

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 154

JULY 2021

Virginia Tech
Transportation Institute

I/O components

Blue Ridge Hydroponics

Hot Yoga

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Our State of Tech



Erin Burcham
Roanoke Blacksburg
Technology Council



Brent Jenkins, *VP Commercial Lending*

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Welcome to July. All state decreed restrictions regarding COVID safety – like wearing a mask and social distancing protocols – are now a thing of the past in Virginia as of June 30, with the Commonwealth hovering around that 70 percent vaccination rate target. And let's face it, people are chomping at the bit to get back to normal. We're all for "normal." Pent up demand has caught supply chains by surprise in many business sectors, leading to product shortages and higher prices – In other words, inflation. Let's hope that spike is short lived as those kinks in the chain are ironed out.

This month we look at various facets of technology, which of course can't be covered in any one issue of any magazine. But we serve up some snapshots – from what's happening at Virginia Tech's Transportation Institute to an associate pastor in Covington with a patent pending wireless power source, to a hydroponics retail store in Roanoke getting ready to show folks how to grow legal weed (yes, as of July 1 you can grow it for personal use), to an overview of what it will take to grow something else — tech jobs in the region. Spoiler alert: collaboration and capital are key. We hope you find all of this somewhat enlightening. Happy reading and pass the sunscreen.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

“Now people are coming out of the woodwork and getting more comfortable talking about it. — Page 24

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Southwest Virginia's technology sectors cooperating for growth

By Nannette Levin



“ ”
It felt good...Maskless.
— Page 37



THE CLOUD AND YOU

Why cloud technology isn't hot air

By Thom Watkins | Vice President, Cox Business Virginia

The past year has shifted how we think about the workplace. And for most of us, we're probably not going back to pre-pandemic business life. It's no longer enough to rely on storefronts as your only source of income. Nor can we guarantee employees can always pop by a physical office space to ask a question or forward a call to the sales team. But with an eye towards innovation, you can future-proof your business.

Here are five ways cloud technology can help your business thrive today and tomorrow.

Support Remote Work

According to the Pew Research Center, 71% of employed adults in the U.S. are currently working from home. More than half of those respondents want to continue working remotely in the post-COVID-19 world. In order for your business to meet that demand, you need flexible solutions at your fingertips. With cloud software and storage, your staff can share files and collaborate online easily from any location and on any device.

Enable Remote IT Management

As your business grows and your customer base expands nationally or globally, you need constant and consistent IT oversight. With managed IT services from Cox Business, you're no longer tied to your work 24/7. We offer monitoring dashboards that allow you to see what's going on with your systems from anywhere and on any device. That means you can enjoy time away from the office with peace of mind knowing your network is still accessible but more importantly, secure.

Mitigate Security Risks

As data breaches and cyber-attacks become more prevalent, you need to protect your data and your customers' data. Fortunately, cloud technologies provide different security levels, depending on your data, industry, and business requirements. Leveraging cloud storage and backup solutions will ensure you're safeguarding your business against any malicious activity. And, with Cox Business Cloud Solutions, you can customize and scale services to fit your needs at any time.

Build IT Resiliency into Business Operations

Resiliency is key to future-proofing your business. In addition to financial and operational resilience, you also need to look at your IT resilience. Cloud computing supports this by reducing risk from disruption and making it easier to recoup after a disaster. In addition, enlisting cloud services as part of your digital transformation strategy makes your company more flexible while giving the right employees access to data.

Attract and Retain Talent and Clients

You need to hire the right people to ensure business success – and you want them to stay. The cloud gives your teams access to the information they need to be productive while building efficiency. And it demonstrates to your employees that your company is forward-thinking and innovative, all of which help you attract a high-quality and tech-savvy workforce.

Any successful business also needs customers and clients. As consumer behaviors change, your company must also evolve while continually identifying and addressing new pain points. With cloud technologies, your team can oversee customer care, connect clients to the right people, and quickly resolve problems. Happy clients are loyal clients.

At Cox Business, we work tirelessly for you, so you can focus on your core business for growth and success. Learn more about our managed cloud services at CoxBusiness.com/cloud.

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JULY



Michael Abraham



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Advisory Board

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

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“”
It's not hard to
be successful here.

— Page 17

“”
You don't
make mistakes
with weddings
and corporate
events if
you want
to remain
in business.

— Page 60

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

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What we look to bring is people who look to sell services outside the region. They're bringing in wealth."

Greg Feldmann, CEO of VERGE (his Innovation column is on Page 30 in this issue), cites area resources supporting the current tech sector climate. "We have regional assets here that are linked to technology," he says. Among them Virginia Tech's R-1 research designation and STEM and computer science degrees. "All of that translates to the potential for new innovations to be discovered through research and development, and commercialized. [We're] producing people ready to come in to work the force of tech-based companies. Innovation economic growth is being focused upon as a part of traditional economic development," he states.

Feldmann notes Carilion, Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, the RAMP high-tech business incubator and the Advancement Foundation (The Gauntlet) as entrepreneurial and innovation hubs. "Trains, coal, textiles, tobacco have been the backbone industries of large parts of the region we live in. A lot of these industries are in decline." Technology related companies are replacing these sectors, he says.



Tom Field

Erin Burcham, RBTC



“ ”

In our region, since the companies are pretty diverse, it's really inclusive and collaborative.



Submitted

Greg Feldmann, VERGE



People invest
in what they
understand.

Area assets & support systems

"From my perspective, our biggest asset is our higher education," states Erin Burcham. She cites Radford's new innovation lab, Virginia Tech's "top in the nation" software engineering and computer science programs, and Liberty University. "Our biggest challenge is keeping the talent here and really being present on campuses," she says.

Burcham recently left the Roanoke Regional Partnership to assume the helm at RBTC. "When I first walked into the Partnership, I wrote a grant call the Brain Drain Study." This investigated the perception students had of the region and what could be done to encourage more to stay after graduation.

Study results found students didn't believe there were good area opportunities. Consequently, partnerships were developed to brand the region with RBTC the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, and Onward New River Valley. "It's an easy sell to the students to live here after graduation but they really want to know they're going to have a job that's competitive," Burcham states. "We've really collaborated on talent, getting in front of our higher ed institutes to get them to stay in the region."

Talent opportunities & challenges

"The pandemic has given [regional tech businesses] a new challenge of competing with everyone in the world for tech talent," says Burcham. "I know even in the last year, year and a half, we've lost some great tech talent to other companies outside the region." Still, Burcham sees opportunities to help companies attract and retain tech workers. "Keeping companies and talent here together is going to be really important."

She cites the high quality of life the area offers for both recruiting talent for local companies and attracting remote workers. "People are really starting to evaluate what they want their life to look like and how they want to spend their time."

"Branding – that's a space that we've really tried to dig in through the Partnership for these mid to high level jobs," Burcham notes. "Really being intentional in showing up where technology workers are." She says the board at RBTC sees branding this region as a technology hub as a priority.

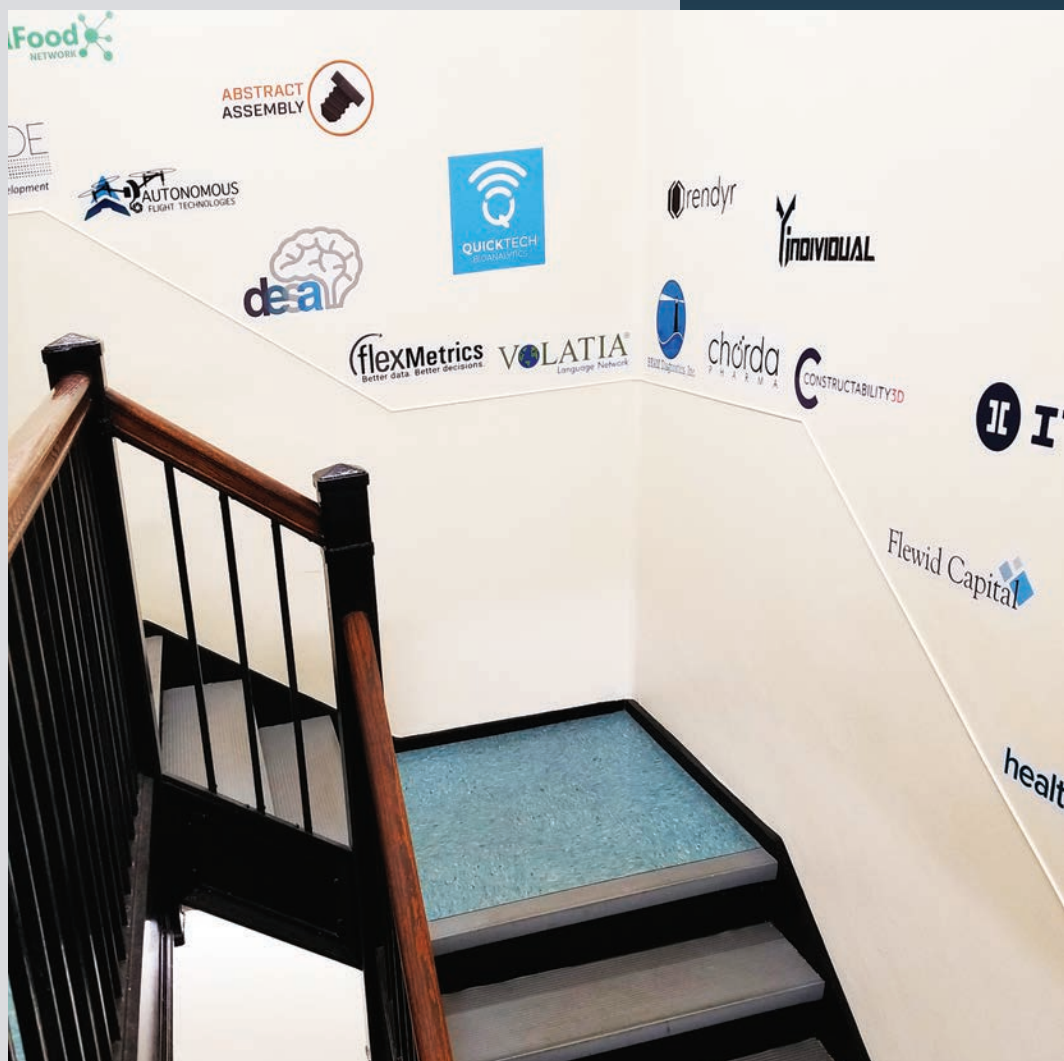
"We have 25 college and universities within an hour of Roanoke," says John Hull. "There's great talent that is available for technology companies and their growth in our higher education resources, alumni network."

Feldmann cites a Valleys Innovation Council survey that identified high demand for mid-career and senior level people. "Some of that talent is present in the region and companies poach from one another to get that talent," he says. One of the challenges he notes is that the area is competing with markets that pay more. He suggests tracking STEM degrees and recruiting back people who take first-time jobs out of the area.

Where's the money?

Financing growth can be a challenge for local companies seeking regional support. "It is an issue, but not an insurmountable issue," says Feldmann. "A group of us have been working on the access to capital problem for a while." He suggests SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) grant funding for product development with start-up companies.

Stairway to [entrepreneurial] heaven



“ ”

Track STEM degrees and recruit back people who take first-time jobs out of the area.



Submitted

John Hull, Roanoke Regional Partnership



Roanoke is well positioned.

For next stage capital, Feldmann cites CommonWealth Angels, a group of Region 2 high-net-worth individuals, most with business success histories and a financial risk appetite. "They want to pay it forward, see good things happen in the region," he says. Feldmann also notes the VTC Seed fund and VTC Innovation Fund. These are for entities being developed within the Virginia Tech and Carilion ecosystem.

