

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 149  
FEBRUARY 2021

Express Employment  
Professionals

Bright Services

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Even with an uptick to around 940,000 first time unemployment filers last month nationwide, one theme heard in these parts when we talked to staffing, recruiting and HR people for our February issue, is that there are jobs out there. It may not exactly what you want to do right now and may require a fast-track skills course or in-house training, but there is work in the region. Many have gone without a job or did for months in the teeth of the COVID pandemic. Knowing that there are jobs – careers even – out there may make some think about life course corrections to take advantage of those opportunities.

New in February also are a handful of new/revived columns and new contributors. A new feature writer too (Rob Ruthenberg) who many of you may have *heard*, and not read, previously. Actually, two other newbies to the magazine in February have radio roots also. Imagine that. Happy Reading. We always appreciate your feedback [news@vbfront.com](mailto:news@vbfront.com).



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor

“”  
Most companies are willing to train workers if they show proven commitment, attendance, and positive attitude. — Page 22

“”  
Sometimes hiring a new employee goes terribly wrong. — Page 36



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FOR  
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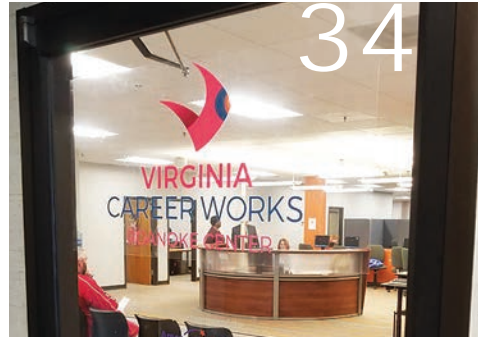
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### Staffing, Hiring, and Recruiting... Oh My!

By Jennifer Poff Cooper



“We also found a new appreciation for tequila.”

— Page 25

Cover photography of Garry Norris by Tom Field.



# VIRGINIA WESTERN

“*I have set myself apart from my peers to pursue a degree and not debt.*”

“The Community College Access Program has allowed me to focus on my studies in the STEM field without the added burden of wondering how I was going to pay for college. With this scholarship, I have set myself apart from my peers to pursue a degree and not debt. If I could give any piece of advice to high school students in Roanoke and surrounding areas, I would tell them to start at Virginia Western. I believe that I am better prepared for my future education and life because of the solid foundation that was given to me at Virginia Western with the help of CCAP.”

**Brooke Bess**

*CCAP student at Virginia Western Community College*

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Salem, VA 24153  
(540) 389-9945  
www.vbFRONT.com

## Staff

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

## Departmental Contacts

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

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

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Valarie Angle



Bruce Bryan



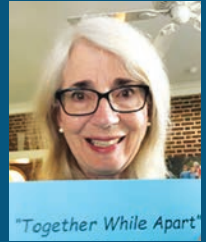
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Zack Jackson



Rob Ruthenberg



Kathy Stockburger

## 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.

# 2021 CONTRIBUTORS



**Jennifer Poff Cooper**



**Dan Dowdy**



**Tom Field**



**Jennifer Leake**



**Mike Leigh**



**Gene Marrano**



**Nicholas Vaassen**



**Shon Aguero**  
Freedom First Credit Union /  
finance – credit unions



**Lisa Clause**  
Richfield Living /  
senior development



**Mike Dame**  
Carillon Clinic / healthcare



**Mary Ann L. Miller**  
Bank of Boletourt /  
finance – banking



**Michael Waldvogel**  
Waldvogel Commercial Properties /  
commercial real estate



**Amy White**  
Virginia Western Community  
College / education

““”  
We are  
winning the  
battle to  
attract and  
retain talent.

— Page 13

““”  
We are  
slammed  
across the  
board.

— Page 27

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

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““”  
You don't ghost  
your clients. — Page 18





Submitted photo

NRV Experience

# Staffing, Hiring, and Recruiting... Oh My!

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

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**Pandemic or not the help wanted sign has been out.**

As of late September 2020, 63% of manufacturers and 38% of technology companies in the New River Valley indicated they had job openings. When asked about their employment levels within the next 12 months, 75% of tech companies and 62% of manufacturers indicated they planned to increase employment. Onward NRV, which released the survey, is a public/private, regional economic development organization whose mission is to attract and retain world class jobs, investment, and talent in Virginia's New River Valley.

Charlie Jewell, Executive Director, said staffing can be a challenge. Lack of available and affordable housing is one stumbling block. Another is the lack of diversity in the population. Then there is a misperception that there are not job opportunities here. Alec Siegel, Managing Director of local recruiting firm Siegel Search, dispelled that notion: "There is a big demand in Blacksburg in emerging technology companies. There are more openings than qualified candidates."

Jewell said there are myriad reasons workers locate in the New River Valley. While salaries are lower here than, say, in Washington, D.C., so is the cost of living. The area also mixes small town amenities like lower crime rates with more urban features, largely associated with the universities (Radford University and Virginia Tech), such as culture and the arts. Outdoor recreational opportunities are also a draw. One other advantage are shorter commutes; Jewell said that workers here spend 200 hours in their cars annually versus 300 in the D.C. area.

“That is gaining back 100 hours of their lives,” Jewell said.

Siegel concurred. Representing local companies looking for professional hires, he approaches many Tech and Radford graduates who “want to get out of the NOVA rat race.” Onward NRV helps augment traditional employment channels such as Indeed and recruiters with digital marketing. This includes a job board on its own website. In addition, Onward NRV has implemented two campaigns through blogs and Facebook videos, one aimed at metro areas within six hours and the other targeting potential manufacturing workers within a three-and-a-half-hour radius.

Charlie Jewell



Tom Field

““  
[shorter commute]  
is gaining back  
100 hours of their  
lives... [they]  
want to get out  
of the rat race.

— Charlie Jewell



There is a big demand in Blacksburg in emerging technology companies.

— Alec Siegel

Onward NRV worked with GO Virginia and the Lynchburg Business Alliance to do a study on “brain drain.” The study looked at higher education institutions and evaluated how invested graduates are. It found that only 18% of students would seek employment locally.

To combat this phenomenon, Onward NRV maintains campus presences. It also instituted NRV Experience, a summer program to support local employer internship programs. With a mix of fun activities and professional development, the program’s goal is to make sure interns have a good experience with the community and make connections, so they are more likely to stay in the New River Valley.

There are not, said Jewell, significant skills deficiencies that impact the ability for New River Valley companies to be competitive when seeking workers. Companies “speak highly of the workforce,” he said.

New River Community College does a “fantastic job,” Jewell added, with training, particularly in the manufacturing sector. NRCC works directly with employers on teaching skills they say they need.

Other companies, such as 1901 Group, are also looking for “alternative demographics” at the community college

Alec Siegel







Submitted photo

level in areas like information technology, which often means hiring locally.

Of course, the pandemic has affected all areas of business, including staffing. Siegel said that pre-pandemic the Blacksburg job market was booming. When COVID-19 hit, Jewell said, 25% of companies in the technology sector here actually added jobs, with only 12% reducing their workforces.

Working remotely has been both a blessing and a curse. Prior to the pandemic, three-fourths of tech companies had less than 5% working remotely. In September, two-thirds had 80% working remotely. While this has allowed productivity to continue, there have been stresses. Jewell said it is difficult to integrate a new hire into a company without face-to-face interaction. That lack of human contact has hurt employee morale as well.

Manufacturing suffered some job loss initially but has rebounded, with 75% at or above pre-pandemic capacity and largely back to in-person work. Siegel said that the Blacksburg area is in "better shape than other places in the country," mainly because of the plethora of emerging technology businesses that kept hiring. Those firms also

Charlie Jewell and  
James Cabler, NRV  
Experience



Submitted photo

Executive Director  
Charlie Jewell speaking  
about the NRV Experience  
Internship Program at  
the Onward NRV 2019  
Winter Social

found that personnel working remotely “worked a lot better than they thought.”

Once new hires have landed here, retention can be another difficulty. Jewell said it is “a little harder to retain young professional talent because of a pull to urban areas” for things like the dating pool. Because of a lack of turnover in jobs here, some feel the need to leave the region to advance their careers.

Jewell said the “bread and butter” demographic in the New River Valley, especially in the technology sector, is those in their early-to-mid thirties who are looking to






“ ”

Prior to the pandemic, three-fourths of tech companies had less than 5% working remotely. In September, two-thirds had 80% working remotely.

settle down. Called “boomerangs,” they are university graduates or locals who, after exploring other areas, bounce back here because of meaningful job opportunities combined with small town amenities.

Projections for the future look encouraging with positive population growth and the labor market tightening back to about 3% unemployment from 11.5% in April, according to Onward NRV. Siegel said he is optimistic that with the COVID vaccine rollout, companies which “hit pause” will restart. Added Jewell, “we are winning the battle to attract and retain talent, as people move here because of growth.” 





Garry Norris

All photos: Tom Field

# THE MOST PLACEABLE

By Tom Field

**Express Employment Professionals might operate as a franchisee, but the two offices in our region match activities in a most local way.**

Around networking events and business functions, he's the pinstripe suit guy. But that's only if you see him in the room and don't know him by name. Because most people do know Garry Norris. He's highly connected.

"Larry (of Roanoke's Davidson's Clothing for Men) once told me I was the only man in Roanoke who could wear a pinstripe suit with a polo shirt," Norris says. The custom bespoke signature style has served him well. He's donned it the past fourteen years as he's built the local Express Employment Professionals business to a top ranked position in the country as the franchise gaining the most new clients. Among the awards in his office, the "100 Hit Club" is a favorite.

"We were ranked number six in the country in terms of new clients," Norris says. In this business, "clients" refer to companies and organizations where Express provides employees. The applicants and candidates who are placed, Express calls "associate employees."

Norris says this Express location tripled in business since he purchased it and moved to the Roanoke region. He, along with the franchiser market operations, determined Roanoke to be a promising opportunity.

"I was interested in an office anywhere between Virginia and Florida," Norris says, "no further north," he added... even as he mentioned his fondness for Charleston, South Carolina. He had traveled extensively, including working gigs in international arenas like Brazil and France. His professional trek included marketing executive positions with IBM and Kodak. His last position in the corporate world was with a smaller business, and he began to get an itch for the entrepreneurial life.

"I wanted my own business," Norris says. He essentially bought the Roanoke site without even visiting, moved here, and got down to business day one.

Today, Norris operates two Express offices, located in Roanoke/Salem area and New River Valley, but serving the greater region. The business places people in positions ranging from light industrial, skilled labor, legal and medical offices. The jobs can be flexible or progress into permanent.

Norris echoes other employment agencies about the opportunities and the reality of more jobs than people to fill them.

"It's a hot market for job seekers," he says. "We differentiate our practice by having an exceptional recruiting strategy."





Still working... Garry Norris says this simple sign by the roadside (updated weekly) has served as one of the best marketing tactics for drawing new “associate employees” in.

