone around us."

Business owner and Roanoke City Council member Trish White-Boyd, says, "For me a power couple is individuals who are both influential and successful in their respective fields. It is a couple that works together to achieve common goals or supporting each other's endeavors.

"Power couples are a force to be reckoned with due to their accomplishments and impact within their social, professional, or public spheres."

When you begin tallying up the accomplishments of this unusual group, a pattern emerges, one that clearly delineates the responsibilities these couples accept as part of their gift to this region.

Examples:

Telecommunications consultant Iliana Sepulveda Aviles says, "The concept of Power Couples is rooted in principles of mutual respect and equality. [She and husband Lenny Kolstad] hold both our respective careers in high regard, recognizing the significance of his professional endeavors as much as we do mine.

"Our household functions cohesively with his active participation, and together we share responsibilities in raising our son. Emphasizing a commitment to balanced participation, we prioritize and create opportunities for equal engagement within our

“ ”

Power is synonymous with accountability and responsibility.

—Nance Agee

“ ”

The concept is rooted in principles of mutual respect and equality.

—Iliana Sepulveda

MOST ICONIC POWER COUPLES IN HISTORY

**Cleopatra & Julius
Caesar**

**Queen Isabella &
King Ferdinand**

**Mumtaz Mahal &
Shah Jahan**

**Queen Elizabeth II &
Prince Phillip**

**Elanor & Franklin D.
Roosevelt**

Eva & Juan Peron

**Jacqueline Kennedy
Onassis & John F.
Kennedy**

**Jiang Qing &
Mao Tse-Tung**

Hilliary & Bill Clinton

-Business Insider

community. Furthermore, we recognize the significance of maintaining personal well-being; hence, we acknowledge the equal importance of his dedicated time for exercise and health, mirroring the value placed on my own pursuit of a healthy lifestyle.”

Agee is not only the top hospital official in the region, but also former chairwoman of the American Hospital Association, one of the Top 100 Most Influential People (nationally) in Healthcare and the Top 25 Women in Healthcare, Virginia Business’s Person of the Year, and member of boards that influence the arts. Husband Steve Agee is a federal judge, a former State Supreme Court Judge and a director of the Bradley Free Clinic.

Cynthia and Heywood Fralin have continued the tradition (begun by Heywood’s late Horace Fralin) of stamping the family name on a number of influential organizations and businesses. Notably, that name appears prominently on the Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia and the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute in Roanoke, where a \$50 million contribution helped found this important piece of the Virginia Tech/Carilion medical education and research facilities. Meanwhile, the couple has used its extensive art collection to boost the region’s museum offerings.

Heywood is a healthcare executive and lawyer, and a member of both the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech boards of visitors and a member of the state’s Council of Higher Education. He recently established a fund to support programs at Mill Mountain Zoo. The Fralins helped found Roanoke’s Taubman Museum of Art.

Trish White-Boyd and her husband Colbert Boyd have been at the center of life in the Roanoke Valley for years. She has owned her eldercare business for nearly 20 years and before retirement, he was deputy commissioner for the Virginia Department of Veteran Services. Both have extensive involvement in their neighborhood association, with Round Hill Elementary School and with the Kiwanis Club.

Kat Pascal and Jimmy Delgado have not only re-defined the hamburger in the Valley with the FarmBurguesa restaurants, but they have also been instrumental in making the Latino voices heard. They are also community volunteers and philanthropists, and she helped found the Latinas Network and Nuestro Latino She is also a Roanoke SBDC consultant and works with numerous other charities and volunteer organizations.

Journalist Dwayne Yancey (founding editor of Cardinal News) says, “I definitely think of someone other than

us [when considering power couples]. Our worlds really don't overlap much—even though we're both involved in theatre, it's in different aspects, with Trina as a producer, director, actor and me as a writer.”

Joe Cobb gets most of the attention in his partnership with James Matthews, but James, a retired radiologist, is also a composer and pianist. He plays in two bell choirs and sings with the Carilion Hospice Choir. He is a board member of the Thursday Morning Music Club and is a tutor for Blue Ridge Literacy. The two have been married since 2017.

Diana Christopulos and Mark McClain are another high-profile pair. He has been a crossword puzzle creator (among other careers), a volunteer at the Salem VA, and has had leadership positions in Sierra Club, Roanoke Valley Greenways, Cool Cities Coalition. Diana is a retired college professor (among other callings), former president Appalachian Trail Club, Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, Cool Cities Coalition, Blue Ridge Land Conservancy. Both love the outdoorsy and show it by volunteering.

Michael and Amanda Mansfield are not only theater royalty in the Valley for their community theatre contributions, but their daughter Gwyneth Strope, is an accomplished actor/director and visual artist. The Mansfields have both won prestigious Perry F. Kendig Awards for contributions to the arts in the Valley.

Veteran journalist Dwayne Yancey is a member of the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame and the founding editor of the trendy online publication Cardinal News. He is also a playwright of note with his plays being produced all over the world, at one point 14 simultaneously. Wife Katrina has earned quite a reputation as a director in local community theatre. 



Submitted

“ ”

Only love has
the power to
transform.

—Joe Cobb

Michael and Amanda
Mansfield and their
daughter Gwyneth Strope



Submitted

Cynthia and Heywood Fralin

FRONTLIST: 40 POWER COUPLES

Compiled by FRONT correspondent Dan Smith, FRONT publisher Tom Field, and with selected input from FRONT patrons, including Alan Ronk, Kevin Holt, Kim Blair, Bart Wilner.

Publisher's Note: I think it's important (imperative) to note that many of the individuals on this list were not asked or invited or even contacted to be included in this recognition. In fact, it is entirely possible that some would have preferred not to be included. The couples were identified by various sources as good representatives for the assignment—that was the only qualifier for nomination. For the record, I established four (4) prerequisites: 1- Relationship (the couple didn't have to be married, but clearly in a relationship with each other; we might even consider purely professional alliances); 2- Money / Wealth (this doesn't mean the couple had to be "rich," but we do want solvent, and prefer formidable financial position); 3- Influence (the couple makes things happen; people come to them, and places change because of them); 4- Contribution (the couple demonstrates philanthropy or service, preferably to our community).

This version of Power Couples showcases people in Virginia's Blue Ridge region—not our larger coverage area.

Lastly, we made the list for 40. There were (are) many other viable couples we just didn't get to publish this time.

NANCY AGEE

CEO and president of Carilion Clinic; former chair American Hospital Association; named Top 100 Most Influential People in Healthcare and the Top 25 Women in Healthcare by Modern Healthcare; Wall Street Council of CEOs; Foundations for Independent Colleges; Virginia Business Council; boards of the Taubman Museum of Art and Mill Mountain Theatre; holds two honorary doctorate degrees

STEVE AGEE

Former Virginia Supreme Court judge; House of Delegates 12 years; Bradley Free Clinic director

CYNTHIA FRALIN

Philanthropist, art collector

HEYWOOD FRALIN

Lawyer, medical professional; philanthropist; developer; art collector

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF POWER COUPLES

They brainstorm together.

The work to improve themselves.

They maintain separate roles but are equal partners.

They make time for themselves.

They have excellent communication.

-Business Success Solution



Submitted

Joe Cobb and James Matthews

ILIANA SEPULVEDA AVILES

Broadband Telecommunications Consultant Senior at American Electric Power; past president of Project Management Institute-SWVA; co-founder and board member of Latinas Network; volunteer for Sustainable Roanoke

LENNY KILSTAD

Mechanical engineer at Ascent Engineering Group; former engineer with Trane Technologies; board member of Hunting Hills Country Club Tennis Committee; board member of Sustainable Roanoke and Renewable Energy and Electric Vehicle Association (REEVA)

KAT PASCAL

Co-Founder of FarmBurguesa restaurants; community volunteer; owns Spotless America Cleaning; member of Latinas Network, Nuestro Latino, Roanoke SBDC consultant; Spot on Kirk; and numerous other charities

JIMMY DELGADO

Co-Founder of FarmBurguesa; philanthropist, community volunteer

MARK MCCLAIN

Volunteer for Salem Veterans Administration;

retired crossword puzzle creator (among other careers); leadership in Sierra Club, Roanoke Valley Greenways, Cool Cities Coalition

DIANA CHRISTOPULOS

Retired college professor (among other callings); former president of Appalachian Trail Club; active with Blue Ridge Land Conservancy and Cool Cities Coalition

JOE COBB

Minister; member of Roanoke City Council (and recently announced running for Mayor of Roanoke); community organizer; Carilion Hospice Choir and two bell choirs

JAMES MATTHEWS

Board member of Thursday Morning Music Club; tutor for Blue Ridge Literacy; Roanoke music scene

MARK LAWRENCE

Vice President Government and External Affairs at Carilion Clinic; Carilion board of directors; Radford University Board of Visitors; Virginia Public Access Projec

CYNTHIA LAWRENCE

Founder of two companies; Carilion Clinic

Director of Workforce Development; Virginia Lottery Board; Virginia Chamber's Workforce and Education Committee; Blue Ridge Partnership for Health Science Careers; Mill Mountain Theatre; Virginia Museum of Transportation; Opera Roanoke; Virginia Opera board; House of Bread board; Jaycees' Outstanding Young Women of Roanoke Valley (who won MS Society's Silver Hope Award)

TRISH WHITE-BOYD

Owner of home health care business; community volunteer; city council member

BERT BOYD

Community activist; neighborhood leadership; retired from Virginia Department of Corrections

Trish White-Boyd and Bert Boyd



Dan Smith



Dan Smith

Dwayne and Katrina Yancey

MICHAEL MANSFIELD

Hollins University visiting professor; award winner in Roanoke area community theatre

AMANDA MANSFIELD

Philanthropy director at Virginia Western Community College; award winner in Roanoke area community theatre

DWAYNE YANCEY

Noted journalist and playwright (allows nonprofits to produce his plays royalty-free)

KATERINA YANCEY

Technical director for Attic Productions; involved in community theatre

CHRISTY ARTHUR

Doctor; founder of Ultra Primary Care

MICHAEL ARTHUR

Doctor; Ultra Primary Care

BANAFSHEH (BANA) HOSSEINIAN

Orthodontist volunteer with the cleft team at Carilion Clinic

FARHAD SAHEBJAM

Physician, gastroenterologist at Gastroenterology Consultants of Southwest Virginia

LAUREN ELLERMAN

Attorney at Frith & Ellerman; co-owners of Cave Spring Grocery and River and Rail restaurant

WHIT ELLERMAN

Attorney at Frith & Ellerman, CEO of Cardinal Bicycle; co-owners of Cave Spring Grocery and River and Rail restaurant

DORSEY TAYLOR

Co-owner of LinDor Gallery, influential in the art community

LINDA TAYLOR

Co-owner of LinDor Gallery, influential in the art community

JACK AVIS

Owner of Avis Construction; active in supporting the arts

GINGER POOLE AVIS

Creative director at Mill Mountain Theatre

DAVE COHEN

General Counsel at Associated Asphalt; director of administration at Wilderness Adventure at Eagle Landing (and zip line instructor)

MELINDA COHEN

Business coach to coaches and author of The Confident Coach

TODD LEESON

Partner at Gentry Locke law firm; chair of the employment law group

WHITNEY LEESON

Roanoke College history professor; author; member of Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation; Mill Mountain Garden Club

LUCAS THORNTON

Developer; owner of Hist:Re Partners, a Roanoke-based construction and preservation development group

ISABELLE THORNTON

Founder and executive director of Restoration Housing, a historical preservation and affordable housing developer

BOB GOODLATTE

Attorney; lobbyist; US House of Representatives Virginia 6th Congressional District (for 13 terms)

MARY ELLEN GOODLATTE

Attorney; previous Roanoke Bar Association president; boards of VWCC, Roanoke City Public Schools Foundation, Roanoke Foundation for Downtown Inc.

