

Valley Business FRONT

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Downtown Retail:
Roanoke & The 'Burgs

Salem's RM Johnson &
Sons Jewelers

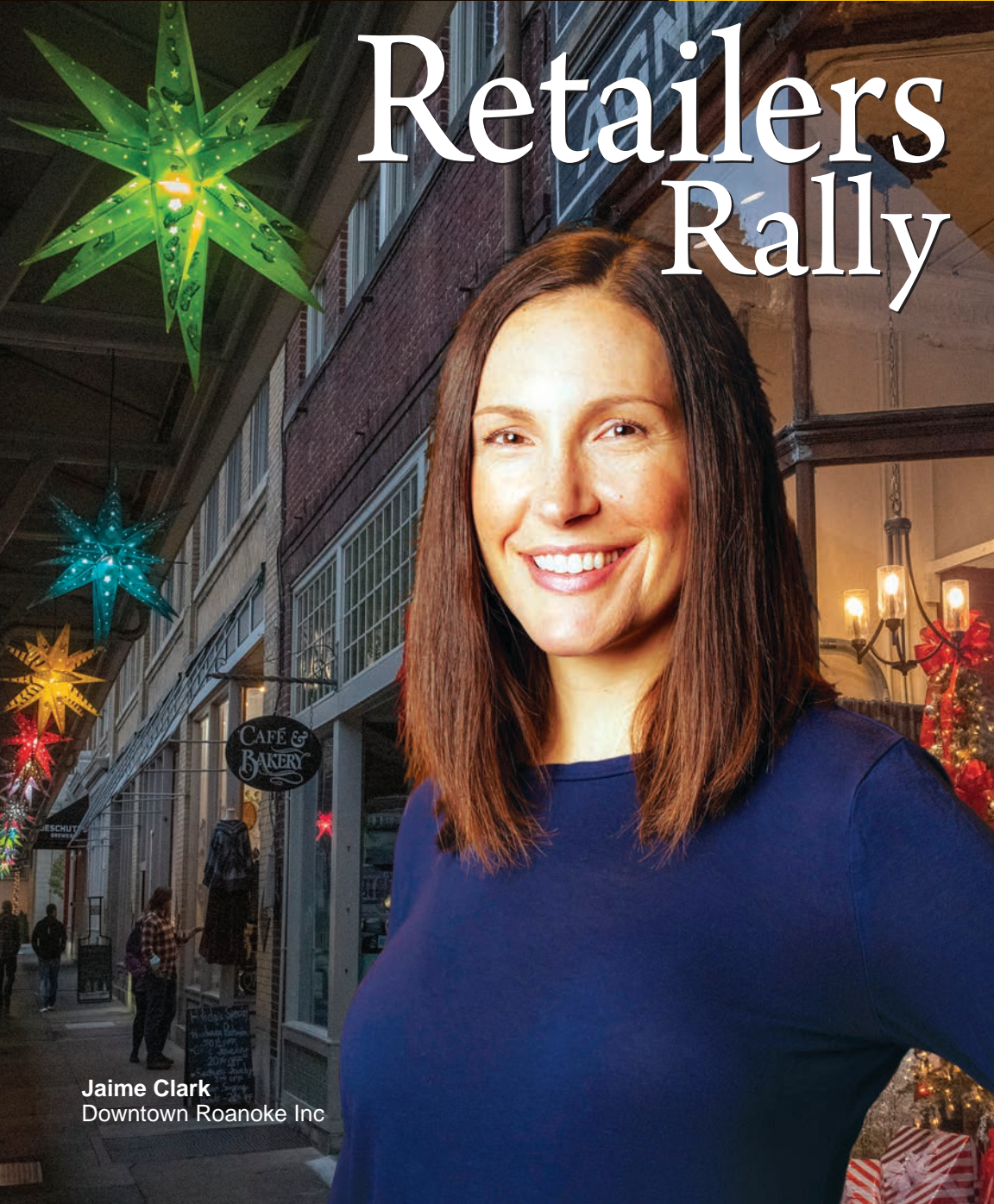
Monique Duncan's Dark Art

New Hope Girls

LewisGale Medical Center's
Community Report

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Retailers Rally



Jaime Clark
Downtown Roanoke Inc



Keith Grindstaff, *VP Commercial Lending*

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

The year ends for many on a somewhat mixed note, with pandemic restrictions largely lifted and more people getting out. On the flip side though product shortages, a smaller than necessary workforce, transportation backlogs, sharply spiking prices – at the gas pump and in the grocery stores – is a bit of a buzzkill. The COVID pandemic really turned a lot of things upside down – not just when it comes to health, but also in the business world where, let's face it, we were not prepared for the impact of such a national emergency and a partial shutdown – or for the surge in consumer demand once its was GO TIME. How do we do better next time?

And some of those who sat out much of last year - with workplaces shut down or limited staff-wise, supported by federal payments, or those who got to work at home and liked it? Some of them are not coming back or are quitting jobs in record numbers, looking for better pay and working conditions, or figuring (especially women by the numbers here) that they would rather stay home with their young children for now, like they did much of last year. But we all move forward and hope for better. Inside this issue we offer a few peeks at what people are saying about business conditions, starting with the always-important Christmas retail shopping season. Happy Reading – and Happy Holidays!



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor



all of us at the FRONT
wish each of you a joyous
holiday season and a
most prosperous new year

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Collaboration shapes City's economic development

By Nanette Levin



“ I will forgive him that Bruins shirt as a NY Islanders fan.— Page 42

FRONTcover photo composite includes downtown holiday décor background by Don Petersen, Downtown Roanoke, Inc; and Jaime Clark by Amy Pearman.

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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 line between work and personal time has become blurred. — Page 14

“When I look around our beautiful downtown is when I feel the most pride.

— Page 23

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

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Hampton Inn Downtown

Collaboration shapes City's economic development

By Nanette Levin

**“There’s a sense of energy, optimism in the community,”
notes Roanoke’s Director of Economic Development**

Marc Nelson started his career in government by way of a fellowship position for newly minted MPAs (Master of Public Administration)

in Savannah, Georgia. He learned how government works with the many roles he was introduced to during that time. Chris



Courtesy photos



Marc Nelson, Roanoke City
Economic Development

Morrill (the former Roanoke City Manager), who was his boss in Savannah, Georgia recruited him to Roanoke. Today, Nelson is focusing on building cooperative initiatives as Roanoke City's Economic Development Director.

He came here in 2011, an opportune time as Roanoke was starting to reimagine selling strategies for surplus buildings. Its independent city status means the jurisdiction has its own taxing powers, separate from the county. This made it possible to create incentive packages for developers.

In exchange for a reduced selling price, buildings like the old YMCA on Church and the Transportation Museum in Wasena, were transformed with local investment stipulations. "It's better to have a developer spend their money than city money, and this puts it (these properties) back on the tax rolls," says Nelson.



The Green Goat - before and after

He notes it was a preferred alternative to tearing down the buildings for parking lots.

This same philosophy was applied to a 22-acre parcel near Carilion in 2012. The developer installed utilities and public streets, costs that were reimbursed by the city. That developed area now sits at the south end of the Innovation Corridor.

Imagining an Innovation Corridor

The idea of an area designated for high tech growth percolated in 2015. Nelson's recruiter, Morrill, began convening a group of area innovation leaders. This included the VT Carilion Research Institute (now the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC), Carilion Clinic, the VT Carilion School of Medicine, Virginia Western Community College, and others. At the time, the corridor was envisioned as being on Jefferson Street, starting at the Carilion campus and extending through downtown.

"Bob Cowell noticed much of the discussion was around the physical place where this work was being done, but he changed it to make it around the general conversation of innovation itself," says Nelson. "What if we had the idea of a Roanoke Innovates concept? That's been the concept moving forward."

Those talks became the seed of the RAMP accelerator initiative. "We worked with Carilion to swap properties," Nelson explains. The City secured a \$600k grant through the State's Revitalization Fund to outfit the building on South Jefferson that once housed a hospital for African Americans in the era of segregation.

RAMP is in its fifth year now, fostering two annual cohorts. It serves as "an investment that allowed us



Jaime Clark, Downtown Roanoke Inc

HOPING FOR HOLIDAYS WINDFALL

While downtown retailers are still challenged with staffing issues, they're excited about the holiday shopping season, says Jaime Clark, Vice President of Marketing and Communications for Downtown Roanoke, Inc. and our FRONTcover model.

The Dickens of a Christmas event will be back to its usual after last year's pandemic adjustments. "That's always a hugely popular event," says Clark. It takes place the first three Fridays in December. Clark estimates attendance at 30,000+. "Everything is free except for the carriage rides," she notes. "The majority of businesses extend their hours to capture people who come down and shop for the holidays. It gives us an opportunity to show off what we have down here in hopes to get people to return again."

Downtown Roanoke, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)6 that contracts with the City of Roanoke to manage the downtown district. Over the past year they've instituted several initiatives to help foster small business survival and success during challenging times. This has included providing funding and grant access as well as organizing two Downtown Roanoke gift card promotions that doubled purchasers' money spent on local stores.

"After the holidays, things inherently slow down because it's colder and people tend not to go out as much," states Clark. Most downtown businesses depend on holiday traffic to get them through winter months until the St. Patrick's Day celebration, she explains. "When you shop at a local store the money stays local," Clark says. "The impact for the businesses and the community is vast."

"With small businesses, you can walk in, get what you want and take it home with you. You don't have to wait for it to ship - or not ship," says Clark. She encourages residents to "shop small" when they can and to remember - it's the local small businesses that also get asked for fundraiser donations.

—Nanette Levin

to have a northern anchor at the top of that corridor," explains Nelson. The VT-Carilion Life Sciences campus is on the south end. "We have a lot of great partners who are doing a lot of great things, and that's really helped," Nelson states. The next step is to create a place where young companies can go for wet lab and office space needs. (It's an initiative also targeted by executive director Dr. Friedlander at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute.)

Settling in Roanoke

Originally from Long Island, NY, Nelson attended college at the University of North Carolina, where he met his wife, Sunny. She's the current Director for Marketing and Human Resources at the Taubman Museum.

His undergraduate degree is in history. His early sights



Locker Room Lofts - before and after

were set on being an attorney. "The most sage advice I got was from the law school dean – if you don't like this now, you're not going to like it 30 years from now." He quit after a year of study. After some time in a variety of jobs, he returned to graduate school at his alma mater for an MPA.

The couple wanted to move closer to her family as they planned for children. Their daughter was born in 2013. Nelson moved from development services to economic development, where he was a manager for about two years. He beat out 39 other candidates to assume his new role on August 1, to become the new Economic Development Director for the City of Roanoke.

Envisioning a regionally cooperative economic future

The City is currently working with a \$500k Build Back Better federal EDA grant to identify economic development projects and partners. This was spearheaded by Verge (the RAMP, Valleys Innovation Council and Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council consortium) and includes Roanoke County and other groups. A collaborative, including RBTC, Verge, Carilion Clinic, VT Foundation, and VT Corporate Research Center are working together to secure additional State funds that should be awarded in January to spur growth of a larger innovation community.

