

Valley Business FRONT

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Montgomery County
Public Schools

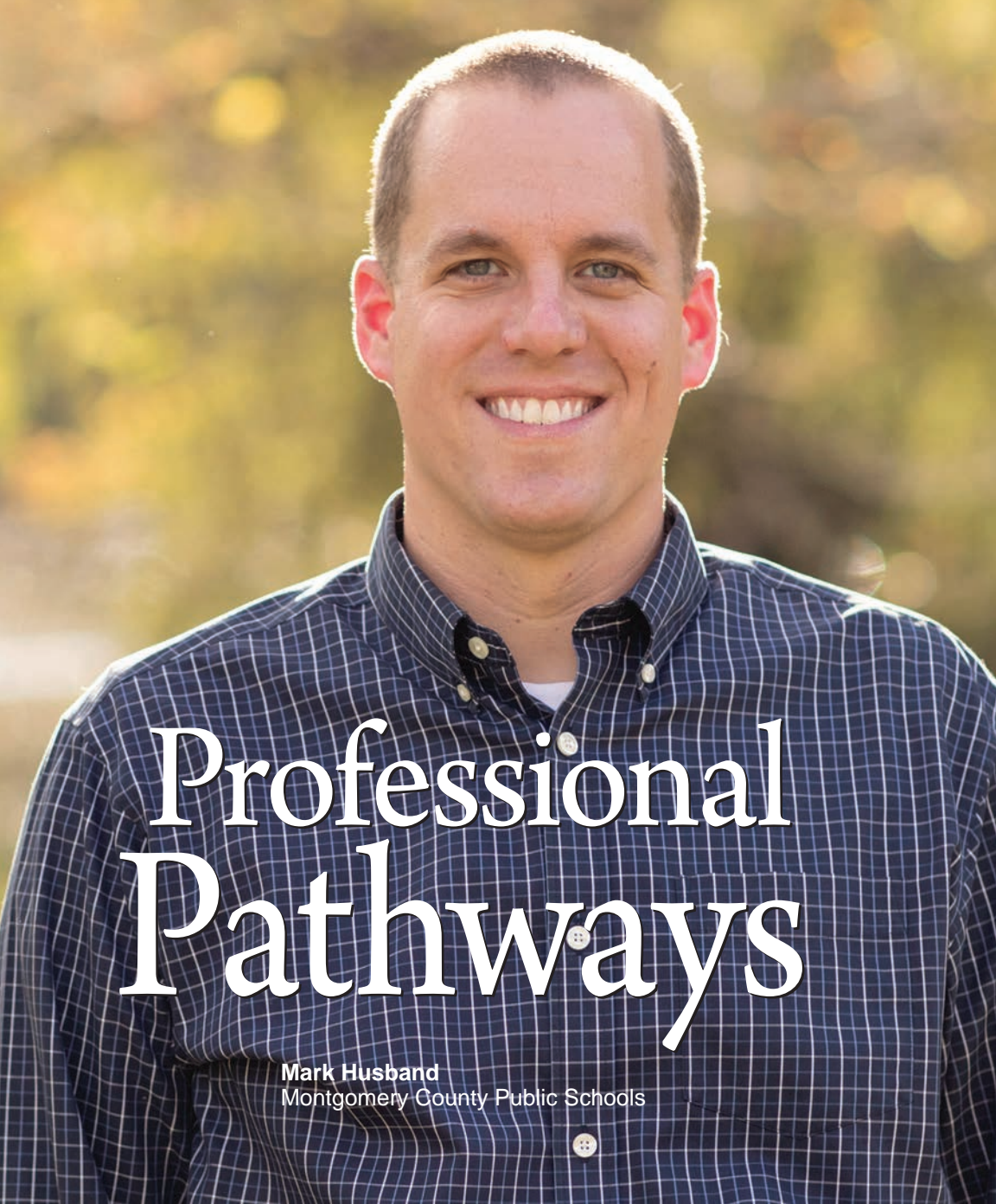
Roanoke Higher
Education Center

ECPI

New River Valley
Regional Commission

Harvester's Micah Davidson

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A portrait of Mark Husband, a man with short brown hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue and white checkered button-down shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with warm, golden light.

Professional Pathways

Mark Husband
Montgomery County Public Schools



Jeremiah Clarke, *VP Private Banking & Treasury Services*

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

It appears we are heading towards some form of normalcy as April arrives. The COVID vaccine pipeline seems to be working out the kinks, more people are getting shots in arms and restrictions on what we can do, with whom and during what hours of the day are being loosened. Like gathering sizes for one thing. In this issue we'll meet the new director of operations at the Harvester Performance Center in Rocky Mount, which will stage outdoor shows until it's deemed safe to assemble inside that intimate music venue. The spotlight this month is on education, from grade school through college and certificate programs designed to give people a leg up.

The COVID-19 pandemic is indeed a health care crisis, but it's also been a catastrophe for many businesses, especially the smaller ones. Not to mention those who lost jobs or had their hours cut dramatically, in the service industries first and foremost. The federal American Rescue Plan has earmarked millions if not billions to help some businesses get back on their feet, as well as the people who worked in those industries. By May, it's predicted that all adults 18+ should be eligible for the vaccine. Let's hope that NOW we can really start celebrating the "New Year, New You," that 2021 promised to be.



Tom Field
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Gene Marrano
Editor



Martha Sullivan
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DEPARTMENTS

16 ECPI

by Gene Marrano

22 Roanoke Higher Education Center

58 Harvester's Micah Davidson

by Rob Ruthenberg

PERSPECTIVES

14 Business Operations

by Lois James

15 Financial Figures

by Michael Shelton

20 A Little Insight

by Bruce C. Bryan

21 Mindful Business

by Beth Bell

26 Real Estate Matters

by Frazier Hughes

27 Tech Whisperer

by Zack Jackson

30 Wellness

by Valarie Angle

31 Good Work

REVIEWS & OPINIONS

34 On Tap from the Pub

by Tom Field

35 There's Something Happening Here

by Gene Marrano

36 Letters

38 Reviews

FRONTLINES

32 Spotlight FRONT'n About

40 FRONT'n About

48 Career FRONT

54 FRONT Notes

vbFRONT.com

COVER STORY PAGE 8

Professional Pathways

By Jennifer Poff Cooper



“ ”
It's nice to be able to get chunks of credentials.
— Page 23

Cover photography of Mark Husband by Hope Bradbury, EHB Photography.

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Advisory Board

Valley Business FRONT has organized an Advisory Board comprised of a selective group of diverse business professionals who support our mission and have an interest in how our business journal best serves our local communities and region. As a sounding board throughout their term, board members have been given the task of helping FRONT understand the issues and develop coverage. You will note that the Board is comprised of experts in many different business / industry "fronts." This is intentional, as we are reporting on all the areas that affect our regional economy and are important to you. Although the members are encouraged to keep FRONT updated on their own industries and the key players, they aren't limited to their area of specialty, as all commercial enterprises ultimately collaborate to impact our quality of life here in this part of Virginia. An additional contribution by the Advisory Board involves direct input on the various FRONTLists we present throughout the year. In keeping with our policy of being "the voice of business in the valleys" we ask each reader to join us as an editorial partner by contacting us with your ideas. You know more than we know about your business—or you certainly should—and that inside knowledge shared with our readers will make us all better at what we do.

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““ The biggest challenge... is hiring and retaining qualified teachers.

— Page 13

““ What bands would you like to see?

— Page 61

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

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Ag Ed Greenhouse students

Professional Pathways

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Today's career and technical education (CTE) is not your father's "vocational education."

Vocational education was rebranded about 25 years ago as part of the Perkins Grant, which in its fifth iteration as passed through Congress is a principal source of funding for career and technical education in school districts. "The name change was a marketing concept," said Mark Husband, Director of Career and Technical Education and Virtual Learning (CTE) in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). The idea was to transition the vocational pathway away from being specific to certain students

and instead to be seen as something beneficial to all students.

Husband said that CTE includes "soft skills" such as customer service, what it means to be a professional, and résumé and job application acumen. Superintendent Dr. Mark Mear came to MCPS, said Husband, wanting to promote such workplace readiness skills. Montgomery County Public Schools has been on the cutting edge of CTE education. Growth in MCPS's CTE program

went from 53 teachers in 2018-2019 to 68 in the current school year.

One avenue to development has been work-based learning. Whether it is job shadowing, internships, or part-time jobs, MCPS works with students to provide high school credit for the work and to offer flexibility in scheduling, such as early dismissal or late arrival, to accommodate their work schedules.

MCPS has been recognized as providing the best work-based learning program for mid-sized school systems in Virginia, with 540 students participating in the last pre-pandemic school year (2018-2019). In terms of course offerings in CTE, Husband said the school system looks at salary potential, ability to advance and availability of work. This has generated specific areas of interest: information technology, health and medical sciences, and advanced manufacturing.

In conjunction with classroom learning schools partner with businesses for on-the-job training. "Many businesses are eager to work with the school system," said Husband. They recognize the need to create a "pipeline of talent" to improve talent retention in the New River Valley.

Supportive health care businesses include long-time partner Warm Hearth Village, where nursing students can log their clinical hours toward CNA (certified nursing assistant) certification, and Blacksburg and Christiansburg Pharmacies, which support the new pharmacy technician program.

Thanks to a two-year, \$180,000 GO Virginia grant, MCPS has been able to partner with local information technology (IT) businesses to reimburse the companies 50% of the



EHB Photography

Mark Husband

Dr. Mear, Montgomery County Schools Superintendent



Submitted



Christianburg HS

Culinary Arts student



CTE includes soft skills, resume and job application acumen.

students' salaries. IT partners include Automation Creations, Inc., Ozmo, Inc., Virginia Tech, Floyd's Citizen Telephone Cooperative, and the MCPS IT department. The grant also provides for technology and equipment in the classroom, as well as help with transportation, when necessary, in the form of gift cards for either gas or ride sharing services. "We are striving for equity," said Husband of leveling the playing field with transportation assistance.

Montgomery County Public Schools also has a working relationship with New River Community College (NRCC). Dual enrollment (DE) classes give students both high school and college credit at the same time. MCPS has been recognized as having more DE classes than any other school system in southwest Virginia. MCPS partners with the Dublin-based community college in three main ways. First and most popular is the transfer associate degree, in which students can use DE classes to graduate from both high school and NRCC simultaneously.

"Because of the way the graduation dates fall," said Husband, "sometimes students receive their associate degrees before they receive their high school diplomas." On the IT pathway, students can work toward an associate degree with a concentration in computer science while still in high school. There is also the five-year RN (registered nurse) program. Students take their first year of nursing at NRCC during their senior year in high school so that they only have one additional year of community college work to finish their RN degree post-high school. All of these programs are free to MCPS students.

