

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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Business Coaches

Craig County STEM

MELD PrintWorks

The Bridges Program  
at Roanoke College

The Hemp Mill:  
Apprentice-to-Owner

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## Passing Down The Joint



a business handover story ★

Debbie Custer and Libby Patterson  
The Hemp Mill



**Meg Reed**  
*VP of Business Banking*



**Kayla Adams**  
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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Welcome to the dog days of summer, which we hope you are enjoying locally, at the beach or maybe up in the mountains somewhere. This month we look at different aspects of education and how it relates to the real world – to the careers students aspire to after they leave school behind. Education can also mean apprenticeships – see our story on such a program at The Hemp Mill in Vinton. And our story on teaching STEM in rural communities, as a way of lifting kids into better careers than they might ever imagine.

Our cover story by Dan Smith involves another aspect of education – as in business coaching, from some of the most respected people in the field locally. For those already working and perhaps leading their own enterprise – what could they improve upon? Do we ever really stop learning? Sure hope not. Happy reading.

**Tom Field**  
Publisher

**Gene Marrano**  
Editor

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# Put Me In, Coach

By Dan Smith



“ ”  
The pandemic really revealed deficits that other people may not have been aware of. — Page 20

FRONTcover photograph of Debbie Custer and Libby Patterson by Tom Field.



## Driving Positive Environmental Change



*By Jeff Merritt  
Market Vice President,  
Cox Roanoke*

At Cox, we believe the success of our business is fundamentally connected to the wellbeing of our world, and we continuously look for ways to reduce our environmental impact across our enterprise. In order to maximize our positive impact on the planet where we work and live, we focus on alternative energy, energy conservation, waste diversion and recycling, water conservation and supply chain sustainability.

Here in Roanoke, our facility on Fallowater Drive serves as one of four permanent locations for County residents to drop off materials for responsible recycling. Due to increased use of the onsite trailers, Cox purchased and donated an additional 25-yard trailer to Roanoke County to further serve its residents in supporting positive environmental change.

There are now a total of four trailers on site at the Fallowater location, all of which were donated by Cox. Through the County's recycling program, each is emptied daily to meet the growing demand, amounting to more than 3,000 cubic yards of recyclables removed each month and diverted from the landfill.

Protecting the planet on a broad scale requires dedication and collaboration between businesses, local government and individuals. Whether it be a recycling program within your office or home, consider the small steps you can take to make a collective impact.

To learn more about Roanoke County's recycling program, visit [roanokecountyva.gov](http://roanokecountyva.gov). To learn more about Cox's commitment to sustainability, visit [coxenterprises.com](http://coxenterprises.com).



# Valley Business FRONT

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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 was pretty easy to recruit kids when you can tell them we're going to make games on your cell phones.

— Page 15

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 48.

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All photos: Dan Smith

**Lynda McNutt Foster: “Our approach is scientific, and our research validates that approach.”**

# Put Me In, Coach

By Dan Smith

**If you want to be ready to play today, you might need a bit of coaching for both you and your business.**

Business coaching is not new, but like so much dealing with business, it is in an almost constant state of evolution, change and keeping up with technology. A lot of it is simple one-on-one evaluation, asking and answering important—and sometimes not-so-important—questions. But these days computer technology, artificial intelligence and teamwork make heavy inroads.

Says coach Kathy Baske Young, who has been busy with clients for nearly a quarter of a century, “Coaching is about facilitating positive change” for the business. “A coach can help identify gaps between where you are, and you want to go.”

And that’s the rub because sometimes the answer is not all that obvious. We talked

to five respected business coaches in the region, and this is what we came up with:

For **Lynda McNutt Foster**, business coaching is about science, research, validation, and constantly monitoring progress. Her elevator speech goes like this: “We empower leaders to scale courage in their organizations, using a scientifically backed approach that encourages continuous change and fosters a culture of innovation.” But there is much more to it.

“Our approach is scientific, and our research validates that approach,” she says. “We monitor progress [with a system] that is not available to others.” It is a system she created, she says. “I monitor 200 clients three times a week and it only takes 10 minutes.”



Her clients most often come from referrals of a large number of clients, she says. And when her organization gets down to brass tacks, “We talk about what is keeping them up at night and what should be keeping them up. It is systems thinking within a 6-to-12-month process. Clients “get the homework they choose.”

The monitoring, Foster insists, “is non-invasive and highly perceptive. Our service is 100 percent guaranteed.” AI is often used, and classes are interactive. She says there is a 90 percent retention rate among clients.

Clients “feel like we have their backs. What we put into action is the result of hours and hours of work and effort. We hold ourselves accountable and clients are people we care deeply about and who care about us. It is sustaining.”

Basically, Foster says, “We coach courage and confidence to be courageous.”

**Katie Beach** of Katie Beach Consulting in Roanoke puts it in a nutshell: “Right now, the most important issue with all business, particularly small to mid-sized business, is attracting and retaining talent.” Businesses like hers, she emphasizes, “help companies engage talent and grow their managers and leaders while creating or maintaining a strong company culture.”

“”

Our approach  
is scientific.

- Lynda McNutt Foster

“”

I fell in love  
with this work.

- Katie Beach

**Katie Beach: “People  
don’t leave a company.  
They leave their manager.”**





Small business owners tend to say 'yes' to everything...

- Jeff Smith

**Jeff Smith: A “common challenge for small business owners is spending too much time working in the business and not enough time working on the business.**

She drags out an old business adage by way of example: “People don’t leave a company. They leave their manager.” Teaching those managers how to manage with efficiency, compassion, understanding and encouragement has become an industry: business coaching.

Beach earned her chops as an athletic trainer at Virginia Tech (women’s softball and soccer) and then, when being home for holidays became an issue, helping attract business to this region for the Roanoke Regional Partnership. “I fell in love with this work,” she says and nearly three years ago, she started her own business.

**Jeff Smith** of Roanoke’s Fortify Leadership Group has been at it a good while longer and his goal for his clients is to “help them understand their value ... in the marketplace. Many of my clients have great ideas but spend too much time falling in love with their own ideas and do not understand what their client’s needs are and, most importantly, what they are willing to pay for.

“I work with them to think about how their product or services will help solve someone’s problem or make their client’s lives easier.”

He points to a “common challenge for small business owners is spending too much time working in the business and not enough time working on the business. Many owners go into business because they have great technical knowledge. However, once they land some business, they spend so much time doing the work that they forget to continue to do business development. They come off a big project and then look around and find they have not done much other work for the past few weeks or months and almost have to start all over again.”

The real challenge, Smith says, is often time and priority management. “Small business owners tend to say ‘yes’ to everything and they feel like they have to do whatever the customer wants. ... My clients also





struggle with transactional work. They let themselves get overwhelmed with lots of little tasks that they do not protect their time well enough to do the creative, transformational work that would move their business forward.

Another common challenge he finds is "reminding my clients that they are running a business and not a charity." Additionally, he asks "my clients to put hope on their calendar every week: a workout; dinner with a significant other, attending a child's game." Life is not all business.

**Dr. Sharon Scott** noted more than three years ago that "changes were coming to workplace culture before the pandemic, but the pandemic accelerated and magnified these issues; one of the largest is the disengagement of leaders and employees within companies. Disengagement can cost a company one third of an employee's salary. With a lower birthrate and an aging workforce, we have fewer employees. We often forget that in August 2019, unemployment was around 2.9%. There was fierce competition for "good employees." Once the pandemic hit, we moved into lockdown and remote work for many companies – our social skills were crippled, impacting the organizational culture."