"The City can step in and do some of that heavy lifting and partner with these organizations to request funds, grants, acquire properties," says Nelson. Because of these initiatives and the strides that have been made over the past decade or so, Nelson believes the state of the economy is strong.

He explains efforts have been made to build up tourism



What if we had the idea of a Roanoke Innovates concept?




RAMP Building

and retail fronts during the pandemic. The manufacturing sector was largely unaffected. Businesses in the hospitality industry are adjusting to keep their best people with strategies that include being closed on certain days. "Developers are starting to express interest in building hotels," he states. Nelson notes formerly boarded up shops are now full in Wasena and healthcare, life sciences, and industrial businesses as also strong growth areas.

The City has big plans as well: "we're going to be hiring an innovation manager very soon," Nelson says. This person will focus on innovation and entrepreneurship. RFPs are out to find a firm to create a strategic plan for the economic development department. Emphasis will be put on regional activities.

"There's a sense of energy, optimism in the community," Nelson states. "When you look at a lot of these organizations, many of them have new leaders. People did a great job before, but when they retired there was an opportunity to bring new energy in," he explains. Nelson cites RBTC (Erin Burcham), Roanoke Allegheny Regional Commission (Jeremy Holmes), Roanoke Regional Partnership (John Hull), the Corporate Research Center (Brent Malone), and VT Foundation (Elizabeth McClanahan) as some of the key organizations with recent leadership transitions.

"In a lot of these cases the hires were internal, but just in general there's a new sense of collaboration," says Marc Nelson. 

“”
There is a sense of energy, optimism in the community.



Off-hours email

As a business owner who wears many hats and often travels, my “normal” hours are anything but normal. I sometimes do work on weekends, in the evening, or early in the morning (my most productive time!) During these odd hours, I usually catch up on my email correspondence.

It’s my choice to review and send email during non-traditional working hours, but I recognized long ago that my team members may feel the need to respond during their off-hour time. I have explicitly told my team members that I will never expect them to respond to any of my emails during nights and weekends, and that if something is urgent, I’ll call or text instead.

With more people working from home due to COVID, and with technology now making it easier to connect us to the office, the line between work and personal time has become more blurred. This sometimes contributes to fatigue and burnout.


In a Wall Street Journal article by Laura Giurge and Vanessa Bohns, the authors describe something they call the “email urgency bias”. In research conducted by the authors, the receivers of non-urgent work email sent outside normal working hours consistently overestimated the need for a fast response. Additionally, the receivers reported feeling more stress from these emails than the senders expected them to feel.

If you are someone who sends emails to colleagues and team members during these times, and you do not recognize the impact on the receivers, then you may be complicit in creating an “always on” work culture.

Fortunately (for me!), the researchers are not recommending that emails stop being sent outside normal working hours. One of the benefits of technology is that it gives us the flexibility to be more productive with our time. However, email senders should be more explicit on the urgency (or lack thereof) of their email requests.

If you sometimes like to work and send emails during off-hours, explicitly tell the receiver that this email is not urgent and that you do not expect a response outside normal working hours. According to the research, that explicit message helps reduce the email urgency bias. You can also schedule a specific date and time for your email to be delivered so that the receiver doesn’t get the email until working hours.

If you are the email receiver and you find yourself needlessly checking your email during off-hours, shut off your email notifications. You can also put on an auto-reply to tell senders that you won’t be reviewing their email until working hours.

Setting email boundaries will help you and your team enjoy your off-hours. 

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Setting email boundaries will help owners/ employees to enjoy the off-hours more.

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
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Phased retirement is worth considering

You know what they say about hindsight. If you haven't considered easing into retirement, you might be surprised at the possibilities.

Employer sponsored

One important thing to consider if you're in a full-time salaried position seeking reduced hours is healthcare costs. Many employers will continue to provide insurance coverage for part-time work. Ask about the minimum work week required to maintain this benefit.

Health insurance is expensive. Don't neglect to consider this as you calculate income loss. According to a Nicole Karlis, 2020 Salon article citing a RAND study: "U.S. households in the bottom fifth of income cohorts pay an average of 33.9 percent of their income toward health care. For households in the middle, between 19.8 percent and 23.3 percent of their income goes toward health care." That adds up fast. Of course, if you're already 65, Medicare makes this a moot point.

Business owners


Succession planning provides opportunities to leave a legacy and enjoy early retirement. You can never start getting your business prepared for a transfer of ownership too soon. Financials are one of the most important focus areas. Keeping accurate records and an asset mentality can mean the difference between finding a buyer and closing your doors.

Also, as you develop a strategy for creating a valuable entity, make sure you're not the primary business asset. If you're not delegating effectively or are banking on good will, it'll be tough to find a new owner. Design and document systems that are easy for someone else to implement.

New career options

There's a big difference in Social Security benefits if you opt to start collecting at 62 vs. 70. Extending your income earning years can make a lot of sense. For those born after 1959, 100% of Social Security benefits kick in at age 67, but benefits jump to 124% if you wait to start collecting until you're 70.

You might be tired of the career path you're on, but retirement isn't your only out. Perhaps there's something you always wanted to try? Why not shift careers into a part-time position? Another option is to start your own business. It's work, sure, but you can design a business to accommodate lifestyle priorities.

Don't think it's all or nothing. There are a lot of reasons phasing into retirement makes a lot of sense. Why not consider the possibilities? 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
The uncertainty of the past two years has many people rethinking work plans. Now's as good a time as any to prepare for the unexpected.

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



Submitted

Sharon Scott

Business in the ‘Burgs

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Our society has become one which expects immediate gratification. Sharon Scott, the now-former President and CEO of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, said, “It is time to get back to more measured expectations.” That is particularly true for the holidays in 2021.

Sharon Scott, (now succeeded by Steve Baffuto, see note in the CareerFRONT this issue) said last month that the retail environment in the New River Valley mirrors those throughout the country, with businesses desperate for workers and dealing with supply chain disruptions.

Stacy Martin, owner of several businesses in Uptown Christiansburg (formerly the New River Valley Mall), said conditions

have been “sluggish” since August or September. He opened La Bella Donna Cherie women’s boutique to diversify his offerings, which also include Adventure Hobbies & Toys and Tea & Totally Gifts.

In downtown Blacksburg, Nancyne Willoughby, owner of Fringe Benefit, said her business is improving. “It’s a lot better than this time last year,” she said. “People are getting back out again.” But

it's still a "roller coaster," she continued, with business dependent on everything from weather to COVID numbers.

The supply chain issue plays a key role in this holiday season's retail hopes. "Fulfillment of orders is essential to customer expectations. How expectations are managed can make or break customer relationships," said Scott.

Unfortunately, Martin said, "Toys are in short supply. We are not going to be able to have the stock we want." He noted that three toy companies will take no more orders for the rest of the year. Similarly, the gift industry, with for example imported tea, is suffering.

Though Martin and Willoughby said inventory has been slow arriving, both indicated that the clothing industry is doing better than some others. Willoughby said that the availability of items depends largely on where they are made, and fortunately many of her clothes are made in the USA. Martin said clothing is better off because it often travels via air instead of container ships, many of which are currently stuck off the coast on California. One thing also hurting the ability of businesses to receive their stock is the dearth of truck drivers.

Workforce shortages plague businesses. At Fringe Benefit, Willoughby has had a "help wanted" sign in the window since August and has only hired two people. Staffing is always hard in a college town because of its transient nature, she said but now is especially difficult because there are not a lot of people looking for

jobs. Willoughby cannot get back to her regular business hours until that abates. "People don't want to come back to the lousy pay in retail," Willoughby said. Martin concurred. He wishes he could pay workers more but cannot because of depressed sales. And so the vicious cycle continues.

Leo Priddy, Marketing and Communications Director for the Chamber said that leaders need to be flexible with their teams to bring people back into the workforce. Work-life balance is key, especially for the younger generation. Internet buying is also impacting local businesses. According to Adobe Analytics, Scott said, 2021's online buying is projected to be an 11% increase over 2020's. She emphasized the importance of educating residents about our "economic footprint" – that if we are not purchasing from local businesses they will close.

Buying decisions impact what our tax dollars support, such as schools, added Scott. If there was just a 10% increase in buying locally, the county could hire 13-17 new teachers, purchase three-quarters of a fully loaded fire truck, or purchase for the sheriff's department drone equipment to locate missing persons. "Maybe you don't get the coolest new toy, but you can get an experience locally, or buy at a local store and help your neighbor," said Scott.

Martin said he understands people purchasing unique items online but buying toilet paper off the Internet is "voting against your community." Because so much of localities' budgets



Fringe Benefits



Submitted photos

Jennifer Poff Cooper



come from business taxes, any decrease in those will likely mean an increase in individual taxes, he said.

To encourage buying local, some businesses have banded together to create the NRV Homegrown Alliance, which encompasses eight counties and 425 businesses. There is a directory and a discount card, which is available for purchase from some retailers and online at www.nrvhomegrown.org.


The Chamber has similar programs. Priddy discussed a buy local campaign that includes challenges for the community to promote locally owned and operated businesses. One month, residents had the opportunity to win prizes by sharing on social media where and why they buy locally.

Willoughby said that last year people came out to buy local and she feels they will support local businesses again this year. "People really want to see the small guys survive," she said.

Priddy mentioned a pairing between Blacksburg High School marketing students and local businesses to help small businesses with marketing. Scott

said the student group (the American Marketing Association at Virginia Tech) created videos to be placed around the university and in collegiate residential communities, to remind students and their parents how much of a difference they make during their four years here.

Even during the pandemic, parents traveling to see their students filled hotels. And when students are here, there is more money circulating in the economy. "The community looks different," Scott said.

For the new year, she sees lingering questions about the economy, and feels retailers will be very careful in inventory selection so as not to overextend. Martin, also a financial planner, said there will not be a lot left on the shelves after the holidays, with no replenishment in sight until spring 2022. He also believes the country may already be heading toward recession. Willoughby though is hopeful that the downtown Blacksburg spring festivals will resume, and people will feel more confident. Sharon Scott concluded, "Businesses are working hard to serve local residents and the community. They have to hold on a little longer." 



Building a Better Future Through Affordability & Digital Equity

Jeff Merritt | Technology Advisor, Valley Business Front

The last year and a half made abundantly clear that access to the internet is foundational to navigating everyday life. We've learned that people, including kids, rely on the internet for services, education and social connection.

In fact, according to one survey, 70% of teachers assign homework that requires broadband access. This means students without an internet connection are often left behind. At Cox, our mission is to build a better future for the next generation, and part of that mission is ensuring that children have the tools they need to thrive. That's why we launched Connect2Compete, which offers steeply discounted internet service to low-income households with K-12 students, all the way back in 2013.

Cox is deeply invested in communities throughout Virginia, including the Star City, and has committed millions of dollars to building out our network in the commonwealth. Cox and other internet providers in Virginia are eager to support the state's goal of universal coverage by 2024. Already, 92% of Virginians have access to a broadband connection, offering speeds of at least 25 Mbps. Many Cox customers have speeds far exceeding this benchmark, up to 1 Gigabit per second.