FRANK CARTER

President of MemberOne Federal Credit Union; art collector and supporter

MEG CARTER

Fralin Biomedical Research Institute advisory board; Roanoke Valley Reads; art collector and supporter

BILL HUME

President and founder of Interactive Design Group Architecture; volunteer for veteran organizations

JILL HUME

CFO of Interactive Design Group; community volunteer; Franklin County YMCA

PETE LARKIN

Carilion Clinic senior consultant; public affairs; Chief of Staff for Congressman Bob Goodlatte

SUSAN LARKIN

Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce Ambassador of the Year

SIGNS THAT
YOU AND YOUR
SIGNIFICANT
OTHER ARE A
POWER COUPLE:

You both feel safe
and secure.

You have open
communication.

You celebrate each
other's successes.

You both have
independence.

You're flexible.

You respond to
and prioritize each
other's needs.

You work to support
each other's goals.

You balance each
other out.

You work well together.

You're open to each
other's interests.

You don't try to casually
one-up each other.

You bring out the
best in each other.

You inspire people
around you.

-Women's Health

JAMES SMITH

Regional Growth Manager at GENEDGE;
volunteer

LUTHERIA SMITH

Executive Vice President at American
National Bank; human resources at
Roanoke City

MONICA MONDAY

Gentry Locke law firm partner (former
managing partner)

ERIC MONDAY

General Counsel for Roanoke-Blacksburg
Regional Airport; previous city manager
of Martinsville

BRUCE STOCKBURGER

Attorney at Gentry Locke; Virginia Law
Foundation Fellow

KATHY STOCKBURGER

Owner of consulting practice; president
of Roanoke Women's Foundation

BEN CLINE

US Representative for Virginia's 6th
Congressional District

ELIZABETH CLINE

Attorney at Moss & Rocovich

CHRIS HEAD

Franchise co-owner of Home Instead
Senior Care; Virginia House of Delegates
17th District

BETSY HEAD

Franchise co-owner of Home Instead;
"Be A Santa" charity

FRANK FRIEDMAN

Virginia Court of Appeals judge

MELISSA FRIEDMAN

Roanoke Juvenile Court judge

KEVIN DYE

Gastroenterologist doctor at Carilion Clinic

NANCY DYE

Surgeon (retired); Ferrum College and
Hargrave Military Academy boards;
Juvenile Diabetes; Mill Mountain
Advisory Committee; Virginia Tech
Board of Visitors

DAN FRITH

Attorney at Frith & Ellerman; former
chair of Litigation / Virginia State Bar

LINDA FRITH

Attorney at Frith, Anderson & Peake;
Grandin Theatre Foundation; Roanoke
Symphony; United Way of Roanoke
Valley

SCOTT GRAEFF

President of Luna Innovations; involved
with mergers and acquisitions, public
offerings, capital financing

QUINN GRAEFF

Attorney; risk management consultant;
General Counsel for Medical Facilities of
America

COOPERYOUELL

Attorney at Whitlow & Youell; Roanoke
Valley Speech & Hearing Center; Saint
Francis Service Dogs

CABELLYOUELL

Attorney; Executive Director of Saint
Francis Service Dogs

BRETT MARSTON

Attorney; Managing Partner at Gentry
Locke law firm; board member Roanoke
Symphony Orchestra

COLEEN MARSTON

Real estate agent at Long & Foster
(Smith Mountain Lake; Roanoke);
Roanoke Outside Foundation

DEBBIE PETRINE

President of Commonwealth Care of
Roanoke; Virginia Tech Foundation
board; VT-Carilion School of Medicine;
VT Center for Gerontology board

JIM PETRINE

President of Enirtep; The Hokie Way board president

MATT BULLINGTON

Texas Tavern owner/operator; Blue Ridge Racing (organization)

MOLLY BULLINGTON

Director of Blue Ridge Marathon; Blue Ridge Racing; civil engineer

GRETCHEN BEEDLE

Financial advisor with The Conner Group; United Way; Downtown Roanoke Inc; Gallop for Greenway founder

ANDREW BEEDLE

Roanoke Valley CrossFit co-founder; The Land Properties co-founder; higher education marketing

JIM FRANTZ

Retired president of Graham-White Mfg Co; board of trustees at Roanoke College

JANET FRANTZ

Mill Mountain Garden Club; Pink Promise; community volunteer

MARK LUCAS

Co-founder Lucas Therapies; mayoral past candidate

WENDY LUCAS

Co-founder Lucas Therapies; charities sponsorships

PATTON COLES

Employee benefits executive vice president and sales executive; chair and boards with Roanoke College, North Cross School


MIMI COLES

Marketing and business development in construction industry; Junior Achievement; Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce board member

KEN MCFADYEN

Director of Botetourt County Department of Economic Development

MELANIE MCFADYEN

Town Manager of Fincastle; reading teacher; Peace Corps 

“ ”

No road is long with good company.

—Turkish proverb

“ ”

Love is a game that two can play and both win.

—Eva Gabor

“ ”

Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction.

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery



Courtesy photo

Rupert Cutler and bookends

“I Don’t Know How to Stop”

Rupert Cutler: a lifetime of achievement and well-deserved recognition

By Gene Marrano

Like many others in the Roanoke Valley Dr. M. Rupert Cutler – Rupe to his friends – is not a native but was drawn here many years ago by opportunity. Now he is The City of Roanoke’s Citizen of the Year at age 90, still vital and connected to the Star City’s vibe as it continues to move forward.

Rupert Cutler grew up in Michigan and first became enamored with all things outdoors when birds drew his attention while he was caddying as a teen on golf courses in Michigan near Detroit. (His grandfather worked for Ford Motor Company and Cutler says he designed the legendary Ford logo that adorns every vehicle it makes.) Years later after moving to Roanoke in 1991, where he became

involved with the original vision for Explore Park, serving as its founding Executive Director, Cutler, an avid “birder,” says he identified around 100 species of birds while hiking the Lick Run Greenway.

“I can’t stop – I’m just a worker bee,” he jokes, I don’t know how to stop.” He’s at his computer by 9, answering and sending emails, monitoring local government issues,

“trying to be involved with policy.” He’s affiliated with the Sons of the American Revolution and has been involved with local historical preservation projects; he writes op-eds for newspapers. “I try to do something creative. My wife and I do not watch television very much. We are book readers.”

In fact, he has thousands of books in his home library (mostly non-fiction, history is a favorite); when they were converting his building into high-end condominiums an engineering assessment had to determine whether the construction would support those bookcases. He keeps track of books written about climate change – “the biggest threat to the life on earth.”

Field trips to state parks with his Boy Scout troop also whetted his appetite for the outdoors and conservation, as did family camping trips growing up and summertime internships. Travel to American

Revolution sites like Valley Forge and other battlefields are another favorite.

A University of Michigan undergraduate (Wildlife Management), Cutler went on to earn a master’s and then a doctorate from Michigan State University in 1972 (while working as a teaching assistant) after determining his career path had “hit a wall.” His thesis examined four lawsuits involving the United States Forest Service and environmental plaintiffs like the Sierra Club that wanted to stop development of what later became wilderness services.

His career path then took him to Washington DC and New York City, and finally to Roanoke. After coming to Roanoke in 1991, where he now lives in a downtown condominium inside the old Colonial American Bank Building on the corner of Campbell Avenue and South Jefferson Street with his wife Brenda McDaniel, Cutler also served as executive director of the Western Virginia



Courtesy photo

Rupert Cutler (L) and Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea Sr



Tom Field

Rupert Cutler

Land Trust (now the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy).

He was an adjunct professor of wildlife sciences at Virginia Tech, which now houses many of his papers from a career that also included a stint in the Jimmy Carter White House as the U.S. assistant secretary of agriculture for conservation, research and education. There he oversaw the Forest Service and spent time on the road looking to protect the country's natural resources. "That was the opportunity of a lifetime. It

was probably the most important thing I've done."

A transition team recommended him to the Carter White House as it was assembling a staff. It turned to the Sierra Club and other environmental groups for advice – and that's when Cutler's name came up. "I had friends in high places." After overcoming objections at his confirmation hearing from some Republican lawmakers who feared he was an extreme environmentalist – receiving support from GOP Senator Bob Dole, Cutler got the job.

Cutler spent time briefing President Carter on related issues; he was in the room as well when Carter signed an agreement to protect land in Alaska; he was in the East Room when Carter signed an agreement with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping to normalize diplomatic relations. The former Georgia Governor turned President, was "rather stiff to work with," he recalls, "to say that he has a mind of his own is an understatement. He was pretty clear what he wanted to do." A micromanager Cutler calls Carter, who would write notes back in the margins of memos Cutler had sent for review. "He was lost in the details," he chuckles four decades-plus later.

Once he landed in southwest Virginia, then-Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine both appointed Cutler to four year terms on the board of trustees for the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. There's more: assistant executive director of The Wilderness Society, senior Vice President of the National Audubon Society (he was a local Audubon Club member in Michigan early on), and President/CEO for Defenders of Wildlife, which he says had a similar mission.

Cutler served one four year term after being elected to Roanoke City Council in 2002 (declining to run again because his late first wife Gladys was very ill), then was appointed in 2008 to fill out the remainder of Alfred Dowe's tenure after Dowe became embroiled in ethical issues that marred what had seemed like a bright future in city political circles. His wife Brenda McDaniel also served a stint on City Council.

Cutler has seen the city grow, with downtown

living spaces making Roanoke a livelier place after business hours, with new employment opportunities and the still growing Innovation Corridor that now includes the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute and the RAMP high tech business incubator. The Virginia Tech-Carilion alliance has the city “on a fast track,” as he sees it. Roanoke is now becoming like Asheville, a city he has held up as a measuring stick, “a four year college community with a lot of younger people and well-paid doctors and research personnel.”


The future is bright for the Star City says Cutler, recalling when he first arrived, that Roanoke had been labeled a “Southern Rust Bowl city. [Norfolk Southern] was leaving – people were pretty down in the mouth. Very negative about this town.” He cites developer Ed Walker as someone who help reawaken the downtown area – including the building he lives in. Cutler is excited about Walker’s latest project, the Riverdale mixed-use development at what was once the American Viscose plant back in the day. “I’m very high on that – an opportunity to provide beautiful housing and businesses – restaurants and cafes.”

Cutler says he helped engineer the preservation of 12,000 acres at Carvins Cove, now a haven for mountain bikers, trail runners and kayakers, and he advocated for a 600 acre conservation easement on Mill Mountain. Outdoor amenities have become a major selling point for Roanoke, as both a tourist destination and as a place for talented professionals to relocate. “One thing I can say is that I stayed true to my original mission of improving wildlife, habitat and protecting wilderness areas.”

Cutler is fond of the cultural activities that abound as well, “the music, the symphony orchestra, opera, the ballet, the bluegrass and the [brewpubs].” He played trombone with the Richmond Symphony Orchestra at one point and in more recent years in Roanoke parades with a local community band. There was also a stretch with the Virginia Barbershop Chorus.