WEARING MANY HATS

The New River Valley Regional Commission is 52 years old, and its role changes with what the local governments that chartered it need, according to Kevin Byrd, Executive Director. Those governments are the counties of Montgomery, Floyd, Giles, and Pulaski, and the city of Radford. The Commission provides technical assistance to the local governments. Its mainstay programs include support in economic development, housing, land use planning, and transportation.

The Commission includes Virginia Tech, Radford University, and New River Community College. The purpose of giving educational institutions seats at the table with elected officials is that they are major economic engines, almost “operating as cities,” said Byrd, with their own resources - like campus police departments. They contribute to regional initiatives, lending their staff’s talent for projects such as advertising the “Be Committed, Be Well” pandemic campaign. “Their expertise is remarkable to observe,” said Byrd.



Kevin Byrd - NRVRC

The Commission’s pandemic response has been two-fold: to provide additional capacity to the New River Health District, and to support impacted sectors of the economy such as service, retail, and lodging. A response team has taken volume off the health district in advising businesses how to handle COVID-19 by establishing a regional telephone hotline, which has needed to increase capacity from 50 to 100 calls per minute. The Commission hired a Volunteer Coordinator to manage manning the call center, helping with vaccine registration, and finding people to deliver the vaccines.

Byrd said that this region is probably the first to have all of its K-12 teachers vaccinated, a priority for the Commission and in part the work of a Commission employee dedicated to coordinating with schools. “If teachers are vaccinated schools open and employees go back to work,” he said.

The Commission also recently hired an Economic Recovery Planner and is working with Onward New River Valley and the Workforce Development Board to glean information from the businesses these agencies interface with directly. The goal is for the Commission to use that data along with information from virtual focus groups of employers, to “find out where they are right now,” said Byrd. Having relevant data and willing businesses allows the Commission to help identify strategies to assist the business sector, as well as enabling the New River Valley Regional Commission to seek additional resources, including grants.

Long-term, the Commission’s comprehensive economic strategy recognizes the need for more formalized apprenticeship programs. It hopes to set up partnerships with schools and community colleges to have a more trained workforce, especially in sectors like construction where licensed fields are lacking workers. Leveraging local resources, promoting education imperatives, and planning an economic recovery are tall tasks - but all in a day’s work for the NRVRC.

—Jennifer Poff Cooper



Auburn High School Student Welder


Submitted

Submitted
CNA Student Brush TeethSubmitted
CNA Student Blood Pressure

The biggest challenge with the CTE program, said Husband, is hiring and retaining qualified teachers. Often MCPS is hiring CTE people straight out of the workforce; the transition to teaching kids can be jarring, and many have to take a pay cut to do so. To help, MCPS has instituted the AMPS (Alternative Model for Professional Studies) program. This free two-and-one-half year program trains new teachers and helps them move from provisional certification to permanent licensure.

To Husband's mind, one of the biggest successes of the CTE program has been academic career planning. Studies show, he said, that the "younger we talk to students the better prepared they are." So, MCPS implemented a middle school component. Students in sixth grade are required to take a "Career Investigations" course to get them thinking intentionally about a career. Then in seventh grade, they work with guidance counselors to map out plans for the rest of their academic careers. "The middle school expansion completely overhauled the education experience," Husband said.

To augment the academic career planning, a "program of studies" document shows students and parents what courses are offered so they can be well-informed about options. Husband said that Montgomery County's practice of student-based scheduling, with students having a great deal of input in their course planning, is innovative among public schools. It improves outcomes by ensuring students take courses that are meaningful to them.

Middle school courses that have been added due to demand include business education, introductory culinary arts, and robotics. Concludes Mark Husband, the Career and Technical Education and Virtual Learning program he oversees provides the opportunity for career exploration and for a "foot in the door to a high paying career." 

“ ”
MCPS has been recognized as having more Dual Enrollment classes than any other school system in southwest Virginia.



BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Lois James

Executive Summary:
The mentor relationship is not as difficult as you may think to develop.

Lois James is Director of Leadership Development for OpX Solutions LLC. She's filling in for Mike Leigh this month. Reach her at lois@opxsolutionsllc.com

Mentoring your team


Have you ever had someone in your life that you turned for an honest opinion before deciding on something important? That person is one you always value as you advance in your career and life, because he or she has your trust as an effective mentor.

Being an empathetic and effective mentor is a powerful leadership tool that pays huge dividends. From an organizational perspective, mentoring team members to realize the overall company vision and goals will always get more buy-in and commitment from your team because they understand the benefits of accomplishing both the short- and long-term goals of the company. From a leadership point of view, mentoring helps steer the team in the direction upper management wants to focus, as well as helping develop trust and engagement with your team. The mentor will quickly realize a team member's willingness to go above and beyond when they know they have a mentor who supports and encourages them.

Mentoring: Schedule time to meet with each mentee on a regular basis. Frequency should be once a week or once a quarter depending on the individual needs and responsibilities of the mentee. During these meetings, you should use the Socratic method of asking questions, rather than supplying answers, to help the individual develop better problem-solving skills and confidence in their decision-making abilities.

You should also take time to learn about the individual's interests and skills as well as what motivates them. As Amy Errett explains in Wharton magazine: "The mentorship relationship is unique in that the mentor doesn't just 'give advice,' but is also part of a personal trusted relationship between two people where questions, advice, knowledge and discussion flow back and forth openly."

Meeting with and effectively mentoring your team members both collectively and individually builds trust, team cohesiveness, and improved morale in the culture of your company. Personally, mentorship can be a very rewarding experience for both the mentor and mentee. It also teaches effective mentorship skills to the next generation, so that they may "pay-it-forward".

If your company doesn't have a structured mentorship program, consider that according to a PGI study that focused on Millennials, "71% stated that they wanted meaningful connections at work and hope to find a 'second family' in their coworkers. Additionally, 75% not only want mentors, but deem it crucial for success." You may be missing a great opportunity to develop better communication and better engagement among your team members. Take the time to establish and invest in mentorship programs. You will see a return on that investment for years to come. 

AI is making bookkeeping and tax returns easier

Most area companies aren't implementing technology to streamline bookkeeping for lower costs, but that doesn't mean you can't. This is a conservative industry in a conservative town, so it's no wonder firms are slow to adopt.


Today, there's no good reason not to be automating at least some of your financial reporting. Sure, you need expert human oversight to ensure errors don't occur, but the time and cost to do this can be greatly reduced with Artificial Intelligence, or AI. Imagine a future when your bank transactions, credit card purchases, billing, and invoicing are recorded in almost real time, producing accurate reports you can access 24/7. That future is now.

Poor financial management costs business owners a ton each year. These cutting-edge software tools pay for themselves almost immediately. They're customized to your particular needs so the AI learns about your business while working in tandem with smart CPA oversight. That saves the traditional time, hassle, and cost of doing manual data entry while giving you a clear picture for bidding jobs, making good depreciation decisions, managing inventory, and implementing wise strategies come tax time.

Where's AI showing up?

Some of the best industries to implement AI-assisted bookkeeping are those that tend to struggle the most with complicated issues. Businesses in the construction, healthcare, and legal fields are benefitting from a less cumbersome approach.

Sure, there's resistance to handing over some of the accounting work to machines, but remember, these AI solutions work in concert with a seasoned pro providing oversight. That lets the financial expert focus on what they're best at, namely providing big-picture perspectives and solutions, while menial tasks are delegated to software that learns over time so fewer adjustments are required.

Think of it this way. Do your customers like paying for you to run to the hardware store to pick up job materials? No. They hired you for your construction expertise. It's the same with accounting support. Why pay for manual bookkeeping data entry when you don't have to? Plus, as much as we hate to admit it, automating the process leads to fewer mistakes. If you've struggled with keeping your financial records up to date, can't get current financial reports quickly, or dread tax time, consider a better approach for bookkeeping. AI is here to stay. Why not be an early adopter for a change? 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
Accounting has come a long way in recent years.

Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at michael@discover360 Financial.com



Kevin Newby - ECPI

“IT REALLY IS A GOOD PLACE”

By Gene Marrano

For-profit ECPI on why its diploma and degree offerings are a cut above.

For-profit colleges have gotten a bum rap in recent years and at least one multi-location school with a former location in Roanoke has gone under (ITT) but the ECPI system that has a campus in Roanoke on Airport Road has been turning out degreed students for several decades. The school has the same regional accreditation as other not-for-profit higher education institutions says its president – and it can take as little as 2.5 years to earn a bachelor’s degree.

Nursing, medical assisting (the two top draws right now), IT and cybersecurity,

and engineering technologies are offered at the local campus, much of it virtually over the past year, where Kevin Newby is the President for ECPI-Roanoke. “That standard of regional accreditation,” says Newby, “raises us above [some other for-profit colleges].” Splitting a semester into five-week terms – with no more than two subjects per term, sometimes one - helps students focus better on that particular subject(s) Newby contends. About 350 students are enrolled during a typical semester locally.

But he adds, “it’s accelerated and it’s not for everybody. It’s fast-paced. A full



commitment.” The pace seems to fit nursing students, with a practical nurse graduating in as little as 14 months (a diploma program), and a registered nurse in just 19 months (a 2-year degree). Interest in healthcare careers has increased since the pandemic onset and with nursing shortages there is work out there. Newby says they are priced competitively with other four-year nursing schools. 120 nursing students graduated from ECPI-Roanoke last year despite all the obvious challenges and students have typically done well on the Nursing Boards. Employment for nursing

graduates is “well above 90%,” and Newby says they make competitive pay. (ECPI has to track that data for accreditation agencies.) “They’re being snapped up right away.”

Three cohorts of 30 nursing students start the program every year (Jan-May-August), also speeding up matriculation. It’s a competitive process to get into those cohort groups. Practical nursing tracks (LPN) start five times a year. 87 practical nurses graduated in 2020 – more than in several local community colleges combined adds a proud school

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president. Newby says Department of Education data shows that ECPI more than holds its own as an institution of higher learning. The school has been around for almost 60 years, started in Virginia, and now has campuses in five southern states.

Live online classes make students feel more connected to the lecturer, says Newby. Except for the hands-on nursing and IT labs, which have remained open, most other classes have been online over the past year, with ECPI-Virginia Beach overseeing the virtual delivery. The typical ECPI student is “non-traditional,” not right out of high school, but someone

going back to school a few years later hoping to advance a career or somebody looking for a new one. On the IT side, short term certificate programs, or “micro-credentials,” that can provide someone with a quick skills upgrade are making a comeback. One drawback: they are currently not eligible for federal loans, and thus students must pay out of their own pockets upfront. ECPI does pay for their certifications. Newby hopes the federal government rethinks not allowing student loans for short term IT certification programs, noting the ongoing shortage of workers in that exploding field.



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“They’re commuting, they have families, they have jobs – they’re not going to live in a dorm,” adds Newby, about who attends ECPI. Smaller class sizes, the fast pace (“get in and get it done,”), and successful outcomes in placing graduates are other selling points. Newby also says there are funds to help students with problems (like paying to fixing their Internet): “we like to work with our students.”