**Sharon Scott:** "Young people want to work for a company that makes a difference and improves the world."

“ ”

Disengagement  
can cost a  
company one  
third of an  
employee's salary.

- Sharon Scott



**Kathy Baske Young:**  
“We came through covid,  
and people reflected on  
another life outside.”



Understand  
what coaching  
is all about and  
how that differs  
from consulting.

- Kathy Baske Young

She works four to six months per client on “specific organizational issues for small to mid-sized businesses like identifying why the company exists, engagement), and personal and company potential.

“Young people want to work for a company that makes a difference and improves the world,” she says. “So, I work with companies to discover just how they make a difference. They often know it, but the focus over the last three years has been on other metrics, such as sales or production goals. The clients I accept 80% of the time improve their performance and achieve the agreed-upon goals.

“I spend a lot of time working to reengage people with their team members and leaders with their team members. The pandemic and social media have made us angry, frustrated, and unkind. We say things today to humans that we would never have said before. I work with Emotional Intelligence.”

**Kathy Baske Young** was among the first business coaches in this region—the first, in fact, to be certified by the professional organization, the Center for Executive Coaching—and she has come to the simple conclusion that “all I do is ask questions. I have no emotional attachment [to the clients]. It is easier to solve problems” that way.

Young says the approach is to “focus on areas as varied and diverse as the clients and all are important issues unique to




that particular business. Sometimes it has to do with succession planning. Are there employees being groomed to step up to a bigger role? Are there managers or individuals who have retirement on the horizon? Is there a plan in place to give everyone the experience and training" needed?

She insists that it is "important to understand what coaching is all about and how that differs from consulting. Coaching is about facilitating positive change. People who are coached usually want more from both their personal and work lives."

And there is a distinct process. When a potential client asks how I can help them, we spend some time on the front end talking about what that might look like. I want to see if we are a good fit ... If that is a match, then the rest is like a dance, a kind of natural evolution that emerges from what we are learning together."

She has concluded that "coaching is unique to each person, so I don't have general recommendations, per se. That said, sometimes it is important to clear the deck, so you have the head space to take on something new. That can be as basic as cleaning your office or deciding what you can delegate or stop doing. Adding even more to an overwhelming day is not a recipe for success."

Unless that addition has a solution. 

“ ”

Business coaching is in an almost constant state of evolution.



Courtesy photos

Boyer with Morgan Romeo, executive director of the Greater Roanoke Workforce Development Board, at TechNite. She nominated him.

# Bringing STEM Education to Rural School Divisions

By Aila Boyd

**While Craig County is known for its natural beauty, it isn't considered to be the epicenter of the region's technology industry. Despite that, one Craig County Public Schools educator is making big moves.**

The dogged efforts of Geoff Boyer to ignite a passion for STEM—science, technology, engineering and math—in his students have put his rural division on the tip of the local tech community's tongue. In recognition of his work, he was given the K-12 STEM-H Educator Award at the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council's TechNite. The annual event brings together state and local educators, government officials and industry leaders who support the region's technology sector. Over 450 individuals attended the May event in Blacksburg on the Virginia Tech campus.

Selected by a panel of judges, the award recognizes a K-12 educator who promotes math, science and the use of technology

in creative ways to transfer knowledge and help develop future technology leaders, and Boyer has done just that throughout his 24 years in the classroom.

The Lancaster, Pennsylvania native came to the Roanoke Valley in the mid-90s to attend Roanoke College.

When he first started in Craig County, he only taught math but later advocated for the addition of a computer science class. "It started out ironically enough without computers," he recalls. "We would just program on a graphing calculator."

The computer science curriculum really took off in the mid-2010s after he joined



Boyer's students made hardwired keyboards this year.

the group Mobile CSP, a College Board-backed curriculum that teaches computer science through the development of mobile apps. This coincided with the increase in smartphone use by teenagers. "It was pretty easy to recruit kids when you can tell them we're going to make games on your cellphone," he said.

County. This year, he had students design their own keyboards by 3-D printing the cases and plates and hand wiring them. Much to his surprise, the students enjoyed making the keyboards even more than they did mobile apps. His students also recently made Game Boy devices from scratch, which were used to code on.

Additional programming classes that involve more coding were later added in Craig

Given the small size of the division and that all grades are taught in the same building,



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Boyer's first block students made Raspberry Pi Pico Boys, devices that resemble a Game Boy.

Boyer teaches both middle and high school grades. He said it's nice to have that kind of crossover so he can help younger students think about the next STEM courses they'll take as they progress year after year.

"We have such a small county. We're fairly limited financially, but the kids are really good hands-on. I have a lot of kids that work on a farm and wouldn't get exposed to any computer science or coding," he explained. "It's always been my idea that you take math, you take computer science not necessarily because that's what you're going to do in life, but it helps you in decision making."

Boyer tries to connect the dots for his students by highlighting that they'll have to make daily decisions based on logic. One of the goals of providing students with an education, he said, is to get them to think on their own. By designing their own devices, they're learning to do just that.

Students seem to be buying what Boyer

is selling, evidenced by the fact that his planning period has essentially turned into a workshop for students who want to keep their momentum going on class projects.

His hope is that a few students each year will be inspired to go into the computer science field the way that Trace Bellassai did.

Bellassai, chairman of the Craig County School Board, now works as a cybersecurity engineer. He said his company often has multiple open positions but no qualified applicants to fill them.

"Even in today's age of children having tablets and cellphones, a true understanding of how that technology works is still not commonplace. That is why STEM programs like the ones Mr. Boyer is teaching are so incredibly valuable," he said. "It gets youth interested in STEM and drives that into further curiosity to not only develop into well-paying careers but also very fulfilling careers that have the opportunity to make a major impact in the world."




Boyer isn't just an educator. He's also an entrepreneur, having started a 3D printing company that ties in his passion for golf. Mark Your Balls makes custom golf ball stencils and markers. He funnels the revenue back into his efforts at the school.

Outside of his work in Craig County, Boyer is a master teacher with Mobile CSP. Prior to the pandemic, he traveled the country during summer breaks to train other STEM teachers. Now, most of the training is done online.

"Most students graduating now are getting jobs that didn't exist 10 years ago. Technology is always changing. Any leg up students can have of going to the next level, whether it be college or work, they're going to be using technology," Boyer said of the importance of divisions investing heavily

in STEM education. "It's easy to get into because students want to get into it. They look forward to coming to my class because what they get to do."

Erin Burcham, executive director of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, noted that many of the businesses the RBTC works with are on the lookout for STEM talent and would like to recruit on a local level.

"We see a strong pipeline out of our school systems. We know it's easier to home grow and train talent than it is to recruit talent in," she said. "We're seeing a lot of growth in our tech and biotech industries. As we evolve and have new emerging technologies, it's going to be very important to produce the talent pipeline that we're going to need." 

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# BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

**Executive Summary:**

*It's an odd way to describe what I do, but my business provides intangibles to other businesses.*

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

## Investing in “intangibles”

What are intangibles? Well, they are generally described as those things that a business possesses that are not physical. Items that you can't hold or touch.