An active Kiwanian and a past president of the Roanoke Kiwanis Club, Cutler chaired an environmental scholarship presentation for the civic organization and currently co-chairs its Horton Nature Park project. In fact, he was lured to a City Council meeting late last year on the pretense that council members wanted to hear his status report on the park in Northwest Roanoke near the Melrose branch library – where he noted Goodwill Industries of the Valleys is reconfiguring its campus into an adult high school, a grocery store “and other cool things,” as part of the Melrose Plaza project

That’s when Mayor Sherman Lea Sr. and others surprised him with a key to the city and the Citizen of the year award. Cutler joked and drew laughter when he said he had put a lot of work into preparing that report, on a project Cutler says might reach a million dollars to develop.

“One after the other members of Roanoke City Council came up, shook my hand with a big grin on their face, saying ‘I’m looking forward to hearing your report on the nature park.’ I began to get a little suspicious. I about fell off my chair [when the award was announced].” Chances are good that City Council and Roanoke haven’t heard the last from Dr. M. Rupert Cutler. 



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High or low? That is the question ...

The goal is to maximize your profit and after 150+ transactions in every neighborhood of the Roanoke Valley, surrounding counties to Blacksburg, Lynchburg, being ranked in the top 25 out of 1,336 realtors last year, here's what I have found works.

When you test your house on the open market, I'd like to think of it as selling an item on eBay. With my dynamic marketing, pictures, name brand, and once it hits the MLS thousands are going to see it from all over. Some of my most recent properties I have listed have had interest from Texas to California, and we have had buyers from New York and Vermont.

Where do we price it to maximize your profit? There are a couple of theories. One of my brokers suggested pricing a home a little lower than market value to try to have a bidding war and get much more for your home. I have not seen a lot of bidding wars in the past 6 months like I did during Covid where I had a client lose out on a home offering \$50k over! My listings are averaging 14 days until under contract.

The other theory is to list your home a little higher than market value to see if the potential buyers will pay more for your home. This strategy includes reducing the price weekly. The NAR tracks statistics and states that 10 showings and no offers, or two weeks without a showing, means the home is overpriced.

This recently happened to me with a listing where we priced it the same as a comparable and ours was not as nice, but we wanted to see if we could get the same price. We had 24 showings in a week and no offers! After week one we dropped the price \$5k then week two another \$10k and it immediately went under contract. We hit the sweet spot with the price drop and my seller netted over \$20k more than we expected with the small drops in price.

If it's up to me, I go high, then drop. You can never raise the price. Small drops show buyers you are serious about selling where no drops make them think otherwise. Remember if the buyer is not paying cash, the home must appraise as well. Start high, get more. 🏠

REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:
Should you list your home higher or lower than market value?

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

“
”
You can never raise the price.


Unleashing futuristic forecasting for business brilliance

Embracing technology opens avenues for more accurate predictions, real-time insights, and strategic planning, allowing small enterprises to navigate uncertainties with agility and precision. One pivotal aspect of leveraging technology in financial planning for small businesses is the integration of advanced forecasting methods. Traditional forecasting often falls short in capturing the intricacies of today's dynamic markets. However, emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), provide small businesses with predictive analytics capabilities that go beyond conventional approaches.

These technologies analyze historical data, identify patterns, and generate forecasts that are more nuanced and responsive to changing market conditions. Moreover, cloud-based financial management platforms empower small businesses to access real-time data from anywhere, facilitating agile decision-making. Cloud computing not only enhances the accuracy of financial forecasts but also promotes collaboration among team members, fostering a more cohesive approach to financial planning. Proactive financial planning, a cornerstone of business resilience, is greatly enhanced through technology. Automation plays a pivotal role in streamlining financial processes, reducing the margin for error, and ensuring that critical financial data is readily available.

Automated tools can monitor cash flow, track expenses, and generate reports, providing business owners with timely insights into their financial health. Furthermore, financial planning software can facilitate scenario analysis, allowing small businesses to simulate different economic conditions and assess their impact. By identifying potential challenges and opportunities, businesses can proactively adjust their strategies to mitigate risks and capitalize on favorable conditions.

Small businesses can also leverage technology to implement zero-based budgeting (ZBB), a strategic approach where every expense must be justified for each new budgeting cycle. Technology-driven budgeting tools simplify the ZBB process, enabling businesses to scrutinize expenditures and allocate resources more efficiently. This approach fosters a culture of costconsciousness and ensures that every dollar spent aligns with organizational objectives.

Additionally, mobile applications for financial management provide small business owners with on-the-go access to critical financial information. These apps enable quick decision-making, expense tracking, and even facilitate mobile payment processing, contributing to a more agile and responsive financial strategy. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

In an era dominated by technological advancements, small businesses can harness the power of innovative tools to elevate their financial strategies through diverse forecasting methods and proactive financial planning.

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



Submitted

Bruce Bryan (with big scissors) cuts ribbon on 5 Points office

The Reluctant Entrepreneur

5 Points Creative's Bruce Bryan

By Aila Boyd

Some people doggedly pursue their dream job until they've secured it, whereas others stumble into the job of their dreams through a series of unexpected events. Bruce Bryan, the owner of 5Points Creative, is an example of the latter.

Bruce Bryan, a James Madison University graduate, started his career in local television in an entry level production position. Once he found out his now ex-wife was expecting their first child, he decided he needed to start making some real money.

"My dad always said I'd be great in sales, so I made my first cold call and walked into the sales manager's office and said I thought I could do this," he remembered of his experience at a Roanoke station in 1987.

The gamble paid off. Despite the turbulence of his first year, having seven different sales managers, he ended up learning a lot by taking key pieces of sales philosophy from each one. His adaptability paid off when he became salesperson of the year in 1988.

He turned that initial success into a launch pad for a lengthy career in sales management. He was eventually recruited by a former boss to help

establish a new territory for a Fox station in Michigan. "It was like the wild, wild west. We were setting all kinds of new sales records," he said.

A slew of additional management positions followed, many of which involved opening new territories. Those experiences instilled a frontier mentality in Bryan in which he had to develop a general concept, then adapt quickly based on developments related to market forces and personnel matters.

His last sales position brought him back to Roanoke in 2007 when he was recruited by WSLs 10 to clean up its sales department. Two years later, at the height of the Great Recession, he found himself without a job after a round of cutbacks. "It was devastating to say the least," he said.

The fact that most of his contacts had been pushed out of the television industry at that point and a desire to remain in Roanoke forced Bryan to be resourceful.

"I'm a reluctant entrepreneur. If I had

other choices, I would have taken them but there weren't really any other choices in 2009," he said. Before making any major decisions, he had conversations with a half-dozen people who knew him well, asking each one what his strengths were. That feedback led him to the realization that he had worked with quite a few clients who weren't represented by agencies during his sales days.

From there, he launched the agency that is now known as 5Points Creative from his kitchen table. At first, he concentrated on media buying for four clients. As time went on, those clients, as well as new ones who had approached him, started asking him to expand his offerings, including websites, press releases and commercial production. To meet this need, he hired freelancers to help fill in the gaps. He continued like this until he was able to hire some of them full time.

"As we grew, we would add another person or two people—that's how things grew and evolved over the past 12-13 years," he said. The agency is currently comprised of 13 full time and seven



Submitted

5 Points employees volunteering at Healing Strides



Submitted

Bruce Bryan

part time employees. “It’s really evolved through the years, and it’s really related to the talent acquisition.”

He opened his first office in 2010 on Kirk Avenue. The agency moved into its current Walnut Avenue SW location in 2020 at the same time it rebranded itself under its current name. The name now represents the five ways the agency helps clients, including marketing, advertising, digital, branding and communications.

At this point, roughly 80% of the agency’s clients are in the greater Roanoke Valley/New River Valley region. Some of the agency’s non-local clients are in Florida, Tennessee, Maryland, Michigan North Carolina and South Carolina. Most client acquisitions come from word-of-mouth referrals.

A throughline in both his television and agency work is that he maintains a high level of curiosity. Despite being pressured by the industry to pick a niche, Bryan has continued to seek out variety in the type of work the agency does.


“When an agency works in one vertical market, you tend to get more cookie cutter solutions,” he said. “The best work we’ve done has come from listening to what people are trying to do and listening to their story and then turning that into a plan that accomplishes their goals.”

Ridge View Bank is one of the agency’s local clients. President Carrie McConnell hired 5Points Creative in 2021 before the bank launched for help with marketing and public relations. Despite planning to hire separate firms for the bank’s needs, she quickly realized 5Points Creative was going to be a one-stop-shop for the bank. “They handle most of our marketing, our advertising, our digital, some of our branding and communications,” she said. “They’ve been a critical component as we’ve rapidly grown Ridge View here, getting our message out, who we are and really making us seem bigger than we were initially as we launched.”

Bryan explained getting to play a role in the bank’s launch tapped into his frontier mentality. He describes the bank as being one of his favorite clients because its leaders “have strong ideas, but they listen and are willing to adjust and adapt,” which has cultivated a highly collaborative partnership.

“We really look for clients that have an interest in mutually growing,” he said.

After being intimately involved in the running of the agency since its inception, Bryan started laying the groundwork for a transition last year. He reports he has strong leaders in place who have progressively been taking on more responsibilities. This has allowed him to spend more time recruiting new clients and investing in his team.

“My goal this year is to get back into the 40-hour range. I plan to stay involved, but I want to let the directors expand and grow the things that it makes sense for them to take over,” he explained. He anticipates working on another book, one focused on business, in some of his newfound free time. 

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** Women may experience signs that may not be as easy to recognize, such as fatigue or feeling flu-like symptoms.*



Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital's Chest Pain Center is accredited by the American College of Cardiology.

Cardiovascular Institute

CARILION CLINIC



SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Sam Sokolove

Executive Summary:
Like any organization, nonprofits need a well-defined purpose to thrive. Without clarity on their unique role, regional nonprofits risk failing amidst growing competition for limited dollars.

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

Why a clear nonprofit mission matters

As 2024 brings new challenges, successfully navigating the landscape requires clear communication of “why we exist” to all stakeholders.


Spotlight Your Distinctions: the number of nonprofits continues rapidly expanding across all fields of work in the region. This means many philanthropic causes get duplicated, making it essential for groups to highlight their differences. Articulating what makes you stand apart in your messaging helps secure the funding and volunteers needed to deliver on your mission.

Know Who You Serve: in the business world, companies lose customers if they don’t understand buyers’ needs. Nonprofits similarly must identify their specific audience and what motivates them to donate or participate. With insight into your target community, you can better convey how you uniquely meet their interests and fill gaps.

Scope Out the Local Competition: while nonprofits embody cooperative values, analyzing peers helps avoid overlap. Extensively researching other regional and local groups in your specific focus area provides context for defining an unmet space to occupy. Comparing operational metrics like expense ratios also allows for favorable positioning of your capabilities.

Perfect Your Elevator Pitch: even armed with a clear mission, nonprofits must communicate it quickly and compellingly to time-strapped donors. Imagine you had 30 seconds with a potential high-level funder before they exit the elevator — what would you say to capture their interest? Craft and memorize a pitch that inspires local action.

Stick to Priorities: with mounting service demands, nonprofits must evaluate all plans and activities in alignment with their central goals. Avoiding distractions - i.e., “Mission Drift” - gives the bandwidth to steer steadily towards long-term desired impacts. Your mission statement serves as true north.

In sum, nonprofits must revisit their guiding purpose as competition rises. Analyzing wider trends and local peers provides a helpful perspective. Defining and conveying your distinct value is key to fruitful work improving lives. 