One of the things Feldmann and his cohorts are working on involves building relationships with angel and venture capital investors to create a syndicate that brings dollars in from other areas. "People invest in what they understand," says Feldmann. "Inherent in technology funding there's a lot of obsolesce risk that no one can forecast." That challenge makes it tough to find local money in a community where technology ventures are a relatively new development.

Homespun success stories

Many tech companies have found success in the region. Hull cites BEAM Diagnostics and PowerSchool. Feldmann tells the stories of Roanoke's Meridium's almost \$500 million buyout by GE Digital. Blacksburg's Torc Robotics saw Daimler Trucks buy a controlling interest in March 2019. Home-grown Interactive Achievement was bought by PowerSchool in 2016. New River Pharmaceuticals of Radford was purchased by Shire Pharmaceuticals in a \$2.6 billion deal. Landos Biopharma did an IPO in February of this year.

Hull cites companies like Ticket Spicket, a RAMP cohort, that saw increased success during the pandemic. The






Iconic graphic adorns renovated Gill Memorial Building at 709 Jefferson Street in Roanoke, home to the RAMP suite and RBTC (Roanoke) office.

company offers a remote ticket sales app for sporting events that was modified to automatically social distance attendees. "They're closing in on 2,000 high schools adopting their platform," says Feldmann.

Regional Technology Trends

Biotechnology and Fintech (Financial technology is described as technology and innovation that aims to compete with traditional financial methods in the delivery of financial services) as two areas where Burcham sees big growth in the region. Feldmann notes clusters, particularly in IT, health and life science, and advanced manufacturing. When the Ericsson/GE Mobile Communications manufacturing facility shut down, employees started businesses to stay in the area. Consequently, wireless technology is a big force in Lynchburg. Nuclear energy, too, "On a per capita basis, there's more nuclear engineers than any other place in the United States."

As for the local state of technology and the potential for job growth in that sector: "Roanoke has emerged from this pandemic stronger in a lot of ways," says Hull. "The outdoors, livability, all very much are very on trend for labor, business. Roanoke is very well positioned. We have growing innovation, a diverse economy, and are very well positioned heading into the future." 

RECENT M&A TECH SUCCESSSES:

- Meridium—
GE Digital
- TORC—
Daimler
- Interactive
Achievement—
PowerSchool
- New River
Pharmaceuticals—
Shire



Virginia Tech Transportation Institute: still driving forward

By Michael Abraham

The future of transportation took root at Virginia Tech 2-plus decades ago.



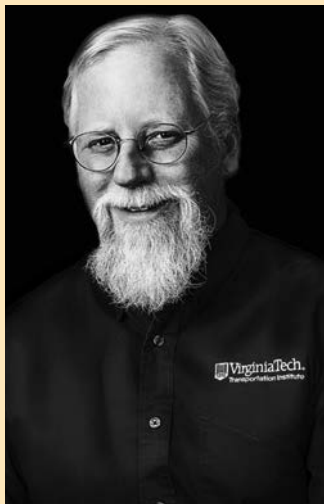
All photos: VTTI

The retiring director of the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, Tom Dingus, is leaving VTTI well positioned for the future. After 25 years at the helm, his leadership and vision has helped lead VTTI to become one of the university's great success stories, overseeing growth from 15 employees to now over 500. "We have an incredible team of researchers and have had very

little turnover," Dingus said. "Many have been with us for 15 or 20 years. It's a good time to step aside. I'd planned on leaving before now, but with COVID, I wanted to be there to pull us out of the trough." He's not fading away entirely just yet: "I'll be a senior fellow at the Institute for Critical Thinking and Technology and Applied Science at Tech ... until I fully retire."



Miguel Perez



Tom Dingus



Mike Mollenhauer

About what the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, home of the Smart Road test track, is doing now: “we’re studying automated and autonomous cars. We were doing automated braking systems 25 years ago. It’s been hard to put a fully autonomous vehicle on the road. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested and thousands of people have contributed, but it’s a thorny, daunting problem. We’re pushing the limits of physics in sensing and computing.”

Funding is always an issue and comes less from the university than one might think notes Dingus: “VTTI is a soft-money organization, working on contracts. We get 10% of our budget from Virginia Tech. We are the most sponsor-driven, sponsor-funded unit at Tech. It’s entrepreneurial and we’re looking for opportunities all the time. We write over 200 proposals, and we win over 80% of them. We typically don’t submit those we aren’t reasonably sure we can win. We’ve done a lot of concept testing for a variety of sponsors including the Federal government, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, Federal Highway Administration, and car companies like General Motors. We’re one of the top three globally in transportation research institutes by any metric.”

People joke about how bad some human drivers are, “but if you’re an alert, sober,

reasonably attentive and trained driver, people are really good at driving. There’s not one [autonomous vehicle] operating in the public domain anywhere in the world without a human backup. A lot of our current work is helping to move the bar forward. “

Dr. Miguel Perez is the Program Lead for Data Engineering in the Division of Data Analytics at VTTI, working there for 19 years. Among other things, he’s focused on autonomous vehicles that carry goods rather than people, delivery vehicles that don’t have drivers. One of his clients is NURO, which delivers pizzas: “They approached us a year ago to help quantify the safety benefits of this approach. We looked at crash databases. If the vehicle is in a crash, at least nobody gets hurt inside. They can make their vehicles smaller, softer and lighter, safer for others and more economical. We found a potential for 58-60% reduction in injuries and fatalities.”

Perez notes another project is looking into mobility options for rural seniors. Potentially driverless vehicles could be applied to pick up older people who have no public transportation. “We’re looking at the quantification of needs. For autonomous vehicles rural road situations present an entirely new list of challenges to location sensing systems and varying speeds, road surfaces and weather conditions. And many rural areas don’t have the internet, or the




seniors don't have the expertise. Our area is a great test platform."

Mike Mollenhauer is the Director for the Division of Technology Implementation at VTTI; his group focuses on taking technologies from the test track into the world, doing early-stage deployment. "We've worked on systems that link vehicles to each other and to traffic lights so they can be safer. There are safety and ecological improvements."

In northern Virginia, he's working on a low-speed, automated shuttle van that carries people to and from Metro Stations, that "last mile" transportation. "I work

to bring multi-jurisdictional concerns together to help align their goals and expectations, rather than just throwing technologies 'over the fence' and hoping for the best. We want to know the costs and benefits of larger, more widespread deployments. We have to understand the needs and wants of the citizens."

The retiring Tom Dingus concludes that, "I feel lucky to have the job I have. VTTI is like a family, and we've done a lot of exceptional things. There are a number of world-class organizations in the New River Valley. It's a great place to live and the future is bright. It's not hard to be successful here." 





BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Technology works best when it is thoroughly evaluated, properly used, and provides ROI to your organization.

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
OpXSolutionsllc.com

Technological challenges

Some people think I am “anti-technology.” I carry around a paper planner, I draw diagrams on white boards, and I love to build layout models with cardboard and wood. I regularly caution my clients before they buy high-tech equipment or complex computer software systems, so it is not a stretch to think I’m against technology. But the truth is I love technology...when properly vetted and applied correctly.

Bluetooth is an example of a great technology when properly used. I love my wireless earbuds and speakers. But do I really need a Bluetooth enabled toothbrush connected to a phone app to help tell me if I am brushing properly? (Yes, my toothbrush does indeed have Bluetooth.)

Technology represents that new “shiny object” that looks cool to have. But without due diligence, you might make a bad investment that can cost your business time and money. Here are some typical errors when buying new technology:

- No ROI. Several years ago, one of my clients implemented a new computer system to help them run their operations. Proponents claimed it would save the company \$10M/year. The cost to buy and implement it went into the millions. Afterwards I saw higher costs in software support and slower transactions. There was indeed better data available to help run the company, but at no time did I see that data result in more profits. When deciding on new technology, carefully evaluate all the costs and estimate what the ROI is.
- Increased risk. Earlier this year, one of my clients had all their computers and servers infected with a virus. It effectively shut them down several days. Technology is great when it works but can be devastating when it does not. The more complex the technology, the more likely it will break, and the longer it will take to recover. Have a backup plan.
- Excess capability. New technology often comes with new functionality that is never used but adds to the cost. Some organizations invest in software that provides robust data gathering and analytics, but never use the data to make improvements. Only buy what you need.

Technology works best when it is thoroughly evaluated, properly used, and provides ROI to your organization. Avoid these typical errors to help ensure you make a good investment. Now excuse me - while I go to my app to determine the efficacy of my toothbrushing. 📱

“Without due diligence, you might make a bad investment that can cost your business time and money.”

Gig economy brings new questions

I'm getting lots of people asking about how to handle bookkeeping and taxes with gig economy jobs. Uber, DoorDash, and Airbnb are some of the places people are going for income. For those former W-2 workers, suddenly becoming an independent contractor can be confusing.

Whether it's due to necessity or opportunity, switching from salaried to independent contractor means you're now a business owner. It's tough to know what to do when you're used to an employer taking care of these financial matters.

Should you file quarterly taxes?

Most people confuse profit with income. Taxes owed on the business are all about the bottom line. Before you can decide if you owe anything, you need to subtract expenses from what you bring in. You are keeping track of this, right? If not, see tips below.

A good general rule of thumb is to submit quarterly tax payments if your profits are more than \$6,000 a year. The IRS expects businesses to pay quarterly if the amount owed is more than \$1000 for the year. That doesn't mean you won't owe taxes; it just means you'll be paying them annually if you do.

Quick tips for keeping more of your money


Whether you like it or not, bookkeeping is essential if you want to minimize your debt to Uncle Sam. Even if you're just using your car to shuttle people or groceries around, you're entitled to deduct expenses.

Those mileage reports you get from Uber and DoorDash only count driving miles with people or stuff in your car. You're allowed credit for travel to and from pickup and drop off points too. That adds up fast.

At 56 cents a mile in 2021, an extra ten miles a day is \$14.56 a year, assuming a five-day work week. Find a system, whether it's a notebook in your car or a digital app. You'll need to record odometer starting and ending miles for the year. For each trip, you must record the odometer readings & date, starting & ending location, the purpose of the trip, and total miles.

Other allowable deductions include a home office. Don't forget to factor a percentage of utilities and real estate taxes based on the square footage. This must be designated business-only space.

Your cell phone can be deducted as a business expense if you have a landline. So can any related insurance.

If you're one of the many who have found work in the gig economy recently, it makes sense to get smart about recording and reporting income, expenses, and profits. Doing so can help you earn more. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Get smart about recording and reporting income, expenses, and profits.

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



Drones

TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES COME FROM COMPANIES LARGE - AND VERY SMALL

By Gene Marrano

Groundbreaking technology ideas don't always come from big labs or big cities.

Richard Mansell isn't an engineer by trade. He's an associate pastor at a Baptist church in Covington. But he has an aptitude for technology and now his company IVO is working on a new power source that can replace batteries in smaller devices like cell phones and drones. It can augment battery life in electric vehicles via something called CBAT – Capacitive Band Aerial Transmission – that uses electrical field pulses, delivered via devices embedded in roadways. He has a ways to go before CBAT is commercially viable but Mansell is excited about the future.

Mansell and IVO went through The Gauntlet business program run by The Advancement

Foundation a few years ago; he now serves as a mentor for other startups that sign on for the annual program, which ends with a Shark Tank-like competition. IVO pays the bills by designing electronic controls; GE and Airbus have been customers in the past. Since he works with drones, Mansell has been able to secure space at the Drone Zone – an old elementary school in Covington that's been converted into a hub for advancing drone technology.

Having such a facility located in the rural Allegheny Highlands city is unusual to say the least. \$100,000 in federal funding helped get the Drone Zone off the ground at what

was once Edgemont Elementary School in Covington. Mansell has been able to work with another company at the facility to make drone arms. “We designed and then prototyped dual manipulator arms ... specifically for repair and maintenance on cell phone towers.” It helped secure more than a million dollars in contracts. Enterprise Zone funding and a local workforce ready to be retrained after traditional jobs in other industries have waned are reasons other companies should consider Covington says Mansell.