The pandemic did hurt the local market, Norris explains, because some people cited the \$600 plus \$300 relief payments as a reason to hold off working. But Norris said the staff continued to stay closely in contact with all the players, even when the activity lulled; and that commitment and vigilance paid off.

“You don’t ghost your clients.”

Norris cites the 4.6 percent unemployment rate for Roanoke, compared to 6 percent statewide,

but says a more revealing statistic is the 15 percent “underemployment” rate.

The Express crew works to provide the “MPC”—most placeable candidate, Norris says. He says experience, skills, and certifications are absolutely valuable; but he also says employers are willing to take a chance if a candidate is trainable. Express has a proprietary method for assessment.

Express Employment Professionals works in the “sweet spot” Norris





The “100 Hit Club” award is a favorite for Garry and the Express office; it signifies the acquisition of 100 unique clients a week—a top ranking performance stat for the international franchise.


describes as mid-tier. “Ten to thirty employees, small industrial, legal and medical businesses.”

A numbers guy himself (a crucial necessity in this business if you are going to be successful), Norris believes companies need to be most aware of local market conditions. For example, he can spout out at a moment’s notice the “going rates” for hourly positions for industrial, non-skilled sector.

“It’s \$15 medium, \$17.85 high, and

\$13 low,” he says. So if companies in that sector are trying to fill openings at \$11 an hour, they need to rethink it.

At the time of this report, the Express sign by the roadside indicates 97 open positions. Garry Norris and crew are going to apply their track record to fill the pipeline. It could sound like a clever tagline or simple formula, but it’s one that keeps working, the man in the pinstripe suit concludes:

“We truly exist to find good people for good clients.” 



## BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

### Executive Summary:

*Who in your organization is responsible for employee engagement and culture?*

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

# Human resources managers are change agents

If you are a regular reader of my column, by now you know that I often write about employee engagement, leadership, and culture. We've all seen the difference between a productive, motivated and engaged team member, and one that isn't. Or the difference between a collaborative and supportive culture and one that is competitive and divisive.

Every organization I work with wants to improve their culture. But rarely do I see someone who owns it. Leaders are expected to be motivators and to develop strong cultural norms and behaviors, but few companies measure, track, and set goals to improve culture. That is where HR should come in.


Human Resources professionals are normally employed to conduct transactional activities (recruiting, staffing, payroll and benefits, discipline, etc.) These activities are important and necessary, but HR teams can and should do more. HR should own a company's culture.

Business and operational leaders need to ensure HR is "at the table" for key strategic and operations discussions. HR professionals should be asked to measure engagement and culture, and to take proactive initiatives to improve them.

Likewise, if you are an HR professional, you need to proactively look for ways to support the staff to help improve engagement and culture. Too often, operational leaders look to HR as a department that only asks for "stuff" that slows them down (annual appraisals, documentation, timecard reviews etc.)

HR professionals can play a central role in driving improvements in culture and employee engagement by fulfilling three important roles:

- **Champion** – HR should be the culture change agents. At every opportunity, HR should communicate the need to improve culture.
- **Coach** – HR should spend as much time as possible talking with and coaching supervisors and managers on how to exhibit those behaviors that are necessary for positive culture change.
- **Consultant** – HR should be measuring and monitoring attitudes, behaviors, and culture. Ideally, they can also establish some key performance indicators (KPIs) and measure return on investment (ROI) of improvement efforts.

Many years ago, I received a master's degree in HR Management. I've learned that HR is an important and rewarding career, but only when they can help make a real difference in organizational outcomes. When business leaders utilize and ask HR to drive operational improvements by changing culture, and when HR professionals step up and own it, higher levels of performance are reached - and cultures improve. 

## The Power2Think on the Fly

Football teams played the Single Wing and the option. Then, someone decided it might be a good idea to pass the ball forward. Before long, there was a "pro set" with two running backs and the quarterback almost always handing the ball off or passing on each play. It was quite predictable, and it led to NFL defenses getting pretty good at stopping offenses from scoring.


In the last decade, a few teams started switching things up. In the past, athletic quarterbacks mixed up the defense with their ability to run. I remember Colin Kaepernick and the "Read and React" approach was one of them. Now there was a plan in the NFL for the athletically gifted quarterbacks who could both run and pass well to decide what to do, based on the defense's setup and their initial moves. For a while, it really changed the game.

Think about how that relates to business. For so long, there were "canned pitches" in the sales world – the IBM way, pharmaceutical sales demos, and even real estate spiels. Just follow these seven steps, and you'll undoubtedly close deals and increase your revenue. Everything was cookie-cutter, and there was no room for variation or adaptation.

### The Impact4Business

Thank goodness those days are gone in sales and marketing. It may be that you walk prospective clients through a standard process. Still, even with automation and managed pricing models, no two deals or situations are exactly alike. That means that to separate yourself from competitors pitching their wares or selling their services, you must simply listen, better. You have to uncover the pain point to determine the best way to help that prospect achieve their goal. When they win, that means you win too.

It's a read and react approach.

And not to overplay that sports analogy, but there's no doubt in my mind that those who can see the play developing and customize a strategy to take advantage of the gaps will ultimately succeed the fastest and win the most. 

“”  
For so long, there were 'canned' pitches in the sales world.



## A LITTLE INSIGHT

By Bruce C. Bryan

**Executive Summary:**  
*Someone makes a move, then the opposing side responds and makes a change. It's the way the sports world has worked for centuries. It's also how business functions.*

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





All photos: submitted

# The Scoop on Staffing Services

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

---

**Bright Services finds that a major player locally in the worker sourcing business is “riding the post-COVID wave.”**

“There’s not a shortage of jobs — but a shortage of people,” said Durmon Coates, Vice President of Sales and Operations for Bright Services, a full-service regional staffing company. Coates, who works out of the Roanoke office, said that COVID-19 caused a scarcity of workers. People were afraid to go to a place of employment for fear of contracting the virus, or were possibly staying home collecting

unemployment benefits that outweighed their earnings.

The job market bottomed out in March 2020, said Coates, losing 50% of its growth. Then manufacturing started to pick up. COVID actually created emergent industries, such as a company that went from making textiles to producing masks.

In addition to the huge demand for workers

in manufacturing, Coates said that the medical industry is booming because of COVID; this includes hospitals, nursing homes, and medical facilities that are seeking everything from nurses to medical billing workers. With the increase in online ordering during the pandemic, there is also a backlog of jobs in shipping and receiving. "We're riding the post-COVID wave," said Coates, who added that Bright is doing the best it has done in several years.

Still, not all sectors have bounced back since the government loosened restrictions. Administrative and clerical jobs in areas such as law and doctor offices took a "big hit." For a staffing company, having employees work at home is harder to monitor, but Bright is "making adjustments."

The hospitality industry has seen hotels and restaurants lose big. But some



Durmon Coates, Bright Services

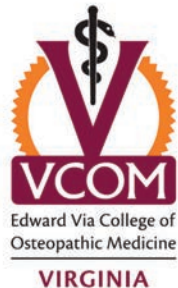
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companies, said Coates, have found it is easier not to be open to the public: thus, they employ less people and are more profitable.

Bright offers myriad staffing services: traditional temporary worker staffing, direct hires (recruiting executives and IT workers), and work to hire (trial runs that hopefully go from temporary to permanent status.)

Skill proficiency is “not really a problem,” said Coates, except for specialized jobs

such as light industrial, which needs more certified people. In fact, he said, most companies are willing to train workers if they show proven commitment, attendance, and positive attitude .

The problem Coates contends is finding enough interested parties for lower-end industrial jobs in the \$9-\$12/hour range. These can include apprenticeships and assistantships with plumbers and electricians. It used to be that teens took those jobs, but they are not

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attracted to them and now about 70% of high school graduates go right on to college. "It's tough to get those people," said Coates. "There is a big gap."

Bright Services sees variation in its busier seasons from location to location – places that include Roanoke, the New River Valley, North Carolina, and Tennessee. In the Roanoke Valley, Coates said, "we get a little bump" approaching the end of the first quarter and into summer. People go on more vacations then, so companies need temp workers to fill in.

Because Bright has been in business for 39 years in this region, it can accomplish most of its recruiting through word of mouth. Coates said Bright builds relationships with both businesses and employees, the positive nature of which they share with others. Only about 30% of Bright's recruiting is via traditional platforms like print advertisements.

Bright Services prides itself said Coates on finding the right fit between job and employee as it is an investment to place, recruit, and train new employees. "Bright makes placements not based on volume - but on precision."

The "secret recipe," is Bright's complex screening and recruiting resources according to Coates, which includes well-qualified management and staff, skill-based testing of prospective employees, employment verification and background checks, and screening tools to find out more about candidates. The company wants to feel comfortable with candidates, so Bright Services continues to see them in person, whereas the trend in the staffing industry has moved away from that. Coates added that it takes about 30 days to see someone's true personality. He also advises any person coming out of college to use the staffing industry to sample various careers: "It opens your eyes. 

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## Why a home inspection makes sense

Do you want a home inspection? Most people do and I would suggest it regardless of whether you ask for repairs or not when it comes to purchasing a home. Not everyone asks for a home inspection. It depends on the house, the situation, and the client.

For example, a client could walk into a home, see it's in good shape, well taken care of and brings in a family member who is a contractor who says everything looks good and they waive the home inspection. A home inspection is not required for any loan. It is for your safety, protection, and peace of mind to make sure what is usually the largest purchase of your life is in sound condition. Inspections include the home inspection for radon, termites, and if the house has it, a well, septic, sewer infiltration system, and dock or any additional structures asked for by the purchaser.

In The Virginia Real Estate Contract, it reads and covers these areas of the home: "This Contract is subject to the Purchaser having the home inspected. The purpose of the home inspection is to discover defects. The term "defects" (Defects) shall be defined as any of the following: (i) that the plumbing (including well, well pump and septic system, if any), heating, air conditioning (if any), electrical system and appliances are not in safe working order; (ii) that there are structural defects; and (iii) that the roof leaks. Cosmetic items, grandfathered systems or features that are properly functioning that would not comply with current building codes if constructed or installed today shall not be considered a defect. The fact that a structural element, system or subsystem is near, at or beyond its normal useful life is not, by itself, a defect.

The home inspection and any subsequent inspections shall be at Purchaser's expense and shall be limited to the primary dwelling. Failure to complete the inspection(s) within the specified time period shall forfeit the Purchaser's right to conduct inspection(s). There are also termite, radon, and dock (if you live at the lake) inspections as well.

Depending on the age and condition of the house you can ask for \$1,000 and up for a remediation limit in repairs if both parties agree. Remember the seller is not obligated to make repairs, and if they will not this gives you the opportunity to back out of the contract to purchase the home. To make their offer stronger some buyers will ask for a home inspection but no repairs with the opportunity to back out. Either way, it's a great idea to have an inspection for peace of mind. 

## REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

### Executive Summary:

*Introducing our newest periodic column on what's been a hot market locally in recent times.*

*Frazier Hughes is with Keller Williams Realty. Reach him at [frazierhughes@gmail.com](mailto:frazierhughes@gmail.com)*


## What's your pivot?

You don't need me to tell you that 2020 was a wild ride for small businesses in just about every way imaginable (not to mention every way that was previously unimaginable). As we move forward (hopefully) to the light at the end of the tunnel, we also need to look back and learn from this experience. Many businesses took a huge hit in 2020, some closing their doors forever. Meanwhile others THRIVED during the situation. How? The Pivot.

If there's one thing that the pandemic has taught us as a business owner, it's that we can't put our entire business model into one expected outcome. Many of our clients are in the food and beverage industry, so needless to say they had to make some massive pivots. Restaurants that were built on the business model of "cram as many people as you can into the place" were suddenly forced with the reality that there were now ZERO customers that could be a part of that model. Suddenly they needed to learn how to adopt to curbside takeout, online ordering, minimal staffing, and more.

While it has been a very difficult journey for them, many of these businesses have learned that they are able to create new revenue streams within their business that they previously never thought they would be able to do. Even when things return to "normal," many of these pivots will remain as part of their plans and will provide multiple revenue streams for the business and can also help protect against future unforeseen events.

We as a company had to pivot as well. Clients that previously needed help with event planning and day to day social media marketing, suddenly needed help with web design, e-commerce, email marketing, and whatever else the day threw their way. We made those pivots, and it helped us learn new ways we could help small businesses succeed in a forever changing marketplace. (We also found a new appreciation for tequila to help take the edge off this wild ride.)

Finding new ways to innovate and expand your revenue streams is the key to your businesses' growth, while also insulating it during trying times. So ... what's YOUR pivot? If your number one source of revenue disappeared tomorrow, what would you do? Don't rely on just one expected outcome. Explore things like e-commerce, affiliate marketing, social media, or whatever makes sense in your industry to always stay in touch with your customer base. If you have any questions about content creation or marketing for your business, please feel free to contact me. I'd be happy to provide any insight I can. 



## TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

### Executive Summary:

*Our new small business-oriented tech columnist on the pivot many had to make in 2020 – and beyond.*

*Zack Jackson is co-founder of The JPG Agency small business creative firm. Reach him at [zack@thejpgagency.com](mailto:zack@thejpgagency.com).*





# STILL WORKING ON THE HR “EVOLUTION”

By Gene Marrano

**Kelly Woolwine wants to “build a better mousetrap for all the companies in our area,” when it comes to the way they hire employees – especially the hourly ones.**

Several years ago, Kelly Woolwine sold Atlantic Credit & Finance to a publicly traded company and says, “we did real well with that.” One thing he learned over his 20 years at the helm of what was basically a credit/debt collection company — not always at the top of the popularity list — is that if you hire the right people, providing the best encouragement and motivation, even those starting out at 9 dollars an hour or so can become superstars. They can make good money (six figures in many cases says Woolwine, who also started the non-profit Life Ring some years ago) and they stick around. In a call center environment where hundreds are employed and the turnover

rate is usually quite high, that’s an anomaly. “What it really was, was the people business,” says Woolwine, “developing those people, retaining them, helping those people reach a higher potential.”

After selling Atlantic, Woolwine started consulting worldwide on recruiting; but with young children he decided to stay closer to home more often and he launched EvolutionHR in southwest Roanoke County about four years ago. His dream scenario is to become true “partners” with the companies Evolution is recruiting for, at this point finding mostly wage workers who have the potential for greater things,

using what they learned at Atlantic as a template. "We did some unique things there from an HR standpoint, [which] I didn't realize at the time," says Woolwine, who wanted to take that "secret sauce," and use it in this region, adding "value" to the labor pool.

Woolwine says one lesson learned while at the Atlantic helm was that the hourly wage pool of workers in the Roanoke were "underappreciated and undervalued – and overlooked." The lack of innovative leadership leaves potential untapped, workers dissatisfied – and adds to that employee churn rate. It also means the "trajectory rate," as he puts it for many does not rise sharply enough as they proceed through their working years.


At Atlantic, where 90 percent of the workers were hourly, Woolwine saw "an enormous amount of potential," with many possessing the same talents as their white-collar counterparts. So, he says they invested first and foremost in the employees, the "human capital;" those making phone calls asking for debtors to settler up, and that helped the company grow. "We just really helped them develop."

That's Woolwine's dream for EvolutionHR, helping employer clients (they pay the fees) to find the right people, with the potential to not just take up space, but those with the talent and desire to grow along with the companies that hire them – if given the proper encouragement and support. For now, he adds, the need for "bodies" is so great that his EvolutionHR team is just having trouble keeping up with the demand for labor. He says despite the pandemic, the region in many ways is booming. "We can't find enough people. If you want to work, you've got a job." Assembly lines, welding,

HVAC, auto parts, electronics, call centers, you name it says Woolwine. "We are slammed across the board." Many are contractor employees right now that actually work for EvolutionHR and move from site to site.

In mid-January Woolwine says they were trying to fill around 200 open positions in the region. Eventually EvolutionHR would like to expand to more of the mid-Atlantic; Woolwine has hired a recruiter who works in the Northern Virginia area. While much of the focus right now is on blue collar staffing, they are also placing engineers and other white-collar professionals. Better employee retention and higher performance levels should be the goal for every hire made at any company says Woolwine. HR professionals generally do a good job of hiring people for what they can do right now says Woolwine, but not for what they could do, what they could learn in the future.

Making new hires believe that if they work harder and learn additional skills, they can truly get ahead is something that was preached at Atlantic Credit & Finance, that secret sauce. It's the direction Woolwine wants EvolutionHR and their employer clients to head in — more of a partnership, with Evolution providing leadership training and other employee development materials, affordably and frequently. It's a new type of relationship between a staffing company and their employer clients, different than the other two dozen or so staffing companies just in Roanoke he contends.

"That's what you want to do for a living," says Kelly Woolwine, "help people ... be more valuable in the workplace. There's a huge vein of potential horsepower in the region, in the hourly worker pool. We're going to keep plugging away." 



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## WELLNESS

By Valarie Angle

**Executive Summary:**

*With 2020 shaking up everything that we know about systems, procedures, and protocols; you might feel anxious about forging ahead. The unknown and lack of control can be very unsettling and it's easy to get trapped into a thought pattern of despair. So says our newest Wellness column contributor.*


*Valarie Angle is the owner & director of The WellNest Roanoke, and is a holistic Life Coach. Contact her at [Connect@TheWellNestRoanoke.com](mailto:Connect@TheWellNestRoanoke.com)*

## Sadhana: bringing balance to work and life

A focus on what we have control over: our own thoughts, beliefs, words, and actions; can help us maintain balance in work and at home, while achieving our goals. We can address our attitude and our behavior so that, no matter what environmental and circumstantial events affect us, we maintain emotional well-being and positive mental health.

I love the Sanskrit term “Sadhana,” referring to the spiritual work of creating the emotional, mental, and physical balance that keeps us well and moving toward our desired outcomes; a methodical discipline to attain a goal. We can incorporate this framework of Sadhana into our daily lives to have a sense of the work-life balance we crave. Dig deep into your motivation. Why do you do what you do? A life coach can help you through this process to uncover the why under the why. Once you come to understand your motivations, set your intentions toward maintaining your focus on that outcome. I like to think of it as if all of the desired outcomes are floating in a lake, waiting for me. I’m on a canoe in a river flowing toward those outcomes. My job is to stay on course, not take a turn into a creek or stream shooting off the river. If I stay on course, I will reach my goals. I stay on course with mindfulness.

Mindfulness means being fully present and aware in our own life experience; not distracted, overwhelmed, or reactive to observations around us. It’s the skill of refusing to analyze the past or allow those experiences and emotions to pull us down. Mindfulness is also the skill of reveling in the moment without worrying about the future. One ancient way of learning to harness mindfulness is through meditation.

Meditation can take on several forms, but at its core, it is taking some time to stop thinking and acting in order to give attention to a calm space within you. While ancient in practice, modern research affirms that consistent meditation results in reduced stress and anxiety; improved sleep, blood pressure, emotional well-being, attention, memory, and focus; and a greater capacity for self-forgiveness and social well-being. Setting intentions, attending to mindfulness, and learning to meditate in a way that is comfortable for you can make all the difference for you in 2021. You’ll find that you are better able to focus on and achieve your goals with a peacefulness and surety that only comes from self-discipline. 

“Consistent meditation results in reduced stress and anxiety...”




## A superpower called RWF

How do you take a woman's \$2,000 donation and convert it into a five- or six-figure transformative grant to a deserving area nonprofit organization? This is exactly what happens when women join the Roanoke Women's Foundation (RWF) and exercise the power of collective charitable giving. RWF is a philanthropic organization based on a model started in Seattle, Washington in 1995. There are now over 1,000 similar organizations throughout the country, and many around the world.

RWF, founded in 2004 by Roanokers Ginny Jarrett and Kandy Elliott, provides an opportunity for women to join together to collectively address important community needs. RWF's membership currently consists of 180 women, each having an equal vote in selecting our annual grant recipients. Since RWF's founding, we've awarded over \$4 million in grants in the areas of Arts and Culture, Health and Human Services, Education and Environment. We welcome your grant applications, and the 2021 process opens on March 1. A comprehensive, months-long grants process ensures member donations are allocated wisely and aligned with demonstrated community needs. Grants are awarded in the fall.

Through an annual commitment of \$2,100 (\$2,000 is tax-deductible for grants, \$100 defrays administrative costs), RWF members make life changing annual gifts to significantly benefit our region. Although its members have no obligation beyond their contributions and voting for grant recipients, there are opportunities for deeper engagement, including serving on the board or a committee and attending events. Women are our superpower and joining is simple!

Please contact us at [info@roanokewomensfoundation.org](mailto:info@roanokewomensfoundation.org) or visit our website, [www.roanokewomensfoundation.org](http://www.roanokewomensfoundation.org) for more information on membership or grant application. 

*Kathy Graves Stockburger is president of Roanoke Women's Foundation.*



*"Together While Apart"*  
Grants Presentation  
The Roanoke Women's Foundation  
2020

## GOOD WORK

**By Kathy Graves Stockburger**

**Executive Summary:**

*The Roanoke Women's Foundation is not only a growing professional networking group, it has proven to be a valuable, measurable contributor to our local community.*



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All photos courtesy of Carilion



## Vaccines for Frontline workers, Carilion executives a step towards “normalcy” >

With the arrival of the first shipments of the Pfizer and then the Moderna COVID vaccines, **Carilion Clinic** doctors, nurses and other frontline workers began receiving the first of two vaccine shots needed in mid-December. A second followed 3-4 weeks later. Carilion executives and department heads (including President and CEO **Nancy**

**Agee**, Chief Medical Officer **Dr. Patrice Weiss** and **Dr. Anthony Baffoe-Bonnie**, Medical Director, Infection Prevention and Control) also received those shots publicly – to show their confidence in their safety and to encourage the public to get the COVID vaccine when they come up on the priority list. Registered nurse **Mary Rogers**, who works in the COVID ICU unit at Carilion, was one of the first employees to be vaccinated. Rogers said she was “excited,” to be part of the rollout process. “I strongly support this and I believe in it. I hope in the [near] future to be able to return to some sense of normalcy. That is what I’m banking on.”