“Articulating what makes you stand apart... helps... deliver on your mission.”

Same as it ever was ... cookies or no cookies

Let's start by summing up the current news as simply as possible. There's a decent chance you've heard panic-inducing headlines like "Businesses Scrambling with the Death of Third-Party Cookies" telling you how Google is protecting the privacy of their consumers (laughable) and doing away with third party cookies. If you buy into this hype, you are then convinced that all hope is lost, you'll never be able to properly advertise again, and the world is in more despair than a Morrissey song.

The real truth? NOTHING IS CHANGING! Yes, Google is doing away with cookies, but if you think they're doing it without a new plan in place to track your every digital move, then I'd like to sell you a couple tickets to the next Fyre Festival. And if you actually believe they care about your online privacy, I'd also like to sell you some Doge coin, a bridge in Brooklyn and GameStop stock.

So that brings us back to the mantra from ... OWN YOUR AUDIENCE!

If you are a business owner who is trying to reach a consumer online, I encourage you to stop relying on these billion dollar companies to do so. Data is gold and they use that data for their own bottom line, not yours. Sure, they'll allow you to reach some of that audience, but not all of it. They also won't share with you that contact information, because that's the power they have over you.

Yes ... using companies like Facebook and Google to advertise to a targeted audience is a useful resource, but don't let it be your ONLY resource. When you do that, you are always at the mercy of their system. They control the algorithms and will in turn control who sees your information and how often. When you own your own audience, YOU have that control.

It is absolutely essential that you explore ways to gather the contact information of your customer base, and then use that information strategically in ways that reward your customers and increase your revenue. There are many ways to do this ... email databases, loyalty programs, and text message reward systems are some examples. And the beautiful thing about systems like these is that when you send something to your audience in these ways, EVERY single one of them will receive it.

When you own your audience, you call the shots. Time to be a shot caller! 📺



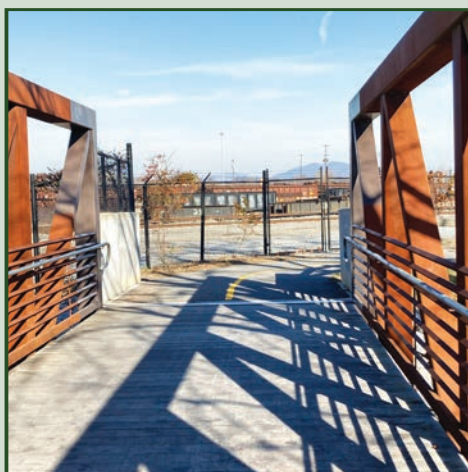
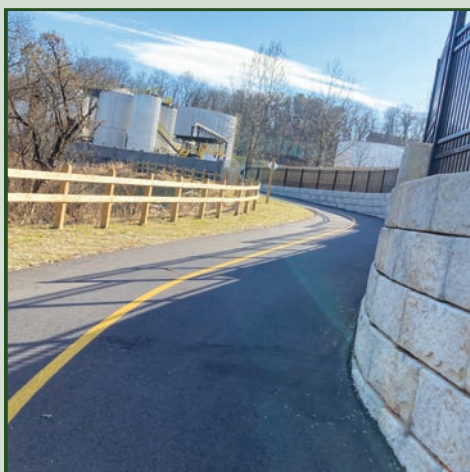
TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

Executive Summary:

Back in April '21 I wrote an article for VBF called "Own Your Audience" and I thought now would be a good time to revisit those principles since the tech world is trying to get you to go "Cookie Crazy" right now.

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



Greenway provides an economic panorama >

Trains, steel processing plants, defunct companies (Walker Foundry). The new 3 mile section of the **Roanoke River Greenway** from the Norwich neighborhood in Roanoke City to Cook Avenue in Salem was built adjacent to some of the valley's industrial underbelly and to Norfolk Southern Freight railroad lines, providing runners, walkers and bikers with a glimpse of several of the companies

and industries that keeps local residents employed. The **City of Salem** is working to connect its portion of the greenway to the city's segment, providing a longer continuous path.

Meanwhile on the eastern end preliminary work is underway to connect the Roanoke River Greenway to **Explore Park** and the **Blue Ridge Parkway**, as the paved urban path project that began more than two decades ago and has encouraged more people outside heads down the home stretch.





Carilion photos

Carilion Roanoke Community doubles outpatient surgery capacity >

Carilion Clinic hosted a ribbon cutting last month to celebrate the opening of four new operating rooms as part of its expanded outpatient surgery services at Carilion Roanoke Community Hospital (101 Elm Avenue).

"This expansion marks a needed increase in access to convenient, outpatient surgical procedures for our communities," said Dr. **Michael Nussbaum**, senior vice president and chair of Surgery for Carilion. The expansion consists of four new operating rooms, doubling the number of operating rooms at Roanoke Community Hospital.

The space also includes a new check-in space, waiting area, and satellite pharmacy, totaling 8,740 square feet.

Carilion's outpatient surgical services are used for many same-day procedures in the Orthopaedic; Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); Gynecology; Uro-Gynecology; Dental; and General Surgery specialties. The four new operating rooms are outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment primarily used for Orthopaedic Surgery, Total Joint Replacement and Spine Surgical procedures.

"The demand for orthopaedic services in our region is high and continues to rise," said Dr. **Joseph Moskal**, senior vice president and chair of Orthopaedic Surgery. "With the largest academic orthopaedic practice in the state, we act as an orthopaedic care destination, and this expansion allows us to best meet community needs for things like hip and knee joint replacements."





Culinary Team USA works in the Euro Kitchen at Virginia Western Community College.

Most Tasty Olympics

VWCC team preps for World Stage

By Shawn Nowlin

Virginia Western Community College's culinary program hosts local chefs, caterers, students for National Culinary Olympics team.



Submitted photos

Overachievers are often told they can't do something, only to use that opinion as fuel to eventually accomplish the task at hand.

Last November, Virginia Western Community College (VWCC) hosted America's National Culinary Team. Squad members took the opportunity to fine-tune their techniques in preparation for this month's IKA Culinary Olympics in Stuttgart, Germany. Competition is often

cut-throat, especially when medals are on the line.

The Claude Moore Education Complex in downtown Roanoke operated by VWCC is where the rehearsals took place. The excitement of students was palpable as they listened attentively. Over a 48-hour period, according to Director of Marketing and Strategic Communications Jamie Snead, team members prepared a full-course meal for more than 100 attendees.



Team manager Chef Kevin Storm (left) inspects the work of Chef Troman Felizmenio (center) and Chef Ted Polfelt.

Because similar rules will govern the Olympics in Germany, this made perfect sense. On the menu was a seafood appetizer, entrée and dessert.

On the team is Chef Ted Pofelt, a faculty member at VWCC's Al Pollard Culinary Arts Program. His Roanoke teammates include captain Dan Holtgrave, manager Kevin

Storm, assistant manager Randy Torres, pastry manager Susan Notter, Jim Storm, Logan Christensen, Tim Recher, Troman Felizmenio as well as team advisors Steven Jilleba and John Coetta.

"I am grateful that our students had the chance to see the intensity of this experience and learn from what our team is doing,"



Team captain Chef Dan Holtgrave (left) and Chef Jim Storm work during the six-hour preparation window.

Polfelt said. "A practice like this is critical to our coordination and planning for the Olympics. It's great to have Virginia Western host us, and for our students to benefit at the same time."

Hannah Martin and Lisa Anthony are two of the VWCC students who worked together at Center Stage Catering. Both pastry chefs were preparing for their certification exams when the Olympic team came to Roanoke. "We mentally prepared ourselves for that. They were constantly being monitored, questioned, critiqued, and that's something we are going to eventually have to deal with," Martin said. Added Anthony, "Team chefs constantly cleaned workstations and maintained crisp white uniforms through the afternoon and evening."

Early this month more than 1,750 participants from 67 countries were slated to participate in this year's Culinary Olympics. For those who couldn't travel to Germany, the team provided opportunities for them to learn elite culinary techniques. Explained Dean of VWCC's School of Business, Technology and Trades Yvonne Campbell, "We were proud to host Team USA's chefs as they prepped for the Olympics. We are very appreciative of their willingness to bring students into this process, because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many to see this level of culinary expertise."

Paramount to everything the Olympic team accomplishes is hard work and preparation. Sponsored by the American Culinary Federation, all signs point to the team having a great shot at winning the gold medal. "We have a fair idea of how they will be judged. As they practice, the window gets smaller for what they need to address," noted Chef Torres.

Many volunteers and sponsors supported the rehearsal week. They included Roanoke Fruit and Produce, Southwestern Virginia Chapter of the American Culinary Federation, Hotel Roanoke, Cavalier Produce, PFG Foods, US Foods, Brandon Oaks, Affinity Group, Jones Dairy Farms, Cheney Brothers and Brandy Allman.


Darla Mehrkens, a VWCC alumna and current director of dining at Brandon Oaks,



Chef Ted Polfelt, Team USA member and a full-time faculty member at Virginia Western, works during the rehearsal as Chef Troman Felizmenio works beside him.



Tables are set at Virginia Western's Claude Moore Education Complex for diners at Culinary Team USA's three-course dinner.

also serves as the treasurer of the ACF Southwestern Virginia chapter. "For me, I enjoy seeing how much progress has been made in just the last two years alone. When you compete against the best, it brings the best out of you." 

See the website www.viriniawestern.edu/academics/business-professional-services/culinary-arts, for more information.



BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:

Companies who incorporate assessments in their talent development strategies report a 57% improvement in team performance and a 35% increase in employee engagement.

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

Unleash the power of employee assessments: a game-changer for your business

A successful business is more than providing excellent products or services. It also requires a dynamic and thriving workforce. How do employee assessments cultivate such a workforce?

1. Identify Strengths and Areas for Growth

Employee assessments provide valuable insights into individual strengths and areas for growth. By evaluating employees' skills, competencies, and personality traits, you gain a comprehensive understanding of your workforce. This knowledge lets you **align employees with roles** that best suit their abilities, fostering a positive and productive work environment. Assessments help identify areas where employees can improve, leading to targeted training and development programs that empower individuals to reach their full potential.

2. Enhance Team Dynamics and Collaboration

A successful workplace relies on **effective collaboration and strong team dynamics**. Evaluating behaviors, interpersonal skills, communication styles, and work preferences helps build well-balanced and cohesive teams. Identify potential conflicts or gaps in skills to proactively address them. By fostering collaboration and understanding among team members, assessments contribute to a harmonious and collaborative work environment and increased productivity.

3. Optimize Recruitment and Onboarding

Every business wants to hire right, and recruiting and onboarding new employees can be a time-consuming and costly process. Employee assessments provide invaluable assistance in streamlining these procedures. Using assessments during the hiring process helps identify candidates who possess the required skills, behaviors, experience, and culture fit. With a more efficient and effective hiring process, you **reduce the likelihood of making costly hiring mistakes**.

They also aid in **customizing onboarding programs** to meet the specific needs of new employees, accelerating their integration into the organization and maximizing their potential from day one.

The effectiveness of employee assessments is backed by compelling statistics. According to recent studies by Aberdeen Group and The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), organizations using assessments during the hiring process experienced a **39% increase in employee productivity** and a **36% decrease in turnover rates**.

Furthermore, companies who incorporate assessments in their talent development strategies report a **57% improvement in team performance and a 35% increase in employee engagement**. These statistics highlight the significant impact assessments can have on workforce optimization and overall business success, and rigorous candidate selection process, resulting in higher-quality hires for the organization.