However, we know that access to broadband infrastructure isn't the only barrier to connecting Virginians. Addressing affordability concerns is also an important component of promoting digital equity statewide. I'm proud to say that since Connect2Compete launched eight years ago, Cox has connected nearly 88,000 people across Virginia. During the pandemic, we made it easier for customers to get Connect2Compete, and provided increases in speed to these customers. In Roanoke alone, we connected nearly 1,000 new households via Connect2Compete in 2020.

With the goal to support student success during a turbulent time, Cox also partnered with Roanoke City Public Schools to offset connection costs. We know that efforts to close the digital divide have tangible benefits for students. More than 90% of parents in Connect2Compete households agreed that having low-cost internet service at home gives their children a "leg up." Even as children return to in-person learning, these connections will remain important.

Cox is always searching for creative ways to expand our network and ensure that our friends and neighbors can benefit from our services. Federal programs such as the Emergency Broadband Benefit enabled partnerships that made internet service affordable for more Virginians during the pandemic and beyond. These federal partnerships supplement consistent efforts by Cox to facilitate public-private collaborations on the state and local levels.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 made an historic investment into broadband expansion, and we're eager to continue collaborating with elected officials and localities to bring broadband to even more communities. We stand ready to help residents overcome any obstacles to broadband adoption, so everyone has access to the opportunities presented by a reliable internet connection. Working together, we can ensure that Virginia remains one of the top states for business and build a better future for everyone. ★

Learn more about Cox's affordability efforts at www.cox.com/digitalequity.



Still a seller's market

I get asked all the time "How is the market, is it still as good as it was last year? Are there more homes available? Are the prices going down? Is the market going to crash?" Don't believe the hype of any negativity as 2021 brought the positivity in real estate, and will 2022? Read on my friend.

The best part of 2021 is not only did I sell more homes, but the market has stayed hot. Last year this time there were 5,676 homes sold in the valley and currently (as of mid-November) 5,738 is the number. The average sales price last year this time was \$266,346 and now it's up (and check out this number) by a big jump to \$293,672. Time on the market is about 25 days at the tail end of 2021 and was almost two weeks longer at the beginning of the year.

The best areas of the valley for selling homes in 2021 continues to be (as was last year) Roanoke County in first and rightfully so, it's the biggest at 1,382, Roanoke City is not far behind in 2nd place at 1,237 homes, 3rd place was Franklin County at 701, 4th place was Bedford County at 516, 5th was Botetourt County at 395, and Salem came in at 6th with 341 homes.

Some other great aspects of real estate in 2021 are that as home prices have risen, it allows you to have extra money in your pocket to invest or put towards purchasing your next home. We see no signs of the market slowing down and your equity going up in 2022 which it has this year. It's been a great time to sell and will continue to be.

The best part of selling in 2021? Every month. Seriously, if your home is priced right, in a desirable area, and in great condition, you could get it under contract any day, anytime. Now may be the perfect time to consider selling. Remember price moves it.

The best part too is that people want to live in the Roanoke Valley. It has a lot to offer with its beauty, mountains, and people. There is a lot to do here and a lot more homes to sell - and you will find one too. Stay positive and your chances will go up in 2022 and the years to come. As Dale Carnegie said, "Happiness doesn't depend on any external conditions, it's governed by our mental attitude." 📌

“The best part of 2021 is not only did I sell more homes, but the market has stayed hot.”

REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:
The Real Estate stats from 2021 don't lie says this award-winning Realtor.

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

Looking to 2021: what in the actual heck is the metaverse?

You probably saw it in the news ... Facebook announced its parent company was changing their name to "Meta." And in true Facebook fashion, it came equipped with creepy statements like "we are a company that builds technology to connect people, and the metaverse is the next frontier." (Cue sinister Dr. Evil music and your own sippy cup of Kool-Aid for the journey.)

The reality is, Facebook owns a lot of things ... Facebook, Instagram, your personal data(!) ... the list goes on. So at the core, it DOES make sense for them to rename the parent company, but it may leave you scratching your head and wondering what the heck this "metaverse" actually is. My opinion? It's the future of social and digital media and something that your business should be prepared to capitalize on to reach and grow your customer base.

I don't make this statement because I've done hours of research or have some sort of crystal ball, I just see what the giant companies with tons of MONEY are doing. Those companies are sinking money and resources into the metaverse. Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft ... you name it ... they have their hands in this. So I keep it simple ... go where the big money is going and figure out how to capitalize on it.

So what is the metaverse? Really, it's just a fancy buzzword for "virtual reality," but with a cool and scary twist ... we basically all live inside it. Have you seen the movie "Ready Player One?" If you haven't, then go watch it, because more and more I have the feeling the "fiction" of the story has a very eerie possibility of coming true. People will basically spend most of their waking hours living in virtual worlds.

And while it's scary at its extreme, think of the practical business applications. For example:

- A restaurant shows an entire table of food laid out to an interested diner before they visit
- A dog trainer gives hands on training to an animal 1,000 miles away
- A clothing designer lets you "try on" an outfit without ever leaving your house.

Pretty cool, huh? Is it also kinda terrifying to think about people "living" in a fake world? Yup! But all we can really do as small business owners is understand the trends, and then figure out ways we can use them to make our own surroundings better (and hopefully those we interact with). 📺



TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

Executive Summary:

Start thinking out of the box and ask yourself how you can take advantage of this virtual world for your business. Like it or not ... the metaverse is coming and it's time to understand how to take advantage of it.

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



Shawn Nowlin photos

Jane Tina Light (R) with customers

The Johnson Family heads towards a 3rd decade in the jewelry business

By Shawn Nowlin

Salem's ex Vice Mayor heads up what is truly a family affair – and still going strong.

For nearly three decades, RM Johnson & Sons Jewelers at 10 S College Avenue in Salem has provided high-level customer service and quality jewelry to the Roanoke Valley. When co-owner Jane Johnson and her late husband, Robert, opened the establishment in 1992, they envisioned offering affordable prices to everyone who walked through the doors.

Asked 29 years later to assess her original mission, Johnson replied, “my husband originally started a jewelry repair business under the name R.M. Johnson Jewelry Co. in 1978 while working for another well-known local firm as a bench jeweler. When that company decided to change their business model in 1992 and send their repairs off premises, we decided to open our own repair shop. Our first hire was our current jeweler, Tina Light. I’d certainly say that we stayed true to our promise over the years.”

Johnson’s journey from an Empire State resident to a successful Virginia small business owner is a unique story. Originally from Huntington, New York, Johnson settled in Salem after attending Virginia Tech. Johnson says her undergraduate years prepared her for what she would ultimately accomplish in subsequent years, a City of

Salem council member and small business owner.

From 2004 to 2020, Johnson served on Salem City Council, the last two as the city’s first female Vice Mayor. “There are so many things I am proud of during my various terms. I was a part of the team who helped the City fiscally survive the Great Recession without having to lay-off employees, and then rebuild our bond rating,” Johnson said.

She added, “When I look around our beautiful downtown is when I feel the most pride from playing a central role in that initiative. I would like to think that I will be remembered as a team player who deeply cared for her city - its businesses, citizens and employees - and always put them first in all decisions.”

Johnson wishes for a brisk holiday shopping season and beyond in downtown Salem: “I am always hopeful; we are already seeing people shopping early. And Beth Bell from the Salem-Roanoke County chamber, along with folks from [Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge] have been doing merchant meet-ups every month so we can plan events together. [We] just had one [recently] at West Salem BBQ.”

Jane Johnson (R)





As President of RM Johnson & Sons Jewelers, Johnson's responsibilities include overseeing the day-to-day operations of the store and managing staff. Her two sons, Mack and Zack, both wear many hats, each serving as a Chief Technology Officer, laser engraving specialist and sales associate. Light is titled by the American Gem Society as the registered jeweler. We are a small team, Johnson said, and "I'm the head cheerleader."

"We supply a great service to the community by providing a welcoming atmosphere to what some may call a high-end business. We take care of people's items and help them continue enjoying them for years to come," Zack said. "You want to be able to trust the people put in charge of handling your most prized possessions."


Continued Light, "I set diamonds, assist customers, repair jewelry, restring pearls, and do appraisals. We offer a large selection of engagement rings, color gemstone jewelry, watches, many different designer pieces, and silver collection from Gabriel and Company."

A wide range of prices are offered to meet every budget. The most popular selections

are diamond necklaces, pendants and engagement rings.

"We pride ourselves in the custom jewelry Zack creates by hand and our partners create in CAD programs. We offer an amazing selection of extraordinary colored gemstones as well as some gift items," Jane Johnson said. "New are award-winning designs by Lika Behar and recently featured at the Taubman Museum jewelry artist Mindy Lam. Other jewelry locally made by Anne Vaughan is very popular for self-purchases and friend-to-friend gifts."

Giving back to the community has become a tradition for RM Johnson & Sons Jewelers.

"We are well-known for finding creative ways to support many who serve community and charitable causes through donations of jewelry. Few requests have been turned down over the years. One example would be support for our first responders. For several years, we have recognized Officers of the Year for their service with a gift of a Citizen watch," Johnson said. "We strongly believe in sharing our gifts with the community and we feel that attitude has helped us build a strong foundation here in Salem." 

LewisGale Medical Center — Leading the Way with Advanced Medical Technology, Compassionate Care, and Tomorrow's Healthcare Leaders

LewisGale Medical Center, located in Salem, Virginia, is part of HCA Virginia Health System, the Commonwealth's most comprehensive provider network with 14 hospitals, 27 outpatient centers, five freestanding emergency rooms and affiliations with 3,000 physicians. Through our comprehensive network of healthcare providers and facilities, HCA Virginia Health System has delivered 2.3 million patient encounters, including 469,000 ER visits and 14,800 newborn deliveries.

Delivering High-Quality Health Outcomes is a Top Priority

LewisGale continually strives for clinical excellence while making patient safety a top priority. The hospital has consistently been recognized for patient safety and health outcomes. Among recent national recognitions is the Healthgrades Orthopedic Surgery Excellence Award, which the hospital has received for six consecutive years. LewisGale has also received Healthgrades Spine Surgery Excellence Award for four consecutive years. These recognitions place the hospital among the top 5 percent in the nation for overall orthopedic services and spine surgery.

As an accredited chest pain center and primary stroke center, the health care team has demonstrated its commitment to providing evidence-based processes that are proven to result in the best outcomes possible.

Quick, Convenient Access to Emergency, Life-Saving Care

With five HCA Virginia ERs located throughout Southwest Virginia in Roanoke, Salem, Blacksburg, Pulaski, and Low Moor, patients have access to emergency, life-saving care, close to home. A sixth

emergency room – LewisGale Hospital Blue Hills ER, located on West Ruritan Road – opens in spring 2022. This strategic location, which will provide the same services provided in an emergency room that is housed within the walls of a hospital, will provide faster, more convenient emergency care to residents who live near this busy Route 460 corridor.