Businesses usually have both tangible and intangible assets. Tangible assets, such as buildings, equipment, machines, and tools, are easier to understand, easier to value, and easier to make investment decisions on. Intangible assets are not as easy.

As our economy has shifted to one based more on information and knowledge, companies have invested a greater share of their capital in intangible assets. Intangible assets are such things as intellectual property, technology and software, branding, and human capital. The focus of this month's FRONT, education and training, falls under this category.

For many companies, investing in intangible assets is hard to evaluate. There often is no predictable return on investment, and it's difficult to put a value on them. Yet, it's critically important for companies to invest in these assets if they want to grow and be successful.

According to a recent research report by McKinsey Global Institute, investing in intangibles correlates directly with productivity and growth. The companies that invest more in intangibles grow more than their peers. And this correlation occurs in all sectors and industries.

Although intangible investing might be hard to value, companies that spend more on R&D, digitization, software technology, innovation, branding and human capital strategies are more successful than companies who invest less. Of course, these investments should be vetted like any other investment to ensure they align with a company's business strategy, but successful companies are willing to take risks on these assets.

Considering the current labor shortage, investing in these intangible assets can make a company stand out from the crowd and help attract and retain talent. Now that's a tangible strategy! 📌

“It's critically important for companies to invest in these assets if they want to grow and be successful.”

## Teaching financial literacy: raising an entrepreneur

We have all heard the saying, "Entrepreneurs are not born; they are made." How do we raise financially literate children and teens? Better yet, how do we raise entrepreneurs?

You don't have to be an entrepreneur to raise one. Simply talk with your kids about your work. I have a client who started her own business who said:

*"My dad involved me in his work. He allowed me to ask questions. He took me to his work and let me participate in acquisitions. He paved a successful path for me while also creating a great relationship."*

### Creativity, Independent Thinking, & Drive

Teach them how earning money works. Help provide opportunities to bring in cash for themselves. Encourage them to offer trash or lawn services to neighbors for a fee. They can sell old toys and clothes they no longer want. Aside from their regular household chores, provide tasks where they can earn some extra money. Encourage creativity.

Provide basic knowledge of starting a business. For example, they could start a dog-walking business. Teach them the difference between *profit* and *revenue*. Will they need to budget for leashes, dog treats, transportation, or other supplies? We need to teach future entrepreneurs to know their numbers. 📊

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



## FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

**Executive Summary:**  
*Experiences, passion, and knowledge are the key stepping stones to being an entrepreneur.*

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ENTRÉ

# Roanoke College looks to bridge the gap by recruiting more future educators of color

By Gene Marrano

**RC will look to school systems in the Roanoke Valley as one of only three such programs in the country.**

It's called The Bridges Program at Roanoke College, which will now work in partnership with the University of Houston and the University of Colorado at Denver to further refine that initiative. Locally, Roanoke College will partner with Salem City Public Schools, Roanoke City Public Schools and Roanoke County Public Schools to identify aspiring teachers of color in local high schools – and then educate them at Roanoke College – placing them back in local K-12 school jobs after graduation. The first two Bridges program students will be enrolled at RC this fall.

The National Center for Research on Educator Diversity is a research hub launched in 2020; NCRED says it is “committed to dismantling inequity in teacher development systems.” U.S. Department of Education and Pew Research indicates that 79% of teachers in America are white – even higher than that in school systems locally. Meanwhile

at least half of public school students in this country are people of color or Indigenous. NCRED says teachers who look like the students in their classrooms have a positive impact on student achievement, engagement and other outcomes.

At Roanoke College Associate Professor of Education Lisa Stoneman chairs the Education Department. This summer she'll gather with other partners in Houston “to set our next steps in motion.” The Bridges Program at Roanoke College “is all about bridging communities and we're very excited to enlarge that community from our local community,” Stoneman says RC has always worked with local school systems but as part of this new partnership they hope to bring new ideas to The Bridges program in hopes of attracting students of color who want to teach, as the nation faces a shortage of educators in many localities.



Lisa Stoneman

“The pandemic really revealed deficits that other people may not have been aware of,” notes Stoneman. Educators and school administrators were well aware of those deficits she insists. Three decades of research says Stoneman highlights that there needs to be more teachers of color in the labor pool. Those educators also appear to “have an impact on white students as well.” The number of teachers of color here are, “worse than the national average,” she also points out – between 4 and 17 percent locally.

## ROANOKE COLLEGE WILL ALSO PARTNER WITH SALEM HIGH SCHOOL ON ANOTHER PROGRAM

Getting local high school students of color to matriculate at Roanoke College in The Bridges program might be easier if they can earn college credits in high school - and now RC has been approved for a \$192,541 Lab School Planning Grant to design a dual enrollment program for at-risk Salem High School students, in conjunction with Virginia Western Community College. Roanoke College is one of 16 schools in Virginia – and the only one in the Roanoke Valley – to be approved for one of these 12 month planning grants. RC and Salem High will spend a year to create a plan for lab school students that would give a jump start on college and their careers.

Its “a plan to improve college access and affordability for more students in the Roanoke Valley,” said Kathy Wolfe, vice president for academic affairs and dean of Roanoke College. She appeared at a news conference with Lisa Stoneman, Roanoke College President Frank Shushok and Dr. Curtis Hicks, superintendent of Salem Public Schools, to announce the Lab School grant. “The Salem community will be the beneficiaries of this program. We’re excited about the planning grant and where it may lead,” said Hicks.

It will also be the first dual enrollment agreement for Roanoke College with




Lab School announcement

any high school. “I hope the community is perceiving how eager Roanoke College to be a part of anything and everything that is moving the Roanoke Valley [and] New River Valley, Southwest Virginia forward,” said Shushok, “we want to be the partner that lifts everyone up.”

The dual enrollment program will cover three career pathways said Wolfe: Education and Global Studies, STEM-Health and Communications/Civic Engagement. The Lab school concept will also be a “great opportunity for faculty at Salem High, Roanoke College and Virginia Western to learn from one another – and for students in our education program at Roanoke to gain valuable experience as peer mentors in the program.”

Local public school systems have signed agreements with The Bridges program at Roanoke College and students will be given “preferential treatment,” in the hiring process if they come through RC as a Bridge graduate. They will also be connected to local school system administrators early on for better visibility. Those students of color who often have financial needs are eligible for scholarships and other aid packages as well, even with financial support from the local business community.

Roanoke College has “traditionally been a white and middle class institution,” notes Stoneman, “and we’re really trying to [move] the needle on that a little bit.

This program could help enormously. Part of The Bridges program at Roanoke College will also involve creating curriculum that’s relevant to students [now]. The demographics of college students has changed so much.” It means being culturally relevant in order to reach – and inspire – more students. Stoneman says they also plan to stay with those graduating students in some way, finding veteran educators perhaps who can be mentors – with many leaving teaching in their third year out of college, burned out or disillusioned by the profession. “What needs to change systemically to keep teachers in the field, to support [and] advocate for teachers?” she asks rhetorically. 



## SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Sam Sokolove

**Executive Summary:**  
*AmeriCorps has been in operation for more than thirty years but remains largely unknown to the majority of Americans.*

*Sam Sokolove is the Senior Consultant and Director of Government Contracting for Building Beloved Communities*

## AmeriCorps: a tool for educational success

The students had been struggling. Home lives impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences - also known as "ACE's" - had created a host of learning obstacles. For many American children, one ACE such as divorce or a parent with addiction issues is fairly commonplace, but in the immigrant-serving school district near the U.S.-Mexico border, these ACE's often included compounding traumas of witnessing violence, the incarceration of household members and losing a family member to suicide.