Assessments Offer Time and Cost Savings

Implementing employee assessments results in substantial **time and cost savings**. They help identify the right candidate, offer objective interview questions and provide a consistent hiring process that often minimizes the need for rehiring.

Conclusion: Incorporating employee assessments isn't just a choice; it's a strategic imperative for building resilient, high-performing teams. The power to unlock potential, improve communication, and drive organizational success lies within the informed decisions facilitated by assessments. 📌

With countless assessment options and costs for your business, **let's talk about the best choices** and solutions for your business. Contact me at **540-420-1004** or email me at Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com.

“The power to... drive organizational success lies within the informed decisions facilitated by assessments.”

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ENTRÉ

JA: Fortify Our Skilled Workforce

By Gene Marrano

This initiative doesn't start with upskilling established adults – it begins with middle schoolers.

Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia is one of five JA offices around the country that will receive part of a \$1.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to bolster its Workforce Pathways for Youth demonstration Initiative.

The effort involves deploying age-appropriate workforce readiness resources for youth between 14 and 21, primarily in rural areas. For Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia that means the target will be Botetourt County, which has morphed from a bedroom community for Roanoke in recent years into its own hub for solid

employment growth, primarily in the manufacturing field.

The JA program will address soft skill development, career exploration, job readiness, work-based learning opportunities and experiences that include apprenticeships and summer jobs. "In recent years JA's programs (including financial literacy and career readiness) have proven valuable for young adults as well," says Brian Woolsey, the JA of Southwest Virginia Board Chair. "With this recognition, local JA areas like ours in Southwest Virginia, are tapped to take part in workforce conversations. This grant is an extension of that existing work."

To support the Workforce Pathways for Youth program, fortified with the new demonstration grant funding, Junior Achievement national and locally has launched several new initiatives focused on young adults, covering coaching, credentialing, badging, and fostering a "talent marketplace," complete with resume tools and connections to employment opportunities.

The JA target is historically underserved youth ages 14 to 21, and Keri Garnett, the President & CEO for Roanoke-based Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia, says if the five JA offices chosen for the Department of Labor grant (including offices in California, Indiana, Western New York and Pennsylvania) demonstrate solid gains, the Workforce Pathways for Youth program will be rolled out nationally by JA.



JA photo

Keri Garnett


"It's our first Department of Labor grant," notes Garnett – who used to run the Freedom First Financial Empowerment Center profiled here last month. "We're developing a pilot program focused on rural communities, just giving them a deeper more hands-on [program] for workforce development. A lot of funding often goes to urban areas." A little extra guidance – and perhaps financial support Garnett says – for kids figuring out whether a four year college experience, a trade or other workplace experience is in their future.

The Department of Labor description of what constitutes a rural area leaves Roanoke out of the mix, so the JA will focus the Workforce Pathways for Youth demonstration in Botetourt County, which does meet the criteria. Garnett identified Botetourt from the 17 county area it serves as the beneficiary of the grant program. Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia will partner with Botetourt County public schools and the private employers it will need to serve as career mentors. Finding companies that will offer job shadowing and apprenticeships is another goal.

JA is working to set up an advisory board that will feature local businesses willing to take the long view on developing the workforce in Botetourt County, where residential and commercial growth in recent years has moved along at a solid

pace, with employment opportunities gathering momentum. Eldor and Altec for example "are already on board," notes Garnett, who for years championed a new skateboard park with ex-husband Jason Garnett in Roanoke City – an aspiration that will be realized several years from now once the new Wasena Bridge is built. A group of adjacent former tennis courts in the Roanoke City Parks and Recreation inventory has already set aside funding for that project.

Garnett will put out the call for other Botetourt County employers to join the Workforce effort: "that will really be the key to success for this," says Garnett, connecting with "kids who are really not sure what they want to do yet. Or maybe they are sure, but they don't have the means to do it. We'll be digging in deep with these individual kids ... trying to make that happen for them."

Workforce development and soft skills has long been a part of what JA does, but the grant will allow them advance that, "this will definitely be a step beyond – a little more personalized," notes Garnett, "working on specific goals." The big winners could be local employers and economic development officials – when they can boast to prospects that Botetourt County with help from JA has a steady pipeline of young, skilled and ambitious talent ready to stay home if they can find good jobs with a solid career path. 



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LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Carrie Cousins

Executive Summary:
Effective emails require attention to details—and some specifics.

5 things you are probably doing wrong in email marketing

Are you sabotaging your own emails before they ever hit the first inbox?

While we all send hundreds of emails each week, sending an email as a brand is a lot different than communication with a colleague or friend. Email marketing is a bit of a relationship that you establish with customers and to do it right you need planning, goal setting, and a dash of technical know-how.

Some of the most common email mistakes can cause even your best customers to delete messages or might even prevent them from getting there at all. Are you making any of these email marketing mistakes?

1. Sending from a Person's Name

Do your customers know the names of your employees? For most businesses, it is unlikely. That means sending an email from a person, rather than from your business name could render your emails unopened. (It can also lead to tricky situations every time an employee leaves the company.)

Here's why this is a problem: Most spam emails are sent from a person's name (often unknown to the person who gets the email). By sending from your business name, you'll establish brand recognition and credibility, leading to more potential opens.

- Use a generic address for your business, such as info@ or hello@
- Send from your business domain, such as leadpointdigital.com
- Include your business name in the "from" field, such as LeadPoint Digital

2. Using too Many Spammy Words

FREE! \$ale! OMG!

Email deliverability is greatly impacted by "spammy" words, odd characters, or unusual fonts; almost ensuring your emails go straight to spam filters.

Start your email with a subject line that's between 30 and 50 characters and provides direct value for your target audience.

3. Writing Longform Content

Last time you opened a long email, did you read it? (Or did you roll your eyes and move on?)

Email is not the proper place to share longform content, and it can impact whether the email is even delivered. The ideal

file size of an HTML email is 20 to 102 KB. (Text and media contribute.)

The best way to reduce the overall weight of your emails? Edit that content! An email should have a direct goal, giving the recipient one thing to do, such as clicking a link to learn more about something or buy a product on your website.

4. Neglecting to Set SPF/DKIM Records

Even if your email content is perfect, it might still need some help to ensure delivery. Every business sending email needs to set SPF and DKIM records. (This may require technical assistance.)

SPF authenticates the sender to ensure that only authorized servers can send emails from your domain. DKIM is used to verify messages haven't been tampered with in transit. Together, they show that your business is a trustworthy email sender, helping messages bypass spam filters.

5. Not Using a Schedule

We are all creatures of habit; therefore, planning an email schedule will help customers know when and what to expect from you, increasing deliverability and open rates. But it's a bit of magic – send too frequently and your messages won't have value; send too sporadically and subscribers might ignore the unexpected messages.

Just the right frequency depends on your business and goals.

If you are making any of these mistakes, don't fret. Correct your errors and with any luck, you'll see a boost in email delivery and open rates. 📈



Email is not the proper place to share long form content.

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Time to tackle the older housing stock issue on a wider scale

- Home sales activity is likely to rebound from 2023 levels with an expected boost from lower mortgage rates. The market anticipates the Federal Reserve to lower the federal funds rate in 2024. This is expected to support the downward trajectory that mortgage rates have been on since November 2023. This will likely spur housing market activity with multiple interested buyers bidding on available houses and will likely cause homes to sell faster.
- New construction activity will see a slowdown in the multifamily sector, but an upward trend is expected in single-family housing construction. In 2024, we expect to see more new homes, especially in single-family housing space, as well as townhomes in some local markets.
- Home prices will continue to climb but at a slower pace in most markets around Virginia, which is a continuation of the 2023 market pattern as the supply-demand imbalance remains a factor in the housing market. With more inventory expected to become available in the market this year, the upward pressure on prices from the supply side will likely continue to soften. But even as the pressure on home prices softens, with more potential buyers entering the market, the higher demand—which will likely lead to bidding wars on listed homes—will keep prices stable and trending up.

Okay, back to me: Rocket Homes reports that it took an average of 23 days to sell a home in December of 2023 in Roanoke, up from 13 the year before but still pretty brisk (better have moving plans in place). Here's the issue in Roanoke City: large portions of the housing stock is pre-1940, rundown or even blighted. The city has just scratched the surface with a program to land bank blighted properties and wait for interested developers, but there only a handful of houses in the fold to date.

There are several quadrants of the city where this is a particular problem, and where public reports of crime or homelessness in the streets doesn't help. Landlords with their feet not held to the fire to keep properties better maintained (one former Mayor once told me – well, where would the poor people live, so city government officials look the other way.) Fears among some lower-income rental residents that block by block improvements may lead to gentrification that forces them out of a rental-turned-house-for-sale once it is cleaned up. All of that keeps inventory artificially low but drives home prices up. Good for sellers, not so much for buyers.

Think of all those younger people living in downtown Roanoke

THERE'S
SOMETHING
HAPPENING
HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Virginia REALTORS (why is that always in all caps? ... we don't write DOCTORS in all caps ... but I digress,) released its outlook for 2024, back in November. Here's a few excerpts from the findings, which you can find in greater detail on their website.

continued on Page 46

Help wanted

In the advertising-marketing-communications arena of business, there is usually a division: external and internal. Most companies I know allocate the majority of their budget to external marketing, a much smaller portion to internal. (That's not always the case; I've seen institutional organizations and even manufacturers and others spend more on their inside audience; and it almost seems counterintuitive.)

Generally, the external marketing is about reaching prospective and existing bases with messages and presentations about the company's product or service.

Oftentimes, the development of human resources, jobs, talents, and positions—is exercised primarily through third party sources. Oh, sure, "careers" will be posted on the company website and social platforms, for the possibility that job-seekers are actively going there to check out openings. But much of the remaining recruiting is placed with online listing services or agencies.

In today's environment, those methods might only perform marginally. You're in the mix with everyone else.

Here's a thought. Consider advertising your "employment" with the same approach, intensity, and objective as you do when advertising your product or service. More companies are doing exactly that; but many remain back in the conventional trenches.

If you allocate part of your employment ads to your current program—or supplement your current program with additional funding, there are just three approaches that I believe will generate viable applications to your HR:

1. CULTURE

This one is fairly easy (unless you have zero cultural distinction). Showcase your business as an environment where people want to be; or even better—demonstrate a workspace that is attractive to a certain demo-psychographic.

2. BENEFITS

This one is best if your benefits are better than average (in your market or in comparison to similar businesses).

3. INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

A super smart approach. This is when you're secure enough to admit you might be a "stepping-stone" to someone who is looking to advance or maneuver within a skill set. Of course, your message can imply long term loyalty; but we all know that's no magnet for most of today's candidates. Your best bet is to show how you



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

Some business consultants say a company should always be actively recruiting; in today's economy, that could be particularly solid advice.



Gene Marrano

Joe Cobb (center) with other Roanoke City Council members) at his campaign launch.

Marrano / There's something

from Page 44

apartments that maybe want to take the next step, purchase a starter home, and they want to stay within the city limits, not too far away, maybe they like the vibe. Will most even consider northwest or southeast Roanoke (and elsewhere in smaller pockets), where some older properties available for a cut rate price just need so much work because they were never maintained or upgraded (electrical, plumbing, painting, etc.) in small bites?