“It takes time to introduce a whole new industry to an area like this,” says Mansell, who has partners for IVO in North Dakota and is just now able to hire help for his space at the Drone Zone. “It’s a really good location for so many reasons,” notes Mansell, who has been in the building for about two years. Now a new round of funding for his wireless technology – if it comes to pass – could help him hire up to 20 people.

There are two fields at 90 degrees to each other when it comes to electricity he notes – electromagnetic fields (emf’s), which he says, “gets all the glory;” and the one Mansell is attempting to harness – simply known as the electric field. The problem with emf’s is heat and radiation he says, so transmitting that through the air means anything in the way “will get cooked.” No such problems with electric fields he adds.

Without an electrical engineering degree Mansell says, “Praise the Lord,” he went about experimenting without being encumbered by the “rules” regarding electrical power transmission. People have discounted his concept, industry leaders he says, even “dismissed” it outright in the past. It ultimately led to his now patent-pending technology, the ability to use those non-emf electrical fields, which he says, “are natural,” and all around us.

So far IVO has powered remote controlled electric boats via a transmitter in the water, with no batteries on board. It has powered drones as well, again, with no batteries on board. With CBAT technology – capacitive based aerial transmission – they are able to supplement the battery in electric vehicles (EV), extending its range by replenishing




Gene Marrano

Richard Mansell

the battery charge as it is in use. “Highways could all have embedded CBAT [technology]. The cost is a fraction of what it would take [with emf].”

It is scalable technology says Mansell, constrained only by the current circuitry in use. “We don’t see the limit at this point to the technology – we just need to spend more money.” EV batteries could be less expensive, driving down the cost to the consumer. He is holding off approaching the big EV manufacturers about licensing CBAT until IVO can scale up the technology – driving up his asking price. Mansell is looking at a 3Q or 4Q 2021 market push for some of the smaller applications like powering cell phones and drones. He would also like an “energy partner” like Dominion to come on board.

Current EV technology would mesh he says with the CBAT concept, with no major retooling required. “We’re actually going to solve a problem for them,” says Richard Mansell. And to think the answer for Tesla, the Big Three, the major foreign players regarding battery life, could emanate from the City of Covington. 



AshleyEaglesonPhotography

BEST PRACTICES

By William R. Hall III

Executive Summary:

It's about corporate culture, not just the size of a paycheck these days.

William R. Hall III is Chief Executive Officer for Beacon Partners Consulting in southwest Roanoke County. Reach him at will.hall@partnerwithbeacon.com

How to effectively source employees in the job market

One of the major challenges facing both large and small companies today is staffing. Pay rates are rising, employee benefits are increasing, and there is a significant push to fill open requisitions in an employee-based hiring market. What happens to smaller businesses who simply don't have the financial resources to flip the switch and increase wages and benefits? The real question is, "How do I hire employees in this new environment?"


Even larger businesses like Taco Bell and McDonald's are being forced to change their hours because they're simply short-staffed. Some other local businesses have changed their operating schedules, even closing on certain days because they don't have enough staff. This is a significant issue when you consider that these business owners have already likely suffered substantial losses due to COVID-19 restrictions in the last 12-14 months.

How do we fix this problem? Political pundits will argue we need to eliminate the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) unemployment benefits that are scheduled to run through September. At surface level, even though this is the easiest "out," this won't fix the overarching problem. We must create environments in which people feel appreciated and want to come to work. It's not as simple as just handing out a paycheck, as it may once have been. Many might think that the number one question from job applicants is about pay, but we are more frequently asked about our work culture. Today's workforce is more concerned about the overall feel and social standing of the business rather than the wage.

Creating a culture that employees enjoy being a part of makes it easier to fill vacancies and retain staff. Retention in Fortune 500 companies is always a topic of conversation on how to improve a business, and it should be discussed in your business as well. I recently spoke with a candidate who was willing to take a \$10,000/year pay cut for a position because she felt like the culture was a better fit for her personality and her mental health.

How do you create that kind of culture in the office? Ask yourself three questions:

1. What do I do to ensure my employees are appreciated?
2. What would I want an employee to share with a prospective employee during an interview?
3. Other than pay, what is important to my employees?

Once you are able to answer these questions, you will have the foundation to build an excellent work culture, to help you recruit and retain ideal staff in these challenging times. 

“It's not as simple as just handing out a paycheck.”


Keep your eye on the numbers

I wish I had better news. It's become a daily occurrence. Every day I talk to at least one person that wants to buy a new home but says houses are selling so fast that they will wait until the market "gets better." I'm at a loss of what to tell them because we don't know what is coming next. It might be smart to wait, but then again, housing prices may never again be lower than they are now, especially in Roanoke where there is a growing population, and the mountainous terrain limits the area for new construction. After all, there are many cities where housing prices have soared so high that renting has become the only option for most. We've all seen the house flipping TV shows where a 900 square foot house is remodeled and sold for a million dollars (Usually on the West Coast). Of course, that might explain the growing number of calls I get from out-of-state people moving to Roanoke and the surrounding areas.

The future of the housing market in Southwest Virginia is unknown, and if you ask any Realtor, they will tell you they have never seen a market like this before. All we can do right now is watch and wait -and by watching, I mean keep an eye on the numbers. In May 2020, we had over 1400 homes on the market, and that number dropped to 601 homes in May 2021. People had a lot more options last year. The good news is, there is a slight increase in inventory. In March we had under 600 homes on the market, and that number grew to over 600 for both April and May. That may be a little optimistic, but we have to find hope wherever we can.

Month/Year	Active Listings	Pending	Avg List Price	Avg Sale Price
May 2021	601	673	433,373	286,034
April 2021	617	638	447,393	306,241
March 2021	577	601	455,342	274,013
February 2021	630	470	439,757	288,153
January 2021	797	528	410,273	274,548
May 2020	1426	633	400,024	241,445
May 2019	1939	608	363,933	236,098

**All data reported from the Roanoke Valley Association of Realtors, MLS*

Spring is always a busy time for real estate, so we could see an even bigger increase of listings as we go into the summer, fall, and especially the winter. If you're thinking about selling your home, now is the time. If you are thinking about buying, just remember that new homes hit the market every day. Keep a good watch and don't hesitate if you like something. 

“It might be smart to wait, but then again, housing prices may never again be lower than they are now.”



HOUSING MARKET UPDATE

By Christopher Borba

Executive Summary:
New homes hit the market every day. Keep a good watch and don't hesitate if you like something in this still-hot market.

Chris Borba, MBA is a buyer's agent and a real estate investor. Reach him at chris@myroanokehome.com



Taylor Reschka

Growing your own legal “tomatoes”

By Ian Price

Hydroponics: the process of growing plants in sand, gravel, or liquid, with added nutrients but without soil.

Blue Ridge Hydroponics has been around longer than most might have guessed. It was launched inside Happy’s Flea Market in 2004 by a man named Chris Arthur; then he moved to a space on Williamson Road until he wanted to retire in 2018. That’s when Tommy Bryant and his brother Jeremy Poe purchased the business.

Tommy says they left Williamson Road for a more visible storefront at the corner of 5th Street and Marshall Avenue in downtown Roanoke – not far from the YMCA. “Our customers drive from all over because we’re the only grow shop in [in the immediate region].” Bryant says when you drive from three counties over, “they don’t care if we’re on Williamson Road, downtown or wherever. But we wanted to be more visible and more

walkable - people aren’t really walking down Williamson Road [a very busy, somewhat pedestrian-challenged commercial roadway] right now.”

As to the July 1 date allowing Virginians to legally possess up to an ounce of marijuana they grow: “It really just brings the community together,” says Jeremy Poe, “it’ll bring a lot more people in here but it’s also going to allow people to learn some new skills.” Bryant says you can feel a change with the customers. “For so long we were in ‘prohibition,’ for 100 years. We’d have to go under code names like we’re growing ‘tomatoes’ because of the very similar grow process ... but now people are coming out of the woodwork and getting more comfortable talking about it.”

Another part-time employee at Blue Ridge Hydroponics has started a business of his own working out of Blue Ridge Hydroponics. Paul Witt is running Kief Cultivation Services, which will run learn-to-grow marijuana classes at the store. The classes cover “from A-Z as far as the whole grow process, because there’s a lot of different techniques and methods that people use,” Bryant added. The learn to grow classes have already started but Witt says they’ll do as many as they need to. Kief Cultivation Services will do everything from consultation on growing, to building a hydroponic system for customers. To sign up for a “Grow 101 class,” stop by the store, or call and pay over the phone to register. Yes, they can also help traditionalists who want to grow their plants in soil.

When you walk into Blue Ridge Hydroponics it feels almost like the craft beer industry when it was just getting started. Ironically, Bryant says the original owner (Chris Arthur) opened the business as Blue Ridge Hydroponics and Home Brewing. Bryant says “we used to do both, and they’re very similar. They are both hobbies.” “We actually started a lot of the breweries in town. They came to Chris to get started and then they came to us for a while until [we] shut down that side [of the business] because there

were so many breweries established.” Bryant name-drops the Big Lick Brewery Company as one example of a craft brew pub that got help getting started at Blue Ridge Hydroponics.

Despite the colorful labels with unique names that beginners might be lost or confused about when it comes to choosing marijuana strains to grow, there are already established brands that are considered the name brands. “They’ve been established for a while, mostly in states like California, where they are 25-30 years ahead of the curve, [and] Colorado,” among others Bryant says.

“Most of our customers are your home growers” Poe continued “Four plants, a four-by-four area, six-and-a-half foot tall. If you have that much room that’s a very typical set-up.” Four plants are the limit per person in Virginia under new marijuana legislation. (Of course, you can grow many other plants hydroponically as well, even on a commercial scale.) The brothers say depending on the bells and whistles attached one could get started with everything needed for those four legal plant plants for about \$1000. “But if you think about it, that’s one-time. Then the rest of it is just maintenance and some nutrients” added Bryant. Grow and consume wisely. 🍃



Taylor Reschka
Tommy Bryant (L) and his brother Jeremy Poe



NO BAD HIRES

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:
Asking the right questions can help you find that diamond in the rough.

For more information and guidance on each of these steps, listen to our short podcasts at SalesHiringStraightTalk.com.

College grads and hiring


Fewer entry-level jobs, hiring freezes, furloughs and layoffs caused the national unemployment rate for 20 to 24-year-olds to rise to 25.6% in April 2020. A year later (post pandemic for the most part), prospects for 2021 graduates are much better, with the unemployment rate in this age group down to 10.1% in May 2021. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) projects employers will hire 7.2% more college graduates from the Class of 2021 than from the Class of 2020.

Jobs are coming back, and companies are more comfortable hiring and onboarding people into remote settings. With more opportunities for both employers and graduates, don't go into a job interview with a few standard questions and hire the person you liked most or who made the best impression. This rarely results in the right hire.

Know what you're looking for (skills, competencies, traits) in an ideal hire and incorporate these pieces into your hiring process. The Candidate Evaluation Guide from Recruiterbox.com offers these suggestions:

1. Deep dive into **skill sets and experience** by asking:
 - Situational questions: "What would you do if ...?"
 - Behavioral questions: "Tell me a time when ...?"
 - Proving questions: "How exactly do you ...?"
 - Best practice questions: "What's the best way to ...?"
2. Hire someone with a **passion for the role**. A recent graduate will be more loyal, have more energy and a desire to learn new skills for a job they're passionate about. Seek candidates who are in it for the long haul by asking:
 - "How did you get into this profession?"
 - "Why do you want to get into this line of work?"
 - "What about this job interests you?"
3. Do they **know your company?** Did they apply for the job title or do they have an interest in what you do? What research have they done prior to the interview?
 - "What do you know about our company?"
 - "What do you know about our industry?"
4. **Emotional intelligence** is one of the most overlooked skills when hiring. You want an employee who can handle stress and cope with challenges. Avoid hiring a toxic presence into the workplace.
 - "How would past managers/bosses describe you?"
Did they take direction and work well with others?
 - "Where do you think you need to improve?" Are they aware of shortcomings and have a desire to improve?
 - "Describe a difficult situation in the past and what did you learn from it?" Do they take responsibility and learn from past mistakes?