The school administrators decided that a new intervention was necessary, one that would bolster their out-of-school time program with enhanced academic assistance and mentorship. To do so, they reached out to a local non-profit agency to begin developing an AmeriCorps program that could recruit and train education majors from the local university to serve as AmeriCorps members, placed in middle schools throughout the district. As the Director of New Mexico's State and National AmeriCorps Commission, I witnessed over the years how this program enabled dozens of once-failing students to flourish as confident and engaged learners, with their families newly connected to vital social services through the host non-profit.

AmeriCorps - the federal agency that connects over 70,000 Americans each year in service to meet community needs in education, the environment and public health (among other focus areas) - has been in operation for more than thirty years but remains largely unknown to the majority of Americans. Part of the problem is that AmeriCorps can be difficult to explain, but it works like this: the Federal government annually appropriates funding to the national AmeriCorps agency that then makes those funds available to 52 state agencies (called "Commissions") that then allocate those funds through a competitive application process to nonprofit, faith-based and community organizations, higher education institutions, and public agencies.


Serve Virginia is our state's AmeriCorps Commission, administering the funding that allows more than 740 AmeriCorps members to annually meet critical community needs.

For the agencies that receive AmeriCorps funding, they can then recruit a cohort of members to perform special, "boots on the ground" service activities that no current employees could otherwise perform. For example, a local food bank could address growing food insolvency in its service area by enlisting ten or more members to serve at new food distribution sites while creating a nutritional curriculum for homebound seniors. Or, an organization promoting

outdoors education could enlist members to help construct new community-access trails and conduct neighborhood beautification projects in blighted urban areas.

For their service, AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance and are eligible to receive an Education Award to repay student loans or pay current tuition.

It's in education, however, where AmeriCorps really shines: AmeriCorps members support students in public, private, and charter schools, as well as out of school time programs. Evidence shows AmeriCorps members improve attendance and engagement, increase high-school graduation rates and expand college enrollment. Meanwhile, since 1994, more than 13,000 Virginia residents have served more than 20 million hours and qualified for Education Awards totaling \$41.1 million to achieve their own educational goals and professional aspirations.

Schools and school districts considering additional support to promote student success should visit the Serve Virginia website ([servevirginia.org/join-the-movement/](http://servevirginia.org/join-the-movement/)) to learn about AmeriCorps opportunities. Building Beloved Communities is also offering eligible organizations free consultations on AmeriCorps program design, development, and the funding application process; you can book a consultation by contacting me at [sam@buildingbelovedcommunities.com](mailto:sam@buildingbelovedcommunities.com). 

“ AmeriCorps members support students in public, private, and charter schools...





Debbie Custer (L) Libby Patterson

All photos: Getra Hanes

# Apprentice-to-Ownership: A local case study

By Beth Bell

**The Hemp Mill in Vinton serves as a good example of a pending business transfer using apprentice-to-ownership.**

In the Roanoke Valley, we've had several locally famed businesses close due to not finding a successor. In some cases, second and third generation family members are not interested in taking over because they saw how much time and work it took to keep the businesses going. Younger generations are valuing a work/life balance more than the 7/24/365 days a year schedule that was adopted by many of the boomer generation. Potential other buyers didn't want to keep the traditions alive that had built the business. Carlos' and The Roanoker are two that come to mind.

Forbes magazine shared earlier last year that the Baby Boomer generation accounts for an estimated 2.3 million small businesses in the United States, which cumulatively employ over 25 million people. If their logical inheritors don't want to take over, the economic and community impact could be devastating.

Debbie Custer, Owner of Coeus Research, The Hemp Mill, and several other businesses, would love to offer a solution to these business owners: Apprentice-to-Ownership. As Custer nears retirement, she has identified and is cultivating an heiress to her hemp throne at The Hemp Mill in Vinton, Libby Patterson.

Patterson, who graduated with a Master's in mental health counseling, has worked for Custer at The Hemp Mill since 2018. Patterson worked as an outpatient counselor for only two years, yet she could tell that wasn't a career she could take on long-term, and burnout was inevitable. Patterson says she knows how The Hemp Mill makes her



Hemp Mill



feel; and her favorite part of her job is watching the change in customers from grumpy to hopeful and joyful as they open up and seek answers for their health concerns. She loves how The Hemp Mill can help customers take control of their health, without the limitations of insurance companies.

The Hemp Mill has a very nurturing, maternal, and feminine energy. If Custer's sons, who have their own successful businesses and careers, had wanted to take over The Hemp Mill, she would have politely declined. She needed a successor who could continue to create the calm, nurturing, space and found that in Libby Patterson. Patterson will learn the ropes of the business through written instructions, hands on, and just day to day working of the business alongside Custer for 18 months. Custer believes most could transition in 12 months, but she is taking a longer approach with Patterson due to other personal and business factors.

We've asked Custer and Patterson for a few quick tips to share with other business owners who may be considering this option.

### **How do you know an apprenticeship-to-ownership option is right for your business?**

Ask yourself what matters most about the next generation of your business. Is it how much money you can make off of the sale of it? Or is it more important to keep your brand and role in your community alive?

If you answered the latter, an apprenticeship-to-ownership option may be a good fit for you.

Many business owners focus on the sale and making a profit from the sale of their business, but then they are disappointed when the look and feel of the business changes.

### **How do you identify a potential apprentice to take over your business?**

Look at your customers first. Who is always raving about your products, cheering you on, and spending time with your business?




**Libby Patterson**

Hint: These types also make great employees. All of The Hemp Mill's employees started as customers first.

Next, at networking events and other professional organizations. Who supports your business?

### **How does the money work?**

The financial arrangements for an apprenticeship to ownership are completely customizable. Custer pays Patterson a wage for the hours worked as well as a bonus program. The bonus money will be used to help purchase the business at the end of the apprenticeship period. At that time, Patterson will obtain an FDA loan from one of many banks that Custer has introduced her to. Custer encourages business owners not to let the money keep them from exploring this option.

If you are a business owner who wants to see your vision continue beyond your lifetime, we hope you'll consider offering the gift of apprenticeship to a willing successor. 



## Be soft and communicate

I thought I knew everything about real estate until I sold my second piece of property. And now, after putting hundreds of pieces of property under contract, I have come to realize every transaction is different. In real estate you are educating yourself every day on how to handle different situations, people, and the language of the contracts. I list a ton of homes; and I have to understand the contracts in and out on both sides. But learning this is not enough education.

There are some major areas people fall short; and I have found after selling probably a thousand clients or more that these areas are soft skills and communication skills. I am a Dale Carnegie Graduate. I sold the courses and in turn my owner at the time of the Virginia, West Virginia, and Atlanta franchise made me take the courses to understand what I was selling. Dale Carnegie teaches soft skills and communication skills better than anyone on the planet. Read the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

What are soft skills? According to the dictionary: personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. I cannot tell you how many people lack these and are hard to do business with. A simple "thank you" goes a long way. Communicating with positive words makes a difference. I have most recently been telling certain people like my wife, other realtors, and the clerk at the supermarket "I appreciate you." It makes them feel good – and I feel good too! Use and remember the person's name over and over to make an impact. I like to throw in cool emojis during texts to enhance our communication. Practicing these behaviors can increase sales and enhance your relationships with friends and family.