Roanoke City might need some sort of Marshall Plan perhaps, with the help of grants and maybe organizations like Habitat for Humanity. Block by block, maybe the outside cosmetic stuff for curb appeal first, before tackling the tougher issues inside. Low interest loans or mini grants for first time buyers that need to upgrade the electrical, or who want to add central air to a ducted central heating system already in place (I did that, wasn't too expensive.)

Create some buzz for those parts of the city. Want to attract people a year or two out of college who see Roanoke as a great place to relocate but want to own their own home? Current Vice-Mayor Job Cobb, who has announced plans to run for Mayor this November with Sherman Lea Sr. stepping down, said at his campaign launch he would ask the City Council to help tackle the rundown and blighted property issue. Time will tell. 🗙

Field / On Tap

from Page 45

can help an individual step up to the next level; and maybe your retention efforts will kick in later if you're attentive (or lucky).

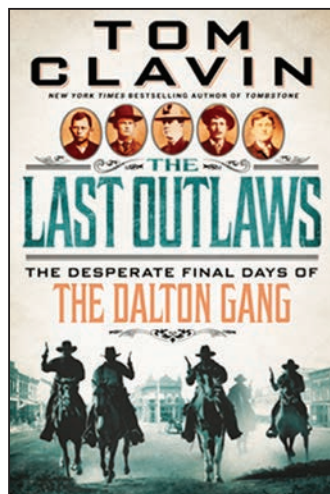
Advertising your organization's employment opportunities doesn't have to be boring or routine. If you address it with the same creative mindset as you do your other advertising, you'll attract more attention (and can even leverage that approach to build that company culture we talked about).

And if you'd like to know a good outlet to PLACE those ads, here's one:

Your local business journal. 🗙

“ ”

Consider advertising your employment with the same intensity as your product.



FRONTReviews >

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

Focus on the big picture

Creative Endurance (Rockport; 2024) by Mike Schnaidt, Creative Director at Fast Company, offers practical advice and inspiration for staying motivated and achieving your big-picture goals. If you're experiencing creative burnout, turn to the effective strategies developed by Schnaidt to remain imaginative and inventive through any tough situation, throughout your life and career.

Featuring inspiring stories from creative professionals like graphic designer Sagi Haviv, astronaut Jeanette Epps, cookbook author Molly Baz, photographer Peter Yang, Olympic Gold medalist Billy Demong, racing legend Hurley Haywood, and more, this book will guide you through the daily grind of work to the big-picture goals of your life. Learn how to overcome obstacles in your daily routine, develop focus and imagination, and establish a sustainable practice. Discover practical tactics for navigating career challenges, along with advice on finding your creative voice and

making a lasting impact in your industry. Each chapter concludes with an interactive and inspiring spread of suggested activities.

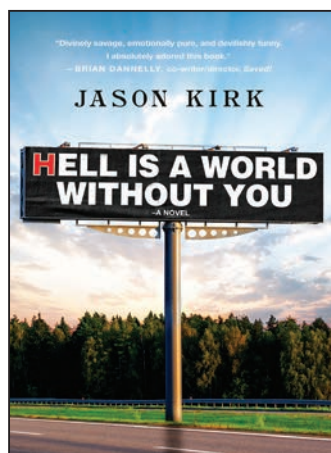
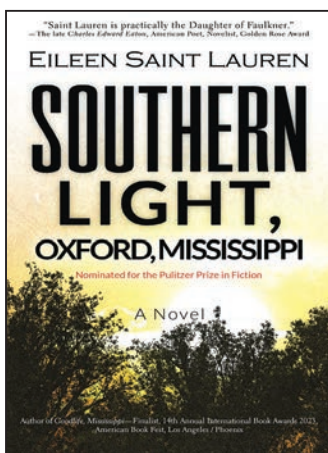
—Lydia Anderson

One last ride

As the 1890's dawned the violent, ruthless, and often lawless ways in the Western United States – think any place west of the Mississippi at that point, were coming to a close. Industrialization, the growth of urban centers and overall westward expansion meant citizens were hungry for law and order. The days of outlaw gangs robbing banks and trains were coming to an end as an increased law enforcement presence and a citizenry ready to take up arms to protect businesses and homesteads became the reality.

Someone forgot to tell the Dalton family and their associates however, as chronicled by author Tom Clavin in *The Last Outlaws: The Desperate Final Days of the Dalton Gang* (St. Martin's Press, 2023). Throw brushes with the James gang and the Cole-Younger gang into the mix (there were some family ties), and you've got a page turner. It didn't end well for the Dalton brothers, as depicted in several grisly photos where deceased Dalton Gang members were propped against a wall and even stood up for photo opps. Lets just say gun violence is not a new issue, as demonstrated in this tale of the fading Wild, Wild West as the 1900's approached.

—Gene Marrano



Faulkneresque follies

I didn't check, but I would be surprised if this book isn't available in the visitors' center or chamber or book and gift shops in Oxford, Mississippi. It's exactly the kind of book one would find there. Eileen Saint Lauren's *Southern Light, Oxford, Mississippi* (Eileen Saint Lauren Books; 2023) is indeed, the southern gothic genre; but more than that, it is a showroom of literary allusions that English and American Lit majors all over would appreciate. I immediately noticed the run-on opening sentence as a parody on William Faulkner's writing style. Most of the literary and "geohistographic" allusions are fully spelled out; so readers don't have to be literary-saturated (like me) to catch the connections; however, I still see this book best suited as a pre-travel guide to your next trip down deep South.

—Tom Field

Church kid struggles

Jason Kirk writes *Hell is a World Without You* (Shutdown Fullbooks; 2023) at an opportune time. He's not likely to be burned at the stake as a heretic. Rather than denouncing his faith, he challenges the tougher tenants of it as defined by fundamentalist evangelical Christians, to make it more tolerable. That's a heresy certain religio-illuminati disciples despise more than agnosticism and atheism; let's be honest. But what amazing narration we have here. For anyone whose childhood and rearing involved this brand of biblical literacy and Judeo-Christian inerrancy, the story's gonna take you back. You're going to be right there, with 13.9 year-old Isaac and your days of Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, church camp, and revival services. You're going

to remember the struggles of frolicking among the damned at your school and the attention you drew as a weirdo. You'll recall the shame and guilt from when you outright sinned and when you failed to save.

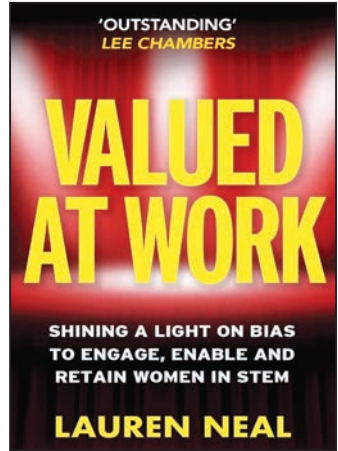
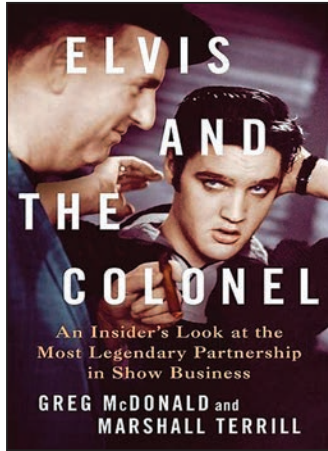
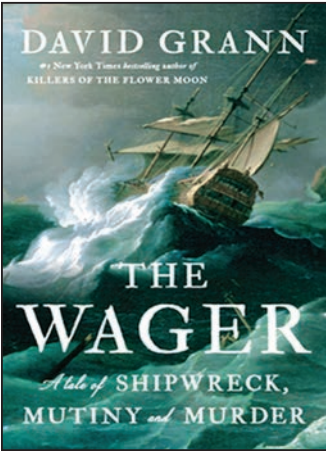
Wow. What a trip. Down the "narrow path" memory lane. And if your time in God's House was at the "Big House" (aka mega church), you'll likely feel an even deeper confessional. At times, the internal voice seems a little too disruptive and frequent, until you realize that's the reality when you're young and trying to comply with what you've been preached is God's plan. I have no doubt this book counts a lot more for the church. Others won't get it at all and may just find it annoying. As hell.

—Tom Field

A tale of courage and treachery

New York Times bestselling author David Grann knows how to spin a good yarn. *His Killers of the Flower Moon* book about unsolved murders of the Osage tribe by white men who wanted the oil under their Oklahoma land – and the FBI investigation that helped launch the long career of J. Edgar Hoover – became a Martin Scorsese movie recently. Now *The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder* (Doubleday, 2023) is bound to draw interest from Hollywood as well. With a starting point in 1742, it's a fascinating tale of the shipwrecked British vessel *Wager*, as it attempted to round Cape Horn at the tip of South America and instead wound up with its crew stranded on a remote, foreboding island.

There's infighting, starvation, murder, miraculous and courageous journeys in small vessels by



survivors eventually making the journey back to England, where a high stakes court-martial – was there a mutiny or not as lower-ranking officers defied a Captain they thought unfit? – kept newspapers supplied with grist for the mill, with the general public taking sides as well. A good read, especially in describing the numerous attempts to leave Wager Island (named after the doomed ship) for the journey home.

—Gene Marrano

Another take on Colonel Parker

Written by a longtime associate of Colonel Tom Parker, the rags to riches Dutch immigrant who as a youth ran away to join the circus, became a promoter by almost by happenstance – and then wound up managing the career of his one and only client – Elvis Presley – *Elvis And The Colonel: An Insider's Look at the Most Legendary Partnership in Show Business* (St. Martin's Press, 2023) by Greg McDonald (and Marshall Terrill) is perhaps a more favorable view of Parker than others who think he derailed Presley's musical impact to an extent and took too big a bite of The King's riches.

McDonald was befriended as a teenager by Parker in Palm Springs in the early 60's and was along for the ride from then on as Presley became a movie star, if somewhat pigeonholed, and struggled to remain relevant music-wise once The Beatles and the British Invasion took root. Las Vegas was Presley's salvation, as Parker struggled to keep Presley from spending more money than was coming in, or from buying people new cars (dozens of them), private jets etc. Presley's struggle with drugs as he gained weight and underperformed at concerts

gradually leads to his premature death in August 1977 - about two weeks before he was scheduled to be in Roanoke.

McDonald portrays Colonel Parker (that was an honorary title) as fair but ruthless, a groundbreaking negotiator in the music management business and someone who played it fair and square with Presley as business partners. There's been plenty written about Elvis Presley; readers can decide for themselves how they want to view the Colonel after reading McDonald's interesting tale.