## LewisGale administers first vaccines to health care staffers >

In mid-December, the first **LewisGale** staff members from several facilities also began getting the COVID-19 vaccine "so they can continue to do their jobs while protecting their patients, family members, and communities for exposure," said LewisGale Vice-President **Nancy May**. They included Dr. **Ben Davidson**, Chief of Staff and ED Medical Director, LewisGale Hospital Pulaski, Dr. **Pro Cortorreal**, Medical Director of Hospitalists,

LewisGale Medical Center and **Viola Plum**, RPh, pharmacist, LewisGale Hospital Allegheny. **Pat Whisman** RN is Nurse Leader, at LewisGale Medical Center in Salem: "my job is making sure the staff has the supplies they need and the support ... to take care of these patients." Whisman has been a nurse at LewisGale for 19 years. "It's emotionally draining," says Whisman of the frontline workers doing their job; "[sometimes] patients don't make it. [but] its emotionally uplifting when you see patients being discharged to home." As for the vaccines that arrived in December: "it's very exciting that this is here. It's something to make ... and keep you well."



All photos courtesy of LewisGale







Submitted photo

Northam at VCW ribbon cutting

# One stop shop for jobs, skills training

By Gene Marrano

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**“Keep your options open and be flexible, because the sky’s really the limit right now,” says Morgan Romeo.**

Morgan Romeo is executive director for the Virginia Career Works Blue Ridge Region office in Roanoke. The VCW she says is a collaboration of various agencies that has been around for a while but rebranded under the Virginia Career Works banner to help job seekers “who are looking for a new or better career.” The current center on Thirlane Road opened almost three years ago – after a fire at Crossroads Center destroyed their previous permanent home. Romeo has worked for VCW and before that for other Commonwealth workforce programs dating back to 2011.

She says “everything” anyone needs to reach their education/training and employment goals can be accessed through the VCW office, on site or online in the COVID era. Seven partners representing 20-30 programs are available there, a “one stop shop model.”

Computers, printers, phones, fax machines and the like are available for those Romeo deems “self-sufficient,” people looking for jobs or maybe a short-term skills training program.

One on one counseling is available – especially for those who may be switching careers or jobs after say, the restaurant they worked at laid them off last year or went belly up. Virginia Career Works can guide people to resources that can help pay for that education adds Romeo. It’s all about progressing towards career goals and “being self-sufficient,” at the same time.

Direct pipelines to employers and their immediate needs can help the unemployed or under-employed land on their feet faster; those businesses are really VCW’s “main customer,” according to Romeo. Providing




a skilled workforce – attuned to local needs - to meet their needs is the focus. “We have ‘tons’ of businesses that we have relationships with.” VCW says Romeo also “works very closely with economic development [agencies],” when jobs come open or a new major employer is about to land in the region.

An online statewide labor exchange (see [virginiacareerworks.com](http://virginiacareerworks.com)) includes job listings. VCW can also help screen for the most likely candidates, handing employers “the cream of the crop,” when it comes to resumes. On site and online job fairs (VCW purchased a virtual job fair platform recently) – even drive through events in the parking lot during the pandemic – have helped place new hires as well.

Romeo says she has seen several workforce changes during the past decade. In the immediate aftermath of the Great Recession many laid off manufacturing workers were retrained for jobs that required a higher level of technical skills – “mainly [migrating into] health care is what I saw.” I.T. was another factor at the same time, but now she sees a swing back towards the hands-on trades. “We have a huge need for plumbers, construction, manufacturing and of course health care is always going to be a need in this region.” The listings for temporary or freelance gig jobs decreased once the pandemic reared its head but as things normalize Romeo expects those to bounce back.

In fact, through various outreach efforts VCW is trying to educate young students and parents that a four-year degree is not always needed to make a decent living – and the jobs are there. Count electricians and carpenters in that group; those who learn the skills needed can also be their own boss if they choose that path. “We’re just trying to educate the region that these possibilities exist – and to not limit [their children] that college is the only option.” The pay is even often better than many with a bachelor’s degree she notes.

Romeo calls Virginia Western Community College “a great partner,” noting the myriad of certificate and two-year degree programs available. “They have a lot of great short term training programs.” VCW often has access to tuition assistance programs, especially for high-demand jobs - sometimes up to 100 percent. Her advice to job seekers? “Keep your options open and be flexible, because the sky’s really the limit right now, with all of the resources we have.” VCW can also help overcome any barriers some might perceive as standing in the way of a better job or a new career. “We are there to help those folks get there. Because we can do it.”

Many don’t know she notes about all the guidance Virginia Career Works can offer during a job search – or the financial available resources for training – so Morgan Romeo is always happy to get the word out. (see [vcwblueridge.com](http://vcwblueridge.com) for access to local information) 





## NO BAD HIRES

By Jennifer Leake

**Executive Summary:**  
*If February is indeed the "Month of Love" consider that interviewing and selecting new employees has some of the same pitfalls that dating and marriage do.*

*Jennifer Leake, CMC is with Assessment Pros in Roanoke. Reach her at [jennifer@assessmentpros.com](mailto:jennifer@assessmentpros.com)*

## 6 key mistakes when interviewing and hiring employees

The initial interview is like a first date, with subsequent interviews much like second and third dates. You liked what you saw initially, so you decide to spend more time with the candidate. You hope additional time together helps you decide if you belong together or not. You both seek a good match – you to the candidate, the candidate to the job. You enter into the business relationship expecting and hoping for a successful “marriage.” Like dating and marriage, sometimes hiring a new employee goes horribly wrong. A recent poll I conducted revealed that when asked, “have you hired someone you wish you hadn’t” – 57% said they had in the past year and another 26% said they had in the past two years. You are in good company if it has happened to you.

A closer look at certain behaviors and thinking shows the parallels of these two situations.


**Mistake #1: You’re Not Sure What You’re Looking For** - It’s hard to find that “perfect one” without a vision of what you are looking for. Gather information on who has been successful (and unsuccessful) in the position before and compare your candidates to this “benchmark.” This increases the chances that the candidate you liked in the interview is the employee you want and need.

**Mistake #2: You’re Too Desperate** - It is hard to make a non-emotional and wise hiring (or dating) decision when desperation creeps into your thinking. In both cases, picking the wrong person can have an emotional and financial toll.

**Mistake #3: You Talk Too Much About Yourself** - Even in a tough job market, your purpose in the interview is to learn as much as you can about the person you are thinking of hiring. It is not to win their approval or convince them to please take your job.

**Mistake #4: You Fall in Love Too Fast** - Using employee assessments offers objective data to supplement or support your experience and “gut” in hiring. Assessments bring objectivity, consistency and thoroughness to the interview process - something you can’t do on your own.

**Mistake #5: You Believe Everything You’re Told** - Be skeptical and consider outside resources such as background check services or an Attitude assessment to measure things like integrity, honesty, hostility and substance abuse.

**Mistake #6: You Think You Can Change Them Later** - Don’t put a square peg in a round hole. Hiring people with the right experience or education doesn’t ensure job success. Hire people with the right attitude and “job fit” for you and your job – and then train them with the skill and knowledge they need to do well. 

# Welcome home



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Dan Mirolli

## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:**  
*Oftentimes, it's the  
smallest things that  
draw people.*

## May I have your attention, please?

My good friend and a great pal of ours at the business journal is Jane Dalier, a former account executive who moved a good number of years back to the Deep South with her husband, Robert, to set up new digs in the land of cotton, magnolias, catfish, and southern charm.

Specifically, Laurel, Mississippi, is where Jane resides—and when she's not engaged in her enduring love of gardening or seeking out shade while strolling along the Pine Belt, she's taken the time to set up a small merchant ladies boutique called The Spotted Dog. Her small town shop is the perfect spot to continue her marketing and saleswomanship skills, and it's where she cultivates an appreciation of culture and style and serving the locals.

I know some of these details because we stay in touch and follow each other—like Oprah Winfrey looking for fried okra, crawdads, and cornbread at a homecoming. (Ms. O hails from a place about 100 miles north of Laurel.)

I also know some details thanks to the notes and copies of the local magazine Jane sends me each year. In these notes, Jane invariably mentions Ben and Erin.

Ben and Erin Napier are hosts of the "Home Town" show on HGTV, and the local renovation projects they document draw a huge following. Jane credits much of the popularization and allure of Laurel, Mississippi to this television program. She also cites the foot traffic it has increased for merchants like hers in "downtown."

Obviously, we can't help but note the comparisons to Roanoke and the "Salvage Dogs" show on DIY Network; and the draw that 11-season long program had, thanks to Robert Kulp and Mike Whiteside at Black Dog Salvage architectural repurposing and fabrication shop.

Drawing attention.

That's the mission of a lot of folks in business, in government, in economic development, and in good old-fashioned pride from citizens of our hometowns and the place we set up home and shop.

As publisher of a regional business journal, a lot of areas get my attention. I'm watching the medical and research and education possibilities from the grand Carilion Clinic experiment. I keep a close eye on autonomous innovation from TORC and other technology advancements in and around Virginia Tech. I even celebrate our quality of life and ever-expanding entertainment and recreational opportunities from marketable enterprises including biking and trails and festivals and breweries/wineries.

And though there are indeed social investments we can employ to hatch out these ideas, I still enjoy the progress that comes from organic spawning, birth, and early development. When a small business owner/operator pursues his or her dream that begins to expand and draw attention simply from the law of supply and demand—now THAT'S a story to tell.

If you get their attention—they will come. 

## “How do we beat India?” and other questions about growing the talent base

A 9 million dollar-plus grant from the Growth and Opportunity for Virginia fund – GO Virginia – announced late last year includes a Round Three Allotment of \$290,000 for the Experiential Learning in Tech Employment (ELITE) internship program. The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council will use that grant to provide sponsorship opportunities for students earning a software development degree at a four-year university in the region. Then it will connect those graduates with smaller tech-based companies that do not have the capacity or expertise to manage their own internship programs.

During a Zoom event in December, Kim Mahan with MAXX Potential and Steve Cooper with ExelARATION in Blacksburg (at the Corporate Research Center just off the Virginia Tech campus) joined RBTC president John Phillips to talk about what seems to be an age-old problem in the region. That is, growing and retaining the technology base coming out of local colleges and universities – but often then heads elsewhere to find work.

MAXX Potential has offices elsewhere in Virginia and North Carolina, and sees the ELITE program as one way to move into this region. MAXX places paid apprentices just out of school with small business partners, where they work on real projects. Founding partner Kim Mahan posited this question during the Zoom webinar: “How do we beat India on both price and quality [for that technical talent]? We have spent the last eight years cultivating this non-traditional pool.” Mahan says for MAXX Potential, diversity means recruiting people “from all walks of life,” to technical, in-demand fields. In fact, Mahan says the average MAXX apprentice is a career-changer, not right out of school. Some don’t even have degrees, but all “have a passion for technology.”