What about communication? Nine out of ten business failures are due to poor communication. Dale Carnegie says "show genuine interest in others." Many of us (I fall into this trap too sometimes) are so wrapped up in ourselves, we ignore others and what they are saying during our conversations. Examples: how is your family, do you have kids, what sports do you like, where do you live, favorite foods, etc. Other tips: show empathy, don't complain, compliment, smile.

Educating yourself on how to interact with others will make your life better. It will strengthen relationships and allows you to adapt with all people, whatever the scenario. 🙏

“  
A simple 'thank you'  
goes a long way.

## REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

**Executive Summary:**  
*The hard sell works best  
with the soft skills.*

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

## Local vet deploys support program

Roanoke Veteran Outreach (RVO), was founded by Roanoke native and retired United States Air Force Master Sergeant Tim Brady. Tim spent 20 years in the military, and throughout his time he received assistance from many volunteers, private organizations and resources all put into place to help service members as they tackle various life-obstacles such as deployments, permanent change of station moves, education expectations as well as issues affecting their personal lives. Each of these challenges often required members to put their lives on hold and in many cases left spouses behind to take care of family matters. Tim received assistance for his family which helped him focus on the mission alleviating the stress of not being home. He wanted to pay it forward after his military career and started RVO.

RVO is just getting started, but looks to provide the same level of veteran advocacy, financial support, education grants and eventually housing to those that came before him and those that will follow. There are hundreds of resources made available to veterans and their families; but oftentimes there is no clear direction as to where to start. RVO looks to become the conduit for resources by becoming a starting point for those transitioning from military service back into the greater Roanoke Valley. Working with local businesses, RVO will also help place veterans with employers based on their skills they learned while serving. Many veterans leave the service with special skills or experience and companies do not know how to translate that into a civilian job.

Lastly, RVO wants to work closely with local banking, insurance and real estate companies to form a veteran-targeted housing program that can help get veterans into homes quicker and with less headache. For our disabled veterans, work to finance homes that are ADA accessible or through grants, help offset the costs of making the home more accessible through renovations, additions or demolitions.

In the end, RVO wants to provide assistance directly to the veteran, ensuring every volunteer hour and every penny donated is spent helping those that have sacrificed so much. 🇺🇸



## GOOD WORK

**Executive Summary:**  
*Roanoke Veteran Outreach is a new initiative to assist military-to-civilian transitions and the many unique challenges for veterans.*



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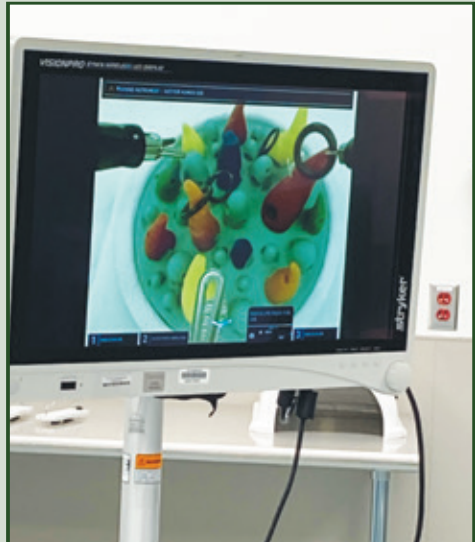
## Valley Metro transit hub in online >

There were some nay-sayers from local businesses and residents in Roanoke's downtown west neighborhood when it was announced that the Valley Metro transit hub would move from drab, dark and outdated Campbell Court to Salem Avenue in front of the Transportation Museum. In mid-June they cut a ribbon and Zach Trogdon from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation was on hand for the occasion: "I think its hard to quantify sometimes what this means in terms of the dignity its going

to bring to the passengers, the operators and all the traveling public."

Some Salem Avenue stakeholders had expressed concerns about safety and property value when the new Valley Metro hub was proposed and then debated at City Council meetings. The \$17 million project finished three months ahead of schedule. DRPT funded more than 7 million dollars of that construction cost. The Third Street Station is also the new home to the Greyhound bus stop and the Smart Way commuter line. Meanwhile Campbell Court is being transformed into a mixed use development.