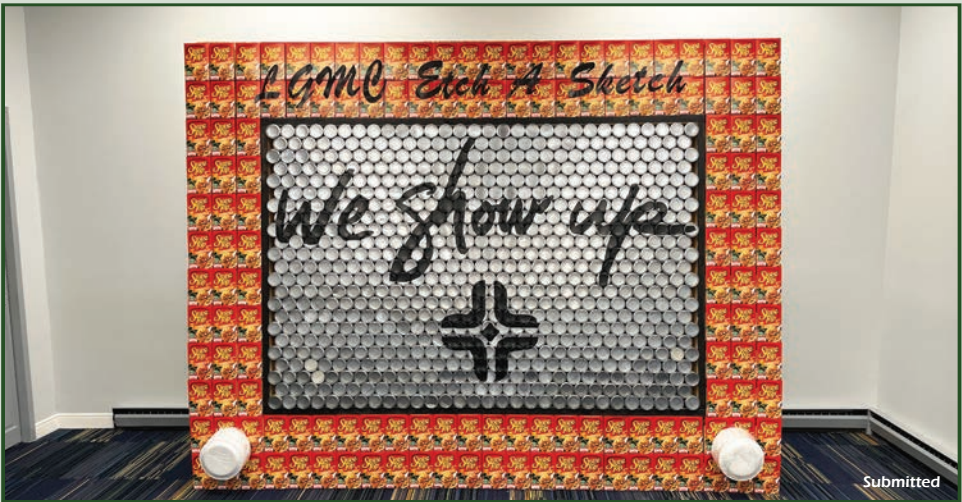
—Gene Marrano

STEMwork

Encouraging more girls to study STEM and setting gender goals for hiring practices is not enough, says engineer Lauren Neal, and that's what makes her insights truly transformational. In *Valued at Work: Shining a Light on Bias to Engage, Enable, and Retain Women in STEM* (Practical Inspiration Publishing; 2023) Neal drills down to what is actually happening behind closed doors in many companies all over the world and awakens businesses to behaviors they either aren't seeing or aren't acknowledging. This powerful book recently became an Amazon No. 1 Best Seller in High-Tech Business & Finance.

—Megan Reece

The reviewers: **Lydia Anderson** is a publicist in Minneapolis, MN; **Gene Marrano** is a news reporter and editor of FRONT; **Tom Field** is a creative director and the publisher of FRONT; **Megan Reece** is a publicist in Friendswood, TX.



LewisGale, HCA step up for FSWVA >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem awarded a \$20,000 grant and almost 1,000 pounds of canned goods to nonprofit Feeding Southwest Virginia last month. Hospital colleagues earned the donation funds by winning both first place in its divisional food drive as well as second place in an enterprise-wide food drive sculpture contest hosted by the hospital's parent company, HCA Healthcare.

For this year's "Healthy Food for Healthier Tomorrow's" Food & Nutrition Drive contest, hospital colleagues at LewisGale in Salem used approximately 800 canned vegetables and nearly 150 boxes of stuffing to construct a human sized "Etch A Sketch." The structure weighs more than 800 pounds and was one of three national HCA winners selected to receive an additional grant to a local food bank. "Our colleagues continually show up for our patients, their families, and our communities," said **Amy Woods**, chief nursing officer. "We are elated to make a significant donation to such a worthy organization that helps our friends, family, and neighbors."

Feeding Southwest Virginia President **Pamela Irvine** says the grant is especially appropriate coming from a health system: "we know that food is medicine. For a long time, it took the healthcare industry and the general public to draw the connection between food and preventative health [and] also treatment for diseases and illnesses, [like] diabetes, kidney disease and high blood pressure."

NRCC president to retire >

New River Community College president Dr. **Pat Huber** has announced plans to retire, effective at the end of December 2024. Huber assumed the role of president in July 2017 and upon retirement, will have served more than 35 years at NRCC. She first joined the college faculty in 1988 as a part-time English instructor, teaching night classes. Later roles included positions as a division dean and academic vice president.

Accomplishments during her tenure included offering high quality academic and workforce development programs, strong partnerships throughout the New River Valley and beyond, upgrading program equipment and facilities, and, most recently, seeing a rebound in enrollment.



Comings and goings on the restaurant front >

Business at **Rain Bowl** on Starkey Road in southwest Roanoke County picked up immediately says an employee there following the sudden closure of CoreLife Eatery on Franklin Road in late December, which also served similar Poke Bowl food offerings (noodles, rice, veggies, proteins). Also shuttered: (after 8 years) Athens Grill, the Greek food restaurant on South Jefferson, and Crescent City Bourbon & BBQ on Salem Avenue downtown, which drew mixed reviews in social media posts. It had been The Quarter (Cajun fare) before that and some – but not all – yearned for its return.

Meanwhile a Starbucks is headed for the Norfolk Southern office tower in downtown Roanoke (near the fountain), just several blocks from Mill Mountain Coffee. Cushman & Wakefield — Thalhimer also reports that another coffee house is slated for the former Burger King on Brambleton Avenue at Cave Spring Corners in Southwest Roanoke County.

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



Tuck

Freedom First Credit Union has welcomed **Edgar Tuck** to its Mortgage team as a Vice President Mortgage Loan Officer. Tuck will assist home buyers in the Roanoke, Lynchburg, and Smith Mountain Lake areas. He has 36 years of banking and mortgage experience. Tuck is a lifelong resident of Bedford County, where his family operates a cattle farm in Moneta that has been part of the family for over 100 years. He is currently in his 7th year serving on the Bedford County Board of Supervisors.

Farm Credit of the Virginias (FCV), a lending cooperative that serves Virginia, West

Virginia and western Maryland, announced that **Matt Scott** joined the Bedford branch as a loan officer. He brings more than 30 years of experience in sales and finance to the FCV team. Scott has been a certified firefighter since 1992 and currently serves as the Deputy Chief of the Bedford Fire Department.



Murray

Ridge View Bank has announced the hiring of **Todd Murray** as Senior Vice President of Commercial Banking in the New River Valley. A graduate of Virginia Tech with an MBA from James Madison University, Murray is a long-time resident of Blacksburg with more than 40 years of banking experience including the last 27 years serving the New River

Valley, most recently as Market President of another financial institution. Roanoke-based Ridge View has plans to expand into the New River Valley.



Seay



Cole

Bank of Botetourt has promoted **Jerrica Seay** to Assistant Vice President, Operations Officer at the Buchanan Care Center, where she will oversee electronic banking card services and loan operations. Seay graduated from Mary Baldwin University and has been with the bank for 12 years.



Focht

Beverly Cole was promoted to Credit Administration Officer, where she will manage credit processes. Cole graduated from VWCC and is active in Relay for Life, Heart Walk for AHA, and her church. **Kelly Focht** was promoted to Fraud Officer at the Buchanan Care Center. A graduate of Ferrum College, Focht has been with the bank for 13 years and is a leader in Botetourt County 4-H Livestock Club and is a 1st grade Sunday School teacher at her church.

LEGAL FRONT

Gentry Locke has announced that that attorneys **Jeffrey P. Miller** and **Ryan J. Starks** have been

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Miller



Starks

promoted to partnership. Miller is a member of the Roanoke-based firm's Civil Defense Litigation practice group. Starks is a member of the firm's Business Litigation practice group, where he assists clients with complex business and civil disputes in state and federal courts throughout Virginia.

EDUCATION FRONT

G. Lyn Hayth III was elected Chair for a

Have a career announcement?

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



Hayth

two-year term at the Roanoke Higher Education Authority's Board of Trustees. Now-retired Senator John S. Edwards had served as Chair of the Roanoke Higher Education Authority's Board of Trustees for the entire 23 years of its existence. Edwards was an early proponent of the Higher Education Center concept, where multiple colleges offer programs under the same roof, and helped secure General Assembly funding to

launch the center, in what had been a Norfolk Southern office building.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Hagy

John Hagy was appointed director of RAMP (Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program), which is part of the Verge alliance (including Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council). Hagy was managing director of the Carolina Angel

Network, the University of North Carolina's early-stage investing organization. He was also a development director at a geospatial intelligence startup, a consultant at Deloitte, and an intelligence officer with the CIA.

Also at RAMP, **Jessica Dunn** was promoted to Program Coordinator; and **Sarah Spotswood** moved into an Alumni Relations role.

DEVELOPMENT FRONT

Building Specialists, Inc. (BSI) has announced the leadership promotion of **Michael R. Bennett** as Vice President. Bennett has been with BSI for 7 years. In his most recent role



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. [cooperjp91@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 Fraim is a top-referred Certified Public Accountant and business finance strategist who is well-connected in the regional business community and nationally recognized. Publisher of The Little Big Small Business Book, he also publishes a blog at www.fraim.cpa/blog and is

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

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

Zack Jackson is the host of the K92 Mornin' Thang radio show on WXLK and co-founder of The JPG Agency, a freelance marketing and creative consulting department for small businesses. He can be reached at [zack@thejpgagency.com]

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

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.

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

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 20 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]



Bennett

with the company, he was Senior Project Manager where he oversaw numerous fast-track commercial capital improvement projects ranging in size from minor renovations to multi-floor up-fits projects.



Whicker

Chris Whicker has been promoted by Building Specialists Inc. (BSI) Construction & Design to Assistant Project Manager/ Estimator. Whicker has been with BSI for 7 years and was hired as a residential superintendent, where he worked closely with clients, subcontractors and suppliers, managing both residential and commercial projects. He has been in the industry for 30 years. **Britney Gilbert** has



Gilbert

been hired by BSI as an Assistant Project Manager. Gilbert will work with the Project Management Team on various projects throughout Roanoke and SW VA.



Höer

Stephanie Höer has joined Build Smart Institute as Director of Operations. She has spent more than 20 years in workforce development, and has been an executive leader for teams focused on strategic planning, collaboration, fiscal management, and innovative delivery of services to those seeking self-sufficiency and independence. Höer, who holds a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice and a Master of Arts with a focus in leadership

theory, is a member of the Greater Roanoke Workforce Development Board of Directors, and treasurer for Roanoke Valley SPCA Board of Directors.

served as HopeTree's Program Director for Therapeutic Foster Care and Adoption Services.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Shepherd

The Board of Supervisors of Roanoke County has appointed **Tammy E. Shepherd** to fill the vacancy in the Vinton Magisterial District. Mrs. Shepherd will hold office until a special election November 5, 2024. The person elected at the special election will serve the remainder of Jason Peters's term, as a result of his election to Roanoke County Commissioner of the Revenue. Peters's term expires December 31, 2025. Shepherd holds a Virginia Real Estate Broker License and Virginia Real Estate Salesperson License. She has owned Shepherd Realty Group since 2017.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano
and Tom Field*

NON-PROFIT FRONT



Updike

HopeTree Family Services, a leader in mental and behavioral health services, has promoted **Shannon Updike**, LCSW to the position of Chief Compliance Officer. She is responsible for the agency's compliance, risk, quality, and privacy efforts to include compliance with HIPAA laws. In addition, Updike oversees HopeTree's accreditation processes and the performance, training, and outcomes of the Electronic Health Record. Updike has nearly 20 years of service with HopeTree Family Services and holds experience in youth services, building strategic partnerships, and community outreach. Most recently, she



I am grateful that our students had the intensity of this experience.

— Page 36

CDBG money headed to Bedford

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD) has awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to the Town of Bedford. This federally funded grant, administered by VDHCD, will allocate \$1,071,644 to the Town of Bedford for the Hilltop Community Revitalization Project.

Another Panda Express headed to Roanoke

Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer has announced the sale of almost one acre at 4807 Valley View Blvd. in Roanoke, in the Valley View Mall area, by CFT NV Developments, LLC, which plans to develop a Panda Express at the location; their 2nd location in the valley. The other is at Tanglewood Mall in an outparcel building.

Freedom First community grants

As part of its "Helping People Prosper – Helping Communities Thrive," Roanoke-based Freedom First Credit Union has announced the non-profit recipients of its 2023 Community Investment Grants program. Twenty non-profits located in the Roanoke, New River Valley, and Lynchburg areas received Community Investment Grants totaling \$35,000. They include Brain Injury Solutions, Casa Latina, Child Health Investment Partnership (CHIP) of

the Roanoke Valley, Harrison Museum of African American Culture, House of Bread, Humble Hustle, IRON Lives, Latinas Network, Lighthouse Beloved Community, Literacy Volunteers of the NRV, Mill Mountain Theatre, Mountain View Humane, Park View Community Mission, Roanoke Diversity Center, Roanoke Veterans Outreach, Southwest Virginia Ballet, YMCA of Pulaski County, YWCA of Central Virginia, Vector Space and We Care.