- “How do you manage priorities?” Can they prioritize and get things done in a timely manner?
5. Are they a **team player**? You want employees who do their part, support, and work well with others. Get a sense of their teamwork by asking:
- “Do you enjoy working by yourself or in a team?” Ideally, they should say both and explain more about each.
 - “What do you do when you have free time at work?” Look for responses where they ask to help others.
 - “How would past coworkers or team members describe you?” Did they have friendly relationships with people they supported or collaborated with?

Recent graduates may not have extensive resumes, nor do they usually have hands-on experience. Asking the right questions can help you find that diamond in the rough for your company. Visit www.AssessmentPros.com to learn more about the **BEST JOB EVER** People system to better hire and retain key talent. 

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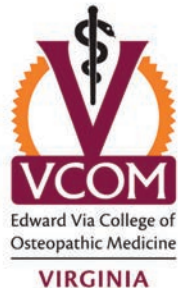


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THE CYSTIC FIBROSIS FOUNDATION VIRGINIA CHAPTER PRESENTS

THE 5th ANNUAL
BREWER'S BALL
“UNTAPPED”

A VIRTUAL CELEBRATION OF
VIRGINIA'S FINEST

FRIDAY JULY 23 2021

7:00PM

ZOOM

<https://Finest.cff.org/virginia>

CF Foundation Finest Honorees represent the Commonwealth's most accomplished and innovative young leaders, who commit to raise funds and awareness for the CF Foundation leading up to the culminating virtual Brewers Ball unTapped event on Friday, July 23rd. Honorees are competitively selected based on their leadership, business and professional successes, spheres of influence, and philanthropic spirit to help support the mission of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and to help move us closer to a cure for all people living with CF.

Tickets

General Admission - **\$25** (100% tax deductible)

Individual Ticket - **\$75** (\$65 tax-deductible)

Includes admission, event swag, and a 6-pack of specially brewed Three Notch'd Brewing Company 65 Roses Hibiscus Blonde Ale

VIP Ticket - **\$150** (0% tax-deductible)

Includes admission, event swag, and a 6-pack of specially brewed Three Notch'd Brewing Company 65 Roses Hibiscus Blonde Ale and a Virginia Craft Brewery passport (\$250+ value) featuring a \$7 credit towards your purchase at participating breweries throughout Virginia

Virginia's Finest Brewery Passport

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The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation's mission is to cure cystic fibrosis and to provide all people with the disease the opportunity to lead full, productive lives by funding research and drug development,

promoting individualized treatment and ensuring access to high-quality, specialized care. When the CF Foundation was established in 1955, most children with CF did not live past

elementary school. Due in large part to the Foundation's aggressive investments in innovative research and comprehensive care, today, many people with CF are living into their 30s, 40s and beyond.

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Blue Ridge Beverage

On Premise Key Account & Operations Manager

- Roanoke Regional Chamber Total Resource Campaign
- Salem-Roanoke County Chamber Awards, Showcase, Kegs & Barrels Committees
- Plays Irish Fiddle with his band Mist on the Mountain
- "Here's a picture of me and Bryan Summerson from Big Lick Brewing in Roanoke, who sponsored a 'Pint Night' to raise money for CFF."



Will Stephenson

Steel Dynamics Inc

Inside Sales Representative

- Make-A-Wish Foundation; completed a one-day, marathon-long hike to raise funds
- Hiked the Teton Crest Trail (34 miles) in two days
- "I like being part of a winning organization, which is exactly what Virginia's Finest and Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is."



Hillori Walsh

Carilion Clinic

Project Administrator / Pulmonary, Critical Care & Sleep Medicine

- Blue Ridge Women's Center volunteer and sponsor
- Busy mother to five wonderful children
- "I enjoy photography, running, fitness, skiing, cooking, and Vizslas." (Vizsla is a red-coated "pointer" gundog that loves the outdoors.)



DIVERSIFIED GAS & OIL



Dominion Payroll



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Cystic fibrosis is a life-threatening genetic disease that affects about 30,000 children and adults in the United States and 70,000 people worldwide. A defective gene and its protein product cause the body to produce unusually thick, sticky mucus that clogs the lungs and leads to lung infections; and obstructs the pancreas and stops natural enzymes from helping the body break down and absorb food.

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation / Virginia Chapter • 804.527.1500 • www.cff.org





INNOVATION

By Greg Feldmann

Executive Summary:

Why is the presence of start-ups and the entrepreneurs and inventors who found them so important to our region's economic competitiveness? And what's a Supernode?

To contact Greg, the CEO of Verge, an alliance of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC), the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP), and Valleys Innovation Council (VIC), visit VergeVA.org or e-mail gfeldmann@skylinecapitalstrategies.com

At the heart of any innovation economy is a vibrant start up ecosystem

As shared in the first article in this series, which focused on Schumpeter's concept of innovation economics, "advanced technologies produced through innovation form not only the cornerstones of national economic competitiveness, but also embody the social shift toward digital and entrepreneurial lifestyles."ⁱ

Most new jobs are generated by firms less than five years old. Advanced industries tend to employ a more STEM educated workforce, typically paying higher wages. The Pew Research Center found that STEM educated workers earned between 32-38% more than non-STEM workers across a spectrum of educational attainment levels, starting with high school and going through PhD levels. That national average salary for a person with a four-year STEM degree was approximately \$81,000, nearly double the median income in GO Virginia Region 2.

Inventors from Gutenberg to Edison have transformed and shaped the world we now enjoy. Inventive entrepreneurs reside everywhere, including right here in Region 2 of Virginia, where we have generated between 100 and 120 patents annually in recent years. But they need support and encouragement from all sectors – government, education, corporations, entrepreneurial support programming like accelerators, mentors and investors – in order to flourish. What is the key to assuring this support exists in an organized, cohesive way?


In their book *The Startup Community Way*, Brad Feld and Ian Hathaway argue that entrepreneurial leaders, which they name "supernodes," are the single most important ingredients to determining the current state and long-term success of any startup community. University of North Carolina researchers used the term "dealmakers" to describe such entrepreneurial leaders as highly connected individuals with deep entrepreneurial experience (i.e., bringing a company to scale), fiduciary ties to startups and valuable social capital. They are willing, typically without personal gain involved, to use all of these attributes to connect people, build relationships, facilitate resources, and form the backbone of a startup community.

Similar conclusions have come from a variety of other studies conducted by the Global Entrepreneurship Network, Endeavor, the World Bank and in the book authored by Victor Hwang and Greg Horowitz entitled, *The Rainforest: The Secret to Building the Next Silicon Valley*, in which they describe supernodes or dealmakers as the "keystone species" of the startup ecosystem. Keystone species

impact many other organisms, and their removal would permanently alter an ecosystem.

Feld and Hathaway argue persuasively that the quality of the supernode network is more important than the size. Region 2 is fortunate to have a reasonable density of such dealmakers, already at work in our region connecting and collaborating with all levels of government, higher education, corporations, research centers, investors - and most importantly our technology entrepreneurs. They are working to nurture commercialization pathways for translational research, accelerate and mentor founders through programs like RAMP, to develop financing resources through the activation of Commonwealth Angels and building relationships with other venture financing partners, to enhance workforce initiatives, and to advocate for improvements to entrepreneurial support mechanisms.

The value proposition of the supernode network is reduced to a simple formula by Feld and Hathaway: Value = # of Connections x the value of the information that travels between the connections.

Expanding and further connecting our supernode network across the entirety of Region 2 is a major opportunity that will allow Region 2 to materially enhance the vibrancy of our regional startup community. 

Greg Feldmann serves as CEO of Verge, a collaborative strategic alliance established to grow the region's innovation economy, technology and life sciences sectors, and to support professional communities via the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC), the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP), and Valleys Innovation Council (VIC). To learn more about membership, events, and how to get involved, visit VergeVA.org.



Inventive entrepreneurs reside everywhere, including right here in Region 2 of Virginia, where we have generated between 100 and 120 patents annually in recent years.

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IRONMAN rocks the Valley – one year later >

Delayed a year by the pandemic, the **Carilion Clinic IRONMAN 70.3** Virginia's Blue Ridge triathlon made its debut in early June, the first event in a three-year commitment from The Ironman Group. The estimated annual impact when all the numbers are tabulated could approach ten million dollars. About 1600 swimmers line up at Carvins Cove early on June 6 for a 1.2-mile swim; then came a 56-mile bike ride (partially on the Blue Ridge Parkway) and a half marathon (13.1 miles) on the Roanoke River Greenway. The River's Edge Sports Complex in Roanoke served as the final transition area from the bike to run portion of the 70 mile-plus event, and as the finish line. An Olympic-style Ironman Village helped attract spectators and family members waiting for someone to finish.

Carilion Clinic Chief Medical Office **Patrice Weiss** held the tape for the overall male and female winners (Matt Schaefer and



Blacksburg's own **Kate Buss**); then she asked for an autograph from Buss. "I knew I was first on the course for most of the [final] run ... when I finished, I was so excited," said Buss. "Just to see the energy and feel the excitement," said Weiss, "just the opportunity to see our community and so many people outside our community come together and celebrate something like fitness and wellness. I had goosebumps – it was undescrivable."





A brief respite from your busy day >

Valley Business FRONT fan and amateur photog **Tina Bernard Urquhardt** snapped some icy pictures for us in the winter; here

are a few more as spring arrived and headed towards summer. "Most all of my flower pictures are taken while walking and running around the beautiful Roanoke Valley. I have to stop and smell the roses/flowers (and take pictures) which increases my run/walk times, but absolutely worth it!" notes Urquhardt.





PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Kimberly Whiter

Executive Summary:

You may be the smartest person in the room – but you may not know everything.

Kimberly Whiter is Director of Education and Support for Huddle Up Moms, the CEO for Elder Care Solutions, an eLearning Specialist, and mom of two.


Keeping an open mind during growth

In February 2021, I made the decision to enter my business, Elder Care Solutions, into the 7th Annual Gauntlet Business Program and Competition. Elder Care Solutions had been in business for a few years already. I went into the Gauntlet experience focused on establishing a growth plan for the business. I did not anticipate the changes that would ensue.

First, the networking was incredible. Suddenly, I was thrust into a rich environment composed of hundreds of other local aspiring and established entrepreneurs. Ideas were shared freely. Participants shared their unique challenges and brainstormed possible solutions with one another. Mentoring relationships were established among local entrepreneurs and business professionals. While caught up in the whirlwind of connecting with so many new people, some very special relationships were forged. I met individuals that had either business ideas that touched my professional realm or had experiences that lend themselves significantly to the growth I had in mind for my business. I had not imagined growing my team, but with an open mind, I couldn't help but see the value in doing so. This resulted in making additions to my leadership which has secured our footing for larger markets.

Additionally, the cognitive work of building a business plan proved substantially fruitful. While we had one in place, The Gauntlet made apparent the need to include certain considerations which had not existed previously. By pouring effort into customer discovery, I had to face the fact that our current services needed some refinement and some additions. Again, although I had not intended to do so, I steered the business through a major rebranding effort and the hiring of another team member to run a completely new service aimed at helping our client families more.