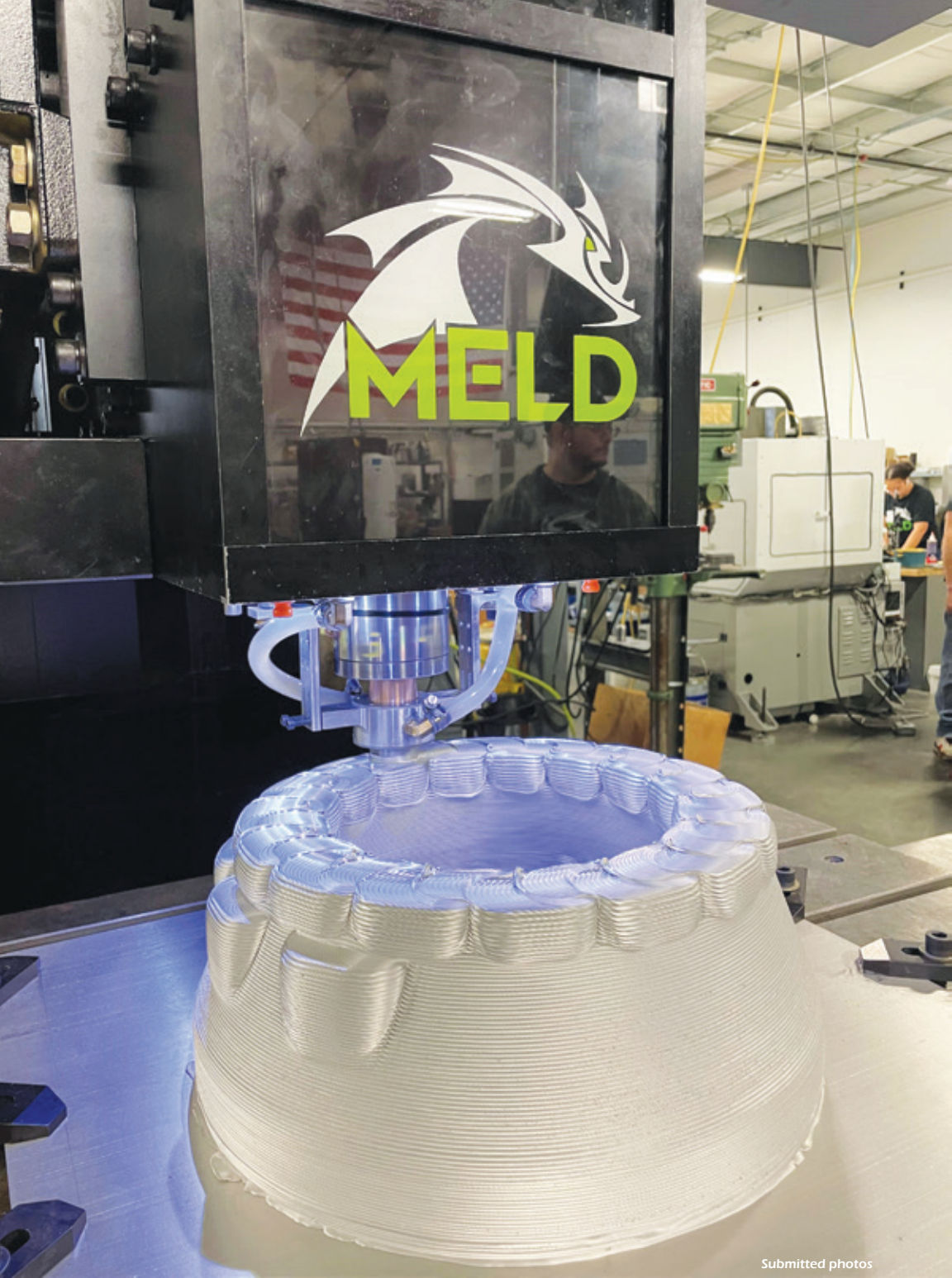




## I, [surgical] Robot at Carilion >

An updated version of the DaVinci robotic surgical tool is now online at Carilion Clinic - focused on procedures related to tonsil cancer. Dr. Patrick Carpenter is an ear, nose and throat specialist – technically an Otolaryngologist: “the back of the throat has historically been very challenging to get to. We had to offer some pretty morbid surgeries to reach it surgically. [Now] we don’t need to do things like splitting the jaw or things that affect how you swallow and the ability to talk after surgery,” said Carpenter as he demonstrated the DaVinci’s dexterity by picking up rubber simulations of the tonsil.

The new DaVinci robot made its debut in May at Carilion and had been used in about a half dozen operations by mid-June. Cancer of the tonsil is a throat disease increasingly common in healthy middle-aged adults these days according to Carilion Clinic. Carpenter says the new DaVinci robot its less invasive, leads to smaller incisions and offers improved imaging: “it allows us to offer surgery to a wider patient population that might have gone for chemo or radiation in the past. The speed has let us improve our efficiency [over the older DaVinci version].” The tonsil is a lymph node in the back of the throat that filters out bacteria. The new DaVinci robotic tool is controlled by surgeons that maneuver its arms from an adjacent console.



Submitted photos

# 3D Printing 2.0

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

A radical new approach to the raw material supply problem," says the company President and CEO

MELD PrintWorks Corporation, a spin-off of MELD Manufacturing Corporation, was born out of requests for greater access to large format printed metal parts. PrintWorks utilizes the MELD® 3D patented printing technology as an additive printing service addressing the needs of multiple industries who struggle to get forgings, castings, and other metal parts due to time constraints and supply-chain issues.

MELD Manufacturing Corporation CEO Nanci Hardwick said, "We spun out this company to provide a source for our many customers eager to have more access to MELD-printed parts."

According to Robb Hudson, President and CEO of PrintWorks, it is the first entity to utilize MELD's patented technology, a solid-state printing process in which metals are not fully melted but are heated to 80-90% of melting temperature, then reformed into a defined shape. A combination of friction and down force are used, a process Hudson likened to starting a campfire. The heat allows the material to go into a plastic state, then it is printed into the requisite shape. MELD makes the material malleable without melting, offering stronger, better-quality parts. This is a completely different process than traditional 3D printing, he said.

Hudson said that MELD Manufacturing Corporation was finding it difficult to manage both R&D and production. So, MELD PrintWorks Corporation has a singular focus on serving customer demand for printed parts in specific alloys (titanium, aluminum,



**Robb Hudson**

and copper) made with the MELD technology. The new company is an independent organization with separate management and operating teams. MELD Manufacturing Corporation provides services to PrintWorks, but it is under contract just like any other supplier, said Hudson. PrintWorks gets the MELD footprint out into the 3D world much faster, exposing companies to the process more quickly.

"It's win-win," said Hudson.

The new company recently launched in a facility separate from the current MELD

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Manufacturing Corporation factory in Christiansburg. With Hardwick being local to the area, it made sense to also locate the new facility in Christiansburg. However, Hudson said he anticipates seeing multiple PrintWorks locations in North America in the next four to five years in order to “be more local to the end use of the product.” He said they have already been asked about standing up PrintWorks operations overseas.

One challenge locally is the lack of available building space. PrintWorks is already outgrowing its current facility, and building a new one would take at least a year, said Hudson.

On the flip side, an advantage of the current location is PrintWorks’ relationships with local institutes of higher education. This addresses another challenge, the lack of a skilled workforce (which, Hudson said, is a nationwide problem). Hudson said that Virginia Tech owns a PrintWorks machine, that at least two PhDs have written their dissertations on the MELD machine, and that PrintWorks has a “big footprint” in the engineering science and materials department. PrintWorks is also developing a relationship with New River Community College (NRCC), as not all jobs at the company require four-year degrees; machine operators are also required to fulfill production needs.

“We are trying to formalize a curriculum that would be MELD-specific,” Hudson said of the NRCC partnership. “We are a year or two from reaping the benefit.”

In the meantime, PrintWorks is “doing what we can for the existing workforce to get more output with fewer machinists,” which requires more engineering work upfront, Hudson said.

PrintWorks’ market is mostly aerospace and defense companies, including missile defense and outer space. Demand has grown significantly because of geo-political events. Supply chain issues in the castings and forgings market was made worse by COVID, as foundries lost workforce that they did not regain.

PrintWorks provides a resource to address material shortages, especially as an alternative for large castings and forgings (20”<sup>3</sup> or bigger), for which the lead time has been very long. PrintWorks replaces that long lead time for critical hardware.

Said Hudson, “PrintWorks serves the nation’s war fighters by getting hardware into their hands faster and more efficiently.”

The company took off quickly in its first few months. There is “tremendous enthusiasm” about MELD technology, said Hudson. The Department of Defense has embraced it and sees it as a potential gamechanger in how they resource raw material. That excitement will trickle down through the supply chain, he said.

In fact, right now PrintWorks is “trying to control the groundswell of opportunities.” There is pent-up demand from existing MELD customers, and “people are coming to us.”



Hudson said, "We already have a global footprint in servicing customers around the world."

PrintWorks is implementing systems to be efficient, as well as quality management systems. The company doesn't want to overextend itself early, but rather be intentional about getting operational foundations secure. Once those are firmly in place, then the company will start looking outward.

"I expect to shift gears in the next couple of months," Hudson said regarding marketing efforts.


That has already begun. PrintWorks, along with the other two companies in the MELD family (Aeroprobe Corporation and MELD Manufacturing Corporation), co-located with the state of Virginia's booth at the Paris Air Show in June.

Hudson came to PrintWorks after a 25-year career in military and defense, and with an extensive manufacturing background.

He said, "I grew up in manufacturing, working for my father as a high-schooler."

With previous experience in helping existing entities prop up new technology, Hudson was a natural fit at PrintWorks. He found that he and Harwick were "like-minded." Also, coming from the aerospace industry, Hudson saw the immediate need for MELD's product.

He sees an economic benefit for the entire industry of aerospace and defense, saying that several hundred million dollars is being held up because of the lack of raw materials, and "time is money."

Hudson said, "This is a radical new approach to the raw material supply problem." 

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## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:**  
*Some succession plans  
work better than others.*

### Acme & Son/Daughter

Over the years, we've carried various stories about succession planning in our business journal. The story we have in this edition about the apprentice-to-ownership model is particularly appealing to me. Why? Well, when the subject of succession planning comes up, often it's either about a family business (most often, one generation handing over to the next), or it's about a crafty business deal engaging all the best tenants of capitalism.