At ExelARATION CEO Steve Cooper uses a different approach (as reported here previously) – they employ current upper-class Virginia Tech students as paid interns, who learn and earn while finishing their degree requirements. There is work out there – and local says Cooper: “the number of tech [companies] looking for someone with one to three years experience ... is twenty times larger than [those] with zero to one years.” So, a little time under your belt as a paid intern or an apprentice, working on real-world projects, may go a long way towards getting a real full-time job.

“The ELITE program is designed to increase the pipeline of software developers and technology workers in our region,” adds RBTC’s John Phillips. He says the ELITE model is one typically used more often in Northern Virginia. It’s also about letting local employers know this pipeline exists. Hopefully, that GO Virginia grant is money well spent. 🍷



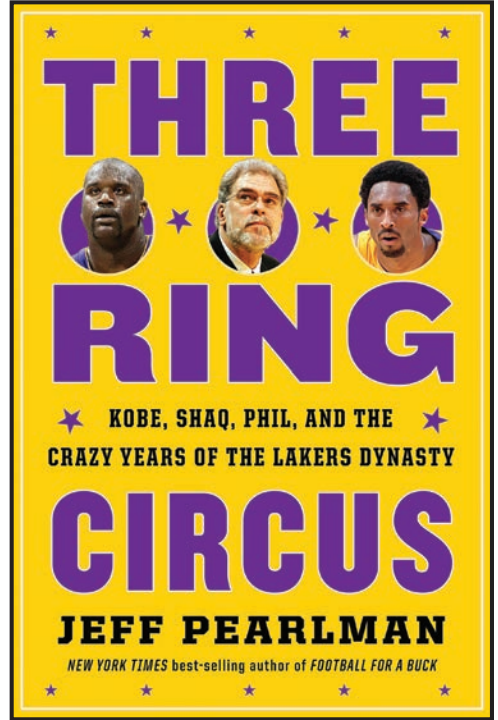
## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
*More regarding what seems to be an age-old problem: growing and then retaining the local technology talent*

## FRONTReviews >

Readers and patrons of the business journal are invited to submit reviews (along with an optional photo) to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto: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.



### *A true "Three Ring Circus"*

You build a world-class organization, with ownership willing to spend whatever it takes to be recognized as the leader in its business sector. Someone widely considered the best in his field as the senior executive with a proven track record is hired. The veteran who leads his team is also at the top of his game and at the same time that veteran gets to mentor a "Young Turk" regarded by many to be the best of a new class of rising stars. It all works brilliantly for several years – dominating the competition, making others in that business sector envious as they try to emulate the winning formula. Then suddenly, it all falls apart, and quickly.

The veteran's skills slip, the Young Turk tries to take his place and other team members are forced to take sides. The money paid to the two "top dogs" means less to refresh the talent surrounding them. The competition sees an opening and moves in for the kill. Sound like a business you've read about over the years? In this case however it's about the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team, winning three straight NBA titles in the early 2000's before it all came apart at the seams: big man Shaquille O'Neal traded, head coach Phil Jackson retiring (he did come back to

LA a few years later) and the late Kobe Bryant – uber talented but seen as aloof, selfish and standoffish to many of his teammates - then planting his flag. Long time LA sportswriter Jeff Pearlman's *Three Ring Circus: Kobe, Shaq, Phil and The Crazy Years of the Los Angeles Lakers Dynasty* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020) is the ultimate insider's book, as many years later he tracks down players and coaches from those "Three-peat" years and the seasons that followed for their impression of the Kobe-Shaq-Phil relationship. For those with even a passing interest in pro basketball – or organizational dynamics – it's a good read from a best-selling author several times over.

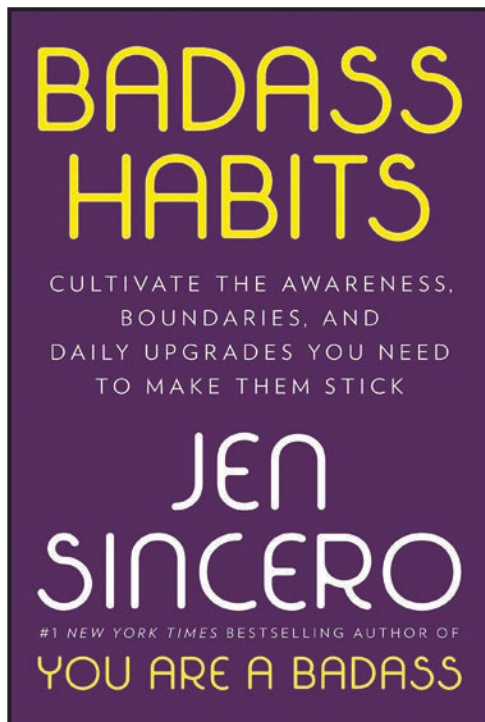
—Gene Marrano

### *Roanoke-Vietnam- Hawaiian connection*

My friend Inette Miller is an author and former journalist who lives in Kauai, Hawaii. She used to live here in Roanoke when she was a single mom raising two boys. She was a war correspondent during the Vietnam era, which was quite rare for a woman.

Inette has written a memoir, *Girls Don't!* A





*Woman's War in Vietnam* (Texas Tech University Press; 2021) which is her fourth memoir. It covers 1970, when Inette was just out of college, and her boyfriend is drafted. She marries within a few days in order to accompany him to the war; but US military wives are prohibited in the country. Inette works out a deal with her newspaper's editor to be a war correspondent, but it's limited to a one-month work visa. She went on to serve in the field for fourteen months.

The memoir includes Inette's perspectives with "women's libbers" and the growth of the feminism movement right on the male-dominated battlefield. It has been described as "a war story, a love story, and an open-hearted confessional."

—Bill Elliot

## *Believe, then do*

Finding this in my stocking at Christmas, Jen Sincero's *Badass Habits: Create the Awareness, Boundaries, and Daily Upgrades You Need to Make Them Stick* (Penguin; 2020) was perfect timing for those New Year's resolutions. It turns out, many of Sincero's other books include "badass"

in their titles... maybe that gives you insight on her mindset.

Indeed, most of the advice in this *Badass* book is about taking control of your thoughts and shifting everything you encounter into tactics to empower. She's militant about mantras (say them every day, as many times as you can), and she likes to blast through blockades to convert them to gateways. The 21-day challenge at the end of the book could have been more practical (instead of simply introducing a different idea to dwell on), but the notion of changing your internal view in order to move from bad directions to new directions was spot on. She's right on her counsel—beliefs preface actions (and results)—but you better be serious about those beliefs. Who wants bad habits when you can have badass habits?

—Tom Field

The reviewers: **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT and an award-winning news reporter; **Bill Elliot** is president of The Elliot Companies, a Roanoke-based commercial, municipal, and industrial full service electrical contractor; **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT.



Carilion

## Carilion gears up for any surge >

**Carilion Clinic's** Senior Vice President of Hospital Operations assumed that role just before the pandemic hit and health systems started feeling the strain. He says they've learned plenty during the past 9 months. **Michael Abbott** says already being a busy level one Trauma Center hospital meant that Carilion Clinic was perhaps more equipped than some systems to handle coronavirus patients. But there's always room to learn says Abbott, who assumed his role at Carilion a year ago: "stress has been put on America's health system. I think we've learned where the challenges are in our supply chain and our staffing, and our care for patients. There's a lot of lessons learned around how we scale [up]." The scramble for PPE supplies is not so much of a scramble now: "compared to the beginning of

COVID the supply chain is so much better. At the beginning all hospitals were short on supplies. We were doing a lot of processing, using different methods to re-sterilize equipment. The supply chain is much more stable now."

Abbott says Carilion is not only caring for COVID patients - they are also keeping an eye on frontline healthcare workers who may need some extra attention as well: "we have a lot of support systems in place for our staff. It is a very challenging time for our staff. It is very busy. It can be very challenging." An employee assistance and wellness programs provide that support. Abbott said the best thing the community can do to show its support for the Carilion staff is follow coronavirus safety protocol for now: wear masks, wash hands frequently and observe social distancing until the all-clear is given. Get the COVID vaccine when available – and a flu shot. "The biggest part of our surge plan is the partnership we have with the community." The vaccination of frontline health care workers that started in December also helps with employee morale and well-being says Abbott: "the vaccine won't change [things] instantly but it is the beginning of a new phase of COVID."



## New logo >

**Citizens Telephone Cooperative** in Floyd has introduced a new logo with the motto "New Year. New Look. Same Dependable People. Same Reliable Service." Citizens is a member-owned Cooperative providing telephone, Internet, and TV to Floyd County, portions of Ft. Chiswell, New Castle, and surrounding communities for over 100 years.



## Local eatery steps up for children; bank steps up for FSWVA >

At **Feeding Southwest Virginia's** Community Solutions Center on Melrose Avenue in Roanoke, **FarmBurguesa** provided 250 meals for children just before Christmas. Each to-go container from the Farm-to-Table restaurant in Roanoke's Grandin Village and in Vinton included a hamburger, fries, pickles and condiments. "Many circumstances contribute to an inadequate food supply. It may be short term because of the loss of a job, or long term because of inadequate fixed incomes or terminal or acute illness.

Whatever the reason, hunger does exist in our region and the mission of the Food Bank is to strive to meet that basic need," said **Kat Pascal**, co-owner of FarmBurguesa. Meanwhile just before another FSWVA pop-up food distribution event in Christiansburg (one of several dozen in 2020), Feeding Southwest Virginia President and CEO Pamela Irvine was surprised with a \$50,000 check from Wells Fargo, the banking giant that also has a call service center in Roanoke.







## Salem author realizes decades-long dream with release of book >

Writing as T.A. Killen, Salem resident **Teresa Killen** has been working on her first full length book, *Wysterra*, for over 20 years – mostly in her head, beginning with characters she made up when other kids ignored her on the playground. In the land of *Wysterra*, the dream world effects the real world. Your thoughts and dreams influence who you become. Killen has battled depression and anxiety over the years and that factors into the book. "It's an analogy about overcoming depression and anxiety," says Killen, also a graphic artist who is working on a virtual reality version. She's published a comic series as well. In *Wysterra*, "there's a lot of things going on. [When] you peel back the layers, it's about kids." And about the forest of unpleasant thoughts, one might add. She says young adults 13-18, especially females, should enjoy this fantasy-filled tale, populated with all sorts of mystical characters, some nice, others scary. Killen's advice to those who have thought for years about writing a book: "just start doing it and chip away." She already has *Wysterra* sequels in mind. Google [wysterra.com](http://wysterra.com) to see more information and a link to Amazon, where it's for sale in paperback (\$14.99) and on Kindle.