A new real-time, cloud-based communication network and mobile app technology to communicate lifesaving information between its network of hospitals and emergency medical services (EMS) in the field was also introduced in 2021. The system is the first in Southwest Virginia to offer this real-time technology, enabling ER physicians to diagnose in real time a life-threatening event such as a stroke, heart attack/arrest, shock, or sepsis before the patient arrives at the hospital. It also enables the ER to activate the appropriate healthcare team to begin administering immediate, life-saving care as soon as the patient arrives, further increasing the odds of a successful recovery.



Partnering with Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute to Bring World-Class Cancer Care Close to Home

In 2021, LewisGale Medical Center partnered with Sarah Cannon, the Cancer Institute of HCA Healthcare, to expand its comprehensive cancer services in Southwestern Virginia. Patients treated for cancer at all HCA Virginia facilities have access to even more advanced and evidence-based care — from screenings, diagnostics, and surgery, to radiation, chemotherapy, and novel clinical trials — eliminating the need to travel far from home.

Since partnering with Sarah Cannon, LewisGale Medical Center has introduced technologies and therapies, such as the robotic bronchoscope, one of the many benefits our partnership with the Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute brings to physicians and patients in this region.

The fight against cancer demands *more.*

More cancer specialists.
More convenient locations.
More of the latest treatment options.

Together, we are here to help
more people facing cancer.

We are Sarah.

Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute
at LewisGale Medical Center
1900 Electric Road
Salem, VA 24153

Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute
at LewisGale Hospital Pulaski
2400 Lee Highway
Pulaski, VA 24301

Visit [lewisgale.com/sarahcannon](https://www.lewisgale.com/sarahcannon)



Advanced Medical Technology Improves Outcomes, Reduces Pain, Shortens Patient Stays

LewisGale offers a wide range of inpatient and outpatient surgical procedures performed by highly trained surgeons and staff. With access to the latest, advanced technologies, surgeons perform laparoscopic and other minimally invasive approaches, including robotic-assisted surgery, resulting in less pain and scarring, and faster recovery.

Last year, LewisGale Medical Center was the first hospital in Virginia to commercially use a new robotic bronchoscope that provides physicians with continuous, direct vision throughout a procedure used to biopsy lung nodules and detect lung cancer in its earliest, most treatable, stage. Additionally, Southwest Virginia's first robotic esophagectomy was also performed at LewisGale Medical Center, enabling surgeons to perform delicate and complex operations, often used to remove esophageal cancer.

As a regional heart care leader, LewisGale Medical Center continues to add new procedures, including transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) service, a minimally-invasive alternative to open heart surgery for the treatment of aortic stenosis.

Caring for the Communities We Serve

LewisGale Medical Center and its employees care about your health and take an active role in caring for the communities they serve, live in and work in. In addition to providing outstanding healthcare to patients, LewisGale Medical Center supports numerous health awareness events at area employers and throughout the community annually to further strengthen and improve health and wellness.

Training Tomorrow's Healthcare Leaders

Looking to the future, LewisGale Medical Center is helping train tomorrow's exceptional physicians through its Graduate Medical Education Program (GME) in internal medicine, family medicine, psychiatry, and emergency medicine. In addition, LewisGale Medical Center partners with local schools and colleges to help build relationships that foster the growth and professional development of future nurses. Through these partnerships, several nursing programs hold their clinicals at our hospital, some of our staff members serve as students' clinical instructors, and other nursing staff members sit on the advisory board at Virginia Western Community College and the University of Lynchburg.

LewisGale's Mission and Vision

Above all else, we are committed to the care and improvement of human life. In pursuit of our mission, we stand by the following value statements:

- We recognize and affirm the unique and intrinsic worth of each individual.
- We treat all we serve with compassion and kindness.
- We trust our colleagues as valuable members of our healthcare team and pledge to treat one another with loyalty, respect and dignity.
- We act with absolute honesty, integrity and fairness in the way we conduct our business and the way we live our lives.



**LewisGale
Medical Center**
HCA Virginia Health System



WELLNESS

By Valarie Angle

Executive Summary:

Wellness is not only good for the body, it can be good for the bottom line.

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

Upward trends for wellness market

In 2021, the global wellness market is valued at over \$4.75 trillion. The industry growth rate has hovered around 6.4% since 2015 and isn't expected to drop anytime soon. In fact, with people concerned about their health resiliency and employers trying to stop the bleed the wellness market is in greater demand than ever.

Workplace wellness (as we have discussed here) has become an increased focus for organizations around the world.


- Approximately 75% of large employers and 33% of small companies partner with wellness programs
- The corporate wellness industry is being driven by increasing insurance costs related to growing obesity levels (88% of Americans are metabolically unwell, with obesity being a contributing factor)
- Well-designed wellness programs have a return on investment of 1.5-3 times the dollar amount spent over 2-9 years.

It's one thing for employers to prioritize wellness and prevention, but do employees take interest? In 2021, consumers are prioritizing their health more than ever, which means greater receptiveness to products and services that support this (particularly those associated with boosting the immune system). For example, meditation's health benefits are now being widely recognized as a way of balancing the autonomic nervous system and managing stress response, boosting its popularity. With more than 50% of employers struggling to retain staff, it's worth investing in wellness programs so that employees aren't lured away to new job opportunities with better pay and additional benefits.

In Roanoke for 2022, look for employers to partner with wellness centers, gyms, and holistic practitioners, to bring resources in-house as well as provide accessibility for their staff. The provision of basic health insurance and gym membership isn't cutting it anymore in a competitive recruiting and retention market because employers want a resilient, productive workforce. Employers will begin investing in programs and policies that (1) demonstrate respect for individual needs; (2) support preventative health and wellness behaviors; and (3) encourage personal wellness responsibility and education. Companies with strong visionary leadership will embrace this trend and grow in conjunction with the rapidly expanding wellness industry.

The most popular trends in wellness are physical

well-being focused, including activities that promote balance, strength, and mental fortitude such as Tai Chi or Yoga; mental wellness including meditation; metabolic wellness (strengthening health at the cellular level); and holistic education.

The wellness industry will exceed GDP rates for stronger than anticipated growth. In a survey among 7500 consumers across Brazil, China, Germany, Japan, the UK, and the US; 79% of respondents said that wellness is important to them-- a substantial increase across all markets over past years. The global wellness industry continues to strengthen, with the pandemic acting as a propellant toward greater consciousness around mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. 

“”
With more than 50% of employers struggling to retain staff, it's worth investing in wellness programs.

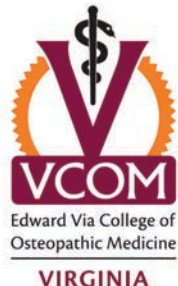
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Monique Duncan at the edge of a scary place

Dark Art and the Photographs of Monique Duncan

By Dan Smith

The haunting pictures tell one side of the photographer, but her life tells another.

Monique Duncan grew up on a farm in Fincastle, learning the trade, the difficulty, the hard work, the intense satisfaction. Over the years, she has battled the often-overwhelming psychological effects of the loss of a child, seriously deteriorating health and other side demons. It threatened a natural disposition that feels like an airplane landing light in a closet.

Hers is naturally bright, cheerful, courageous and steadfast outlook. Recently, she was apologizing for not being at full strength days after major surgery. "My jeans hurt," she smiles.

But when the dark side threatens, she has an equally dark outlet to battle the demons: it's her photography, that can

at once be hilarious and creepy, fun and threatening, expository and vague. But always—always—interesting.

“I was raised by a Southern grandmother who is the hero of my life, in a home with a rotary phone, three channels of TV, reliant on images,” she says. “I was barefoot in the woods and the creek, knowing that poor people had to do it the hard way. That’s where it all started.

“Mom [noted artist Candy Wallace] took me to the woods on our property and to abandoned farmsteads—all the outbuildings—and at 4, I experienced my first abandoned house. At 22, when I lost my child, I thought that if I didn’t find something to do, I’d eat a bullet. I picked up a point-and-shoot camera at an abandoned house, aimed my car’s lights at it and started shooting.”

She found an old mental institution that appealed, abandoned hospitals that needed “rescuing,” as she calls it.

Duncan worked in the “dark history of an old funeral home,” where bodies were

left to rot and she found the remains of a cremated child, left alone for 21 years. She photographed it all. She taught herself to photograph; never went to college but talks and acts like a woman with an earned PhD. “I was never really taught how to operate a camera,” Duncan says. She taught herself Photoshop as well.

Abandoned places, she insists, “are my greatest passion. I want to document history, the intimate moments, people’s lives, preserving a fading America. She preserves some of that history on her body with an extensive system of meaningful tattoos. She also serves as her own model, occasionally nude and alone.

Her many health problems have occasionally intruded on her breakneck speed, but “I just keep going. I don’t know how to do anything but go and live.”

Duncan’s day job tells another story: one of health care administrative associate and patient advocate at Carilion, a research job collaborating directly with patients where her natural curiosity and empathy are best used.



Monique Duncan



Her photos now are of decaying houses with nude models, dripping at the mouth, crawling on the floor, contrasted with the wildly funny wedding photo of the entire troupe doing an impromptu vaudeville act. She shoots portraits others would ignore because of their honesty and the simple fact that they don't physically flatter the subject. Her photos are often more expressionistic paintings than simple "pictures don't lie" evidence.

Some of Duncan's professional work is

much more conventional and those pay the bills for the artistic side. "I have the routine down," she says, smiling. "There is so much stress in weddings, so much going on and, ultimately, what you keep are the photos. It is important to make it as much fun as possible. Weddings used to make me nervous, but not anymore." The "edgy stuff"? Well, "I don't sell that."

Her favorite model, Melissa Webster, a professional in theater craft, is one who understands what Duncan is shooting






for with her dark side. She gives away some details: “Monique has broken her hand punching someone and saved the lives of friends who she found in their homes overdosing. Her father has many children by different people. She has discovered some of them with the last decade or so.”

Duncan has developed a relationship with her father—a man with an intensely shady past. She is now engaged to a scientist she adores.

Monique Duncan loves adventure and

talks excitedly of “salvaging history” by “Ninja-ing” her way into abandoned hospitals (one of them the lovely old Charity Hospital in New Orleans) and making off with artifacts that could easily be lost with further decay. She treats those collections as if she were a professional at the National Archives, wearing gloves to handle them, turning pages and picking up items with the greatest care. “National treasures” is what she calls them as she points her Canon camera to record the history and the art that they are. She’s preserving national treasures by becoming one. 



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NRCC students brighten up downtown Pulaski >

Art students at **New River Community College** were recently involved in a special community outdoor mural painting project. Under the guidance of NRCC art professor **Tammy Parks**, students spent eight days working on the bright, imaginative forest mural that covers a large portion of an outdoor brick wall in downtown Pulaski. Parks incorporated the mural project into her students' curriculum for the fall semester. Through their work, students have learned the process of mural painting from preparation to design to installation. Parks' two-dimensional design, three-

dimensional design, and painting classes all worked on the project. "It allows us to really concentrate on contrast and composition," said Parks.