Certainly both of those two forms can involve passion; but in the apprentice-to-ownership model, it *invariably* involves passion. A family member may or may not have helped build the business. Likewise a standard succession via merger or acquisition doesn't require the same degree of intimacy you get from an insider.

I've always been intrigued by business successions. In all the stories I've encountered, I have found that when it comes to family businesses, secession planning might have been the better option.

Reminder: succession involves following; secession involves withdrawing.

It's a generalization to be sure, but usually, the founder owned and operated the business better than the son, daughter, or children. Ok, ok, ok... NOT ALWAYS! There are exceptions. (Those are great stories, too.) But when the second, third, or fourth generation picks up the retail store, the construction firm, the dental practice... older customers (and those we label with "institutional memory") often notice some slippage to a lesser or greater degree. A decline in service. An inferior product. A less caring customer service.

For now, I won't go into the reasons why this occurs; you probably know why, just as I do.

Some changes are subtle (subtle enough that younger and newer customers aren't even affected). Some changes are drastic (where the business isn't even recognizable from its origin).

I'd like to see some consultants and workshops and seminars offer secession planning. Step One: smack the business owners right in the face if they are not a good fit. Then move to the additional steps that guide the transition of the business to employees, collaborators or competitors, investors, or other prospective stakeholders.

I bet you're thinking of a local business right now that exemplifies succession planning gone wrong. If not, then you've simply quit patronizing them. And that's how it should be.

Junior doesn't deserve a free pass just because his daddy handed over the keys. If he's not keeping up, customers can secede.

They always do. 

## Hoping that the chips fall right here in Virginia

Virginia Tech has partnered with Micron Technology, the National Science Foundation and 10 other universities to develop semiconductor “talent” in the U.S. and Japan. Micron – which has a semiconductor manufacturing plant in northern Virginia – calls it UPWARDS for the Future. With help from the NSF, \$50 million will be invested to get semiconductor memory research moving forward at schools like Virginia Tech.

The worldwide semiconductor shortage that became apparent during the height of the pandemic helped lead to passage of the federal CHIPS and Science Act, as the country looks to gain back market share for semiconductor manufacturing that all too often now leaves our supply chain in the hands of countries like China, which does not always have our best interests at heart as an industrial competitor. “This creative partnership will keep Micron and Virginia Tech at the forefront in meeting the nation’s critical need for talented, innovative engineers with a global perspective,” said Virginia Tech President Tim Sands when the UPWARDS partnership was announced.

There is a major gap in the pipeline for skilled labor in semiconductor technology – a McKinsey study pegs it as a shortfall of 300,000 engineers (yes, a 3 with five zeros) and another 90,000 skilled technicians by 2030. That’s not very far away. Tech’s Chip-Scale Integration Program is one of 14 majors in electrical and computer engineering, launched with the help of a previous grant. A GO Virginia \$3.3 million award helped establish the Virginia Alliance for Semiconductor Technology, which Virginia Tech has partnered with.

“Through these partnerships we’re going to become even more attractive to business and industry,” says Mark Owczarski, associate vice president for university relations and chief spokesperson, “to encourage them to come to Virginia to set up shop. We want to take this talent we’re recruiting to Virginia

continued on Page 36



Mark Owczarski

Virginia Tech



## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
Virginia Tech is invited to join a handful of universities in a major initiative to grow the semiconductor talent pool.



Luke Hayes, Virginia Tech

Student in the College of Engineering fabricate semiconductors

## Marrano / There's something

from Page 35

Tech - and keep them right here in Virginia." Owczarski also says VT's commitment to fostering diversity in STEM fields helped secure a place in the UPWARDS initiative. "Faculty are going out into the field, into communities across the Commonwealth, encouraging young children to pursue careers in STEM education. What we're hearing from industry is that we need more of it, because the demand for talent is great."

Who knows, if Tech can help grow a workforce and engineers focused on semiconductor technology, maybe that new semiconductor manufacturing and research facility that Senator Mark Warner is always talking about luring to the Commonwealth will wind up in our own backyard. 🇺🇸

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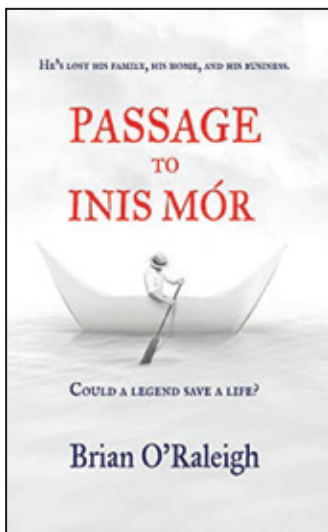
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## FRONTReviews >

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



### *Pseudo seanchai*

The best news about Brian O'Raleigh's *Passage to Inis Mor* (self-published; 2021) is that it boasts excellent reviews—a slew of 4 ½ stars. Sadly, I found it disappointing. Hey, I still read all of it. After all, I snagged it just prior to my trip to Ireland, with all the high hopes of a “selkie” and salty air. The story is not a bad one; and I'm guessing that's the reason for the positive reviews. But the storytelling is devoid of that Irish “seanchai” color we are expecting. If you like the straight newsy, reporting feel of a... well... news report—then you won't mind the lack of literary richness (though there is a wee bit of poetry). I also didn't like the repetitiveness (we actually hear some stories twice, in almost the exact same fashion). I was able to picture some of the lore, the scenery, a few characters, and the boatbuilding—so that's plus-enough to offer this review. You may see more stars than I did.

—Tom Field

### *Strung out in our hollers*

Uncanny how Barbara Kingsolver elicits empathy for people most of society would regard as the kind who just make bad choices and “get what they deserve.” In *Demon Copperhead* (Harper; 2022) we get a first person account of a boy/young man slicing through a cruddy stream of nothing but misfortune from the get-go. We, who are

“from here” will appreciate the southwestern Virginia setting—dire as it can be (apart from the natural beauty). A classic “Appalachian” bildungsroman no less revealing than Dickens or Twain, you get a bit of everything here: boyhood adventure, foster care shuffle, Friday night football, small town and rural life, high school partying, and prescription drugs... plenty of scripts.

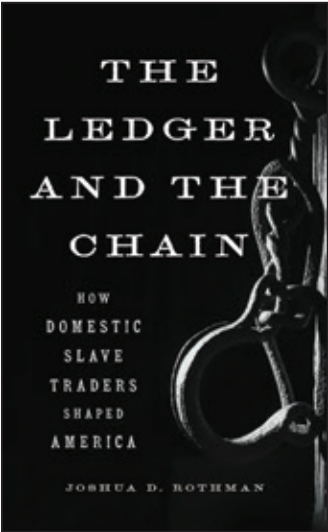
And what a script we have here with Damon Fields (the book's namesake). Toward the end of our story, after high school, I have to say it got a little strung out (I kept thinking my Kindle version would end any minute); but upon conclusion, the stringing out makes perfect sense. Our narrator speaks a little past his position (particularly in younger years) but we needed that insight. First person voice/POV was the right call. Kingsolver is a master at capturing teenage boy thinking: as if she hung out in locker rooms.