Newby has been in the for-profit college world for about two decades. “I’ve seen the good, the bad, and I’ve seen the ugly, to be honest.” In fact, he was at now-defunct ITT Technical Institute

15 years ago. In September 2016 with plummeting enrollment and in part because students were banned from using government loans any longer, ITT went under, leaving 40,000 students and 800 employees on 130+ campuses in the lurch. ECPI students are eligible for all of the typical school loans, says Newby.

“Good outcomes, fast paced, hands-on,” is Kevin Newby’s elevator pitch for ECPI as a college choice. Not to say some for-profit schools didn’t deserve that bad rap, but as for the ECPI way, “it really is a good place,” he insists; “we’ve been doing this for a long time – and doing it well.” 

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A LITTLE INSIGHT

By Bruce C. Bryan

Executive Summary:

Treat your clients' business just like you would - if it were your own.

Bruce C. Bryan is the president of 5Points Creative, an award-winning advertising and marketing agency in Roanoke. Contact him at bruce@5PointsCreative.com

Practice what you preach

Asked4Specific Help

It's fascinating when a client says something to me that I've already thought or said myself many times. As if hearing the idea for the first time, their comment hits my head (or my heart) and drives home a concept chock full of value. That's exactly what happened to me during a recent Zoom call with a client.

We were talking about their media plans and how they suggested we approach their strategy for the coming season. We were working through their goals, their budget, previous success, and some new ideas to consider. We were looking at some expansion to new markets for them when they said to us, "just treat it exactly as you would if it were your company to market or advertise."

Interestingly, that is exactly what my media buyer and I already do at our agency.

Translating it2Your Situation

Early in the development of our marketing firm, I used to say to clients – "if this were my company, here is exactly what I would do." With that caveat, I felt even better about sharing my recommendations.

A few years back, my son (and our media buyer at 5Points) considered purchasing a franchise in his hometown of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Ultimately, he decided it wasn't the right time. However, through an odd turn of events, the gentleman who did purchase the franchise became a client of ours. What did we do?

Right away, we shared with our new client the plans my son had put together as the new owner prepared to open the business.


When the pandemic first became real to many Americans, our agency did the very thing we encouraged our clients to do. We invested in additional advertising and shored up our marketing and outreach approach. It is far easier to make strong recommendations when the advice you give is the advice you follow. That seamless approach over time is simply the way you do business. You practice what you preach. Then, you treat your clients' business just like you would if it were your own. 📌

“Our agency did the very thing we encouraged our clients to do.”

Here are 5 easy ways you can help prevent local businesses from going under

The Small Business Pulse Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in December 2020 shows that 53% of small businesses don't expect to return to pre-Covid operations for at least the next six months. I've been trying to paint the picture to my local connections of what that could look like. Think of your top 10 favorite locally owned restaurants, clothing boutiques, running stores, artists, and entertainment businesses. Which 5 would you be OKAY with failing to thrive by the end of this year?

- **If you are buying anything, there is rarely a reason you can't find it locally.** You may have to pay a few dollars more, but if you are someone who donates a few bucks to the PTA, rounds up your store purchases for the charity of the month, buys Girl Scout cookies or Boy Scout popcorn-then what's the difference? When you buy local and not online you are supporting your neighbors and their families.
- **While you're there, tip more than usual if you are able.** The service industry is the hardest hit. The challenges they've endured include moving to carry-out only services, diminished capacity, less open hours, and under-staffing. In the past, I would not have felt guilty about not tipping on an order I called in and picked up. However, I fill out that "tip" line every single time now 20% and round up. And if the staffer is particularly charming, I'll give them more. It means the world to that server.
- **Word of mouth is still the number one way to grow business.** Be intentional on sharing and promoting local businesses you support. Post your experience to social media, write them Google, Yelp and Facebook reviews, comment on posts on the Next Door app when you see your neighbors asking for recommendation.
- **Engage with them in a new way.** If your favorite local business is still here, 13+ months after COVID-19 shut everything down, they have adapted their services. They likely have an online store, curbside pickup, delivery, or started new services to continue to bring in income.
- **Point them to the resources that can help them.** Have them call me personally at the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce and I will point them to sources of funding, low cost and effective marketing strategies, and free, local small business development resources.

It's time for everyone to do their part to continue to love our local businesses and help them get back to thriving. 



FiftyCentLove Photographie

MINDFUL BUSINESS

By Beth Bell

Executive Summary:
Shop and eat Locally as much as possible.

Beth Bell is the executive director for the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce and helped found FemCity Roanoke, a business networking community for women. Contact her at bethboydbell@gmail.com.



Ticket to success

By Roanoke Higher Education Center

Certificate programs give job candidates a competitive edge.

In today's competitive business environment, what will set one candidate apart from someone else with seemingly equal skills and abilities? What will help someone sharpen their skills to pursue a new career or advance at work? What educational opportunities will give them the knowledge to thrive? For many people in the Roanoke Valley, the answer is certificate programs.

The Roanoke Higher Education Center

(RHEC), located in the heart of downtown Roanoke, can help. Through their multiple member institutions, students have access to 55 certificate programs all across Virginia, including cybersecurity, entrepreneurship, and human resource management, just to name a few. Programs are available at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

Mary Baldwin University and Old Dominion University are two RHEC members that offer



The Roanoke Higher Education Center, which opened in 2000, offers over 200 programs of study through multiple member institutions. Students can take undergraduate- and graduate-level courses, either here at the center or online, through one of the partnering colleges and universities. RHEC also offers job training programs through a partnership with TAP – This Valley Works.

certificate programs through RHEC. Because these programs are online (and, already Covid-friendly!), Roanoke students can complete them while staying at home. Many students continue to work full-time, while taking one to two courses at a time. According to Joe Sprangel, Dean, College of Business & Professional Studies at Mary Baldwin University, there are so many benefits to pursuing a certificate program, as opposed to a full degree. Sprangel says, “In this current world, it’s nice to be able to get chunks of credentials, so that you can be prepared to move on to some new opportunity or to advance in your existing company.”

Their certificate in Project Management, for instance, aligns with the requirements of that particular certification exam and can make candidates more marketable once they complete the program and pass the exam.

Students who have been out of the school for many years may wish to deepen their knowledge of a subject relevant to their work. Sprangel explains that for someone who completed their MBA 10-20 years ago when sustainability wasn’t at the forefront, they could take one of Mary Baldwin’s graduate concentrations as a certificate, such as Sustainable Enterprise. “I can learn what it



Kay Dunkley, Executive Director



Carla James-Jackson, Senior Director of Academic & Student Services

means to be a business as a sustainable operation that's focused on creating not only profit," he says, "but we also want to create a social and environmental beneficial organization. If I didn't get that experience in the past, then I can go ahead and get that in this new course work, that I can add on."

The ability to "add on" or have "stackable" courses, is another benefit. "The certificate is a piece of earning an undergraduate or graduate degree," states Sprangel. He also notes that their MBA program offers badges for each of their courses, that can be shared on social media, with everything counting towards the certificate. At Mary Baldwin University, the certificate programs tend to be 16 credit hours, the minimum number of credits to earn in order to be able to get financial aid.


Old Dominion University (ODU) is another great option to consider, as they offer 31 certificate programs and have an office at RHEC. According to Regenia Hill, Director of Community Outreach and Engagement with Old Dominion University/ODUOnline, popular certificate programs include Cybersecurity, Community College Leadership, Nurse Educator, Project Management, and Online Teaching for K-12 Teachers. ODUOnline certificate programs are 12-18 credit hours, and can generally be completed in a year or more.

In addition to the traditional certificate programs, ODU also offers an Endorsement

program, allowing aspiring teachers the opportunity to earn credentials online to become licensed to teach in Virginia. Students must have completed an undergraduate degree. By completing the program, students will qualify for the Virginia teaching licensure, without having to complete a masters degree.

Like Sprangel, Hill sees many benefits to certificate programs, and they can help students to decide whether to pursue a full program of study. She notes that certificates can potentially give someone a competitive advantage in pursuing advancement, and increase knowledge skills that can lead to a promotion. Also, it's an efficient way to pursue education that may be less expensive, and certificate programs can increase someone's professional credibility.

"If you look at it," says Hill, "you might have two people pursuing the same position. They are equal in qualifications, but one may have something extra, a certificate. Having a certificate may make the difference in who is offered the position. Certificates make you more marketable, prepare you for advancement or can be helpful if you are considering a career change."

For more information about certificate programs through the Roanoke Higher Education Center, please visit www.education.edu/programs/type/certificates/ or call 540-767-6161. 

ROANOKE HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER

Certificates

BUSINESS & LEADERSHIP

Business Analytics Graduate Certificate	Online	RU
Certificate in Entrepreneurship	Online	MBU
Certified Financial Planner Certificate	Online	JMU
Certificate in Human Resources Management	Online	MBU
Certificate in Marketing Communication	Online	MBU
Certificate in Procurement & Contracts Management	Online	ODU
Certificate in Project Management	Online	JMU, ODU, MBU
Certificate in Sustainable Business Management	Online	MBU
Graduate Certificate in Business Analysis & Big Data	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Maritime, Ports & Logistics Management	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Public Administration and Policy	On-site	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Public Sector Leadership	Online	ODU
IMPACT: Cybersecurity Certificate	Online	RU
Leadership Academy	On-site	VT
Undergraduate Certificate in Professional Writing	Online	ODU

EDUCATION

Autism Spectrum Disorders	Online	JMU, MBU, ODU
Educational Leadership Certificate	On-site	JMU
Educational Technology Certificate	Online	JMU
Graduate Certificate in Literacy Coaching	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Online Teaching for K-12 Teachers	Hybrid	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Secondary Education Professional Studies	Online	ODU
Higher Education Assessment Specialist Certificate	Online	JMU
ISTE-T Certification	Online	JMU
K-12 Gifted Education Endorsement	Online	JMU
Mathematics Education Graduate Certificate	Online	RU
Professional Certificate in Environment-Based Learning (EBL)	Hybrid	MBU
Teaching Language Arts in Digital Age Graduate Certificate	Online	RU

ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY

Advanced Engineering Certificate in Cyber Systems Security	Online	ODU
Crime Analysis Certificate	Hybrid	RU
Graduate Certificate in Coastal Engineering (CECP)	Online	ODU
Engineering Management	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Cybersecurity	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Mission Analysis & Engineering	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Modeling and Simulation Engineering	Online	ODU

GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management	On-site	VT
Paralegal Studies Certificate	Online	JMU
Public Sector Leadership	Online	ODU

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Certificate in Aging Studies	Hybrid	VCU
Certified Clinical Medical Assistant	On-site	TAP
Certified Nursing Assistant Program	On-site	TAP
Graduate Certificate in Global Health	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Nurse Educator	Online	ODU
Graduate Certificate in Nurse/Healthcare Executive	Online	ODU
Licensed Massage Therapist	On-site	DSLCC
Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing Graduate Certificate	Online	RU

MISCELLANEOUS

Beer Brewer Professional Certificate	On-site	VT
Culinary Arts: Advanced Foodservice Career Studies Certificate	On-site	VWCC
Culinary Arts: Baking and Pastry Career Studies Certificate	On-site	VWCC
Culinary Arts: Cake Production & Decorating, Career Studies Certificate	On-site	VWCC
Culinary Arts: Introduction to Foodservice Career Studies Certificate	On-site	VWCC
Culinary Arts: Professional Catering, Career Studies Certificate	On-site	VWCC
Lean Six Sigma Certificate	On-site	JMU
MFA Design Thinking Graduate Certificate	Online	RU
OSHA 10-hour	On-site	VT
OSHA 30-hour	On-site	VT



REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:

*Your house not selling?
Don't take this personally
but you may be the issue.*

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

Take the offer ... and run

Right now, the market is hot. How hot is it? Well, this time last year in 2020 there were just over 1500 homes available in the Roanoke Valley and now just over 500. In January 2021, the median home price in Virginia was up 12.5%. The median house price is the sale price of the middle home in a list of properties ranked from highest sale price to lowest over a set period of time.