## Goodwill job training more crucial than ever >

Much of Roanoke-based **Goodwill Industries of the Valleys** mission revolves around job training and re-training and in 2020 its focus was never more needed. **Chelsea Moran** is the marketing and public relations manager; she says Goodwill Industries of the Valleys - covering a swath between Roanoke and Lynchburg - demonstrated versatility after the COVID pandemic began: "we took programming that was done almost 100 percent in person and after March we turned that into virtual services." Moran says Goodwill expected to help more than 60,000 people train for and find jobs in 2020 - compared to around 38,000 in 2019. 89 percent of the Goodwill revenues generated supported job training and placement programs.



Submitted

## First SML Leadership class kicks off with VBF columnist >

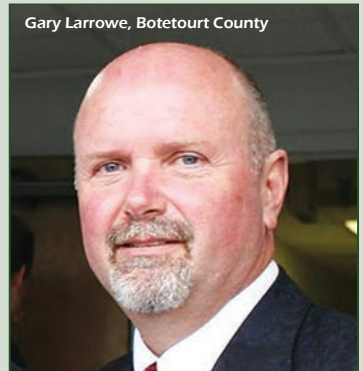
The **Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce (SMLRCC)** welcomed 14 professionals in its inaugural Smith Mountain Lake (SML) Leadership Academy, a 12-month program designed "to educate, connect, and inspire existing and emerging community leaders." The Leadership Academy kicked off on January 6 at The Franklin Center for Advanced Learning and Enterprise in Rocky Mount and featured a half-day orientation with guest speaker **Beth Bell**, executive director of the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce. Bell delivered a presentation entitled "Developing Your Centers of Influence," which included advice and tips to improve networking Return on Investment (ROI). "Bell's presentation was impressive and provided participants with strategies to build lasting relationships that are mutually beneficial and that can boost market access and credibility through referrals, testimonials, and simple, undervalued word-of-mouth," said SMLRCC Executive Director Christopher Finley, noting that Bell also serves as publisher of *Macaroni Kid Roanoke*, founder and president of *FemCity Roanoke*, a women's networking group, and as a columnist for *Valley Business FRONT*.

## Botetourt gears up >

Attrition and preparing for future growth has led **Botetourt County** to do some department and position shuffling in recent months. A new recreation Director - **Mandy Atkins** - has come aboard and there are other recent department hires. The Department of Recreation has been separated from the Facilities division. County administrator **Gary Larrowe** says they are looking to establish more programs around natural assets like trails and rivers, "expanding these other opportunities that we have such a natural fit for." There's also a new maintenance director and the County Engineer position has been reinstated.

Larrowe says these changes will help prepare Botetourt County for future growth - like more broadband expansion - not even on the radar when he started five years ago: "there had not been any efforts associated back in 2016. We started working on broadband deployment in 2018." Now says Larrowe the county is even working with their neighbors in Craig County through the electric power co-op to bring more high-speed broadband service to that rural locality. What Larrowe says he learned in the 2020 COVID world? "Being able to design programs and activities that people in the community needed, for something that filled a void. I think it's really [about] creativity, flexibility - and also compassion."

Gary Larrowe, Botetourt County





## WRABA on the move >

The **Williamson Road Area Business Association** has moved its office to the former Happy's Flea Market Building that was renovated as the Fort Knox drive-through storage facility, which also includes retail space. WRABA Executive director **Valerie Brown** says it straddles the Roanoke City-Roanoke County line – symbolic in a way since the organization that strives to promote local businesses along that busy corridor stretches into both localities. “WRABA will become the anchor of that retail location,” says Brown. They’ll formally cut a ribbon sometime early this year. WRABA is also seeking permission to add sections along Hershberger Road and near Orange Avenue to the district. “I see it as ... the Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association. We actually reach just beyond the footprint of Williamson Road.”



That philosophy has also led to the creation of a new logo for the business-funded organization. Brown says she has spent a good deal of time

reaching out to local eateries, “to help them and encourage them,” to get through the pandemic while working to ensure patrons that their establishments are safe – even if just for curbside pickup, “to hold their hands virtually [when needed] to get them through this.” She helped some fill out forms seeking government aid. Brown, on the job for about two years, said most have held on, not closing permanently, and several new ones have even opened “with baby steps.”

## Cardinal Glass expands >

**Cardinal Glass Industries** cut the ribbon last month on a facility expansion project which includes a state-of-the-art robotic seaming and cutting system. Located in the Vinton Business Center, Cardinal makes glass units for residential windows and doors. The 26,000 square foot project



expands and modernizes the facility's production and maintenance space, office area and adds employee break room/locker rooms. The facility upgrades and new equipment represents an \$8 million investment and is expected to create 60 new jobs within the next few years (about 200 are employed there now.) Construction was by Salem-based G & H Contracting. Vinton Mayor **Brad Grose** and Vinton District supervisor **Jason Peters** helped cut the ribbon. “It shows Cardinal’s commitment to this community and growing our business here in the Roanoke Valley, and expanding our staff” said Plant Manager **Todd Mathias**. “We’re very excited about the expansion here at Cardinal Glass,” added Grose.



## Downtown Roanoke iconic retailer under new management >

A fixture on Salem Avenue in downtown Roanoke since Ken Rattenbury and his wife opened the doors in 1979, **Fret Mill Music Company** has a new owner as of the beginning of the year. Fellow musician and long-time customer **Marie Anderson** – and now Fret Mill Music owner- says she is, “super-excited for people who want to continue to play, people who want to learn to play because that has been a part of my life for a really long time.”

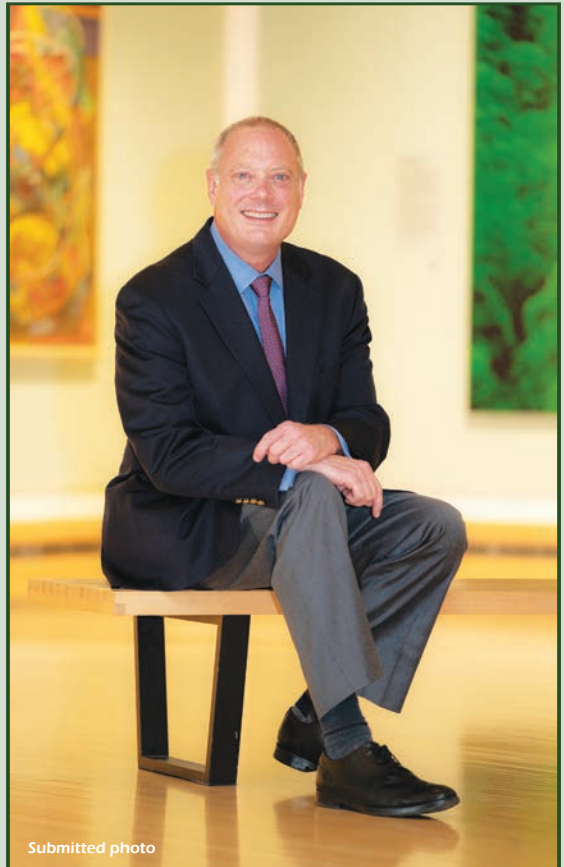
Anderson said. “I couldn’t be happier,” said Rattenbury in a video announcing the transaction, “I’m very excited and pleased to pass the torch over to Marie. I hope you all will support her the way you supported us all these years.” Fret Mill Music offers acoustic and electric instruments, accessories, lessons and instrument repairs.



## New chief curator has extensive resume >

He’s been on the job since November actually - but the new Chief Curator and Deputy Director of Exhibitions and Community Engagement at the **Taubman Museum of Art** is just now being introduced to the public. Dr. **Karl Emil Willers** comes from the Nassau County Museum of Art in New York and brings an extensive resume with him. The Texas native earned his doctorate at Yale.

“There are a lot of exhibitions on the schedule, I’m looking forward to that, [and] some fascinating projects coming up. I’ve already had my hand in doing some installation work here.” Willers succeeds the late Patrick Shaw Cable, who died unexpectedly of natural causes at age 53 last April. Willers is also the Deputy Director of Exhibitions and Community Engagement at the Taubman Museum.



*Valley Business FRONT is FRONT'n About at many events each month. Check the social media links at [www.vbFRONT.com](http://www.vbFRONT.com) for more coverage.*

## DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Hull

The Roanoke Regional Partnership has named **John Hull** as its new executive director. He succeeds Beth Doughty, who retired in December after 22 years with the economic development organization. Hull is a Roanoke College graduate and had already served in several roles at the Partnership, including as director of marketing intelligence since 2010. "I'm a firm believer in a data-driven approach ... that's going to be my [focus] moving ahead," says Hull, who also gives Doughty kudos as a mentor. "Beth has really taught me a lot ... I've seen her do it again and again."

Roanoke-based Branch Builds has promoted **Heather Bowman** to



Bowman

Business Unit Leader, Southern Region, which covers Roanoke and Richmond, as well as Charlotte, North Carolina. She is responsible for new growth and projects, staffing, planning and executing awarded projects. Bowman joined Branch Builds in 1995 and most recently, served as the Director of Business Administration.

## FINANCIAL FRONT

Freedom First Credit Union has announced the addition of **Jeremiah Clarke** as Vice President of Private Banking and Treasury Services. He has nearly a decade of experience in banking and financial services. Clarke worked in the insurance industry for more than a decade



Clarke

before moving into banking and investment services.



Doughty

Bank of Botetourt has appointed of **Beth Doughty** to the Board of Directors. Doughty retired after 22 years as the executive director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership. As executive director, she managed a \$2.4 million-dollar economic development program for an eight-locality, urban-suburban-rural region. Between two stints as executive director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, Doughty was also

president of the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce and is a past president of the Virginia Economic Developers Association.



Johnson

Cushman & Wakefield | Thalheimer announces that **Jessica Johnson**, CCIM has been appointed as the Secretary/Treasurer for the CCIM (Certified Commercial Investment Member) Mid-Atlantic Board of Directors for 2021- 2022. Johnson has also been selected to serve on the CCIM National Marketing Committee for a two-year term, 2021-2023. CCIM Institute is a professional organization providing industry education and is recognized as an expert in commercial investment real estate. Johnson joined Thalheimer's Southwest Virginia office in

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Roanoke in 2015 and has over fifteen years of experience in the real estate industry



**Bishop**



**Bain**

Salem-based Partners in Financial Planning, LLC, has announced that **Chris Bishop**, CFP®, and **Stephen Bain**, CFP®, have entered into part ownership of the firm. The firm's co-founder and senior financial planner, James Pearnan, Jr., CFP®, CPA/PFS, says, "the addition of Chris and Stephen to our ownership group is an important step in assuring the continuity

and growth of our firm." A native of Roanoke, Bishop joined Partners in Financial Planning in 2014. Bain has been part of Partners in Financial Planning since 2016. Both men hold undergraduate degrees from Virginia Tech.

## LEGAL FRONT

Four attorneys have been elected shareholders of Sands Anderson PC, a Mid-Atlantic law firm with 6 offices in Virginia and North Carolina. Two are in the Christiansburg office. **Steve Durbin** focuses his practice on local government issues. **Michael Bedsaul** helps local governments, departments of social services, and other public agencies with their needs.

## Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto: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.