Through the art project, students have had the opportunity to not only visit the downtown Pulaski area but also to get to know and collaborate with some community volunteers. "Students thrive when they are placed out in the community," said Parks. Community members will also have the chance to get involved in painting. The mural can be viewed off Main Street in Pulaski at the Count's Crossing pocket park. Funding for the project was provided through a state grant obtained by the Pulaski On Main organization, where Parks is also a volunteer.



Chipping away at vacant properties >

The vacancy rate in southeast Roanoke City was at 17 percent last month. The non-profit **Restoration Housing** has been slowly chipping at that number and in November a second blighted southeast home more than 120 years old on Dale Avenue cut the ribbon after 11 months of repair and remodeling. **Mary Beth Mills** is with Restoration Housing: "this house was in a state of severe disrepair when we acquired it about two years ago. It had been vacant for six years and during that time a hole in the roof had basically destroyed the first and second story floor systems." Restoration Housing has another southeast Roanoke project underway on Stuart Avenue. "We hope that this will inspire citizens to get a house, to know that [other] people are making investments. I'm especially proud that we're here in Southeast [Roanoke City]," said Mayor **Sherman Lea Sr.** after he helped cut the ribbon. The Dale Avenue restoration cost about \$400,000; much of that will be recouped with tax credits and grants. It will be rented at an affordable rate to a family of Afghan refugees.





A LITTLE INSIGHT

By Bruce C. Bryan

Executive Summary:

If you call too often, they say you're pushy. If you wait too long to reach out, you are just as likely to hear that you didn't seem interested. People who sell things to businesses need to hit it just right.

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

It's a fine line² to walk sometime

Most sellers don't want to be labeled as being too forward in business because it gives them a reputation as a selfish or aggressive salesperson. Many prospects find that distasteful. Additionally, I've had salespeople call on me through the years who failed to share the latest information, new developments, or products that I would have likely been interested in buying. As a result, it felt like I didn't matter to them and that my business wasn't a priority.


Despite their naivete, most want to get the sale right. This becomes even harder to master as technology, working from home, mixed messages from managers and corporate headquarters all combine to make commerce so complicated. So how can salespeople practice the ultimate balance in their field?

Apply This Basic Concept⁴ The Best Results

Let's simplify things and try a more direct approach. Start by building a connection with the prospect or your current client. Listen to what they are telling you and what form of communication they prefer. Pay attention to how they communicate with you. Do they call? If so, use the phone when reaching out to them. Are they texters? Flex those thumb skills to communicate back. If they write you emails – write them emails back. Note how they send messages and return the favor.

Then ask them: "Would it be okay for me to call you next week (next month? etc.)" Find out, "When will you be taking the next steps?"

Once you've gotten that information, be available a day (or a few days) early if it's out into the future. It's far better to be a few days early than a few days late. Most salespeople are eliminated from the process because they start selling before listening, miss their calendar mark, or get distracted and move on to something else. Some people lose deals because they are too pushy, sure, but more often it is inactivity which leads to the loss of the deal.

Ask questions, pay attention, mirror, and use that information to get it just right in your communication. 

“
Most salespeople are eliminated from the process because they start selling before listening.”

2021 highlights from Building Beloved Communities

Winter & Spring: The Gauntlet Program & Competition

The Gauntlet is a regional business program and competition that helps entrepreneurs get connected to resources, information, and mentorship. From February to April 2021 BBC participated in The Gauntlet Business Program. In May 2021, BBC won GOLD level in The Gauntlet Competition.

Summer: The Back-to-School Shoes Project


In June 2021, BBC received a large contract with a nonprofit in New Mexico as Interim Director of Operations and hired their first employee, Shannon Dominguez, former Director of The Gauntlet Program. From June to August, BBC worked with a Roanoke, VA nonprofit Project Forward to raise over \$150,000 cash in 60 days and a total of over \$450,000 in cash & in-kind donations in less than 90 days!

Fall & Winter: New Clients & An Updated Website

BBC volunteers with Latinas Network in long term strategic planning sessions with the board. BBC has been hired on by The Dream Initiative, The Care Colloquium, The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce, Vag Con, and will be hiring soon so stay tuned! BBC launches their updated website in December 2021. By the end of 2021, BBC will have donated over \$15,000 cash to nonprofits and helped raise over \$500,000 for nonprofits.

BBC & 2022: What to Expect

BBC is consulting with Jen Marie Cliff for the 1st Annual Virtual Vag Con on April 21-23, 2022, and with Kimberly Whiter for the 1st Annual National Care Colloquium on November 14 – 16, 2022. BBC will be expanding and hiring additional team members in 2022. BBC aims to raise over \$25,000 for nonprofits in 2022.

Building Beloved Communities is grateful to every client, partnership, and relationship cultivated over 2021 and is excited to connect with more entrepreneurs and new partnerships in 2022. If you'd like to connect with BBC, you can email them at bonnie@buildingbelovedcommunities.com or shannon@buildingbelovedcommunities.com or visit www.BuildingBelovedCommunities.com. 



GOOD WORK

By Shannon Dominguez

Executive Summary:

Building Beloved Communities (BBC) is a Roanoke-based business consulting firm with a focus on bringing community centered solutions to small business and nonprofits to create a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem. BBC has been in operation since 2018, and 2021 proved to be the year it took off. Here's a recap of a very exciting year.



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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

Is it time to review your membership in organizations?

Let's go clubbing

"Hello. My name is Harold; what's your name?"

"Geraldine."

"Well, welcome to the Cat Logistics and Wranglers club, or as we like to call it, CLAW. Meow!!! [chuckle, chuckle]. Anywho... I know you're new; what brings you in today?"

"Well, 'Shusi'—that's my cat's name—has been quite the wanderer lately. But I'm really here just to check out the club. It's my first visit."

Geraldine is smart. Some people join an association without even attending first. They heard it was good to do and that's enough.

Nah. You should check it out yourself, first.

This time of year (the end of one, the beginning of the new one) is a good time to review your involvement with organizations, nonprofits, chambers, professional and trade associations, networking groups, and whatnot. Some of us got involved with a group, perhaps long ago, and we just stick with it. Some of us are in groups that are known "players" in our vocation or industry, and we see them as necessary.

Whatever your criteria, here's one simple flowchart you can consider:

#1: BUDGET – Admittedly, few of us REALLY start our decision with this factor at the top of the list. But we should. Budgeting here, refers to the time commitment as much as financial. Would your current level of involvement with groups outside of work change if you accounted for the investment of time and fees? (Hint: if you're in more than one "club" it probably would.) If you put on paper the fees and time BEFORE joining or participating in a group, there's a good chance the value of each possibility will rise up and reveal itself in obvious fashion. I'd recommend considering your TIME first, then the cost. (Can you be a dues-paying member and be uninvolved? Yes; happens frequently. But if that's your plan, consider being a sponsor instead—which may bestow membership, anyway. That's better than being a constant no-show.)

#2: ENJOYMENT – If you're a scanner (you see the big points before reading from start to finish) or you enjoy spoilers, you noticed I placed enjoyment before mission (or usefulness). For participation in organizations outside your work and home life "curriculum" it's rather foolhardy to stay with a group you just don't enjoy, regret the time, or even despise (even if you "need" to be a member). There are far too many other options out there. If you can't find a group in your area of interest that has some fun to it; maybe you should start one.

#3 MISSION – Believe it or not, mission goes in all directions. Is the mission of the organization going to serve you? Or are you going to serve the organization's mission? Or... does it clearly go both ways: you serve each other? I've been involved in all three; and that last one (mutual and collaborative) has proven to be the best for me and most sustainable. (NOTE: It's not likely going to be 50/50 equitable.) But I've certainly enjoyed tremendous satisfaction from serving

continued on Page 41


Random thoughts as 2021 comes to a close

Who were your heroes this year? What stood out in the business world, or in your personal life? How did you manage the pandemic as restrictions loosened? The economy boomed again with all of that pent up demand, although it caught the supply chain short. Companies that shed workers last year now can't get them back in some cases (or at same pay levels); material inventories cut to the bone left manufacturers hard pressed to ramp up again to normal operating levels, let alone to deal with the surges many expected once pandemic restrictions were lifted to a large extent.

Many businesses may have to reexamine their emergency operation plans, finding better ways to rebound from a similar catastrophe, although let's hope we don't see something quite like COVID-19 again in our lifetime. In the meantime, we are all dealing with delayed orders and shortages of things down to the plastic bags at my local bookstore – which couldn't get them for more than three weeks at one point. Plastic bags for Pete's Sake!

Kudos to the Virginia Department of Health, which after a rough and confusing start got into gear on getting the COVID-19 vaccines out via mass clinics or through other providers. The federal government stepped up with its own pharmacy distribution network and although there are still vaccine holdouts – let's not go there – the majority of Virginia adults and an increasing number of youths have been getting their shots. Local health district directors **Dr. Cynthia Morrow** and **Dr. Noelle Bissell** led the charge and were tireless all year in spreading the message as to why the vaccines were safe and why folks should get them. The local business world began to bloom anew, transmission rates came down and people starting getting out of their homes again.

Armed with American Rescue Plan Act federal funding – \$64.5 million in Roanoke City alone – localities all over the Commonwealth examined ways to spend their allotments, to make changes (like adding more broadband) that have long lasting impact. In Roanoke, **City Manager Bob Cowell** and City Council looked at ways to spend those funds with inclusion and equity in mind, so that more sectors of a community could benefit, either from a business or quality of life standpoint.

Kudos also to the healthcare workers; the nurses, the physicians, the PA's, technicians etc. for dealing with several COVID infection spikes in 2021 that once again threatened to overrun ICU's at local hospitals. And shoutouts to all of the small businesses that decided to open their doors in 2021, despite a COVID recovery that's been uneven at times. Inflation threatens to put a major crimp on consumer spending power if the labor and supply shortages fueling it aren't dealt with on a timely matter. But let's think positively and look forward to 2022. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
This probably wasn't quite the "Year of Recovery" you thought it might be. Or was it?



GUEST COMMENTARY

By Alexis Davila

Executive Summary:

The idea for the Latinas Network was born after a coffee date with Latina friends in Roanoke.

Latinas Network fills a void in the valley

In just one year, Latinas Network grew into a community of more than 1,000 Latina entrepreneurs and professionals across the Roanoke Valley. Founded in November 2020, the mission is to guide leading ladies in the Hispanic community by providing business and professional development resources to achieve economic empowerment.

It's a home away from home for many of the members, including Bonnie Chavez, who created a consulting firm called Building Beloved Communities. She moved to Roanoke at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. Settling into her new home was jarring until she found her new family. "These strong women are family now," Chavez said. "A place where I can ask questions, meet other Latinas and grow my network."

Every month, Lunch with Leaders gives members a chance to network with others over training sessions and presentations. Recognizing the lack of funds available for Latina entrepreneurs to soar, the organization helps them reach milestones by awarding grant money. With the help of sponsors, the network has organized about 20 free events and sponsored multiple Latina led business and organizations. But as the network continues to grow, more sponsorships and donations are needed to fuel people's pathways to success.