Yes, it is a seller's market and I predict even if the rates go up your house will still sell. In fact, this year we will stay hot and with Covid slowly drifting to the side, more people will open up to moving, selling their homes, and not being so nervous. I talk to other realtors and lenders and this is what they are all saying so do not worry, sell happy.

That being said, due to lack of homes sellers are raising the price to try to get the most money they can. Can you blame them? Lots of sellers are getting more for their home right now. A good example: I listed a home in one of the city's most sought after neighborhoods. My clients listed for \$25k higher than my analysis, got it, and it appraised for the list price as well.

However, some sellers are not receiving more for their home. Why wouldn't you get more for your home? It may need too many repairs and buyers could be turned off by this and offer less. It may not appraise for what you are asking for the house and the lender will only allow what it appraises for. Don't take this personally but you may be the issue.

Usually, the first offer is the best offer and if you do not take it you could be very sorry in the long run. I have seen sellers lose tens of thousands of dollars by not taking the first offer, thinking that something better will come along the way. This means the house sits longer and becomes stale. Usually, your offers are less week after week.

What is a great offer? Well cash is king, but these are far and few in between. Full asking price or over ask, all closing costs, and with no inspection may be your best offer. The market will test the house. The only reason your house is not selling is price, condition, and you. Listen to your realtor and if he or she tells you this is a great offer and you should take it, take the offer and run. 🏠

“The only reason your house is not selling is price, condition, and you.”

Own your audience

There's been a great deal of talk lately (or "noise" might be the better word) about Apple vs. Facebook vs. Google vs. Advertising vs. Privacy. I could sit here and try to dissect the entire hot mess, but really you just have a bunch of billion-dollar companies fighting with all of them trying to look like the "hero" in the court of public opinion.

It's kind of like when DIRECTV would fight with a network like ESPN over money. Each side would tell you how the other is the "bad guy" and how you need to go complain to them to "do what's right." Simple fact is, no matter who "wins" this battle of digital privacy, there's still going to be a million ways to track individual users and "new and improved" ways to squeeze money out of small businesses for ad spending.

I bring all of this up to hammer home this message ... stop just relying on other resources to reach your audience!
OWN YOUR AUDIENCE YOURSELF!!!

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 from your customer base, and then use that information strategically in ways that reward your customers and increase 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.

Meanwhile, Facebook will sit here and squash your organic reach down to about 10% of your audience and then tell you to spend money for the "privilege" of reaching the rest. Why? Because they own the audience and get to decide how to utilize it. When YOU own the audience, you're the one who calls those shots.

When done right, social media marketing can absolutely be an effective way to boost your business. However, things are always evolving and changing, so it's entirely possible that there will be a day that social media marketing doesn't exist, or at least isn't the shiny new marketing toy. When you're the one who owns your audience, you're already prepared for that evolution and can continue to reach them in the most effective ways possible. 📌

“”
Stop just relying on other
resources to reach your audience!



TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

Executive Summary:
*Explore ways to gather
the contact information
of your customer base.*

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





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WELLNESS

By Valarie Angle

Executive Summary:
Want to perform better at work? Let's talk metabolism.

Valarie Angle is the owner and director of The WellNest Roanoke, and is a holistic Life Coach. Contact her at Connect@TheWellNestRoanoke.com

Myths of metabolic wellness

True or False?


- Obesity and metabolically wellness cannot coexist.
- A low calorie, low fat diet assures metabolic wellness.
- Thin, fit people are always metabolically healthy.
- Metabolic imbalance increases risk of severe illness.
- Only 48% of Americans are metabolically healthy.

Want to perform better at work? Let's talk metabolism. It might not be what you think. Metabolism is the set of life-sustaining chemical reactions in your cells that convert food to energy to run cellular processes; convert food to building blocks for proteins, lipids, nucleic acids, and some carbohydrates; balance oxidative stress, and eliminate waste.

Were you just born with bad metabolism? Probably not. Often, metabolism is confused with digestion and elimination. Metabolism is happening at the microscopic cellular level as your body works with hydrogen, oxygen, and food (sugar and fats). Instead of digestion and elimination through your stomach and intestines, think smaller--as in terms of protons and electrons; oxidation; glucose and insulin. Less than 12% of Americans are metabolically well. In fact, poor dissemination of research studies over past decades has contributed to metabolic imbalance by not getting the message out to the population about what causes this imbalance and how to use simple changes to correct it.

This "micro" metabolism going inside of you has everything to do with your ability to process glucose, react to insulin, maintain a functional digestive tract, balance fat burning and storage, fight disease, and sustain strong cardiovascular function.

How do you know if you are metabolically well? It's not discernable based on your weight, body type, or fitness level. Don't assume that if you work out 3-5 times a week and eat according to the USDA Choose My Plate guidelines that you are metabolically well. 1 in 8 of us will be, but not the rest.

Dr. Stephen Hussey, head of The WellNest's Metabolic Wellness Program and author of *Understanding the Heart: Uncommon Insights into Our Most Commonly Diseased Organ*, suggests a very specific panel of blood work interpreted by a doctor or coach who is an expert in Metabolic Wellness. From there, nutritional, exercise, and lifestyle recommendations can be discussed between patient and care provider. Finding out the keys to your metabolic wellness takes less than an hour and could be the turning point to greater focus, improved stamina and performance, enhanced mood, prevention of disease and overall fitness and health for a more rewarding career and lifestyle. 

Equipping children who have disabilities


If you have a child with a mobility challenge and other difficulties such as accessing baths and toilets or communicating, or even engaging a recreational activity, the good news is there are a lot of innovative devices and equipment to assist these activities. The bad news is many of the options are expensive, and both public and private health insurance does not provide all that these children need to participate in the world around them.

Enter “CATS” — the Children’s Assistive Technology Services — a 501(c)3 charitable organization operating out of Moneta. The organization manages an inventory of “adaptive equipment” which enables children to play with their friends, participate in meals and bath time, explore the world, moving and learning, and be more independent.

The founder and past president of CATS is Cathie Cummins; and today’s organization is comprised of John Naples, interim executive director; board members: Laura Alexander, Aven Alford, David Bates, Beth Beach, Forrest Bassett, Francie Mitchell, Constance Mills, Susan Elmore, and staff: Cathy Watkins and Linda Dew.

What kind of equipment and devices might a parent or caregiver find in the CATS inventory? The number of current units available are listed with each category, including wheelchairs and strollers, power wheelchairs, walking aids, standers, therapy equipment, bathing and toileting, adaptive seating, recreation, and communication devices and switches.

CATS could use volunteers — particularly for cleaning and repairing equipment (on location or possibly at your own home workshops or sewing room). Drivers for donated items, fundraising and events, and office help are other ways you can help.

CATS /Virginia includes operations in Roanoke, Hampton Roads, Richmond, and Marion. For more information, visit <http://hr.atdevicesforkids.org> or the Facebook page, or call 540-493-2285. 



GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:
Children’s Assistive Technology Services gets gently-used pediatric mobility and adaptive devices at no cost to children with disabilities.



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GM Photos



New Roanoke fire station was a team effort >

After 8-plus years of visioning, planning, approvals, land acquisition, a road closure etc., the new **Roanoke Fire-EMS Station #7** in the Grandin Village area opened last month. The 16,000 square foot structure replaced a 99-year-old building one quarter that size in the same footprint. KZF Design (Cincinnati) teamed with **SFCS Architects** in Roanoke to design the \$7 million (total cost)

project. "We're building a station for the next 75 years," said Roanoke Fire-EMS Chief **David Hoback**; "we wanted to build a station that had sustainability." Elements kept from the old station includes brick and wood, repurposed with the help of **Black Dog Salvage** and other local companies. **F&R Services** in Roanoke provided geotechnical engineering services, which involved "subsurface exploration program and geotechnical engineering analyses, primarily focused on bearing capacity of the footings." Salem-based **G&H Contracting Inc.** built the new station, which includes local artist **Anne Glover's** beloved Trojan Dog installation out front along Memorial Avenue.

Local Business on the move >

Tribal Rugs Gallery has opened a new location at Oak Grove Plaza in southwest Roanoke County. The family-owned, custom-made Afghan rug shop moved from a downtown Roanoke location to Oak Grove Plaza last summer, but the ribbon cutting was held just recently. The 20,000 square foot store houses over 1,000 rugs and offers cleaning and repair services in house. **Mohammad Zada**, third generation owner, started in 2008 with a store on the

Camp Phoenix Army base in Kabul City, Afghanistan where he earned a business award. Zada then opened a store in Los Angeles before moving his family and joining his brothers, also business owners, to Roanoke in 2017. "Tribal Rug Gallery adds diversity to Roanoke County by bringing a new culture to our retail scene," says **Marshall Stanley**, Economic Development Specialist for the County. Pictured: owner Mohammad Hassanzada accepting a Certificate of Appreciation from Roanoke County Board of Supervisor, Paul Mahoney, who represents the Cave Spring Magisterial District and Hassanzada cut the ribbon for Tribal Rug Gallery.



Roanoke County



FB Photo



Salem-Roanoke County Chamber



Roanoke County



Dan Mirolli

ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
The big picture matters most, but the little parts can be important, too.

The tiniest detail

Although based on my home cleaning performance, my wife would be scratching her head over this statement, I'm actually someone who appreciates details. The tiniest details. My socks usually have some small color or texture element that matches my shirt. And two activities in my profession require attention to details that I suck up against with the intensity of velour and cat hair. The first is photography; and photoshoots—done properly—involve aggressive attention to detail. The second is event management—and I am one who can immediately determine when a presentation or meeting missed a detail... from seating arrangement and room configuration, to lighting, ambient noise, temperature, and the format itself.

I know I elevate the stress and exasperation of my staff and people I work with from my *what-we-don't-do* and *what-we-do-do* demands, but I just cling to the notion that they might realize I have only good intentions. Or at least, give them an experience where they got to work with an eccentric. (Everyone should have that adventure for at least a short while. Or join the military.)