**Stephenson**

Gentry Locke announced the promotion of **Scott A. Stephenson** to the partnership. Stephenson is a member of the firm's Business Litigation team. Stephenson earned his B.A. degree from Roanoke College and his J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.

Southeast Tourism Society has announced its Board of Directors for the term through December 30, 2022. **Lisa Bleakley**, Executive Director of Blacksburg-Christiansburg-

Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism (Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism), was newly elected as a Virginia representative for a two-year term. The organization focuses on Education, Advocacy, Recognition and Networking for travel and tourism industry professionals and their respective destinations. Bleakley has worked to promote tourism in Virginia for over 25 years and was hired as the Executive Director of the Montgomery County VA Regional Tourism in 2012, to create the first tourism program for Montgomery County.

## TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

Victaulic has announced the appointment of





**Rick Bucher** as Chief Executive Officer, succeeding John F. Malloy. Dr. Bucher was named President of Victaulic in April of 2020, following a June 2019 appointment as Chief Operating Officer. Prior to joining Easton, Pennsylvania-based Victaulic in 2009 as Vice President of Engineering, Bucher worked for 15 years for W.L. Gore, a manufacturer of technologically advanced composite materials. Bucher received a B.S. and M.S. in engineering from Rice University and a Ph.D. in material science from Virginia Tech.



**Howard**

Draper Aden Associates has named two new Senior Associates and four new Associates, based at four of the firm's eight offices throughout the Mid-Atlantic. The new Senior Associates at Draper Aden include **Carolyn Howard, PE, LEED AP** as Regional Manager on the Site Development and Infrastructure team in the firm's Blacksburg office. The firm also named four new Associates in Richmond, Raleigh and Newport. Draper Aden Associates is a Mid-Atlantic engineering, surveying, and environmental services firm founded almost 50

years ago in Blacksburg.

## EDUCATIONAL FRONT



**Park**

**Jung-Min "Jerry" Park**, a professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech, has been named a Bradley Senior Faculty Fellow by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. The Bradley Senior Faculty Fellowship is bestowed on a faculty member in recognition of an exemplary record of research achievement and innovation in one or more fields of ECE. A member of the Virginia Tech faculty since 2003, Park is known for pioneering research in the fields of dynamic spectrum access and sharing, wireless security and privacy, and cognitive radio networks. He has received 32 funded research projects totaling \$15.2 million as either the principal investigator or a co-principal investigator.

**Scott Bailey**, professor of electrical and computer engineering in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech, has been named a Bradley Senior Faculty Fellow by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. A member of the Virginia Tech faculty since 2006, Bailey is known



**Bailey**

for his pioneering research in the fields of space and atmospheric science and, in particular, remote sensing of the Earth's atmosphere. Since 2019, he has served as the director of the Center for Space Sciences and Engineering Research (Space@VT), a consortium of 25 researchers across the university with an annual research budget of \$5 million from both internal and external sources.



**Behkam**

**Bahareh Behkam**, associate professor of mechanical engineering in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech, has been awarded the John R. Jones III Faculty Fellowship in Mechanical Engineering by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. Jones is a member of the Class of 1967 who earned his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and retired as an executive of American Electric Power. A member of the Virginia Tech faculty since 2008, Behkam is an internationally

recognized leader in biohybrid microrobotics.



**Roediger**

**Emily Roediger** has joined the Virginia Tech College of Engineering as the director of communications and marketing. Roediger first joined Virginia Tech in 2017 and most recently served as the director of communications for the College of Architecture and Urban Studies

**William J. Farrell II**, President of Berglund Automotive Group, has been named Chair of the Virginia Western Community College Educational Foundation Board of Directors. Russ Ellett, President of Excel Truck Center, also joins Board leadership as Treasurer. Neil D. Wilkin Jr., CEO of Optical Cable Corp., will move to the position of Immediate Past Chair. Other officers include: Vice Chair Deborah L. Petrine, CEO and Chair of Commonwealth Care of Roanoke, and Secretary Tammy Moss Finley, Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary of Advance Auto Parts. W. Heywood Fralin, Chair of Medical Facilities of America, will lead the Educational Foundation's Nominating Committee. Chris Carey, President of VACORP and Metis Holdings, joins the

Board as an at-large member.



Ferguson

**Dr. Laurie Anne Ferguson** has been named the Founding Dean of the new School of Nursing at Emory & Henry College. Most recently she served as Dean of the College of Nursing and Health and Director of the School of Nursing at Loyola University in New Orleans. Emory & Henry plans to launch a

new School of Nursing in the Spring of 2021, at the undergraduate and graduate level. Dr. Ferguson brings more than 36 years of experience practicing as a Nurse Practitioner.



Cleveland

After two years at Virginia Tech as assistant dean of advancement for the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, **Dan Cleveland** has been named assistant vice president for

advancement - colleges and units. In this new position, Cleveland will oversee the chief advancement officers of 12 colleges and programs.

## SENIOR FRONT

Friendship, the senior living and rehabilitation organization, has appointed **Amanda Joines** as director of dining services at Salem Terrace at Harrogate, a retirement community managed by Friendship. Joines recently moved to the Roanoke Valley. After serving in the United States Air Force as a munitions systems

specialist she began studying culinary arts at Johnson & Wales University and earned her degree in 2016, one of three bachelor's degrees she now holds.

Richfield Living has announced **Amy Stoehr** as the new Executive Director of Rehab Services, Therapy. Stoehr, a graduate of Radford University with a bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders and a master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology, joined the team in November of 2020.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**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]

**Bruce C. Bryan** is proprietor of the award-winning advertising and marketing agency, 5Points Creative, located in downtown Roanoke. [bruce@5PointsCreative.com]

**Lisa Clause** is senior director of marketing and philanthropy at Richfield Living. She is a recent MBA graduate with distinction of Liberty University and has a bachelor's degree in marketing and minor in professional and technical writing at Virginia Tech. She began her career at the Roanoke Times, moved to WSET television rising to national sales manager. She co-owns Fine Line Interiors with her husband, and enjoys gardening, bike riding, and church activities.

**Jennifer Poff Cooper** is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjp91@gmail.com]

**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.

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

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

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

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

**Jennifer Leake** is an expert in employee assessments and their use to better select, engage and lead employees. Jennifer has over 20 years of assessment experience and is certified in multiple assessments, including Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement tools.

**Mike Leigh** is president of OpX Solutions, LLC, a performance improvement company that helps organizations pursue operational excellence. A retired naval commander and former GE manufacturing manager, he has extensive experience in leadership development and process improvement. [Mike@OpXSolutionsLLC.com]

**Gene Marrano** is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. [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.

**Brian Powell** is the owner and operator of Wine Gourmet in Roanoke Virginia. Brian moved to Roanoke when he purchased Wine Gourmet in 2011. Brian attended Virginia Tech and is an avid Hokie Fan! A member of the Guild of Sommoliers,

Brian resides in Roanoke and enjoys time with family and friends.

**Rob Ruthenberg** grew up most of his life in Roanoke Virginia. He has been a TV, radio personality, live event producer, writer and comedian for almost 30 years. [robbruthenberg1@gmail.com]

**Kathy Graves Stockburger** is a strategic planning consultant with over 30 years' experience concentrating on the nonprofit sector. She has served as the Executive Director of the Conflict Resolution Center, Inc., and on numerous community boards, including chairing the boards of the Roanoke City Public Schools, the United Way of Roanoke Valley, CHIP, and Good Samaritan Hospice. She currently serves on the boards of CHIP, Renovation Alliance, RWF, and the Steering Committee for Smart Beginnings of Greater Roanoke, and on the United Way Community Impact Council. [kstockburger@cox.net]

**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]

**Amy White** is the Dean of STEM (School of Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) at Virginia Western Community College. She has a Bachelor's degree in biology from James Madison University, a Master's degree in microbiology and immunology from Virginia Commonwealth University, hails from Botetourt County, and has worked at VWCC since 2003.

““

We did some unique things there... I didn't realize at the time. — Page 27



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*Targeted Chamber directory*

The **Roanoke Regional Partnership** will create a new online directory focused on women and minority-owned businesses, a resource it hopes to launch within the next month or so. It's free and you do not have to be a Chamber member to be listed. Joyce Waugh is the Chamber's President & CEO: "it's to help people find the folks they're trying to find, for the type of work they want someone to do." Colors Virginia magazine publisher Robert Jeffrey Jr. - also a new Roanoke City Council member - is partnering on the virtual directory. See a link on the Roanoke Regional Chamber website - or on our website - to submit information on your business.

*HUD issues grant to help with employment opportunities*

The U.S. **Housing and Urban Development** (HUD) awarded grants totaling \$1,879,967 to 19 public housing and redevelopment authorities in Virginia to support the agencies' Family Self-Sufficiency programs. HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program enables participating families to find jobs, increase earned income, reduce or eliminate the need for rental and/or welfare assistance, and make progress toward achieving economic independence and self-sufficiency. FSS participants sign a five-year contract that requires the head of

the household to obtain employment and defines that no member of the household may have received cash welfare assistance for twelve months prior to program graduation. The Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority received almost \$152,000 from the FSS program in December.

*Funds to help fill vacant storefronts issued*

The Commonwealth has issued \$90,000 in Community Business Launch (CBL) grants for the town of Blackstone and the city of Buena Vista. CBL provides funding to conduct business plan competitions and offer training to entrepreneurs that aligns with local and regional economic development strategies, primarily in Virginia's downtown commercial districts. Administered through the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), CBL is a place-based entrepreneurial development initiative that helps fill vacant storefronts with community-based expansion or startup ventures.

*BioHub grants*

Another round of **GO Virginia** grants totaling more than 6 million dollars and targeted towards efforts to stimulate economic growth have been issued by the Commonwealth. The City of Roanoke got some of that funding as part of the Virginia Bio Connect project, which

aims to create jobs in the bioscience industry by forming four new "BioHubs" across the state.

*More recognition for bike-friendly culture*

The **League of American Bicyclists** has honored the City of Roanoke with a Bronze-level Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) award, joining 485 other communities in the movement for the promotion of safer streets and better bicycling for everyone. The award recognizes Roanoke for its commitment to creating transportation and recreational resources that also encourage healthier and more sustainable transportation choices. The City of Roanoke, along with the RIDE Solutions commuter assistance program, has designed a self-guided Bicycle Friendly Roanoke tour, available on the city website. Promoting a bike-friendly environment and the area's extensive mountain biking trail network has become a recruitment tool and a way to attract visitors in recent years as well.

*Broadband Expansion*

**Botetourt County** has secured a Fast-Track Broadband grant in the amount of \$569,808, which will be used to increase broadband accessibility to underserved citizens. Over the past few years, the County says it has made "significant investments to improve and expand broadband

access." That includes more than \$3.3 million in grant funding to support and prioritize broadband expansion initiatives. This latest grant provides Botetourt County with a Citizens Broadband Radio Service; a fixed wireless Customer Premise Units (CPEs) technology for use in the Fincastle area. It should serve around 250 customers.