But everyone needs time to have fun too. Latinas Network brings people together by arranging events that allow them to embrace their cultures. During Hispanic Heritage Month, members got a taste of Latin flavors as they salsa danced at local restaurants and museums. These unique types of get-togethers are crucial for the team to feel empowered and express themselves unequivocally.

As an immigrant, Iliana Sepulveda knows the challenge of starting a new life with loved ones not near and strangers passing judgement.



Submitted

Latinas Network - Lunch with Leaders

Letters

Keep reporting, advocating

I have always enjoyed and appreciated your Valley Business FRONT magazine and great local coverage. Balzer and Associates, Inc. has remained in the forefront in the Valley as a strong partner and community advocate for economic, educational and cultural growth, and we have always found VB FRONT as a strong leader and communicator of these areas of our


lives in the Valley. We've remained very busy over the past years and are proud to be a "survivor" from our world pandemic and all of the challenges it has presented and continues to present. Our workload continues to strengthen and we are seeing exciting new developments for the Valley and through our many statewide offices are seeing great growth for Virginia. We appreciate the reporting you have done on many of the projects we have been involved with over the years. Keep up your great work.

R. Craig Balzer
Roanoke

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

For more than two years, Sepulveda had to leave the emergency contact box empty on all her documents. But now, she has a community to turn to when her family is in need.

"Latinas Network has given me a place where I can make connections and build a village," Sepulveda said. "My family is back in Mexico, but that doesn't mean we are here alone. The support that this group offers is a landline to connect with my culture, my language, and my heritage."

For other members, one year with Latinas Network has been the best investment for their whole family. Board Member Shannon Dominguez said her two daughters now have a team of women to look up to as they navigate life. "Latinas Network creates a space where my daughters can visualize their future, see what success looks like for Latinas, and know they are supported." 


Field / On Tap

from Page 38

organizations with no real payback other than altruistic.

I can't say that I've been involved with any organization at any level of real substance that only served my interests. I do know some folks who seek out that model; their memberships usually don't last long.

Good luck in preparing your portfolio of memberships for 2022. This isn't the joining/renewal period for many; but it's still a good time to review (and perhaps include in your resolutions). I would say that if you decide to exit a group, finish out your term responsibility (whether that involves your activity or fees) and let the officers know why you're leaving (in polite, professional fashion) so they can determine if change is advised or your profile is just not a good fit.

Geraldine and her cat didn't end up joining CLAW, by the way. They found the members a bit prissy. 

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.



Captain D's

Just like Mama used to make

I've had two takeout meals so far from Uncle D's at 2016 Electric Road in southwest Roanoke County. Both were homestyle-good like the meatloaf and sides pictured. Run by a Boston area native (I will forgive him that Bruins shirt as a NY Islanders fan), Uncle D's also draws raves for its chicken and dumplings, the sausage and peppers sub; well just read this review someone else posted on line: if you want authentic, down home, southern food THIS IS THE SPOT! We just got home with 4 platters including the meatloaf, chicken tenders, pot roast, and chicken with dumplings. Everything was SUPERB. Excellent flavor with good texture. All of the sides were fantastic (we got the corn, Mac and cheese, green beans, mashed potatoes, and sweet potato tots). It's like eating out of your grandmother's kitchen when you were a kid. Give it a try, but note – Uncle D's is NOT open on the weekend.

—Gene Marrano

Just doing their job

Is there any better microcosm than your neighborhood grocery store? I can't think of one; and after reading Adam Kaat's *Life on the Grocery Line* (Inspired Forever; 2021), I'm convinced here is all the environment you need to observe and study a society at its most natural state of reality. Other service sectors often involve appointments and mission-specific purposes; but a grocery store is a voluntary (though it may not feel like it), independent, hunting-gathering activity, where you need not be

pretentious or prepared for human engagement other than paying for the bounty you scored at that ubiquitous checkout line.

Some of us remember it's still a place to be proper, civil, polite. Many—it seems—do not bother, when such behavior is—apparently, unnecessary.

Such is the introspective we have here, with Daniel (our "questionably fictional" employee narrator) as he deals with the "Linda" and "Dave" stereotypes who frequent the upscale grocery boutique in Denver. The keen observations of customers start out on the surface but quickly saturate with each next pile of groceries the conveyor trudges to the scanner. And if you really want to reveal our human condition?... Just install Plexiglas. Yes, it's as if the very lights in our grocery store change hue and intensity with the arrival of our 2020 pandemic.

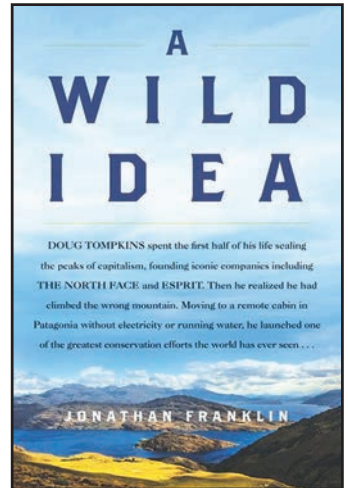
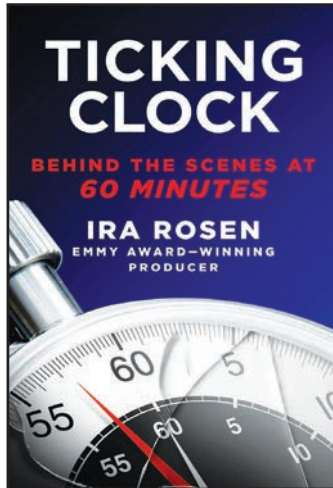
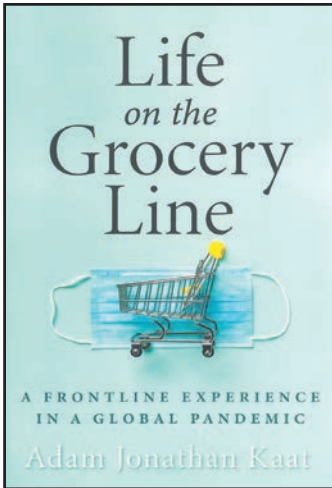
The chatter about essential and front line workers and heroes is something we hear with frequency, but all of it falls to the side, like scattered disposable masks, every six feet apart, surrounding the cart return bin in our parking lot.

An absorbing, quick, worthwhile read.

—Tom Field

Still ticking after 50-plus years

I admit it; I am still a *60 Minutes* junkie, one of the very few TV programs I watch on a regular basis. Now a longtime *60 Minutes* producer



who worked for the CBS newsmagazine in two stints totaling almost 25 years has written a memoir about his time there. *Ticking Clock: Behind the Scenes at 60 Minutes* (St. Martin's Press, 2021) by Ira Rosen pulls no punches. Now retired, Rosen, who jumped to ABC in the middle of his 60 Minutes years to produce segments for *Primetime Live* and *20/20*, is candid when talking about his love-hate relationship with correspondent Mike Wallace, who battled his own demons. Steve Kroft, Charlie Rose and Diane Sawyer also get skewered at times by Rosen – but in the end he recognizes their talent and genius in uncovering good stories and getting interview subjects to be as open as possible when on camera. Sometimes it took weeks, months, even years to get a subject to agree to a sit-down under the white-hot lights of 60 Minutes. Rosen also became and is good friends with John Gotti Jr. – son of the Dapper Don – who agreed to his own confessional of sorts on camera. If you're a fan of the show it's a good read, told in episodic, standalone chapters.

—Gene Marrano

Midlife environmentalist

From the 60's through the 80's Doug Tompkins created apparel companies like Esprit and The North Face (with spouses and others), juggling that with mountain climbing, whitewater rafting and other derring-do adventures with lifelong friends. One of those buddies created the Patagonia clothing line and in 1991 that's

where Doug Tompkins abandoned his comfortable life in San Francisco for – the Patagonia region in southern Argentina. *A Wild Idea* (Harper One, 2021) by Jonathan Franklin explores the complicated, hard driving, often grating and visionary man that Doug Tompkins was. He spent the last 25 years or so of his life working to save beautiful, pristine swaths of land in Argentina and Chile, turning them into The Route of National Parks, protecting them from logging, mining, river damming and overdevelopment.

As a “gringo” he had to overcome suspicion of his motives and his second wife Kris Tompkins often had to smooth out the rough edges when it came to negotiations. Tompkins was also a fearless pilot who explored the land he came to love and vowed to protect. Ironically it was after his death past age 70 while doing something he loved – kayaking – that much of the land Doug Tompkins strove to turn into parkland came to pass – when many realized that he really had good intentions after all and was not the typical American robber baron. *A Wild Idea* may leave readers breathless at times as they read about a very driven person who dauntlessly worked around many roadblocks. A whole world of Doug Tompkins may be a bit much for many - but it's good to have a few of those people around to keep those wild ideas moving forward.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Tom Field** is publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT.



A sweet shop indeed >

With help from the **Small Business Development Center** and the **Roanoke City Economic Development Department**, **Shaneice Jones** has gone from making custom cakes and other confectionary treats in her kitchen to a new storefront at 501 Campbell Avenue Southwest. "Sweets by Shaneice" cut the ribbon last month, with help from Mayor **Sherman Lea Sr.** and City Council member **Stephanie Moon Reynolds**. "I outgrew my kitchen," said Jones. Besides those custom-made cakes, Sweets by Shaneice will offer cupcakes, stuffed cheesecake cones, candied apples and more. Her advice to other would-be small business start-ups: "ask for help. There's a lot of people, a lot of resources out here [that a lot of people] don't know about. It was a long process but there are a lot of people here [in Roanoke] that want to help."



New bank in town >

A new community-based financial institution intends to launch with branches next year. **Carrie McConnell** is the president of **Ridge View Bank**, which will be based here in the valley. Ridge View will have a focus on financial services tailored to small and medium size businesses and their employees. "We plan to have 4 to 6 branches over the next five years and hire at least 50 employees McConnell said at the formal announcement atop Center in the Square recently. The first branch should be up and running on Main Street in Salem 3Q 2022. McConnell knows Salem very well – having played basketball for Roanoke College. "It's just how it worked out. We found the perfect location on Main Street [for] our first full-service site. I also live in Salem as well so it's very exciting." Ridge View Bank is a subsidiary of Pennsylvania-based CNB Bank. McConnell already has an office established in Roanoke and is working on loans with local commercial customers.

Coming back home >

Taylor Johnson has joined the **Roanoke Regional Partnership** as the new director of talent attraction, leading the Partnership's continued effort in talent attraction and workforce development. She succeeds Erin Burcham, who now heads up the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council. "Taylor was selected for her experience creating, developing, and implementing programs focused on talent outreach strategies, partnerships, and marketing to attract talent," said **John Hull**, executive director of the Partnership. "Talent attraction is important work that will be a critical element in the economic future of the Roanoke Region."



Johnson herself is a "boomerang," returning to the Roanoke region after living and working in Arlington for almost a decade. She had been employed by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership in NOVA, running a grant program before the pandemic made her reassess what was important – like being closer to family. "It was a hard decision, but the pandemic made me think a lot about life." Johnson stayed with her parents in Vinton and worked remotely for about four months last year – which also made her think of being able "to have grass," and a lawn attached to a house she might be able to afford. "This opportunity came up and I really couldn't pass it up." Johnson says her previous background in recruiting will also come in handy as the Regional Partnership's director of talent attraction. Yes, chuckles Johnson, she is "the prototype" for luring natives back to the area, after spending their early years after college in bigger metropolitan regions like Northern Virginia/DC.