Here are three tiny examples in my agency business that confirmed the importance of tiny details.

Museum Mishap

An easy one to overlook. Even experienced photographers and journalists can miss this one. I received a photo of an important dignitary speaking at our own Taubman Museum of Art in Roanoke. When the photo is cropped and ready to release or publish, one of the common perspectives has the name of the museum directly behind and above the head of the speaker. Nice touch, right? Not if the final picture shows only four letters at the end of the name. Your dignitary is no longer dignified. (I'll give you all the time you need to figure out what makes the photo unflattering...it's a puzzle some of you may never solve; but if you saw the photo, you might LOL.) — That's a TINY detail.

Bad Will Gesture

We all know about this one. The kid in your high school yearbook who flashes an inappropriate hand gesture in the group photo. I know a local publisher who—at the insistence of the client—had to manually apply thousands of stickers to cover up a picture in a booklet. They had to either re-shoot or photo-edit the picture, reclaim the inventory, manually flip to the page, and slap the replacement photo over the original... carefully positioning so it wasn't obvious... and hoping that the sticker was thin enough so most readers wouldn't notice. The juvenile act was a tiny part of the picture; so I wondered if the sticker drew more attention than just leaving it alone. — An expensive, TINY detail.

Frenchman's Cap

Speaking of costly. I once produced a direct mail piece for a product distributed internationally. One of the versions was French. Oftentimes, in copywriting headlines, you employ

continued on Page 36

Another casualty of the COVID era: our backs


With the pandemic past the one-year mark now – and hopefully the end in sight – how are you feeling? Some are sitting for longer stretches while working at home; the use of makeshift desks and household chairs may be leaving more people experiencing lower back pain. Some tips from Dr. Russell Amundson, a neurosurgeon and senior medical director at UnitedHealthcare, on how to prevent and treat back pain:

Focus on Posture. Whether at the kitchen table or on the couch, sit up straight (like mom always said) with your knees at a 90-degree angle, shoulders in a straight line over the hips and your ears directly over your shoulders. Adjust screen height to eye level and elevate the keyboard to help keep hands, wrists and forearms in line and parallel to the floor. “There has been a reported increase in incidents in low back and neck symptoms due to folks working from home,” notes the Philly-based Amundson, “with less than ergonomically-designed offices.”

Take Breaks. Stay in one spot for too long, your muscles and joints may get stiff. Take breaks every 30 minutes, get up and stretch or walk around. This may also promote better blood flow for your muscles and joints.

Stay Active. While some people with low back pain may consider bed rest, it’s better to consider low impact activities like walking and swimming (not while working obviously). Strengthening leg muscles may also prove helpful. Yoga and tai chi have been shown to ease moderate to severe low back pain.

Eat a Healthier Diet. It’s easier to be a poor eater and heavy snacker when the fridge is 5 feet away from your, umm, “home office.” The bones, muscles, discs and other structures need proper nutrition to help support your body. Eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean protein and healthy fats may help reduce inflammation, a contributing factor to chronic back pain. A healthier diet also helps maintain a healthy weight, which may also reduce risk for back pain.

Consider care options. Exercise-based therapies should be the first line of treatment, followed by physical therapy, chiropractic care, acupuncture and over-the-counter anti-inflammatory drugs. Noninvasive treatment options may help 95% of people with low back pain recover after 12 weeks says Dr. Amundson. Amundson says he boils it down to CORE: Correct alignment, Overweight (as in don’t pick up something too heavy for you – or eat excessively), Reaching or stretching occasionally and Exercise. “Get up and move,” advises Amundson – whether still working at home or back in the office. 



THERE'S
SOMETHING
HAPPENING
HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

*Desk bound while working from home?
Too much snacking?
Bad ergonomics?
Thanks a lot, COVID ...*

Letters

Connection clarification

The executive summary accompanying your Good Works column [February 2020] on the Roanoke Women's Foundation stated that we are a "professional networking group." While there are definitely opportunities to network, RWF's mission is to connect the power of women and their pooled financial

resources to enhance the quality of life in our communities. Roanoke Women's Foundation is a philanthropic organization that supports arts and culture, education, the environment, and health and human services through a competitive grants process. The Foundation is funded by member donations, and all women are invited to join. As we grow, so does our impact!

Kathy Stockburger
RWF

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

Field / On Tap

from Page 34

initial caps—where the first letter of each word is capitalized, either for design or persuasive emphasis. (See my subheads in this column.) The client/distributor refused to accept or use the material. He insisted that initial caps were totally inappropriate in French usage. *Je ne comprends pas?* I had even employed a French language expert to proof check the piece. Later on, I found out his "correction" wasn't so universal. Initial caps weren't prohibited by any means, particularly for marketing material. He was just enforcing a preference—or more aptly—*being French-Canadian*. — A TINY, petite (petty?) detail.

At the end of this month, I get the pleasure of hosting my daughter Lauren's wedding! Are details—tiny details—important at a wedding? Probably not as much as most of us think... but to her on her special day, her mom and I, her sisters, and others helping to put this great affair on center stage—you BET they are important.

A tiny example: We all know Uncle Henry is obliged to overindulge. Do we seat him all the way across the room from the bar, keeping the greatest distance between him and our friendly bartenders? Well, that could provide even more of a spectacle as he has to stumble through more guest and more square footage than just plopping him right next to the bar.

Ahhh... details. Those TINY details. 

“”
He was just being... *French-Canadian*.

Welcome home



Home means many things – connections, a shared meal, reminiscing, celebrating. And, for 86 years, Richfield has been that home for so many people. On our beautiful campus we provide continuous care, from vibrant independent living to short-term rehab, to outpatient therapy, a wellness program, assisted living, respite care, and an innovative, resident centered household model of skilled nursing care.



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FRONTReviews >

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



Several hits, then a miss at Twisted

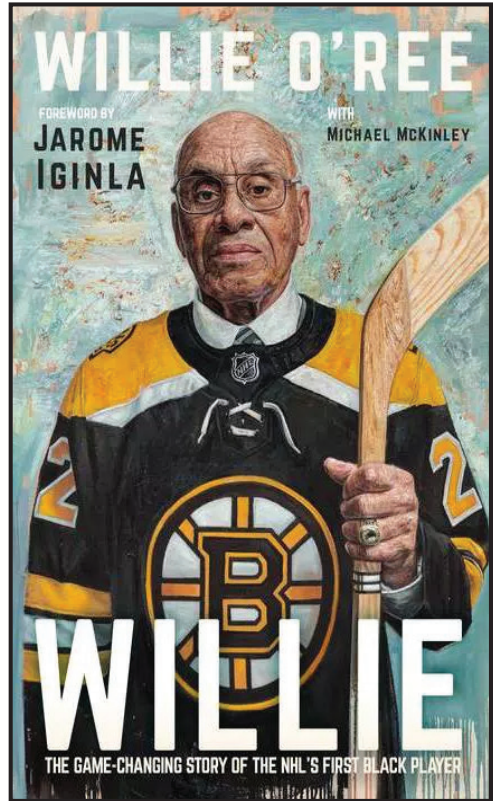
This was written after my third visit to Twisted Track Brewpub on Shenandoah Avenue in downtown Roanoke (formerly Soaring Ridge). The huge building along with the fire pits outside make for a nice place to chill with friends and enjoy beverages. An added bonus is FOOD! The kitchen is located inside - no food trucks. Lots of tables for seating both inside and out. A smaller room is available for parties and its kid friendly. First visit: Fantastic! Got flights of beer - best idea yet to try different samples. Next was the menu with an amazing assortment of foods. The Boat train Tuna Wonton Tacos with onion rings were fabulous - full of tuna and the avocados were sliced and plentiful. Second visit: limited menu mostly chicken. This was the BEST fried chicken I've had in a while. Along with an amazing assortment of ciders. Another band playing and a great evening.

Third Trip: back to regular menu and because they were so good on my first visit, I got the Tacos again. Sadly, they were lacking this time and definitely NOT worth the price. The onion rings were overcooked and barely warm when I got them. The pretzels were just long bread sticks; they did have a good flavor - just not what I imagined pretzels to be. Only a few choices in cider and unless you thought to specifically ask for the larger size (I was never asked this time) you got the smaller one. I was VERY Disappointed in this visit, but the guy singing was great. The company was great. Parking still an issue. Not sure what time you need to get there to have a fireside seat? Let's try another brewery.

—Brenda Smith

The sports pioneer you may never have heard of

We all know who broke the color barrier in



major league baseball – Jackie Robinson with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. But have you ever heard of Willie O’Ree? In 1958 the native of the Province of New Brunswick, Canada was called up to the Boston Bruins, and as the papers later wrote, he became the first “Negro” to play in the National Hockey League. Sent back to the minors after a few games, the speedy forward with a nose for the net came back up to Boston a few seasons later to play 43 games. All of that happened after he had lost the vision in his left eye while playing junior hockey. Willie O’Ree broke the color barrier with one good eye.

Ironically about a decade earlier O’Ree and his youth championship baseball team traveled to Brooklyn where he met Jackie Robinson; the two would cross paths later as well. A baseball tryout in 1956 with the Milwaukee Braves at a training camp in the Jim Crow, segregated southern town of Waycross, Georgia convinced O’Ree to

go back to his first love of hockey, even when others told him “black people don’t play in the NHL.” That isn’t true anymore, even if the numbers are still small. *Willie: The Game-Changing Story Of The NHL’s First Black Player* (Viking, 2020) is a sweetly told tale from a man who acknowledges the obstacles he had to overcome, while grateful for the opportunity and the support of teammates. Hockey historians will enjoy the names of those O’Ree encountered during his fleeting NHL career – just one part of a two decades-plus he spent in pro hockey as a player, before the now Hall of Famer became involved with the league’s diversity program.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Brenda Smith** is a USPS letter carrier living at Smith Mountain Lake; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT and an award-winning news reporter.



New wine bar-restaurant >

Orange County-based **Well Hung Vineyard** (yes, that's the name) has opened a wine bar featuring its own labels on South Jefferson Street in downtown Roanoke, across from the Mast General Store. The wine-focused restaurant features wine flights, wine slushies and a food menu. "With Well Hung Vineyard occupying the southeast corner of Jefferson Street and Mast General Store just across the street, there will certainly be a synergy between these two assets to Roanoke," says **Lisa B. Soltis** with the City of Roanoke Economic Development department. "Both businesses create a reason for shoppers and visitors to turn the corner at the end of Market Street ... and head west to patronize other retail businesses such as Davidson's, Bread Craft, Crafteria, LinDor Arts, Texas Tavern and more. [It] creates a new gathering spot for bright minds."