Business leaders tend to function most effectively within the boundaries of our missions and goals. And while these provide structure for our efforts and growth, sometimes what is needed is an open mind so we can see the changes, big or small, that need to take place or the hard truths about what is holding us back. Business is booming for Elder Care Solutions. Our refined marketing strategies and processes are hitting the right notes. We are reaching our target clients, which means we are more able to help families. It feels wonderful to do our work to the best of our ability and provide the help that so many families need as they care for their aging loved ones. I highly suggest putting your business through an incubator program, finding a mentor, or creating a mastermind. Critical feedback about your processes, goals, mission, and plans is vital when you are growing a business.

Kimberly Whiter is CEO for Elder Care Solutions, a Platinum Winner in The 2021 Gauntlet Business Program, and an occasional columnist for Valley Business Front. Elder Care Solutions helps families with the challenges of long-term care through their two unique solutions: helping families pay for long-term care needs and helping families assess their senior living options. Visit www.eldercareolutionsinc.com to learn more. 


Woof, woof, at winery

"Angels of Assisi is changing the role of an animal shelter to include resources, programs, and services to benefit the pets in our communities and the people who love them. We are an independent, nonprofit animal welfare organization serving SW Virginia and West Virginia. Along with our Adoption Center and Farm Sanctuary, we offer a Community Pet Hospital, Rural Veterinary Care, Cruelty Investigations, Disaster Response, and a Safety Net Program for those needing temporary help due to domestic violence or emergency situations."

That's straight from the Angels of Assisi website. What's not possible to show on the organization's website is the sheer amount of support, the volume of volunteers, and the breadth of stakeholders who truly care about our pets in our communities and throughout the region.

One way this "third party" care is demonstrated is when a separate entity helps advance the mission. Such is the case with Blue Ridge Vineyard at Eagle Rock in Botetourt County. Every year, the dog-friendly venue puts a very big paw print stamp on its attitude toward our family members of the four-footed furry variety. On a Saturday in mid-June (that indeed felt like the Dog Days of Summer), the hot, sultry temperature was tamed by the music, food, beverages, and of course, the selection of BRV wines—all in a celebration of the vineyard's Annual Benefit for the Angels of Assisi.

Admission to the event was free when you brought a big bag of dog/cat food; and all of that supply plus money from peripheral fundraising was delivered to the local Angels of Assisi in Roanoke.

Blue Ridge Vineyard just turned 35 years old the same month (June) and has always made a point to promote its dog-friendly environment. For more information about Angels of Assisi, including its programs, services, adoption, and ways to help, visit angelssofassis.org. 

“Blue Ridge Vineyard always makes a point to promote its dog-friendly environment.”



Benefit for Angels of Assisi at Blue Ridge Vineyard

GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:
Angels of Assisi is one of our nonprofit service agencies that brings smiles to your faces—or wags to your tails.



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Dan Mirolli

ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

If you take delight in divining the future, here's a view for our business and economic front.

I see...

As publisher of our regional business journal—and more significantly—just being a native and lifetime observer of what happens in our market here, I get a sense, an intuition, when something is about to change and something big is about to happen.

Strictly business-speaking, you can look back at our journal's history and see some of the milestones per industry. We hit on the craft brewing craze just as the very first one re-entered the scene here in our Star City. Of course that was followed by an explosion of brewery and pub selections within a few hops of each other. The same happened with medical research, drones, and other topics. Don't believe me? Check out our archives and compare the timelines at vbfront.com/IssueArchive.html.

But don't call me for stock advice; most of our predictions are pre-IPO.

One of my favorite issues was May 2009, where we had Dr. Larry Lynch, a business and econ professor from Roanoke College, who suited up in Swami-esque garb, complete with a crystal ball. He and other business leaders provided their prognostications on what our future might look like here in Virginia's Blue Ridge and Southwest Virginia. I even met with a Psychic on Roanoke's Williamson Road for her reading. (She said at the time it was tough, but we'd be ok two years down the road.)

That was fun. We might revisit that idea.

So, what's happening in my gut? What inklings cause me to see past the current business and economic horizon?

I'm not entirely sure. But if I was slapping down Tarot cards on a table in front of you in a house on the side of Williamson Road, this is what I'm seeing...

There's a widening gap.

I think most of us would agree we're all seeing divisions in so many social-political arenas, in the areas of income classes, political parties, race, and religion. In the business-econ world, the split may not be all bad. But it will require our attention.

I believe we're losing the middle segment of our chain.

We'll still have big business; corporations that grow to mammoth, near-monopoly status. And we'll have


continued on Page 38

Quick hits on The Gauntlet ... and Normalcy

The Gauntlet: I had not been to the Gauntlet finale – the business mentoring and competition since the first one seven years ago, when it was a much smaller affair that wrapped up at the Grandin CoLab and featured startups from the immediate Roanoke area. This year the May finale was held at the Vinton War Memorial, the cash/in-kind services prize package was worth upwards of \$300,000 and those small businesses looking for help with their growth came from as far away as the Alleghany Highlands and Buena Vista.

The Gauntlet roster this year was heavily female (about 70 percent I was told) and heavily “main street” oriented, as opposed to the high-tech startups you might see in the RAMP program, but most small businesses are Main Street. One common thread among the final group of entries that made it to the competition round – most if not all of their prize packages had an emphasis on in-kind marketing support, which is where many fledging businesses often lack the resources – to advertise/market their company to the right audience. The Gauntlet, a creation of The Advancement Foundation is already seeking applicants for the 2022 class. See the website.

Back to “normal”: human nature is a funny thing. Once more people started getting vaccinated and the mandates for wearing masks came down – or an individual business decreed those fully vaccinated did NOT have to wear a mask inside its establishment – we got to see whole faces in many cases for the first time in over a year. It struck me when a friend invited me to Wilderness Adventure, the Craig County outdoor venue that has been rebranding itself in recent years as not only a great place for group or corporate outings, but as a camping destination.

Invited to a wine tasting, I was seated at a long table with maybe 30 other people. I suddenly realized that no one had a mask on, no one was 6 feet away, everyone was talking and sipping wine – and it all felt entirely normal. I didn’t even think about it as being “weird.” I assumed that like me this group of people had the smarts enough to be fully vaccinated before they sat down. This was their reward. Being free of the mask, able to establish contact with other human beings the way we always have. This is normalcy. And it felt good. Since then, I’ve been to a ballgame or two, an outdoor concert, indoor trivia at Martin’s Downtown in Roanoke and a brewpub or two. Maskless. Welcome to the “new normal”; it feels a lot like the old normal if you ask me and that’s a great feeling. 



THERE'S
SOMETHING
HAPPENING
HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
*Do you feel it too?
Life as we know it
is coming back.*

Field / On Tap

from Page 36


micro-preneurs, startups, and quick-spin ventures designed for acquisition.

What middle-sized, mid-capacity, mid-range businesses that are providing products and services we have will be short lived. They'll either be blasted apart and replaced by peripherals—or smacked into reorganization and absorbed by “Big + [name that industry].”

So what?

If this happens, I'd just say, be ready. If you're entering or new to the vocational world, think about how you might fit and serve either in an established environment where you maximize the rules to advance—or a small, flexible, perhaps chaotic environment where you earn the trust to write the rules.

And if you're working for a business who's in the middle of the market ownership chart—dust off that resume.

The crystal ball says you're going to need it. 



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FRONTReviews >

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

Public health policy disarray

Michael Lewis is a masterful and very detailed teller of true stories. Witness previous non-fiction works like *The Big Short*, *The Blind Side* and *Moneyball*, all made into movies as well. Now Lewis (who tragically lost his teenaged daughter in a recent car accident) takes on the COVID-19 pandemic, in a sort of prequel, examining the long-time failure to have a public health pandemic plan in place. *The Premonition: A Pandemic Story* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2021) examines in some detail through a series of characters – down to the local public health level – who were willing to stick their necks out years ago and say if a pandemic happens, this is going to be bad unless there is an action plan already in place.

Many years before COVID, academic models – starting with one created by a teenager as a school project – showed that social distancing, teleworking and yes, closing schools, could help stop the spread of a deadly virus. *The Premonition* also details how reacting at the first sign of an outbreak is key. The Trump Administration stopping flights from China early in 2020? That was already too late says one of the characters in Lewis's book; COVID was already here in the country. The lack of a coherent public health strategy that begins at the federal level and works its way down ... the politicization of the CDC and the agency's unwillingness at times to be a true leader in a public health crisis are all detailed here. How the U.S. failed to set the example for the rest of the world on how to combat a deadly, ever-mutating virus. *The Premonition* may frustrate readers and yes, hindsight is always 20/20, but one can only hope that true lessons have been learned. Somewhere

down the road says the experts, we will face another deadly pandemic.

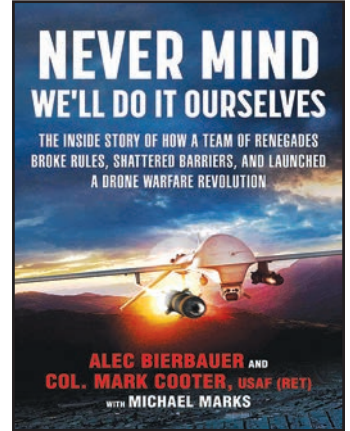
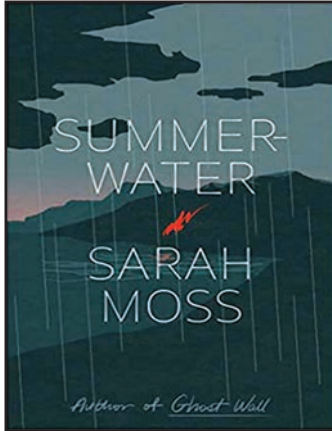
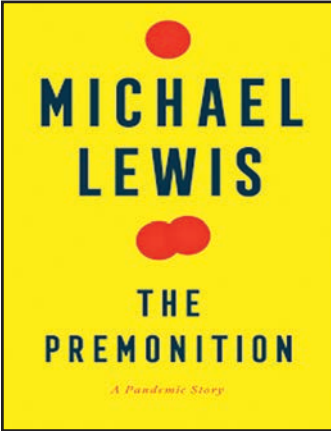
—Gene Marrano

Let the story out

Summerwater (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020) would be the perfect book to tag along for my beach vacation—I thought. On the plus side, it's an excellent application of internal dialogue. Also, it's plain outright beautifully written. And one more thing: the dozen or so people "holidaying" at the picturesque park in Scotland creates a setting that certainly draws me in, even with the persistent rain. Moody weather, moody people.

But there's no story.

This book has the feeling and all the trappings of an assignment given at a writers' retreat. On the surface, everything moves along with a great degree of perfection; and though I don't expect a resolution every time (particularly with literary fiction) I do prefer at least some skeleton shell of a plot. To be fair, the novel sums up with a tie-in event at the very end—but that "climax" comes across rushed and as if it was serving a forced outline to satisfy the reason to share all previous chapters. In fact, we could have skipped that ending bang, resulting in no different experience... leaving us the melancholy voices inside the heads of all our anxiety-ridden cabin dwellers. If I were the writer retreat task master, I'd say keep this manuscript for excellent character development for the upcoming novel— one that could be a real page-turner to see what



happens next, not wonder why and where we're going.

—Tom Field

No man's sky

I always thought the term “smart weapon” was a misnomer. I still do. That’s because in my mind, a truly smart weapon would know the difference between good and evil. It would only attack and destroy the bad people. We’re not there yet. And thus, I’ve had reservations about armed drone warfare. Not the use of them in selected tactical maneuvers so much, but the tremendous potential for misuse. Misuse against civilians and what governments like to call “collateral.”

I know drones have been misused. SIGNIFICANTLY misused. By our own military and under all administrations since the first deployment. I took this book with me to the beach (yeah, light summer reading!); and I couldn’t help but look up in the bright blue sky and wonder how any of us would react if an unmanned aircraft was circling above, watching, pinpointing, locking in, and firing a missile literally right into our bodies. Can you imagine if just ONE drone from a foreign country dropped just one small bomb in one place... even the most remote area of our country? We’ve done that thousands of times, with civilian casualties reported as high as twenty percent collectively (depending on the source).