*Project Outside gets a boost*

The **Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia** has awarded a grant of \$10,000 to Roanoke Outside to support Project Outside, a community fund created by businesses, governments, and individuals to support outdoor capital projects, maintain key outdoor assets, and help launch and support business in the outdoor sector. Pete Eshelman Director of Roanoke Outside said, "this pandemic has created a lot of firsts for our community, including first time outdoor users. While we should be celebrating this, it is actually generating a lot of unanticipated wear and tear on already over-taxed trails, greenways, and rivers." The [grant] to Project Outside will allow for quick maintenance of key regional outdoor assets, investment in new outdoor infrastructure projects, and support for outdoor businesses and initiatives impacted by COVID." Eshelman said previously the initial goal for Project Outside was to raise \$100,000

and then make it a more sustainable campaign.

*Foot Levelers continues BRM sponsorship*

**Foot Levelers, Inc.** will continue its title sponsorship of the Foot Levelers Blue Ridge Marathon and Half Marathon for the next three years. This marks their 9th year as the title sponsor. This year's race is scheduled for Saturday, April 17. It was canceled in 2020 due to pandemic concerns. The Foot Levelers Blue Ridge Marathon is considered "America's Toughest Road Marathon" due to a change in elevation of over 7,430 feet, greater

than any other U.S. road marathon. Roanoke-based Foot Levelers is a provider of custom orthotics and other therapeutic products.

*Small businesses may need to get more tech-savvy*

The **Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce** says it worked to help its members survive the pandemic last year with an enhanced online business directory and by encouraging them to create on-line stores. But executive director Beth Bell (also a Valley Business FRONT

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columnist) says some will have to invest more this year for their online presence: "I think there's a technology gap. I think [small businesses] need to pay someone to do it and they need to understand that's going to be a cost of doing business and a cost of moving forward – and surviving." Bell says

some members did use Facebook creatively to help lure customers to their shops.

*Hokie-owned business directory debuts*

**Virginia Tech** has launched a new Hokie-owned business directory designed to



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help connect Virginia Tech faculty and alumni who are entrepreneurs and business owners. "Hokies supporting Hokies — this is a defining characteristic of our global community," said Brandy Salmon, associate vice president for innovation and partnerships at Virginia Tech. "With the launch of Aluminate, a platform for engaging our alumni around topics of work and careers, we are helping them tap into the best and most vibrant network in the world. This business directory is one small way that we're doing that." The publicly accessible, online business directory is piloted by LAUNCH:

the Center for New Ventures at Virginia Tech. See at link to the directory at vt.edu.

*New deal with aerospace giant*

Roanoke-based **Luna Innovations**, which manufactures advanced optical technology, has announced a \$6.2 million deal with Lockheed Martin, further extending a long-term relationship involving the development of new optical measurement products for the global fleet of F-35 aircraft. "The longevity and success of our relationship with Lockheed Martin is a testament

to our mission, to accelerate bringing state-of-the-art products that rely on fiber optics, like the F-35, to market and recognizes our technical expertise," said Scott Graeff, President and Chief Executive Officer of Luna, in December.

*Mill Mountain Theatre soldiers on*

Producing artistic director Ginger Poole accentuated the positive in a year-end online video that described how Roanoke's only professional equity theater pivoted in 2020 once the pandemic arrived. For example,

the digital production of Polkadots, a youth-oriented musical about inclusion, was viewed almost 500 times in five countries. The Meet Me at the Mountain podcast that launched last year was downloaded about 800 times – in 11 countries. Around 1000 students "from all over the world," says Poole went through the virtual Mill Mountain Theatre conservancy and a MMT virtual homecoming concert raised over \$1500 during its 90-minute performance. "2020 has been a year like no other, but the history of Mill Mountain Theatre [including going dark in 2009 over financial issues] has



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shown its more than capable to weather the storm,” said Poole.

*Online academy for professional excavators*

**Virginia811**, the Roanoke-based organization created by Virginia’s utilities to protect their underground facilities, has launched a new online training program called Virginia811 Academy – Safety Through Education, designed to leverage

online learning technology and educate excavators about damage prevention and best practices. The Academy contains several educational videos and other online tools to teach professional excavators how to accurately enter underground utility location requests using Virginia811’s Web Ticket Entry platform. Professional excavators will no longer be required to take in-person or live, virtual training sessions,

but will have the option to take advantage of the Academy’s online resources (in several different learning formats) so they can become qualified to enter their own requests online, as opposed to calling 811. It launched in mid-January. See [Academy.va811.com](http://Academy.va811.com).

*Good news in Carroll County*

**Mohawk Industries**, a global manufacturer of residential and

commercial flooring products, will invest \$22.5 million to expand its operation in Carroll County, adding 19,000 square feet to a facility in Hillsville and installing new equipment. The governor’s office said in mid-January that Virginia competed with other states for the project, which will retain 75 existing jobs and create 35 new ones.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano*

Check out additional FRONT Notes from Valley Business FRONT on our Facebook site or social media links at [www.vbFRONT.com](http://www.vbFRONT.com).

# 2021 SEASON LINEUP

*So far....*

- 5/8 Jackyl
- 5/14 Metallica Tribute: Battery
- 5/15 Jamey Johnson
- 5/28 Eagles Tribute: EagleMania
- 6/5 Aaron Lewis
- 6/11 Van Halen Tribute: Completely Unchained
- 6/12 Ashley McBryde

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- 6/19 The Cadillac Three
- 6/25 Fleetwood Mac Tribute: Rumours
- 6/26 Blues Traveler/JJ Grey & Mofo
- 9/9 Blackberry Smoke
- 9/18 Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
- 9/24 Prince Tribute: Dean Ford & the Beautiful Ones







# 5 Points Music Sanctuary still finding its way

By Rob Ruthenberg

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The pandemic has led one popular live music venue to think on its feet, in order to remain viable.





5 Points Music Sanctuary

Tyler Godsey

Tyler Godsey, Director and Founder of The 5 Points Music Foundation (on Maple Avenue near downtown Roanoke) had some serious encouragement when over 275 people came to the soft opening in January 2017 to see the local Grateful Dead tribute act Dead Reckoning. "I thought it was going to be a cake walk; I was like, man the town is dying for something like this." Godsey believed that there was a need in the market for what he had in mind. Fast forward to March of that year for the official opening concert featuring classical pianist Holly Bowling, best known for transcribing the music of Phish and The Grateful Dead for solo piano. He found out it was going to be a grind, teaching him that building a brand was going to take some time. 5 Points (named for the unusual five-way intersection nearby) averaged over 100 shows a year until the start of the Pandemic.

## In the beginning

In August 2016, Godsey left his position with the Roanoke Valley Regional Commission to start 5 Points. He wanted to explore which business model was going to support the quality and quantity of shows that best fits the venue (a former church). The non-profit model allowed him some flexibility when it came to things like carrying an ABC license

at shows. "I had no interest in becoming a restaurant." Godsey explains that being a non-profit allowed for education and advocacy programs to continue even when shows weren't going on. With the help of advisors, he explored various business plans and carefully put together projections – thinking that if he went with the wrong model it would be harder to change it later on. 5 Points currently consists of 6 volunteer board members and 4 paid part time employees, including himself. "This set up does not allow me to be on a pedestal. If I mess it up and the board doesn't think I'm doing a good job, they can fire me."

## Close to home

"It was built around sound." Godsey is hearing impaired and both his children have a condition known as Ushers Syndrome, characterized by a combination of hearing loss and visual impairment causing them to be born deaf and eventually leading to premature blindness by adolescence. The input of Tyler's children has been instrumental in helping to provide accessibility for those who otherwise may not be able to have the live show experience. "Sound is not just defined by what we hear," says Godsey, "it's everything, it encompasses what we see, feel, and share collectively." All of the sweat



equity is worth it though. "I wanted to restructure my life around something that made me feel good when I woke up in the morning." This enabled programs like Hearing Loss Advocacy, where live events help fund and promote programs that help reduce the risk of hearing loss. This program also involves education and implementing practices that can be incorporated at other venues. In addition, 5 Points Music has provided nearly \$40,000 worth of free music therapy sessions, partnering with Anderson Music Therapy to serve multiple age groups with various special needs, ranging from 3-year-olds with Down Syndrome to Veterans with PTSD.

## Making good use of time

In the beginning of the pandemic like at many other venues, The 5 Points Music

Sanctuary continued to do shows that were more scaled down in compliance with new restrictions. Godsey also looked at what other venues did as a "work-around" including the drive-in show model. This helped to inspire him to get creative as he searched for new revenue streams, eventually leading to outdoor shows in Roanoke's Wasena Park. Some small private events also continued, like weddings. Godsey looked at this time last year as an opportunity to catch up on some more back end infrastructure work, tapping into the various skill sets of his employees and volunteers.

They continued to build on and reimagine the 5 Points brand, including work on their web presence, helping to strengthen the fundraising and donation capabilities already in place. They also launched a line of merchandise that included clothing






Cloud Bobby Photography

and limited edition show posters currently available for sale on their website ([5pointsmusic.com](http://5pointsmusic.com)). Applying for multiple grants and loans became almost a full-time job but allowed them to maintain a good working relationship with the building's owners and to continue helping other non-profits as well. But Godsey says that the strict dependence on live shows and good will was not going to be sustainable long term.

## Moving forward

The implementation of best practices - and finding out exactly what they are - through the collection of reliable data has been the encompassing thought process throughout most of this pandemic period. "Are things going to be different moving forward? Yes," says Godsey. "Will

our staff members and the production team have to work harder than they did in the past? Likely. I just wanted to make sure that everybody got paid and we did it safely. Is the goal to remain in the black? Of course, it is. It may not be what it was before, but we will figure this out together."

For now, Godsey plans to produce socially distanced outdoor shows starting in March and see where things go from there. They continue to rent the building for small private events. 5 Points is also committed to leveraging what they do in order to help other nonprofits with fundraising efforts, with webcasting and live streaming events. This also lets 5 Points put on smaller and more local acts and still raise money for various causes. "All we can do is keep pushing this thing down the road and keep doing what we're doing," says Tyler Godsey. 



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“”  
Sound is not just defined by what we hear. — Page 59

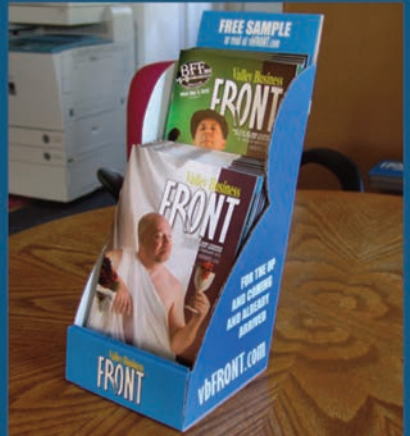
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**2**

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**3**

Dizziness, fainting or sudden abnormal sweating

**4**

Shortness of breath

**5**

Heartburn, nausea or indigestion-like pain

**6**

Extreme fatigue or exhaustion\*

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

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