Tanglewood Mall announces new tenants, construction >

Blackwater Resources, LLC has announced the tenant line-up for two new outparcel buildings to be constructed at **Tanglewood Mall**, which it owns along the Electric Road/Route 419 corridor in Southwest Roanoke County. Construction that was scheduled to commence last month will welcome **Panda Express, Jersey Mikes, Aspen Dental, Blaze Pizza and Chipotle**. The new buildings will be sited along Electric Road in front of the new Carilion Children's (former JC Penney) space, a \$30 million project designed to centralize all of the Carilion Children's outpatient services. Tenants should be able to start moving in at the start of 2022 says Alabama-based Blackwater. "[This is] is exciting news for Roanoke County," said **Jill Loope**, Roanoke County Director of Economic Development, "Tanglewood is the retail anchor for the 419 Town Center and serves as a primary economic driver for our community." Then a week later another fast-casual eatery was announced: **Chicken Salad Chick**, which says it offers "delicious, scratch-made, Southern-style favorites made fresh daily ... with more than a dozen flavors of chicken salad to choose from, plus sides, dessert." The Reimagine 419 plan is also underway with road improvements including a new turning lane to US 220. Loope estimates at least 100 new jobs and \$300-500,000 in annual tax revenue from the new outparcel construction.

On the Verge of something big? >

In 2020 an alliance was formed among **Valleys Innovation Council, Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC)**, and the **Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP)**. The alliance aims "to drive initiatives to support the region's innovation economy and technology community." Now the creative firm **Eddy Alexander** has helped with a rebranding effort. "While the RBTC is part of the larger organization, **Verge**, the RBTC name, mission, and structure will remain the same," says exiting RBTC President John Phillips. **Greg Feldmann** is the Verge Executive Director and CEO: "from the public facing standpoint it will be the dominant [name]." He also sees the name as suggesting the region "is on the verge of making some really big strides across several major advanced industries ... like life sciences, autonomous systems [and] software. We need to build on that foundation – and always be on the verge." Feldmann says Verge is also a play on the word convergence: "to have a strong innovation ecosystem you really do need to have all the sectors aligned and driving to the right kind of nurturing environment."



New leader for Goodwill >

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys named **Richmond J. Vincent Jr.** its new president and CEO, effective in late March. He succeeded CEO Bruce Phipps, who announced his retirement after nearly 18 years leading the organization and more than 4 decades with Goodwill. Richmond had been president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of South Mississippi (Gulfport) and Mississippi Goodworks. “The engagement with other community partners [evident in Roanoke],” was one reason Vincent said he was attracted to this opportunity. “We really want to refine the collaboration with other non-profits, create a formalized community [effort].” Vincent also envisions the 42 thrift stores under the Goodwill Industries of the Valleys as distribution points since they already community centers of a kind. They could be central location to pick up PPE – or maybe even get a vaccine shot as some of the Goodwill parking lots in Mississippi were used for. It’s all about “utilizing all of the assets we have there in the region.”



Vincent has an extensive background in workforce development at Goodwill, going back to his time with the organization in the Phoenix area. “It’s the foundation. What we do is empower people to achieve their fullest potential.” The retail stories in fact reminds Vincent, exist to provide funding for job services training programs - often for people from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with some type of physical or mental challenge. “We address all of those barriers to employment.” He also envisions local non-profits pulling together to offer a “one stop shopping” access point for those seeking information about assistance available to help them get back on their feet.



Something new brewing in Christiansburg >

Iron Tree Brewing Company should be open by early April on Roanoke Street in Christiansburg. Microbrewery owners **Jansen Lee**, **Steve Peter** and **Seth Locklear** are all Virginia Tech graduates, who, like other craft brewers, started out by homebrewing their beer.



Roanoke County celebrates eateries new and not-so-new >

Roanoke County officials helped cut the ribbon for **Cast Plates & Pints** (American fare on Electric Road in SW Roanoke County) recently. The Board of Supervisors also saluted the family-run **Luigi's Italian** restaurant (Brambleton Avenue) for its 50th anniversary at a recent meeting.



Vinton Roofing helps brighten day for Navy veteran >

An 8-year former US Navy Veteran near Rocky Mount has a new roof on his house – for free – in conjunction with **Habitat for Humanity of Franklin County** and **Vinton Roofing**. The Navy vet, who did not want his name used, said he spent part of his two tours in the mountains of Afghanistan fighting the Taliban. Vinton Roofing and Owens Corning's "Deployment Project" picked up the \$12,000 tab for his new roof: "I'm very grateful for it. The deployments that I went on [in Afghanistan], you see all these pictures of everybody waiting at the airport. I came home to an empty airport. I'm glad we're not forgotten about." **Jason Webb** is the General Manager for Vinton Roofing: "we couldn't have been more excited to participate. Our goal today is not only to help out the veteran; he's sacrificed for us; we want to be able to give him piece of mind. It's our way of giving back."



Frankies in Salem includes boutique hotel >

Jefferson Street Management Group, which operates seven restaurants in the Roanoke Valley and in Christiansburg, has opened a second **Frankie Rowland's** location on Main Street in Salem – which also features a 16-room boutique hotel. The original Frankie Rowland's steakhouse is in downtown Roanoke. **Page Moir** is the director of corporate development for Jefferson Street Management Group. "I drove by it for 28 years of work," says the former Roanoke College basketball coach about the new home for Frankies on Main Street in Salem. It had been a theater until the 70's, then morphed into office and retail/restaurant space. Three-plus years after purchasing the building Moir thinks the Rowland Hotel "is really something special. We'll draw a variety of customers to the hotel." Moir also commends the City of Salem for downtown improvements that include more allowances for outside sidewalk dining. "[They've] made it customer-friendly."



Courtesy Photo

SML Chamber awards >

Outstanding area businesses and community advocates were honored by the **Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce** during a presentation on March 11 at the SMLYMCA. "Congratulations to the winners, as well as the finalists in each category," said **Cheryl Ward**, SMLRCC Interim Executive Director. "The past year has been extremely challenging, and these leaders stepped up in big ways." Tourism Advocate of the Year: **J Bohn Bishop, KEEPin' Up with J Bohn**; Community Leaders of the Year: **Bruno and Tiffany Silva, The Landing Love Project**; Large Business of the Year: **Capps Home Building Center**; Small Business of the Year (tie): **Haywood's Jewelers and Smith Mountain Lake Coffee House**; Non-Profit of the Year: **Lake Christian Ministries**. Pictured: SML Regional Chamber of Commerce Award winners from left, Carla Brubaker, Sarah Gray and Kevin Gray, Smith Mountain Lake Coffee House; J Bohn Bishop, KEEPin' Up with J Bohn; Bruce Shelton, Capps Home Building Center; Jane Winters, Lake Christian Ministries; Charity Evans and Joanna Gruver, Haywood's Jewelers.



Submitted Photos

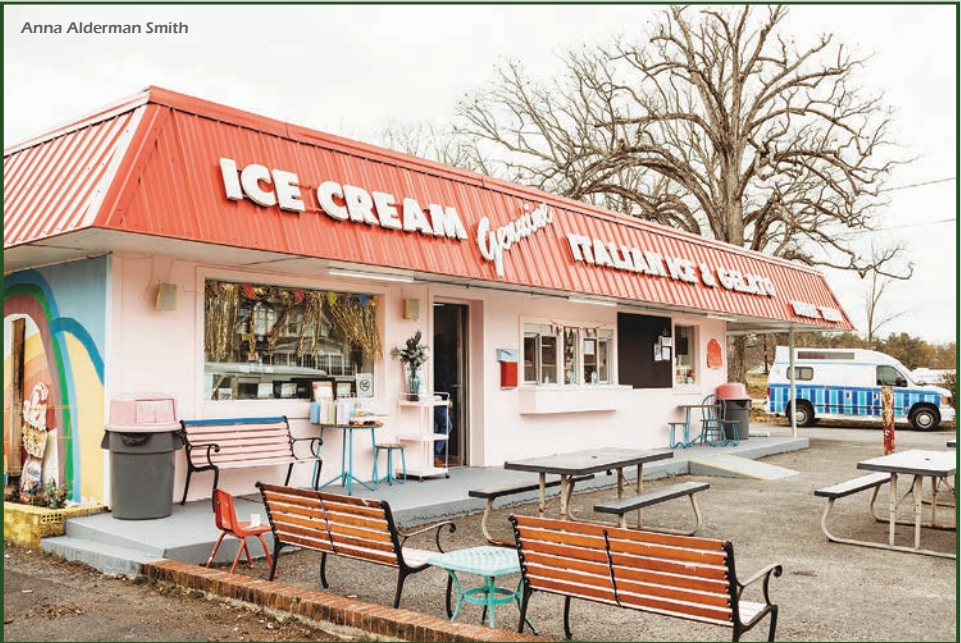


Local civic group pitches in >

The local chapter of **BAPS Charities**, an organization featuring South Asian business owners with roots in India and other countries has been distributing free water bottles and granola bars to everyone coming for a COVID shot at mass vaccination events taking place at Roanoke's Berglund Center since late February. BAPS Charities is also planning a Virtual Walkathon in June to support the Susan Komen Foundation's fight against breast cancer (the local Komen chapter has been disbanded). "BAPS Charities has been very active for over the last 12 months all around country in donating PPP, masks, medical equipment and food boxes ... to fight the pandemic," says **Sunny Shah**, the BAPS Charities, the Public Relations and Community Outreach in Roanoke, and a local hotelier.



Anna Alderman Smith



Reopening in Christiansburg >

Gardner's Frozen Treats & The Grill celebrated a grand reopening on Roanoke Street in mid-March. Ice cream, Italian ices and gelato are on the menu – just in time for warmer weather. So are made from scratch food favorites like Philly cheesesteaks. Gardner's has been in business since 2007. **Angelica Hernandez** is the owner; sisters Karla and Reina are helping out. **The Latinas Network**, dedicated to, "building Roanoke's and NRV's community of Professional Latinas," was on hand for the ribbon cutting, along with Christiansburg Town Council member Johnana Hicks.



VBF editor launches business show on Blue Ridge PBS >

Business Matters with Gene Marrano is scheduled to launch on April 2 on Blue Ridge PBS. The weekly half hour show, all filmed on Zoom for now, features guest panelists covering topics from local economic development to working mothers, outdoor tourism and broadband expansion etc. "Business Matters strives to explore that subject from a variety of viewpoints and scenarios - featuring interviews with the people helping to grow jobs, the economy and the Blue Ridge region," says Marrano. Episodes will also be streamed on the Blue Ridge PBS YouTube channel. Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball (pictured) will appear on an early April episode.

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

DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Ryder

The Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors has appointed **Khari Ryder** as the Executive Director. Ryder has served as Finance Director at Total Action Against Poverty (TAP), project manager and research and development specialist for Stik-Pak Solutions, a principal at Principal Endeavors, LLC, and Adjunct Professor for Midway University. He is also the founder of Equine Endeavors, a business that involves education, training, and open judging. "Botetourt's location and beautiful setting position it to be an ideal location for growth, both for businesses and the endless family life opportunities it



Stanley

offers," says Ryder.

The Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce (SMLRCC) has hired **Erin Stanley** as its member relations and events manager. She comes to the Chamber with 13 years of experience in account management and expertise in marketing and branding. Stanley's principal responsibilities in the newly created full-time position will be implementing member relations initiatives, including recruiting new members and executing an annual membership engagement plan.

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Smith Mountain Lake Real Estate has welcomed **Luke Schmidt**, REALTOR® to the



Schmidt

team. Schmidt has been a sales professional in the Franklin County area for more than 25 years. He first came to Franklin County in 1990, when he enrolled at Ferrum College and then played on Ferrum's Championship baseball team while working toward a Bachelor of Science degree, specializing in business marketing.



Jones

Roanoke-based Lawrence Companies (a moving, storage, construction equipment, and freight business)



Cheyne



Groseclose

announced an organizational restructuring plan for its senior leadership "to better align with the Company's operations." **Jennifer Jones** has been promoted to Chief Financial Officer and **Sandee Cheynet** has been appointed Chief Administrative Officer. Both are company veterans. Newcomer **Warren Groseclose** joins as Chief Operating Officer from Hillcrest Transportation in Midlothian. The new management team will report directly to Lawrence Companies

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president Barry Holland.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Proctor

North Cross School in Roanoke County has announced that Head of School **Christian J. Proctor**, Ph. D., will step down at the end of the 2021-22 school year, his eleventh with the school. In his letter to the community, Proctor said, "The timing of this announcement, with more than a year before my departure, will allow the Board of Trustees a full recruitment cycle as they seek the next Head of School." Proctor also noted that the school is "finishing its most successful capital campaign in its history, recently constructed a new campus, and is

enjoying record high enrollment and budgetary success."



Collins

Lance R. Collins, vice president and executive director of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, is one of 106 new members elected to the National Academy of Engineering for 2021, among the highest professional distinctions for an engineer. Collins was the Dean of Engineering at Cornell University for a decade before joining the Innovation Campus in northern Virginia last year. He was honored

for his contributions to "understanding turbulent processes, leadership in engineering, and contributions to the diversity of the profession."



Thorpe

Chevon Thorpe has been appointed the assistant dean of inclusion, diversity, and equity for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. Thorpe has been at Virginia Tech since 2018 and earned her Ph.D. in biochemistry from VT in 2012, and her bachelor of science in biology from

Christopher Newport University.

SENIOR FRONT



Kingery

Richfield Living, a senior living and rehabilitation company, has announced the appointment of Rev. **Gary Kingery** as Senior Chaplain. Kingery is a graduate of Brown Theological Seminary at Fredericksburg Bible College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology and an Associate of Arts degree in Business Administration



from National Business College. He joined Richfield Living in 2014.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Griffith

Roanoke County Fire and Rescue has named **Travis Griffith** as the new Fire & Rescue Chief after a nationwide recruitment process. Griffith had been Deputy Chief of

Operations for Roanoke County Fire & Rescue. He succeeds the retired Steve Simon and began his service with the County in 2002 as a Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician. Before that Griffith played football while attending UVA.

NON-PROFIT FRONT

DePaul Community Resources in Roanoke has promoted **Kate Means** to Managing Director for Strategic Projects, where she will help DePaul tackle the systemic issues keeping thousands of children in Virginia's

foster care system on waiting lists. More than 13,000 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities on waiting lists—sometimes for ten or more years—for access to the critical services they need today.

Amy M. Morgan is the new Operations Director for Mill Mountain Zoo, responsible for the management of daily zoo operations including finance, guest services, education, and planning. Morgan previously served as Vice President of Programs at Feeding Southwest Virginia. She has more than 13 years' experience in

executive management for non-profit and government organizations in the Roanoke Valley. Mill Mountain Zoo has also welcomed Jessie Coffman as Development Director, responsible for developing fundraising goals and strategies, donor development, managing sponsorship programs, and media and public relations. Coffman is the first person to hold this position in the nearly 70-year history of Mill Mountain Zoo. She most recently served as Director of Philanthropy for United Way of Roanoke Valley.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

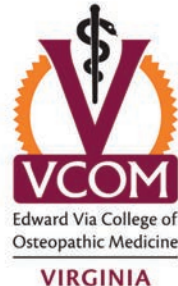
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GREEN GOALS

Keeping sustainability
a priority beyond
Earth Month



Just over 50 years ago, U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson created the very first Earth Day. Every April since, we're inspired to be more conscious of how our actions as individuals and companies impact our planet.

At Cox, our goal isn't just to reduce our impact on the environment, but to encourage others to do the same. So, here are some ways to ensure sustainability stays top of mind long after April.

Waste reduction

Recycling is one of the easiest ways to reduce our carbon footprint. Unfortunately, the EPA estimates Americans only recycle about 30% of their trash. By partnering with Roanoke County, we're proud to serve as a drop-off location offering several recycling trailers at our Fallowater Lane facility. Through this, and our own company-wide recycling initiative, we're helping our community reduce the number of harmful items sent to landfills.

Encourage volunteering

From hiking McAfee Knob to biking Mill Mountain, the Valley is an awesome destination for outdoor recreation. But the trails and rivers don't maintain themselves. Encourage your employees to get out and make a difference in our community. Cox employees are given 16 hours of paid time off to volunteer and we've had a great time utilizing river clean-up as team building activities.

Update your goals

Sustainability is an increasingly important value to customers. But, having sustainability goals alone isn't enough. As businesses, we need to be agile enough to update our goals when situations change. Recognizing that climate change is constantly evolving, we recently accelerated our goal to be carbon and water neutral from 2044 to 2034. This 10-year difference seems small but it really means our total greenhouse gas emissions will be substantially reduced sooner and our planet all the better for it.



Jeff Merritt is Vice President of Roanoke Operations for Cox Virginia. As the executive sponsor of the regional Cox Conserves Council, he advises employee volunteers advocating for positive environmental change. He holds a Master of Natural Resources degree in Sustainability from Virginia Tech.

To learn more about Cox's conservation efforts, visit coxenterprises.com/cox-conserves.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Valarie Angle is the owner & director of The WellNest Roanoke, downtown Roanoke's holistic hub where dozens of wellness practitioners serve the community through services, classes, and special events. Valarie earned an Educational Specialist graduate degree from Virginia Tech; a master's in liberal studies from Hollins University; and undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Central Florida. She and her partner, Jonathan, are passionate about growing a wellness-focused community. Contact her at [connect@thewellnestroanoke.com]

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Mike Dame is the vice president of marketing and communications at Carilion Clinic. A graduate of the University of Florida, he spent nearly a decade as a sportswriter for the Orlando Sentinel before transitioning to a career in digital communications that landed him at Virginia Tech in 2005; he joined Carilion in 2008. Mike lives in Roanoke with his wife Valeria and enjoys golf, guitar, spending time with friends and cheering on his beloved Florida Gators.

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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, Matthew and their son Ira.

Rob Ruthenberg grew up most of his life in Roanoke Virginia. He has been a TV, radio personality, live event producer, writer and comedian for almost 30 years. [robruthenberg@gmail.com]

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



You should use the Socratic method of asking questions. — Page 14

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Sometimes, students receive their associate degrees before they receive their high school diplomas. — Page 9

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ROA hires consultants to help with search

The **Roanoke Regional Airport Commission** has approved a one-year contract with Paslay Management Group to provide consultant services in an advisory capacity during its search for a new Airport Executive Director. The Texas-based professional management firm specializes in aviation development to partner with airport executive teams on executive search processes, air service development strategies and operational programs. The agreement was entered into effective February 1 for 12 months. David Jeavons will continue as Interim Executive Director at Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, after the departure of Timothy Bradshaw late last year. In March the Commission contracted with Korn Ferry to lead the search process for the position of Executive Director. The Commission anticipates interviews to begin by late spring.

Kudos for Pinnacle

Pinnacle Financial Partners, which has a branch in downtown Roanoke, brought home 27 Greenwich Excellence and Greenwich Best Brand Awards for 2020. Only one bank in the nation won more. These awards are national and regional honors earned by banks who have measurably distinctive brands and service quality. Greenwich Best Brand Awards are based on interviews with more than 23,000 small business

and middle market business leaders about experiences with their bank. Pinnacle Financial Partners offers banking, investment, trust, mortgage and insurance products and services designed for businesses.

Return of Ironman

Ironman Group CEO Andy Messick released a statement on video in February, concerning the status of the triathlon series returning to live events this spring – including the 70.3-mile swim, bike and run planned for the Roanoke Valley on June 6. That event was expected to draw around 2500 participants and to be a major economic impact boost. “Our athletes have made it very clear that many are eager to return to racing – we are too ... as soon as we can, with safety at our core,” said Messick, adding that the state of the pandemic and the willingness of localities like those in the Roanoke Valley to host the event in June will be determining factors when they make the call. Messick also noted that Ironman “Tri’s” elsewhere have been moved to the Fall.

Creative diversity the goal

The Virginia Western Educational Foundation has launched new annual and endowed scholarships, intended to create greater diversity in the communications and advertising fields. The Virginia Western BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color)

Annual Scholarship will be available to students in communications and advertising fields in Fall Semester 2021 at Virginia Western Community College. “We acknowledge that this scholarship is not a solution and is only one small step in welcoming new voices and new talent to our industry,” said Tony Pearman, President and CEO of Access Advertising & Public Relations, which launched the fund with a lead gift.

The future is ... robots

A growing number of businesses use manufacturing robots to automate repetitive tasks, reduce errors, and enable their employees to focus on innovation and efficiency, causing the entire sector’s impressive growth. Now according to data presented by AksjeBloggen.com, the global market value of conventional and advanced robotics in the manufacturing industry is expected to continue rising and hit \$18.6 billion in 2021, a 40% increase in three years. The robotics market value jumped by \$5.4B in just the last three years states London-based AksjeBloggen.

More on Moog move

Governor Ralph Northam announced in February that **Moog Inc.**, a designer and manufacturer of high-performance motion control products and solutions, will invest \$10.7 million to transfer existing jobs and

equipment from one of its Blacksburg facilities to a larger building in the Falling Branch Corporate Park in Montgomery County. The company will have an additional 80,000 square feet at its new operation in Christiansburg (the former Dish Network service center) and will create 75 new jobs. “Moog is an important partner in the Commonwealth, and it is exciting to see the company grow its capabilities in Montgomery County,” said Governor Northam. “Virginia’s aerospace sector is strong, and Moog is a valuable contributor to our leadership position in this sector,” said Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball.

Roanoke Colleges plans for new Science Center

Several **Roanoke College** alumni and their spouses have stepped up with donations for the school’s planned Science Center. John and Betty Shannon have donated \$3.3 million. Morris and Sheila Cregger and Dr. Paul and Constance Capp have each donated \$1 million to the Science Center project. The ongoing Science Center campaign, Beyond the Rise, is nearing \$20 million raised from all donors. “It’s a timely endeavor,” said John “Jack” Shannon ‘52, a former member of the Roanoke College Board of Trustees. “It’s something the College has needed, and the time has come to go forward with it.” The new Center will be built for the “next century of discovery” with state-

of-the-art teaching and learning spaces. The plan calls for complete renovations of the half-century-old Life Sciences and Trexler buildings, removal of Massengill Auditorium and construction of a new state-of-the-art central building in its place that connects Life Sciences and Trexler into one integrated facility.