Grant will help grad students in Ag Sciences

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has awarded Virginia Tech \$238,500 in Food and Ag Sciences National Needs Graduate and Post-grad Fellowship Grants. Virginia Tech plans to use the grant money to steer three graduate students towards the completion of their doctoral degree and eventual placement in industry or research positions in the field of Animal Science and Production.

Publix headed to Roanoke County

An affiliate of the Publix supermarkets chain has purchased 9 acres (for around 2 million dollars) at the corner of Old Cave Spring Road and Brambleton Avenue – with a Kroger across the street – and plans to build a grocery store there. Publix is based

largely in states south of Virginia. The hilly tract will require plenty of excavation work and a large retaining wall. Roanoke County Director of Economic Development says the addition of a high-profile chain to the valley could help attract others: "its showing that we are building momentum, we are attractive to those retailers. That's very exciting."

Major moves for Luna

Roanoke-based Luna Innovations Incorporated, a manufacturer of advanced fiber optic-based technology, has announced the strategic acquisition of Silixa, a UK based leader in distributed fiber optic sensing solutions. The acquisition strengthens Luna's position in the fiber optic sensing market, adding capabilities in distributed acoustic sensing (DAS), distributed temperature sensing (DTS) and distributed strain sensing (DSS) that offer enhanced performance for applications in energy, natural environments, mining and defense

"The addition of Silixa not only elevates the portfolio of solutions we already offer in our key end markets, but also further strengthens our position as an enabler of energy transition by extending our reach into exciting new growth sectors, such as carbon capture and storage, as well as into monitoring processes that will help sustain ecosystems and

safeguard fragile environments," said Scott Graeff, President and Chief Executive Officer of Luna.

Luna has also announced a \$50 million investment by White Hat Capital Partners ("White Hat"), an investment firm focused on sustainable value creation in technology companies serving mission-critical applications. Proceeds from this strategic investment were partially used to fund the acquisition of Silixa. Luna says the capital infusion will be used to develop fiber optic sensing solutions for infrastructure, to increase its manufacturing capability and to develop new technologies.

Logistics company expansion in Botetourt

Universal Logistics Holdings, Inc., a holding company that owns subsidiaries providing customized transportation and logistics solutions, will undertake an expansion with a new industrial building situated on Lee Highway in Botetourt County. Universal expects to invest approximately \$50 million and generate 45 new employment opportunities with the expansion.

This expansion will bolster Universal's heavy truck capabilities in servicing Class 8 truck assembly operations. The 254,000 square-foot facility is expected to commence operations in 2025 after a 12-month facility customization

process. "Our expansion in the Roanoke region represents an exciting phase for Universal's heavy truck division as we fortify our commitment to delivering top-tier services within the logistics and transportation sectors," stated Universal's CEO Tim Phillips.

Member One FCU part of merger

Virginia Credit Union, Inc. and Roanoke-based Member One Federal Credit Union have announced plans to merge pending regulatory approval and a positive Member One membership

vote. If approved, the combined credit union would serve close to 500,000 members with 37 branch locations and employ approximately 1,100 employees throughout Virginia. A successful merger is contingent upon Member One Federal Credit Union member approval. Upon that approval, the entities legally join sometime in 2024.

Grants for NRV companies

The U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Science has awarded two grants aimed at supporting small

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businesses for their work to develop new technologies to advance the clean energy sector: Sentek Instrument, LLC (Blacksburg), \$200,000; Distributed Magnetic Field and Temperature Monitoring for Linear Superconducting Radio Frequency Cavities; and NanoSonic, Inc (Pembroke), - \$200,000; Integrated Liquid/Steam Multiphase Flow Sensors

for Geothermal Applications.

Amazon moving forward in Roanoke

Amazon is planning to open a new last-mile facility in the City of Roanoke which it will use to serve customers in the Roanoke Valley and across southwest Virginia. Launch plans

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for this facility are in the early stages, with construction scheduled to start in the coming weeks. With coordinated efforts from the City and the Roanoke Regional Partnership, Amazon recently purchased 50 acres from Deschutes Brewery on Blue Hills Drive. “The City is the ideal location for an Amazon last-mile facility due to its proximity to the interstate, infrastructure and available workforce,” said Marc Nelson, Roanoke City’s Director of Economic Development.

Youngkin board appointments

Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority, Board Of Directors: Megan Baker of Roanoke County, Economic Development Director, Roanoke

County; Phil C. North of Roanoke, Chair, Roanoke County Board of Supervisors. Virginia Nuclear Energy Consortium Authority: Rhonnie Smith of Moneta, retired President, BWXT Technical Services Division. Virginia Board For Asbestos, Lead, And Home Inspectors: Jesse Phillips of Roanoke, Industrial Hygiene Practice Leader, Froehling & Robertson, Inc.

Rescue Mission’s 2023 report

The Roanoke Rescue Mission reported the following statistics for 2023: Over 80,000 nights of safe shelter (1,600 individual guests); over 190,000 meals; over 15,000 Manna Food Boxes provided

for families in need; over 4,000 Fralin Free Clinic visits; over 300 children and families provided with gifts for Christmas; over 8,000 participants in the Drumstick DASH.

Roanoke Housing development plans

Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority has shares a plan to provide housing for “at least 86 low-income families” on 12.2 acres at the intersection of Peters Creek Road and Shenandoah Avenue Northwest.

WF jumping from tower

Wells Fargo announced it is closing its branch in the iconic Roanoke downtown Tower on March 20, 2024. The company—which recently announced

a major expansion in Roanoke with an \$87 million investment in jobs and services at its customer support center on Plantation Road in Roanoke County—says the Tower branch exit is part of its plan to reduce or combine branches.

Stuart’s star shining

One Family Productions (event management organization) has entered into an agreement with the Town of Stuart in Patrick County to operate the Historic Star Theatre. Plans include hosting live music, theatre, performing arts, private-business-community events.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field

Check out additional FRONT Notes from Valley Business FRONT on our Facebook site or social media links at www.vbFRONT.com.

“By identifying potential challenges and opportunities, businesses can proactively adjust their strategies to mitigate risks and capitalize on favorable conditions. — Page 25

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“ [Workforce Pathways for Youth] involves deploying age-appropriate workforce readiness resources for youth between 14 and 21, primarily in rural areas [Boteourt County]. — Page 40

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Andrew Mann for VTs

Tanya LeRoith Andrew Mann

Virginia Tech's ViTAL Veterinarians

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

In a win that highlights the expertise of veterinarians at the Virginia Tech Animal Laboratory Services (ViTALS), the on-site diagnostic lab of the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine has been selected to be part of the Partnership to Improve Early Detection of Emerging Diseases.

According to Tanya LeRoith, DVM and director of ViTALS, after foot and mouth disease appeared in the United Kingdom in the early 2000s, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD) realized extra testing capacity was needed in the event of an outbreak that could affect the food supply in the U.S. Only having a single statewide lab in Virginia gave way to the vision of having multiple labs, capable of testing for diseases in food production animals, such as cattle and poultry.

Also putting the partnership on the ViTALS radar was that LeRoith and the associate director of the lab, Kevin Lahmers, trained at Washington State

University, which started the initiative.

ViTALS application leveraged its expertise in different aspects of disease investigation in one place: epidemiologists, who look at distribution of diseases and how they spread, and pathologists, who look at diseases in actual animals to see if they are infectious.

As one of five laboratories chosen for this new partnership between the National Animal Health Laboratory Network and the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, ViTALS will host a scientist for four years to assess regional disease development risk. LeRoith said the position will be funded by the USDA. One goal is liaising with other labs in the region to help with new diagnostic testing.


Emerging infectious diseases to be studied include African swine fever, avian influenza, and the new respiratory illness in dogs that has received recent publicity. "It's an outbreak situation we have been asked to look at," LeRoith said.

ViTALS has evolved from simply being an on-site lab to becoming the first veterinary hospital lab accredited by the AAVLD. This is not a requirement, said LeRoith, but the ViTALS "med techs," who train on humans and are then taught how to work on animals, pushed for the same type of accreditation they saw in human-based labs. Accreditation means to clients that "when you get a result, you can trust that result," said LeRoith.

ViTALS grew after it started getting requests from outside practitioners. Today it is a full-service lab serving the region, the state, and beyond. With a budget of \$2 million a year, the lab is self-funding, receiving no state support except what comes to Virginia Tech. Staff includes ten staff people plus vet school students. Faculty are involved in research, teaching, and training. Clients are veterinarians who take samples from patients and send them in for testing, as well as federal and state partners for which ViTALS does testing.

What makes ViTALS successful? LeRoith quickly answered: the best people. "It is a small lab but the people like their jobs and are happy to be there. They understand the mission and are passionate about what we do."

Still, there are challenges. Funding is "always a concern," said LeRoith, noting first that ViTALS gets no insurance reimbursement as human labs might, and secondly that running lab tests are a large cost for clients. Another issue is lack of space, especially given the new partnership; also, adequate square footage is needed to make sure there is no contamination.

Veterinary pathology is a "big field" and there is a "big need" for pathologists in veterinary practices, in industry, and in drug development LeRoith concluded. LeRoith said its future is assured, "as long as we have a food supply to protect." 

TOP DOG

Tanya LeRoith, DVM and clinical professor of anatomic pathology in the Department of Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology, is also the new president-elect of the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians, according to a press release by the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

LeRoith, a 1999 graduate of the school, was always interested in infectious diseases and knew she wanted to engage in specialty training. As a fourth-year vet student, she decided to concentrate in pathology. Following vet school, she trained at Washington State University, where she earned a Ph.D. But she wanted to return to Blacksburg and took a position at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine right out of residency. She has been there since 2005.

Now the director of the Virginia Tech Animal Laboratory Services (ViTALS) on-site interdisciplinary lab, LeRoith will lead over 1,000 association members from 30 countries.

In this position, LeRoith hopes to implement workforce development initiatives. She said there is a shortage of veterinary diagnosticians who "can put things together, [and] can tie in all the findings to figure out the disease." Smaller state labs struggle to find pathologists because their salaries cannot compete with those of private clinics. Since most veterinarians graduate vet school with debt, she explained, they may eschew specialty training afterwards.

In part through funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the association has been developing programs to train lab directors, diagnosticians, bench scientists, and Ph.D. students, said the press release.

Another goal of LeRoith's as association president is to "disseminate information to labs as they face challenges." This is largely done through the annual meeting, which attracts over 1,200 participants.

She is also interested in evaluating the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in diagnostics. "How do we validate [results]? And who is responsible or liable for mistakes?" LeRoith asked rhetorically. "It is useful ... if done correctly."

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“ ”

It was like the wild, wild west. — Page 27

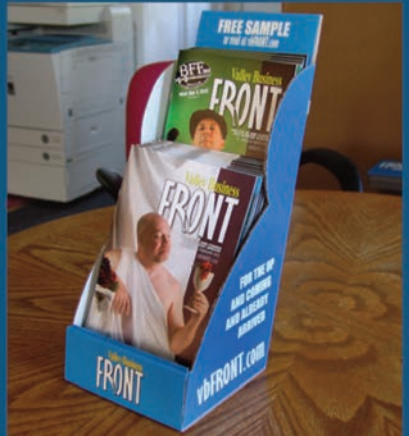
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