New sleep apnea treatment >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem is the first hospital in Southwest Virginia to offer a new breakthrough obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) treatment option for those who cannot use continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy. Inspire works inside the body with a patient's natural breathing process to treat sleep apnea. Mild stimulation opens the airway during sleep, allowing oxygen to flow naturally. The patient uses a small handheld remote to turn the device on before bed and off when they wake up. "Patients who have been diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea and are intolerant of, or unable to get consistent benefit from, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) treatment may benefit from this novel treatment option," said **Dr. Brian Gross**, board certified otolaryngologist with LewisGale Physicians who now offers this treatment option to qualifying patients. A five-year clinical trial (STAR trial) showed that patients using the device experienced significant reductions in sleep apnea events and numerous improvements in quality-of-life measures.

Ballyhack wins award - with help from a herd of goats >

Ballyhack Golf Club in Roanoke County was honored with the 2021 National Golf Course Owners Association Mid-Atlantic Sustainability Award at the trade association's annual meeting at Trump National Washington D.C. in late October. The Sustainability Award recognizes a club for innovation and leadership to incorporate sustainability and environmental stewardship into operating practices. "Our goal is to naturally grow the healthiest turf we can," said **Steven Ball**, Ballyhack Director of Agronomy, who helped write the state's 2021 Best Management Practices Manual for Virginia Golf Courses. Ball's lean water management philosophy ensures a firm and fast course, while conserving water and electricity. Irrigation is sparse, with the course instead relying on hand watering, spot watering, and three wells across the property. Approximately 80 acres of native grasses framing the course needs very little attention: half the area is mowed twice a year, while the other is mowed only once annually. The club's herd of 10 African Boer goats helps in this regard, often isolated in specific areas to eat down unwanted growth. Pictured with Steven Ball, Ballyhack Director of Agronomy, is Mike Bennett, President of the National Golf Course Owners Association Mid-Atlantic region. And the goats.



LOA looks to expand >

Local Office on Aging has completed purchase of 4902 Frontage Rd. NW, the property adjacent to its Roanoke headquarters and the former location of Emergency Veterinary & Specialty Services of Roanoke, for expansion of services and to further its mission of allowing seniors to age in place. The new facility will serve as Local Office on Aging's Health & Wellness Center and will house the nonprofit's nutrition staff, Meals on Wheels office, a new congregate diner's site as well as classes, programs and activities aimed at providing greater options for healthy aging. Local Office on Aging anticipates renovations to be completed and for the facility to open in the spring of 2022.



Shawn Nowlin



Salem is Titletown once again >

The Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association football championship game returned to **Salem Stadium** last month, as Bowie State claimed its third consecutive CIAA title, topping Fayetteville State 17-7 at Salem Stadium. It's the third straight time that the Bulldogs bested Fayetteville as well for the title. **Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge** reminds that, "the City of Salem has earned a reputation of being Virginia's Championship City and has hosted more than 85 NCAA Championships over the past 25 years."



New shared business space in Vinton >

Alt Offices is a new coworking space in the Town of Vinton providing diverse office space options. Entrepreneurship and remote working have become topics of higher interest since the beginning of the pandemic, so businesses like Alt Offices add to inventory of coworking spaces in the Roanoke Valley, a resource to help small businesses, startups, entrepreneurs, and remote workers.



In appreciation – RBT’s Dracula >

The night before Halloween I made my ballet debut (something I never thought I would ever say) with **Roanoke Ballet Theatre** at a sold-out Jefferson Center in Dracula ... as a priest about to be attacked, killed and dragged off stage by a bunch of vampire women. A physical role (no dancing thankfully!) - I get thrown to ground and rolled around, then dragged off stage. A great experience and a new appreciation for this art form. These young folks work hard and strive for perfection, even tweaking what they can between acts when the curtain comes down briefly. I was recruited for this part; RBT (under the leadership of **Sandra Meythaler**) has done Dracula before, and they told me I did it well. Dracula isn't Swan Lake – its edgy, very athletic and with a music score stitched together from various sources including Batman movies. A perfect introduction to ballet. RBT is back with The Nutcracker this month (as is Southwest Virginia Ballet). Thanks, fellow castmate **Laura White** for the photos. She's a PA at Carilion Clinic when not taking pictures or appearing in ballets. – Gene Marrano, VBF Editor

Top Shop award >

Global Metal Finishing, Inc., headquartered in Roanoke, has been recognized as a 2021 Top Shop from Products Finishing's, honors in the categories of electroplating and anodizing. Awards for the distinction are based on data analytics from this year's Top Shops Benchmarking Survey. Major coating and finishing shops across North America participate annually in the survey. "Each and every day is an opportunity for improvement and to build from the previous day," explained Tamea Franco, president and CEO of Global Metal Finishing. Global Metal Finishing was founded in 1987 and is recognized as experts in aluminum finishing.





More expansion for Friendship >

Friendship Health and Rehab Center on Hershberger Road celebrated the opening of its new Transitional Care Unit last month with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and tour. Friendship has converted wings to better accommodate patient's desire for more privacy and is moving the pharmacy and emporium there as well. The new dining venue called **Bistro '66** - hailing to the year Friendship opened its doors – is also open to the public - not just Friendship residents from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. **Chuck Flynn** is Administrator at Friendship and says that many of the residents are excited about the renovation: "the fact that everybody would be able to have a restaurant that they can order from - and one of the big things is that we still have folks sharing rooms, sharing a bathroom. Going from that to being able to have your privacy, [even] therapy sometimes in your room without anybody in there – having your own shower and bath."



Roanoke County looking to ELEVATE >

ELEVATE 2026 is Roanoke County's strategic plan that will help guide economic growth over the next five years. The Plan is currently in its draft form and **Roanoke County Economic Development** is still requesting feedback from Roanoke County residents, businesses and stakeholders. You can learn more about the Plan and take the survey by visiting yesroanoke.com

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

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

Brown Hound Tree Service owner **James Poff** passed the International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist Certification exam and is now an ISA Certified Arborist.



Newman

Inorganic Ventures in Christiansburg announced that **Michael Newman** has joined the organization as Head of Global Growth and Business Development. In this new role, Newman will create and define the global sales strategy for the organization enabling Inorganic Ventures to accelerate revenue growth and global product distribution. He brings over 25 years of

industry experience in the international sales and business development arena. Most recently, Newman served as Vice President of Sales for Condux International. Additionally, he served over 20 years in various sales leadership roles with Optical Cable Corporation in Roanoke.

WELLNESS FRONT



Baker

LewisGale Medical Center has appointed **Maury Baker** as vice president of operations; **Shayne Dwyer** as marketing manager; **Kimberly Frampton** as vice president of human resources; **Gran Shinwar** as vice president of behavioral health services; and



Dwyer



Frampton



Shinwar



Labrador

Michael Labrador as assistant administrator.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Moore

Janette "Jana" Moser Moore, assistant director for student services for the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute, has been named director of the university's Office of Veteran Services (OVS). In her new position, Moore provides oversight and leadership for OVS and the Veterans Resource Center (VetZone). Veterans and military-connected students work with OVS for the certification of Veterans Affairs educational benefits and to connect with financial, academic, and social resources necessary for a successful transition to and through their course of study at

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Virginia Tech.

SENIOR FRONT



Smith

Warm Hearth Village recently hired **Todd Smith** as the new Director of Physical Plant, succeeding Davie Whitlock, who retired after 26 years with the Village. Smith will oversee maintenance and grounds efforts across campus. Smith worked at Warm Hearth Village from 2001 to 2010 and since has been employed at BAE Systems as their Facilities Team Leader.

NON-PROFIT FRONT

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys has

Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to news@vbFRONT.com

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



Moore



Conner

appointed **Brenda Moore** as Chief Information Officer and **Chris Conner** as Vice President of

Information Technology. Both Moore and Conner join Goodwill's Executive Leadership Team and will lead the Information Technology department. Moore had been with Medical Facilities of America since 1998 and served as their Chief Information Officer. Conner had been with Diagcore/Medical Facilities of America since 2016 and served as their Network Infrastructure Engineer. He was formerly at Sam Moore Furniture, LLC as an IT Director.

West End Center for Youth in Roanoke has

named **Karen Pillis** as the organization's new Executive Director. Pillis comes to West End Center with nonprofit leadership and management experience, having served 12 years in various capacities at Family Service of Roanoke Valley. For many years, West End Center and Family Service have had a community partnership. Through her roles with FSRV as Manager of Community Counseling Programs, Director of Youth Development, and most recently as Director of Mental Health Services, Pillis has been closely



CONTRIBUTORS

Shon Aguero is the executive vice president and chief banking officer for Freedom First Credit Union. A graduate of Oklahoma State University, Walden University, SW Graduate School of Banking, Cox School of Business - SMU, and New York Institute of Finance, he moved here from Southwest and Midwest US, and lives in Roanoke with his wife and two children.

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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Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjpp1@gmail.com]

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.

Alexis Davila is a volunteer with the Latinas Network

Shannon Dominguez is Director of Business Development for The Advancement Foundation in Vinton and helps run The Gauntlet Business competition. Shannon has a diverse background in planning, finances, human resources, IT and marketing, and has played a leadership role in business development for two law firms. [shannon@theadvancementfoundation.org]

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Frazier Hughes was recruited by the CEO of Keller Williams Realty after being named 2017 salesman of the

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Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. He also now hosts and co-produces "Business Matters" on Blue Ridge PBS. [gmarrano@cox.net]

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.

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

Michael Shelton is a Registered Financial Consultant, tax specialist, and owner of 360 Wealth Consultants. His firm specializes in providing retirement planning and wealth preservation strategies for business owners and astute individuals. What really has the locals excited, though, is his groundbreaking, proprietary software, designed to streamline accounting and wealth planning for business owners of medical practices, real estate properties, and construction industry businesses. [michael@discover360Financial.com]

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Nicholas Vaassen is a graphic designer with 19 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]

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.

involved with West End programs.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

With less than two months left on the job Governor Northam has appointed several people from the region to various boards. Advisory Committee on Sexual and Domestic Violence - **Unique Phillips** of Christiansburg, Sex Trafficking Case Manager, Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley; Cemetery Board - **Susan Mini** of Salem, President and Chief Executive Officer, Sherwood Memorial Park, Inc.; Real Estate



Miller

Appraiser Board - **Kelvin C. Bratton** of Roanoke, Supervising Appraiser, City of Roanoke.

The Roanoke Regional Partnership has welcomed **Matt Miller** as the new director of market intelligence. He has assumed the data analysis and market intelligence role previously performed by John Hull, who was

selected as the Partnership's executive director earlier in 2021. Miller has 25 years of experience in the region working on demographic research, economic impact analysis, mapping, and planning with the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission.