Finally open

Four years in the making, from conception to construction, from equipment delays to unique employee training, **Chris's Coffee & Custard** on 9th Street Southeast Roanoke on the edge of the industrial park, is

now open. As we wrote about previously, Chris's Coffee & Custard employs mostly young people with special challenges in their lives. Co-Owner Beth Woodrum on the long road to this point and the reward: "it's been a long process, but just to see our young adults working and training – they're so excited about having a job. We're really blessed." Woodrum is hoping to expand her LoveAble Services training program in the future to help staff other local businesses. One participant was her son Chris – the coffee shop's namesake, who has Down Syndrome. Construction delays associated with renovating

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 A contact / source must be provided. Inclusions are not guaranteed and all submissions are subject to editing.

an older building and then waiting on custard machines to arrive delayed the planned opening last Fall.

APCO looks to go greener

Appalachian Power has issued a Request for Proposals (RFPs) for up to 300 megawatts (MWs)

of solar and/or wind generation resources. The request for bids is the first in a series of RFPs Appalachian Power will issue this year to comply with provisions of the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA). Appalachian Power must meet annual targets as it works toward 100 percent carbon-free energy in its Virginia service territory



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by 2050. Proposals with an operational date of no later than Dec. 15, 2024 will be considered. Bidders may also include proposals with an option for a battery storage system. "This is Appalachian Power's largest request yet in a single year for renewable energy bids," said Chris Beam, Appalachian Power president and chief operating officer.

Ferrum, law school in sync

Ferrum College and Appalachian School of Law have entered into an agreement which will allow Ferrum students to enroll in ASL after 3 years of undergraduate study at Ferrum College. "Our partnership with Appalachian School of Law is a natural fit," said Ferrum College President David Johns. "ASL's mission ... builds upon the work we do."

Pandemic doesn't slow down the SVTP much

The **Shenandoah Valley Tourism Partnership** (SVTP) has announced

the opening of 70 new tourism businesses and attractions in the Shenandoah Valley. Within the SVTP footprint, a total of 20 new restaurants, 25 new attractions, and 25 accommodations have opened or expanded, with more on the way. The recently updated SVTP website (shenandoahvalley.org) highlights the new tourism businesses and attractions in a What's New section. "Despite the challenges to tourism world-wide due to COVID-19, there are signs of optimism in the Shenandoah Valley," states Jean Clark, SVTP President, "tourism businesses continue to open and serve tourists in the region."

Honors for local creative firm

5Points Creative was awarded a Gold ADDY and Best of Digital Award for the Gregory Pallet and Lumber website, as well as a Silver ADDY Award for the 5Points Creative "That's Our Normal" video campaign. AAF Roanoke hosted

the Virtual Awards Gala on February 25. The 2021 competition included 95 professional entries from 23 agencies, firms, in-house creatives, and individuals, as well as 67 student entries from regional universities and colleges.

The devil in the details

Governor Ralph Northam's office said shortly after Congress passed and President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan, they were reading the fine print of the \$1.9 federal COVID-19 relief bill. Then they planned to meet with legislative leaders to start talks about how the state's portion of the aid would be best spent. Secretary of Finance Aubrey Lane said **Virginia** is expecting about 6.8 billion dollars in state and local allocations on top of other grant funding in the bill. Layne also said the governor will likely have to call them back to Richmond sometime this year for a special session on allocating the new money. In addition to state and local relief,

the bill provides \$2.1 billion for public schools in Virginia. Funds could be used to purchase PPE, reduce class sizes, repair ventilation systems, hire support staff, and implement other CDC-recommended public health measures. School districts could also use funds to help students who have fallen behind catch up and get back on track. The bill also provides \$845 million for Virginia's colleges and universities.

Blacksburg software company acquired

A United Kingdom based compliance management software company is planning to create dozens of jobs in Blacksburg over the next few years. **Ideagen, Ptc** has acquired Blacksburg's **Qualtrax** for its US headquarters, in a move to establish a larger presence in the United States. Amy Ankrum, the President and CEO for Qualtrax (she was featured in VBF's December 2020 leadership issue) will stay on as a senior VP for Ideagen. Qualtrax

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now employs about 40 people who help companies obtain their goals, while making sure they are meeting critical industry regulations.

Lofty goal reached

The **Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia** more than met its target during the 2021 Roanoke Valley Gives Day on March 15, a 24-hour online effort to raise funds for over 140 local nonprofits, large and small. The

one-day total finished at \$1,148,668 - exceeding the \$900,000 goal and a more than a 60% increase over 2020., which took place just as the COVID pandemic arrived. Over 4,500 unique donors contributed from the communities served by the Foundation and from elsewhere this year. "We want to thank all of our Roanoke Valley Gives sponsors, especially our Platinum Sponsor, Davis H. Elliot, who play such a critical role in making the online giving day possible," said

Kaitlyn Van Buskirk, the Foundation's Grants Associate, who coordinated the day. Sponsors of the event donate challenge grants and bonuses tied to specific hours and which non-profits raise the most money in that time frame.

New Ramp Cohort underway

The Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program in downtown Roanoke, or **RAMP**, has selected its first cohort focused

specifically on Life Sciences. An intensive 12-week program got underway in mid-March. Much of it will be virtual. Cohort members include Tiny Cargo, a spinoff from the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute on the Virginia Tech Carilion campus in Roanoke and the lab of Dr. Rob Gourdie. The other three life science startups are based in northern Virginia and Charlottesville.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

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

2021 SEASON LINEUP

so far....

- 5/8 Jackyl
- 5/14 Metallica Tribute: Battery
- 5/15 Jamey Johnson
- 5/28 Eagles Tribute: EagleMania
- 5/29 Kip Moore
- 6/5 Aaron Lewis
- 6/11 Van Halen Tribute: Completely Unchained
- 6/12 Ashley McBryde
- 6/18 Michael Ray
- 6/19 The Cadillac Three
- 6/25 Fleetwood Mac Tribute: Rumours
- 6/26 Blues Traveler/JJ Grey & Mofro
- 7/9 Steely Dan Tribute: The Royal Scam
- 7/23 AC/DC Tribute: Shoot to Thrill
- 7/30 Colt Ford
- 8/8 Lee Brice
- 8/13 Absolute Queen
- 8/20 Marshall Tucker Band
- 9/9 Blackberry Smoke
- 9/18 Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
- 9/24 Prince Tribute: Dean Ford & the Beautiful Ones



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Valley Business FRONT **BURCHETT HOMES TEAM** Bringing Families Home



Submitted Photos

New Leadership at The Harvester

By Rob Ruthenberg

“I absolutely want to make sure that the town feels like this is their venue,” says Micah Davidson.



The Harvester Performance Center in Rocky Mount had its grand opening (The Indigo Girls) in 2014. Over 1000 shows later CEO and Assistant Town Manager Matt Hankins stepped down in 2020. The town owns the Harvester, which they redeveloped from the former tractor showroom. Then in January, General Manager Gary Jackson announced his retirement. Enter Roanoke born native Micah Davidson, the president of Midwood Entertainment in Charlotte, a firm that specializes in artist management, venue

operations, and produces multiple festivals in the eastern US. Davidson comes to the Harvester as the newly minted Director of Operations with more than 20 years of experience in the field.

“Even in high school I was always drawn to music, and I started writing and playing in bands. Then my father introduced me to Skip Brown.” Brown is a long-time recording studio proprietor and concert promoter (Festival in the Park for starters) here in



Micah Davidson



Old Crow Medicine Show in Bristol

Roanoke. In his teens, Davidson worked at a venue in Charlotte called The Neighborhood Theater, learning about operations from ticket sales to security, production and sometimes just cleaning the place up. "Any aspect on how to operate a venue, I wanted to learn."

A few years later Davidson (now 42) started his own company, the Carolina Live Music Society, a non-profit designed to help build a better music scene in Charlotte. "Every show could be more successful if everyone is not having a bluegrass band on the same night." He then became the General Manager of the Double Door Inn where he handled "everything" for about six years. During his time at the Double Door, he was approached by a talent agency and he soon went to work handling territories in the deep south. Davidson began producing music events at some point and in 2015 he started Midwood Entertainment, which now handles over 30-plus festivals a year.

Davidson says he is not out to make huge

changes in his new role as Director of Operations at the Harvester. Veteran Gary Jackson had been promoting world class entertainment since the 1960s and Davidson knows he has big shoes to fill. "First and foremost, I want to make sure that I am continuing Gary's legacy." As for the Harvester Performance Center in 2021, Davidson says "right now ... we are likely not going to be doing any indoor shows of any kind at least through August, if not into early fall." Currently he is working on site layouts that meet the latest COVID safety guidelines, while also dealing with the budget and marketing plans for any upcoming outdoor shows.

There's also still the reluctance of the performers: "I don't know any artist at the moment that wants to do anything inside. The larger the artist, they are just taking another year off, especially the ones that can afford it." For now, artists are likely to be more willing to do outdoor shows at first. Another important focus for Davidson is outreach to the community around the Harvester in Rocky Mount and Franklin

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County, and beyond. "Communication with patrons is something that is not only important throughout a normal year - it's even more important right now."

Davidson wants the Harvester's role on a local level to expand, while maintaining a reputation for high caliber, intimate shows. He wants feedback: "what are the bands that you loved in the past that came through the [Harvester]? What bands would you love to see who have never played this venue? How can we ... be more aware of community events and be more involved; how can we prop up the events already going on in town

that the Harvester has not been involved with in the past?"

In late February, Micah Davidson was still doing his "on-boarding," working on the administrative part of his position. Then he planned to dive right in, trying to get a better grasp on what the region wants music-wise. "At the end of the day this is their community. I absolutely want to make sure that the town feels like this is their venue and I want them to have an opportunity to have a say - and feel like they are part of what happens here." 



ADVERTISER INDEX

Ameriprise Financial / Christine Smith.....	53	Fraim Crawley & Co CPA	18
Anytime Fitness.....	60	Freedom First Credit Union	2
Aztec Rental	61	Garland Properties / Crafteria.....	55
Bank of Botetourt.....	48-49	Gentry Locke	5
Brown Hound Tree Service.....	53	Richfield Living	37
Carilion Clinic.....	BC	Roanoke Higher Education Center ...	25
Citizens	19	Salem Health & Rehabilitation Center	3
Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia	31	Simmons Landscaping	53
Cox	51	Sponsor Hounds / Dr. Pepper Park....	57
Davis H. Elliot Company	53	VCOM	50
Entre Computer Center.....	56	Virginia Business Systems	63
		Waldvogel Commercial Properties ...	17

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“ ”
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— Page 30

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