This book, *Never Mind, We’ll Do It Ourselves* (Skyhorse; 2021) doesn’t address that part

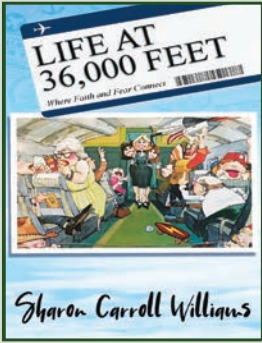
of the story. And because most of us would find it to be a “positive” report on how drones were used to RESPOND to an attack from our enemies, I can see why the story told by military and intelligence personnel was released.

This book does make a great case for how drones can actually reduce (in some cases, eliminate) unintended casualties. We may not high-five each other after a hit (like the energy you feel from this account), but I can see how we would celebrate or take some solace in striking back against the perpetrators of a tragedy like 9/11. This book provides an excellent account from the inside; and when you consider some of the alternatives (tanks, submarines, fighter jets, bombers, and the ultimate—boots on ground, with every pair occupied by our boys and girls) one could easily argue that an unmanned armed drone is one of the most precise measures a military can take to accomplish a mission with fewest losses. Throw in chemical and viral warfare, and a drone could seem like a pussycat among tigers.

Unfortunately, the Predator drone and all its offspring are not pussycats. They are pure terror from the sky, and like all weapons, they will be used in ways to harm mankind and deconstruct our humanity. Watching video feeds and maneuvering a remote control from a temporary compound in Northern Virginia doesn’t make war less terrible.

—Tom Field

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



Life at 36,000 Feet >

Local author **Sharon Carroll Williams**, a former flight attendant, shares unexpected and entertaining answers to aviation-related questions in her new book, *Life at 36,000 Feet; Where Faith and Fear Connect*. Williams touches on passenger behavior, how she handled sensitive situations with grace and describes “the humorous and inspirational challenges she has encountered from her mid-aisle vantage point.” Williams held a book signing at Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport in late May to help launch her memoir.

First SML Restaurant Week a hit >

More than four hundred Smith Mountain Lake residents and visitors took advantage of discounts and specials during the inaugural **SML Restaurant Week** April 19-May 1. **Erin Stanley**, SMLRCC Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce Member Relations and Events Director, says twenty-five regional restaurants participated in the event, drawing diners from five states and 40 towns/cities. “We’re very pleased with the turnout, and feedback from the participating restaurants has been extremely positive.” Stanley said she expects the event to continue next year as a way to draw attention to Smith Mountain Lake’s diverse restaurant scene. “We definitely have a ton of ideas for ways to expand and improve in 2022.”



7th Annual Gauntlet wraps up >

The **Gauntlet Business program** and competition wrapped up with its late May award ceremony in Vinton, handing out in-kind and cash awards to the startups and small businesses that made it to the final round of judging. The overall Platinum Category winner with a prize package totaling almost \$24,000 was **Beaver Dam Farms** in Buchanan. **Candace Monaghan** picked up the symbolic big check. “I don’t have any formal business training, that’s the main reason I entered The Gauntlet, in hopes of winning a little bit of money to help with expansion. I learned a lot of business lessons; the business plan [created with the help of mentors] was way more involved than what I thought it would be.” Since 2016 Beaver Dam Farms has held a popular sunflowers festival every September. Expansion plans include processing and selling more sunflower oil.

104 startups and existing small businesses looking to expand went through the seventh annual Gauntlet Business Program and Competition this year; half made it to the two-stage competition phase. Those that made it to the two-stage competition phase received their cash and in-kind services awards at the finale. **Annette Patterson** is president of the Advancement Foundation, which stages The Gauntlet: “an incredible group with just sheer grit. Who tries to start a business in the middle of a pandemic? These folks had their ideas, they came forward, they came to class [virtually in many cases], they worked the network [and with]



their mentors. They came up with solid business plans or plans to expand what they were already doing.” The total prize package award this year for The Gauntlet was around \$300,000, between cash and in-kind services. **The Pie Shoppe** in Fincastle (profiled previously in VBF) was another Platinum level winner with a prize package worth more than \$12,000.

RU growing >

Radford University has broken ground on a multi-million-dollar, state of the art blended learning building. The Artis Center for Adaptive Innovation and Creativity will replace McGuffey and Porterfield Halls. Once completed the \$178,000 square foot, four-story building will become the home of the Waldron College of Health and Human Services and the Artis College of Science and Technology.

Pictured (L-R) Pat Artis, Ph.D., Nancy E. Artis '73, President Brian O. Hemphill, Ph.D.



Expansion for VA Furniture Market >

A late May groundbreaking in Franklin County for a new centralized warehouse and offices for **Virginia Furniture Market**. President and owner **Joel Shepard** says the \$10 million investment



should be completed early next year: "we are ultimately a local business, so even though now we serve all of southwestern and central Virginia, this will serve as our corporate headquarters and distribution center – for the markets we serve now and for future growth. Virginia Furniture Market operates eight stores; Shepard says the new central warehouse should also speed up delivery times to customers.

It's all about (Total) You >

Total You Health has celebrated its new location on Starkey Road in Southwest Roanoke County. The Salem-Roanoke Chamber of Commerce helped cut the ribbon in June after a COVID-delay from 2020. Owner **Linda Bailey**, who went through The Gauntlet business competition twice, launched Total You Health in 2018, offering "red light therapy," low level lasers (full body or topical) to help improve tissue repair. It's called photobiomodulation, and is used says Bailey by NFL, NBA and Olympic squads; also by NASA, the US Army etc. Bailey had a client who had competed in last month's Carilion Clinic Ironman 70.3 triathlon and came in later that same day, seeking relief for his aching muscles – telling her he left Total You Health less sore than after other triathlons.

Bailey's idea for starting the business came from wanting to help heal her daughter's brain trauma after a car accident. "Red Light Therapy helps not only pain and inflammation, [also] depression and anxiety – who hasn't been anxious in this past year? It literally helps put oxygen in the [blood] cell and cells make energy from oxygen [and] then can function at 100 percent." Bailey also says red light therapy has been around for over 50 years. "It's been slow to get to this area, but we are starting to see some doctors beginning to refer [patients]."



Greenway expansion in Vinton also an economic driver >

The Town of Vinton and Roanoke County has cut the ribbon on another segment of the **Glade Creek Greenway** that will eventually connect Vinton to the Roanoke River Greenway. The "Phase-2A" portion dedicated is near the Billy Byrd apartments on Gus Nicks Boulevard, across the street from the Gish Mill site about to be redeveloped. **Pete Peters** is the Vinton Town Manager: "it will connect us to downtown Roanoke [via eventual links to the Tinker Creek and Roanoke River greenways]; it provides a great gateway and entrance to our community. Combine this with the development of the Billy Byrd apartments and the promised development of Gish Mill, it just brings a lot of energy and a new look to the town."



Funding for the next phase of the Glade Creek Greenway is in place and construction could start as soon as this Fall according to Peters. Vinton Mayor **Brad Grose** also paid tribute to the person perhaps most likely associated with the still-expanding Roanoke Valley Greenway system, coordinator **Liz Belcher** (pictured with Grose), who is retiring this summer after almost 25 years in that position.



Salem Rotary honors local frontline workers >

Five nurses from **LewisGale Medical Center** were among the recipients of the **Salem Rotary Club's** 2021 Outstanding Citizen of the Year recognizing Roanoke Salem Region Nurses. Ten additional healthcare workers were also awarded from Carilion Clinic and the Salem VA Medical Center. The five LewisGale Medical Center nurses honored were: **Shane Butler, RN**; COVID-19 Unit, **Stacey Steeves, RN**; COVID-19 Unit, **Kimsa Tran, RN**; COVID-19 Unit, **Pat Whisman, RN**; Nursing Director of COVID-19 Unit and **Alyssa Spradlin, RN**; Emergency Department. "This recognition is ever-more poignant in that it celebrates nurses having made it through one of the most challenging years in modern healthcare," said **Lea Margaret Lee**, chief nursing officer at LewisGale Medical Center.



Caroline Moore



Caroline Moore

New home for WRABA >

What is now officially known as the **Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association** has cut the ribbon on its new office - inside the remodeled building that used to house Happy's Flea Market in Roanoke. Coming soon - a small business incubator they will call "The Williamson." **Valerie Brown** is executive director for WRABA. "Private offices as well as conference rooms, for people to come in if they don't have a space of their own. This becomes their world. They don't have to be on Williamson Road – they just have to have an entrepreneurial spirit."

Developer **Jim Cherney** spent six million dollars redeveloping the Happy's building into a drive-through storage facility and the WRABA offices; the back lot will still be home to an outdoor flea market on weekends. "There's a lot going on here and I'm proud to be a part of it," said Cherney at the ribbon cutting. "We've invested six million dollars in this iconic building, this iconic gathering place come to fruition. A new attitude, a new beginning and a focused new energy on the site we have here." Greater was added to the business group's title after its footprint was expanded to include parts of Hershberger Road.

Another big gain for Botetourt County >

Munters Group has broken ground on their new home in Botetourt County at Greenfield. It will replace the current home for the air treatment and climate solutions manufacturer in Buena Vista. Botetourt County supervisor **Billy Martin** was there in mid-May, saluting the county's economic development team as well in helping to land Munters: "it's a testament to the quality of life and quality of our region and our workforce." About 200 current Munters employees are expected to work at the new 365,000 square foot building when it is completed. The project could generate another 160 jobs.

The new larger footprint in Botetourt County will allow the Sweden-based company to expand its reach into a growing air treatment market. **Michael Gantert** is president for the Munters Data Center division. "This facility ... will be home to our global center of excellence for data center cooling solutions, serving a growing industry with manufacturing, engineering, sales and research &

development." That includes a 10,000 square foot lab space as well noted Gantert at the groundbreaking. The Roanoke Regional Partnership projects a \$93 million annual economic impact from the project, which could also generate another 160 direct or indirect jobs.



Roanoke Regional Partnership

New market in Roanoke "food desert" >

Parts of Northwest Roanoke City have been labeled as a "food desert" but now there's a new option for fresh meats, produce, spices and other items - with a Middle Eastern flair. **Roanoke Grocery Market** in the 3800 block of Melrose Avenue has cut the ribbon. Roanoke City Council member **Stephanie Moon-Reynolds** gave the city's official welcome: "it shows you that the economy despite the pandemic is still being revitalized. I think it's what they're bringing – that variety. Moon-Reynolds also says Roanoke Grocery Market may inspire other investors in Northwest.

Store owner **Hisham Alammurri** says while doing the research he looked all over Melrose Avenue to see if there were any other grocery stores like his. "The only thing I saw were convenience stores that really did not provide much food for the community." He says some patrons have been coming in from out of town to purchase their unique food items. Some of the brand names may be unfamiliar but Roanoke Grocery Market should be welcomed by local residents in a part of Roanoke often designated as a USDA food desert. "Food connects people together," says Alammurri, who also wants to join other merchants in helping to feed the homeless when they can.



Richfield opens Town Center >

Richfield Living in western Roanoke County cut the ribbon in May on its recently opened Town Hall Center, along with nearly 80 new independent living senior apartments. Another 64 apartments are on the way in a few years. The new Richfield Town Center features several cafes, an outdoor space, a chapel/meeting room, a wellness studio and a beauty salon. "We don't really have a space that ties all of our buildings together. It was really important for us to create a sense of community," says Richfield CEO **Cherie Grisso**.