Baffuto

The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce has hired

Steve Baffuto as its President & CEO after a national search, the fourth leader for The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, which serves Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and Montgomery County. Baffuto comes to the Chamber through Virginia ABC, where he served as Special Agent in Charge for Roanoke and Lynchburg Region. In his position, he provided specialized services and training to new field agents, also working with restaurants and businesses from Pulaski to Lynchburg.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

“ ”
 If there was just a 10% increase in buying locally, the county could hire 13–17 new teachers, purchase three-quarters of a fully loaded fire truck, or purchase for the sheriff's department drone equipment to locate missing persons. — Page 17



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Money for the Arts

Virginia Humanities announced that \$950,600 in grants will be distributed among eighty-three nonprofit organizations across the state. Funding for these grants comes from The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) through a program called Sustaining the Humanities through the American Rescue Plan (SHARP). The SHARP grants are a part of the American Rescue Plan Act, passed by Congress earlier this year. Blue Ridge PBS (Roanoke): \$17,000, the Botetourt County Historical Society & Museum (Fincastle): \$11,900, Points of Diversity (Roanoke): \$17,000, and Salem Historical Society, Inc (Salem): \$7,040 are among the recipients.

Fed money to help guard against future shock

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo announced last month that the Department's Economic Development

Administration (EDA) is awarding \$1 million American Rescue Plan Act grants to 30 states and territories across the nation to support statewide economic development planning efforts. Virginia received one million dollars. The EDA says the ARPA funding is intended to accelerate economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and to help build resiliency to future economic shocks.

New healthcare career track at VWCC

Virginia Western Community College has announced the establishment of a new Associate of Applied Science degree in Surgical Technology. It will prepare students to serve as surgical technologists, and has been transferred from Radford University to Virginia Western following the merger of Jefferson College of Health Sciences and Radford. Healthcare is the largest employment sector in the Roanoke Valley economy and the

need for well-trained surgical technologists is projected to continue to grow said VWCC. "We are excited to offer this fantastic entry point to a career in healthcare to our students and to those continuing the program from Radford University," said Dr. Robert Sandel, President of Virginia Western. "I have heard from many leaders in the medical community of the increased need for surgical technologists."

LewisGale Montgomery rolls out new technology

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has announced two capital technology improvements including a new 3D mammography tool for screening, and a specialized system for biopsies. 3D mammography images show cross-sections of the breast tissue, so that radiologists can actually see behind certain structures in order to gain a better understanding of the tissue composition. The new breast

biopsy system allows radiologists to view the tissue sample in real time as the biopsy is taking place. "These new mammography options add to our portfolio of biopsy techniques to allow us to choose the best imaging approach for each patient," said Dr. Brandon Langlinais, a radiologist at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery.

Big gift is boost for RC's Science Center

Roanoke College has received the single largest cash gift in the school's 179-year history from Shaun McConnon, a Massachusetts-based cybersecurity expert who founded several high-tech security companies. He has donated \$15 million for the College's new Science Center. McConnon is a 1966 graduate of Roanoke College. The new Science Center will impact every student at Roanoke College — those majoring in the sciences and those majoring in other

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academic fields. One-third of all courses on campus will be taught in the Science Center. Most of the student research will take place there, and it will house three of Roanoke's 10 most popular majors: psychology, biology and environmental studies.

New jobs in Henry County

VF Corporation, a branded lifestyle apparel, footwear, and accessories company, will invest \$10.2 million to grow their operation in Henry County. The expansion will create 82 jobs. The company will use its 500,000-square-foot facility in Martinsville to increase distribution capacity to deliver products to its consumers faster. Virginia successfully competed with California and Pennsylvania for the project. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership worked with the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation and the Virginia Office of Outdoor Recreation

to secure the project for Virginia. Governor Northam approved a \$225,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund to assist Henry County with the project.

RAMP ramps up again for Spring 2022

The RAMP high tech business incubator is taking applications for its Spring 2022 cohort, which once again (like Spring 2021) will be focused on Health and Life Science startup companies. RAMP says it is "looking for companies with scalability, and coachable entrepreneurs who have a desire to do the work." RAMP will select up to five companies for the 12-week cohort that provides mentoring, free office space in downtown Roanoke and access to funding.

Broadband pledge

Governor Northam's office announced last month that Virginia has received a record number of local and

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private sector applications to match state broadband investments, putting the Commonwealth "on track to become one of the first states to achieve universal broadband access by 2024." Virginia anticipates more than \$2 billion in total broadband funding, thanks to local and private sector matching funds that go beyond the \$874 million in state appropriations since the Governor took office in 2018.

U-Haul shop

One Stop Automotive at 2920 Orange Ave. in Roanoke has signed on as a U-Haul® neighborhood dealer to serve the Roanoke

community. The shop will offer services like U-Haul trucks, trailers, towing equipment, moving supplies and in-store pickup for boxes.

More chicken in Danville

Tyson Foods, Inc. will invest \$300 million to establish a manufacturing facility in Cane Creek Centre, an industrial park jointly owned by the City of Danville and Pittsylvania County. The company will construct a 325,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility and is committing to purchase 60 million pounds of Virginia-grown chicken over the next three years. Virginia successfully competed with North



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Carolina for the project, which will create 376 new jobs. The new facility will be used primarily for the production of fully cooked Tyson brand products, which includes Any'tizer® Snacks and Chicken Nuggets.

Governor Ralph Northam approved a \$3.048 million grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund and a \$3 million performance-based grant from the Virginia Investment Performance Grant, an incentive that encourages continued capital investment by existing Virginia companies, to assist Danville-Pittsylvania County with the project. Northam also approved

a \$500,000 grant from the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund that supports projects sourcing Virginia-grown products. The Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission also approved \$1.5 million from the Tobacco Region Opportunity Fund for the project.

Props again for Pinnacle

Pinnacle Financial Partners is one of the 10 best banks to work for in the nation and No. 1 among banks with more than \$11 billion in assets. That's according to the latest list of Best Banks to Work For from American Banker magazine, which

ranks Pinnacle No. 9 among 90, with no other banks of similar asset size appearing on the list. This is the firm's ninth consecutive appearance. Nashville-based Pinnacle has an office in downtown Roanoke.

WRABA incubator moving before it opens

A small business incubator with office and meeting space for startups that was to have been housed inside the new home for the Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association (in the old Happy's Flea Market space) instead is on the move even before it opens sometime next year - to Williamson Road Plaza next door. WRABA executive

director Valerie Brown says they realized a bigger space was needed: "probably a good dozen could be in there at any one time," adds Brown, "and we're also going to be able to offer some mini-grants to businesses all up and down Williamson Road that might need a necessary purchase - or they might need to send their team to training." Brown says construction bids are out now and several grants will help pay for the Business Co-lab. Brown also says there has been "huge interest" in renting space at the incubator once it opens.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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“” The most popular trends in wellness are physical well-being... mental wellness... metabolic wellness... and holistic education. — Page 29

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Submitted photos

Caitlyn-Scaggs

PURCHASE WITH A PURPOSE

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

People and businesses today are looking for opportunities to do good, said Caitlyn Scaggs, Executive Manager of New Hope Girls, an organization in the Dominican Republic that exists to fight trafficking, exploitation, and abuse of young girls.

About 10 years ago, founder Joy Reyes was in the foreign country working on education initiatives, when she became aware of the need to rescue vulnerable girls from bad situations. The first step was creating safe houses; then Reyes realized that long-term change was needed in the forms of breaking the cycle of exploitation and giving economic empowerment to women.

Thus, the genesis of “transformative employment,” said Caitlyn Scaggs, in

the form of workshops where adult women made cloth handbags. It had the dual benefits of supporting families with their salaries and plowing profits back into the safe houses. (Scaggs left a position at Radford University to join New Hope Girls earlier this year.)

At a Global Leadership Conference, New Hope Girls’ friend Tom Hinton suggested that the CEO of Vera Bradley check out the operation. Since both partners make vibrant fabric bags, it seemed a natural



Joy Reyes - Founder of New Hope Girls

fit to him. The CEO reached out to Reyes to ask how Vera Bradley could help, and a partnership formed that has been “tremendous for the organization,” said Scaggs.

The company helped scale up the workshop in the Dominican Republic with industrial sewing machines. In addition, Vera Bradley employees donate and conduct supply drives. Scaggs said that Vera Bradley employees provided furnishings for the newest safe house. “Vera Bradley recognizes the importance of beauty,” said Scaggs, “and its role in helping promote healing.”

There have not been overt fundraising efforts or intentional recruitment of donors. “We have shared who we are, what we do, and why it matters and welcomed those who feel invited,” said Scaggs. This has yielded dependable private donors. New Hope Girls also partners with faith-based organizations, including some in the New River Valley. “There are churches who have provided tangible support, invited us to speak, and allowed us to share our beautiful



bags with their church families,” said Scaggs.

New Hope Girls’ bag business is “consistently growing.” Scaggs said there are two core groups of customers: 1) college-age girls who love the bohemian look of the hobo style bag, and 2) professional women who appreciate the gorgeous lifestyle imagery – with both groups looking to be “conscious consumers.”

The bags are beautiful, but that’s not enough, reiterated Scaggs. It’s important for people to recognize the product-cause connection. The storytelling of New Hope Girls is critical to its marketing. The work is not without its challenges. New Hope Girls is a “lean non-profit” so Scaggs - the only full-time employee - is without a broad team to tap into. The language barrier is another hurdle, though her Spanish is “improving.”

As with many entrepreneurial ventures, New Hope Girls with one person (Reyes, who is still in the Dominican Republic)


EXECUTIVE PROFILE



identifying a problem (exploitation) and finding solutions (safe houses, outreach efforts to high-risk girls). The business structure allows for growth, which brings greater missional impact, and around it goes. Business savvy and faith in the importance of the work are equally important to its success, said Scaggs, who views her job as a calling.

The board is always doing strategic planning for the future. One goal: increase service offerings to girls as they age, including a university girls' house. Growing the bag component helps make such dreams possible.

Scaggs emphasized that the program is not about numbers, but about the depth and quality of relationships. "We never want to lose that unique and personal approach" either with the girls or with the women in the workshops, she said.

On the sales side, said Scaggs, society is reflecting on how it can adjust its impact by the items people choose to buy for themselves or, say, for Christmas gifts. "It's a great time to be a cause-based brand," says Caitlyn Scaggs. Visit the New Hope Girls site at newhopegirls.com to learn more, donate, or purchase a bag. 



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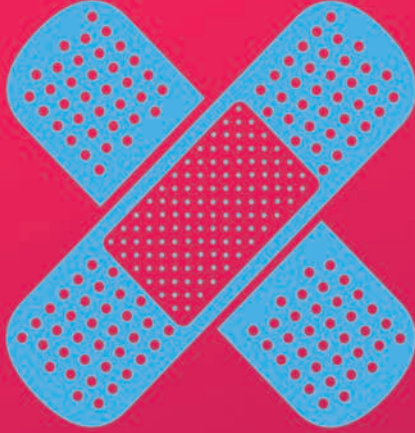


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