A new skilled nursing center will open soon as part of a 58 million dollar "Vision 2020:Project Home" for Richfield Living, which debuted 85 years ago. Adds Grisso on the makeover: "we didn't have enough independent living. We knew that there was a bigger demand. The biggest change was going from an institutional model of care to a household model of care - a personal model, trying to create home-like environments in every single building." A capital campaign that also includes a new skilled nursing facility and an "adjusted" Rehab Center at Richfield is ongoing.

New endowment fund for Boys & Girls Clubs of SWVA cut first check >

Boys and Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia has awarded its first annual educational scholarship to a club member. Eastern Montgomery High School graduate **Jack Graves** is headed to William and Mary; he attended the Shawsville club branch for more than 6 years. The Jim Barker Educational Scholarship Fund – named after a Board Member who grew up in an afterschool Boys & Girls Clubs program – has reached over \$100,000 in endowment funding with sights set on raising \$1 million. Jim Barker is currently Chief Financial Officer at Delta Dental of Virginia, based in Roanoke County. The scholarship was endowed in 2020 through the generosity and benevolence of Mike and Danielle Wise, long-time supporters of the Boys & Girls Club.

Jack Graves will receive almost \$4,000 dollars toward his college costs. He sees himself perhaps as a history professor down the road (Medieval battle tactics are of special interest.) "I've gotten to know some of the kids here," says Graves of other current Club afterschool and summer camp program members. "Each and every one of them has the same opportunities that the club has given me. I know that there is going to be many more stories like mine where they're able to go out and do [many] wonderful things."



Gene Marrano

ECHO, ECHO >

It's a streaming service first and a broadcast television channel second – that's how **Blue Ridge PBS** is describing the new "ECHO" channel that debuted in June. It harkens back to the Roanoke-based station's roots as an education resource. Virginia First Lady **Pam Northam** was on hand to celebrate the launch of ECHO on June 10 – as in Education, Community, Health, Opportunity. So were some of the show hosts; several in character. Northam is a former teacher. "The ECHO channel is a direct result of what was learned during this pandemic; a great edition to education as a whole and to our community, by supplementing what children are learning [in] our schools," said Northam. ECHO will be available on-line and over the air as well; the latest addition to the Blue Ridge PBS lineup of stations. Valley Business FRONT editor **Gene Marrano's** show Business Matters is also slated for the ECHO lineup.



Blue Ridge PBS

Ribbon cutting in NRV one year later >



New River Valley Building Supply on Roanoke Street in Christiansburg opened its doors over a year ago at the height of the COVID pandemic, but delayed its ribbon cutting until mid-June this year. NRV Building Supply is fairly new but as a member of The Lester Group it has ties to a company founded in 1896, with building materials operations in several other Virginia localities.



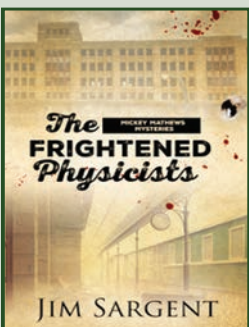
LewisGale Montgomery service expansion >

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has opened a newly renovated, state-of-the-art Cardiac Catheterization Lab, part of nearly \$35 million in capital improvements at the hospital, to enhance the delivery of cardiovascular services, featuring advanced medical equipment and new patient safety. The renovated Cardiac Catheterization Lab includes upgraded echocardiogram technology for cardiac imaging and advanced system applications "to enhance patient care, make complex procedures safer and simpler, and to provide physicians with advanced technology to perform a comprehensive range of diagnostic and interventional procedures," according to a LewisGale news release.

Mickey Mathews is back >

Retired professor of American History (mostly at Virginia Western Community College)

Jim Sargent is keeping very busy with his historical fiction series of novels featuring Mickey Mathews, who is back in *The Frightened Physicists* (Doce Blant Publishing). This is the fifth



in Sargent's series, which began with the Mathews character just prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Now its post-World War II. Most of it occurs either on a train trip from Washington DC to Buffalo New York, or across the river in Fort Erie (Canada). Two physicists who had worked at Los Alamos on the atomic bomb are suspected of selling secrets to the Russians. "There are also Russian agents on the train," notes Sargent, as the Hitchcockian plot thickens. *The Frightened Physicists* is available online. "The question is – were they really selling secrets to the Russians – or as they claim, were they protecting secrets?" Sargent asks. Will Mickey Mathews and his pal Frank Tuttle sort it all out? You'll have to read the book.



“Serial Entrepreneur” joins medical startup >

Victor Iannello, Sc.D., has joined Roanoke-based **Chorda Pharma** as its CEO. “ChordaPharma is poised for significant growth in the coming months and years,” said **Rick Carliss, Ph.D.**, founder of Chorda Pharma, “and it’s the right time to bring in someone like Dr. Iannello, who has considerable experience taking companies to the next level.” Chorda Pharma is an early-stage pharmaceuticals company that is developing a pipeline of opioid-free drugs to manage pain. Carilion Clinic will collaborate on development and testing.

Iannello has started several technology companies in the Roanoke region, including Synchrony Inc., acquired by Dresser-Rand in 2013 and now part of Johnson Controls. Iannello has previously served as Chairman of the Carilion Medical Center Board of Directors, Co-Chairman of Valleys Innovation Council (now Verge), and as President of the Roanoke Regional Partnership. “It’s very suitable for long term treatment,” says Iannello of a topical opioid-free cream now under development, “it really fills a gap, [a product] that’s not available in the market right now.” Iannello was consulting for Carliss - also an associate Professor of Biology at Radford - before being asked to come aboard as Chief Executive Officer.

Dr. Pepper Park returns >

No truncated schedule this year with the pandemic on the wane. **Dr. Pepper Park** opened with a full slate of tribute bands and national acts in May. The Eaglemania Eagles tribute band was an early highlight; park president Waynette Anderson couldn’t help herself and took a bow with the band at the end of the show.



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

FINANCIAL FRONT



Moore

The Bank of Botetourt Board of Directors has elected **Tommy L. Moore** to serve as its new Chairman. Moore has been on the Board since 1982 and currently serves as the Circuit Court Clerk for Botetourt County. Moore served four years active duty as a JAG Officer in the United States Marine Corps and 32 years in the Marine Corps Reserve. He is an alumnus of Hampden Sydney College (1972) and the University of Virginia School of Law (1975). In 1991, Moore was elected to be the Circuit Court Clerk for Botetourt County.

Lori Cauley, Chief Brand Officer at Member One Federal Credit Union, has joined Allied



Cauley

Solutions' Digital and Data Council as a charter member. The Council is a collaborative working group comprised of Allied Solutions and partner credit union executives who will identify industry trends and opportunities related to digital transformation and data strategies. An employee of Member One since March 2019, Cauley has more than 17 years of corporate experience in brand and project management, data analytics, and business and community development.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Christopher Kiel has been named Virginia Tech's university building official, responsible for enforcing the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code for



Kiel

construction work on all Virginia Tech-owned facilities, including Blacksburg, Roanoke and the greater Washington, D.C., metro area. Kiel brings three decades of experience in the construction industry and over two decades of experience in building and fire jurisdictions across the U.S. He joins Virginia Tech from Toledo, Ohio, where he served as senior plan check engineer for Municipal Plan Check Services.



Laymon

Hollins University has announced the appointment of **Steven**

E. Laymon, Ph.D., as vice president for graduate programs and continuing studies. He will provide leadership for the university's existing programs and develop new initiatives. Laymon comes to Hollins from the University of Virginia's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, where he has worked in several capacities since 2014.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Burcham

The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, a Verge affiliate, has named **Erin Burcham** has been named Executive Director of RBTC. (see story elsewhere in this issue). Burcham succeeds John Phillips. "Erin's experience leading talent and workforce development

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initiatives across the Region 2 footprint aligns very well with the RBTC's desire to help our member companies retain, attract, and expand their workforces," said Verge Executive Director and CEO Greg Feldmann. A native of Southwest Virginia, Burcham graduated from the University of South Carolina in 2006 with a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communications, and holds a Master of Science in Leadership Studies, with a focus on economic development, from Virginia Tech, which she completed in 2017.

SENIOR FRONT



Duncan

Friendship has announced the appointment of **Amber Duncan** as director of dining services at

Friendship Health and Rehab Center, located on Hershberger Road. Since 2008, Duncan had served as the retail dining and nutrition director for Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital. There she oversaw nine different retail cafes, supervised, trained and developed a culinary, kitchen and dining leadership team.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Magruder

Marc Magruder has been promoted to the Director of Management and Budget for Montgomery County.

He reports to Angie Hill, Assistant County Administrator and Chief Financial Officer. Magruder is responsible for overseeing the Management and Budget Department, specifically County budgeting and related financial reporting. In August 2004, Magruder joined Montgomery County as Budget Manager. Prior to that, he served as Management and Budget Analyst II in Prince William County.



Cox

The Western Virginia Regional Jail Authority has appointed **David**

Cox as Superintendent of the Western Virginia Regional Jail (WVRJ). Cox assumes his new position immediately. Said Jay Taliaferro, chairman of the Western Virginia Jail Authority: "he has been a key figure at the jail since it opened, and I cannot think of a better person to succeed Bobby Russell as superintendent and continue the jail's high level of professionalism." Cox had been serving as Lieutenant Colonel and Interim Superintendent of the WVRJ.



Boas

Julia Boas has been named director of



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marketing for the Roanoke Regional Partnership. Boas has worked the last seven years as the director of events and events marketing at the Roanoke Outside Foundation, a non-profit created by the Roanoke Regional Partnership in 2013. The Partnership states that under her leadership, the Blue Ridge Marathon was “built into an internationally recognized event,” with a \$6.9 million economic impact to date and 10-15 percent increased participation every year (pre-COVID). The GO Outside Festival became a national event, growing in attendance from 15,000 to 40,000. Go Cross Cyclocross Race, in only three years, became a UCI event “putting Roanoke on the international cycling map,” attracting professional athletes from around the world.

Tiffany Bradbury has moved on from the City of Roanoke as Community Engagement Manager and has joined Botetourt County as the Director of



Bradbury

Communications. Bradbury spent 16 years with the City of Roanoke.



Bruns

The Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce has named **Andy Bruns** as its new Executive Director. Bruns replaces Christopher Finley, who resigned in March to take a position with LewisGale Regional Health System. Bruns was most recently a regional publisher for Lee Enterprises, where he was responsible for publications that included The Roanoke

Times, Lynchburg News & Advance, Laker Weekly, Laker Magazine and properties in Danville and Martinsville.

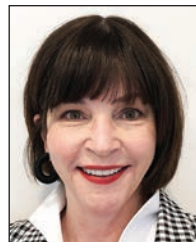


Holmes

The Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission has named **Jeremy Holmes** its new Executive Director. Holmes follows Wayne Strickland, who retired on June 30 after 42 years with the Regional Commission. Holmes has served as director of the Commission’s RIDE Solutions Commuter Assistance Program for the past fifteen years and in January of 2020 became the Commission’s Associate Executive Director. In addition to his leadership of the RIDE Solutions program, Holmes

has been involved in a number of regional community advocacy efforts.

NON-PROFIT FRONT



Whitney

Betsy Whitney has been selected as Chief Philanthropy Officer (CPO) for Good Samaritan, the community-based advanced illness/hospice provider serving southwest Virginia, with headquarters in Roanoke County. Whitney is the first CPO in the organization’s history. She has eighteen years of fundraising experience with Total Action for Progress (TAP), Habitat for Humanity in the Roanoke Valley and the Carilion Clinic Foundation. Currently, Whitney serves on



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the Roanoke Arts Commission and is a member of the Roanoke Women's Foundation.



Childress

United Way of Roanoke Valley has announced that **Alisha Childress** is the new Vice President of Resource Development. Childress joins UWRV from Apple Ridge Farm, where she served as Director for

Operations for the past two years. Prior to that she was the Director of Community Cultivations at The Pace Center in Richmond. Childress, a Roanoke native, holds two master's degrees from the University of Maryland, where she studied Nonprofit Management and Business Administration.

Compiled by
Gene Marrano

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“”
Roanoke has emerged from this pandemic stronger in a lot of ways.

— Page 13

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Christopher Borba, MBA is a buyer's agent for the Reiner Realty Team at Lichtenstein Rowan and a real estate investor. The Reiner Realty Team did over \$15 million in real estate transactions last year and is one of the top real estate teams in the Roanoke Valley. [chris@myroanokehome.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.

Mike Dame is the vice president of marketing and communications at Carillon 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 Carillon in 2008. Mike lives in Roanoke with his wife Valeria and enjoys golf, guitar, spending time with friends and cheering on his beloved Florida Gators.

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

Mary Ann L. Miller is vice president of business banking and community relations at Bank of Botetourt. A graduate of Bridgewater College, she has been in the banking industry for more than fifteen years and currently serves on the board and executive committee as past-president with the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce, a board member with the Daleville Institute, and is vice chair of the board of with the Botetourt Family YMCA. A native of Botetourt County, she resides in Daleville with her husband, Matthew and their son Ira.

Ian Price is a radio and print journalist in Roanoke

who looks at things through a Millennial's eye. The Radford University communications major is also a pretty good DJ and trivia host, some say. [IanPrice23@gmail.com]

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

Kimberly Whiter is CEO and Cofounder for Elder Care Solutions, a Roanoke-based remote company focused on helping caregivers across the U.S. face the financial challenges of long-term care needs. [kimberly@eldercaresolutionsinc.com]

““

It's been hard to put a fully autonomous vehicle on the road. — Page 16

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Plug-in aircraft?

Virginia Tech states that electric aircraft can significantly reduce carbon and nitrogen oxides emissions, it is a promising solution to a global problem. Now the U.S. Department of Energy has released \$10 million in funding to support research that furthers the development of electric aircraft. One of the six projects funded under the Connecting Aviation by Lighter Electrical Systems (CABLES) topic will take place at Virginia Tech, where project team received \$1.3 million to develop a prototype for a high-voltage, power-dense, cost-effective cable for twin-aisle aircraft that can safely operate in high-altitude, low pressure environments.

Things looking up at ROA

The Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport saw a 21% increase in April 2021 traffic versus March 2021. The airport's increase of 5,799 passengers from March to April equates to 193 more passengers flying each day. Leisure travel continues to rebound. The airport saw an increase in April 2021 traffic of 1677% on a year-over-year basis; however, when compared

to April 2019 (pre-pandemic), traffic decreased 46%.

"Passengers are more comfortable with the measures taken by the airports and airlines to ensure their safety," stated David Jeavons, interim executive director of the Roanoke Regional Airport Commission. "Lower overall airfare has stimulated leisure demand, and as airlines rebuild their schedules, it is critical to use our current service not only to keep it but also to have more restored and help our regional economy recover. Air service will be even more important when our business customers return to the sky."

Engage NRV

The New River Valley Regional Commission has launched a new community engagement platform, "to reach diverse voices in local and regional government planning." EngageNRV.org came about in response to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on public gatherings. It proved to be an effective way for people to provide input says the NRVRC and will be kept in place. Current opportunities for interaction on EngageNRV.org include the Town of Pulaski's comprehensive plan

update and planning for Radford's eastern downtown revitalization.

Props for local commercial REALTOR

CoStar Group, Inc., a provider of commercial real estate information, analytics and online marketplaces, has announced the CoStar Power Broker Quarterly Deals winners for the first quarter of 2021. Waldvogel Commercial Properties President and CEO Michael Waldvogel, CCIM, SIOR, and Vice President and COO Krista Vannoy, CCIM, SIOR topped that list for industrial transactions in Roanoke. The CoStar Power Brokers Quarterly Deals winners are determined by the top deals executed every quarter, based on price and square footage.

Barrel Chest on the move

Barrel Chest Wine and Beer has pulled up stakes from southwest Roanoke County and moved down the road to the former Salon Del Sol building on Franklin Road in Roanoke City. The beer and wine mega-warehouse will also feature a pay by the ounce, pour-your-own beer and wine system set to debut closer to

the Fall. Patrons start a tab, receive something like a credit card they hold up to screen where the automated taps will be, which then pour as much beverage as desired. Barrel Chest owner Martin Keck says the Electric Road/Starkey Road intersection with its highway divider and no direct access from motorists going towards Salem on Electric Road/Route 419 was a factor in moving as well. Keck also owns his new location on Franklin Road. "It's a bigger space, it's a nicer building. We've had a nano-brewery for most of the time we've been [at the old location]; we're going to start making small batches of wine as well."

VWCC, Carilion team up for PPE production

Virginia Western Community College recently completed a project with Carilion Clinic to manufacture PPE devices that helped protect healthcare providers in the Roanoke Region during the COVID-19 pandemic. College employees and students collaborated in the STEM Building's Fab Lab to 3D print almost 600 devices that were used to increase the effectiveness of respirators. At the end of 2020, Carilion Clinic reached out to Virginia

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Western's Fab Lab about partnering on the project. There was a shortage of the PPE devices, which attach to a respirator and allow additional filter material to be used with the respirator.

"When the COVID-19 pandemic caused a shortage of PPE for healthcare workers globally, I knew there could be a demand for the use of equipment in our labs and an opportunity for our students to gain valuable experience," said Kristian Cusimano, the VWCC Fab Lab Manager. "We enjoyed working closely with Carilion to ensure we made what they needed, when they needed it." Virginia Western students worked on the 3D printing

projects at school in the Fab Lab, and they also were able to work at home with portable 3D printers on loan.

It's been a while for Dawgs

The Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs have announced their home game schedule for the upcoming 2021-2022 season from the Southern Professional Hockey League. The team will play a 56-game regular season, split evenly between home and away games. The 2021-2022 home schedule features 22 Friday and Saturday games, three Thursday dates and three Sunday dates. Special dates to highlight include Black Friday (November 26); "that's the first time

Have an announcement about your business?

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

we've done that in a couple of years," says Dawgs Vice President Alexandra Martin. Other notable dates are the day before Christmas Eve, December 23 ("we're excited about that as well"), and New Year's Eve (December 31). "We've done that since the beginning," notes Martin. Roanoke's last home game was February 22, 2020, just before

the 2019-2020 SPHL season was cancelled due to COVID-19. After 601 days without hockey in the Star City, the Rail Yard Dawgs will be back on the Berglund Center ice October 15. Martin expects the Rail Yard Dawgs to see a flurry of ticket sales now that the home schedule has been released. Season packages and group outings are on sale now;



2021 SEASON LINEUP

- 7/9 Steely Dan Tribute: The Royal Scam
- 7/17 Jackyl
- 7/23 AC/DC Tribute: Shoot to Thrill
- 7/30 Colt Ford
- 8/7 Lee Brice
- 8/13 Queen Tribute: Absolute Queen
- 8/20 The Marshall Tucker Band
- 9/9 Blackberry Smoke
- 9/10 Tom Petty Tribute: The Wildflowers
- 9/16 Tesla
- 9/18 Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
- 10/8 Pink Floyd Tribute: Us and Floyd
- 10/15 38 Special

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FRONT NOTES

single game tickets are expected to be released by September.

Explore Park Adventure Plan continues to unfold

Roanoke County has opened two new mountain bike features at Explore Park. The Voyager Trail is a quarter-mile mountain bike trail designed and built by Blue Ridge Off-Road Cyclists. Explore Park's new Blue Ridge Bike Center has also opened, the first phase of a progressive skills park development, including a skills loop,

intermediate connector trail and new parking lot. Each trail and element is designed for beginner and intermediate skills development. Phase one includes rock features, dirt berms, log rumble strips, rock armored rollers and rock gardens. The opening of the Blue Ridge Bike Center is a key amenity as identified in the Explore Park Adventure Plan, adopted by the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors in 2016. Parks, Recreation and Tourism department director Doug Blount says, "we see this bike center as the starting

point, as we gear up for additional phases, which continues Explore Park's role as a destination for outdoor recreation in Virginia's Blue Ridge – America's East Coast Mountain Biking Capital."

YouthBuild grant

Almost \$2.7 million in federal "YouthBuild" in grant funding to provide job training and education for at-risk youth is headed to this region. That includes \$1.2 million for Goodwill Industries of the Valleys in Roanoke. Another

\$1.5 million will support workforce programs in the New River Valley. Mary Ann Gilmer with Goodwill says YouthBuild will focus on academic training, life skills and construction training in conjunction with several partners: "it's really a great holistic program that addresses community needs, youth needs and provides us with a fantastic opportunity to work with our very valuable partners in this grant."

*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.

A close-up photograph of a wooden-handled hammer with a metal head, positioned diagonally. The hammer's head is crushing a silver metal can, which is split in two. The background is dark and textured.

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Caroline LaRocca: "I felt cleansed. I felt exhausted. I worked every system of my body. And my mind."

HOT YOGA: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR SOME

"I was 44. I'm now 52. And I feel 30. Because of hot yoga."

Caroline LaRocca has been in a high-stress, pressure-packed profession for 20 years and until 2012 "I was in a dark place" where the intensity of planning and delivering weddings could wallop her.

"Since 2012, I have practiced weekly. I have practiced in every city I've travelled to. I have a membership

in New York City and in Virginia. I got certified to teach in 2014. It became a way of life for me."

She discovered hot yoga in 2012 at Brooklyn's Sacred Studio and at first "I was intimidated and didn't think I'd make it through class because it was 105 degrees in the room. I got through though. I did all 26 postures. Tears

poured out. Sweat everywhere. I felt cleansed. I felt exhausted. I worked every system of my body. And my mind.”

It was an almost instant revelation. Hammond has owned and operated Caroline LaRocca Event Design in Roanoke for two decades and has put together more than 1,000 events from weddings to corporate retreats. It is an industry whose very nature is pressure. You don't make mistakes with weddings and corporate events if you want to remain in business. LaRocca has flourished and one of the cogs in her wheel is hot yoga, which releases the steam-engine pressure valve in a heated room that feels almost unbearable.

Initially her instructor “inspired me to push myself in the best of ways. I drove home feeling drained. And then I went back. Chi Chi [her instructor] inspired me to ‘marvel’ at what my body was capable of even when I wanted to give up. I kept going back. I would drive to Lynchburg from Roanoke because it was the only studio in the area that offered the classic 90-minute series and kept the studio at 105 degrees.” Roanoke now has a hot yoga studio.


The pain of a well-publicized missing person case turned personal tragedy was lessened somewhat by yoga says LaRocca. “When my daughter, Sarabeth, was diagnosed with chronic Lyme Disease, I took her to hot yoga, and

it eased her pain. It heals every function of the body. It strengthens and it energizes. When I lost Sarabeth [Hammond, to an automobile accident on Bent Mountain in 2016], I had yoga to turn to.”

Her routine is a 90-minute moving meditation “where I find peace and strength. It’s where I learned to love myself again. Where I can grieve... and heal through movement and meditation.

“When Covid hit, I could no longer attend the hot room. So, I created one in my home. I added a whole new circuit where I could plug in three electric heaters, a propane heater, and a humidifier. I did private practices over zoom with my guru, Upkar, in New York.

“Those zoom practices have taken my yoga experience to a whole new level and I’m stronger than ever. Yoga is an exercise that energizes you, that works every system: digestive, nervous, endocrine. My immunity is stronger than ever, my energy is high, and my body is limber, and it’s all because of hot yoga.

Carolina LaRocca has no plans to put her yoga mat away any time soon either: “I see people in the studio who are well over 80 - and I plan on being right there with them.” 

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 Critical feedback about your processes, goals, mission, and plans is vital when you are growing a business. — Page 34



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