What a movie this would make. And yes, it earned that 2023 Pulitzer.

—Tom Field

### *Not an easy read – but eye opening*

The most powerful slave trading operation in the early to mid-1800's, where human beings were commoditized, families torn apart, young women were set aside for the master's



own perverse pleasure, and where slaves were shipped in cramped ship holds or marched across land for hundreds of miles while shackled? It happened right here in Virginia and in “Washington City” itself, almost in the shadow of the Capitol. *In The Ledger and the Chain* (Basic Books 2021) Joshua D. Rothman, who chairs the department of history at the University of Alabama, lays it all out in graphic detail – man’s inhumanity to man.

Isaac Franklin, John Armfield and Rice Ballard were far from bit players as they shipped, bought and sold thousands of human beings over several decades; indeed, they were respected businessman who befriended politicians, judges, law enforcement agencies, etc. Enslaved people helped build the agrarian south, got little credit and lost their freedom. The entrenchment of slavery among the larger, wealthy plantation owners, especially in the Deep South, and its ties to the economy, provide more insight on how the Civil War came to pass.

—Gene Marrano

## *An appreciation for the RSO*

The last performance for the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra until the free outdoor show at Elmwood Park in August was the tribute to Pink Floyd last month, with the RSO backing up the group Jean’s N Classics as they played through much of Pink Floyd’s

The Wall and, after intermission, Dark Side of the Moon without interruption. Many sat at tables on the floor at the Salem Civic Center bringing their own food with them; others were in the Civic Center stands. Even if you profess not to be a classical music type, check out the Pops concert lineup for 2023-24 when the RSO announces it shortly. Then surprise yourself maybe and go check out a classical music event as the orchestra is put through its paces by Maestro David Stewart Wiley, who always puts on a show.

—Gene Marrano

## *Been to Beale’s yet?*

It’s about a 40 minute drive from the Roanoke area and longer from the New River Valley but if you haven’t checked out Beale’s brewery in the Town of Bedford – and you are a craft beer aficionado – put it on your to-do list. Beale’s is known for its lagers and ales but offers a wide variety of other styles as well. There’s a big outdoor seating area and live music as well. Beale’s also offers a menu of appealing barbecue sandwiches with a variety of sauce styles. Worth the trip.

—Gene Marrano

*The reviewers:* **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is a veteran local news journalist and editor of FRONT.

## Award for Sleep Apnea work >

Dr. Brian Gross, a board certified otolaryngologist with LewisGale Physicians ENT – Salem, has been recognized as a national Physician of Excellence by the manufacturer of the hypoglossal nerve stimulator, an implanted device that relieves moderate to severe Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA), a common and serious sleep disorder. Dr. Gross received the award for launching a successful sleep surgery program at LewisGale Medical Center in October 2021 and for demonstrating superior commitment to delivering an exceptional patient experience while achieving excellent clinical outcomes.

Gross is one of only 80 physicians in the United States to earn the award. “It’s truly a life changing procedure for patients who have struggled to treat their sleep apnea using Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) therapy and are now able to sleep peacefully,” say Dr. Gross.



## LG Montgomery reverified >

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has announced that the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has reverified the facility as a Level III Trauma Center for another three years after a rigorous on-site survey - finding zero deficiencies. For more than 31 years, LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has been one of 19 state-recognized trauma centers in Virginia. Reverification validates that hospital trauma centers continue meeting stringent state standards to care for some of the most critically injured patients.

Lauren Dudley, chief executive officer of LewisGale Hospital Montgomery, says, “the



reverification is a reflection of our ability to provide prompt assessment, resuscitation, surgery, intensive care and stabilization of injured patients, and emergency operations for the community.” The hospital's trauma program includes physicians, specialists, critical care nurses, and support staff 24/7.





Courtesy

## Friendship gives >

Friendship residents have come together to support the Local Office on Aging (LOA) with their annual Let's Give Lunch fundraiser, helping to fundraise for the local Meals on Wheels and Nutrition services through the LOA, which helps older adults in the greater Roanoke Valley. Together, residents and employees bought 60 lunches and raised \$1,200. Each \$20 donation raises funds for two meals for the LOA's Meals on Wheels and Nutrition services.

By partnering with the LOA, residents can help to identify needs and challenges faced by older adults in their area and be involved in community initiatives by staying active and engaged. "We are thankful for the support of our homebound seniors through Let's Give Lunch," says Laura Anderson, Development Manager at the Local Office on Aging.

## More Friendship giving >

Friendship hails the community supporters and golfers who participated in its annual golf tournament, which took place in May at Roanoke Country Club. The yearly tournament was an opportunity to spend a day on the course while supporting the organization's Friendship Fund, which was established to respond to unbudgeted needs of the organization and those it serves.

The tournament featured various contests, raffles, and awards, adding to the excitement of the day and raised over \$20,000 for the Friendship Fund. Joe Hoff, President and CEO, said, "we enjoyed seeing many familiar faces and meeting new supporters out on the course. This event each year has been instrumental in helping us better serve those who live throughout Friendship's three campuses." The afternoon golf tournament attracted 92 golfers and over 50 corporate sponsors. Cary Street Partners and Marsh McLennan Agency both served as title sponsors.



Facebook photo

## LEAP has its own space now >

With help from American Rescue Plan funding the Local Environmental Agriculture Project - or LEAP, which operates several seasonal farmers markets to support growers and a mobile unit (focused on underserved communities), has opened a renovated headquarters on Patterson Avenue SW, the LEAP Hub. Local developer Brent Cochran is a LEAP board member: "everybody should have access to health food. We're just trying to figure out the best way to do that. We have a long way to go but I think we've hit our stride."

The LEAP Hub includes a community room, cold and dry storage for food products and warehouse space. LEAP also operates a shared community kitchen space in Roanoke's West End, not far from its new hub. Maureen Best, executive director for the Local Environmental Agriculture Project, on getting through the COVID years, at a ribbon in early June. "We've raised more money, purchased more local food and moved more fruits and veggies than ever before. It is really a reality to have a space where we can grow and be a more visible part of the community."



## 100 and counting at LewisGale >

The LewisGale Medical Center structural heart team in Salem has surpassed its 100th case since launching the program in 2021. Surgeons at LewisGale Medical Center perform two types of structural heart procedures, left atrial appendage closure (LAAC), which reduces stroke risk in patients with non-valvular atrial fibrillation, and transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), which treats aortic stenosis. The procedures are both minimally invasive, reduce risk of complications, and require less time in the hospital than open heart surgery.

B. John Hynes, MD, a board-certified cardiac electrophysiologist with LewisGale Physicians – Electrophysiology, performed the first LAAC procedure at LewisGale Medical Center and also sees improvements to patient care made through these types of procedures. "It's been very gratifying to be on the forefront of this life-saving technology," Dr. Hynes said.



## Zoo Choo is back >

Mill Mountain Zoo has relaunched the "Zoo Choo" small-scale train ride after a complete makeover. Executive director Nikki Voudren believes it will help attract more visitors to the mountaintop zoo that's been around for more than six decades: "we could no longer ignore demand from visitors wanting to ride the beloved Zoo Choo. [It] will provide our visitors with a much more robust experience." The Zoo Choo train tracks were also upgraded and there's a new sunshade to cover visitors while they wait to board the Zoo Choo. Amy Morgan is the Director of Operations: "the memory of being a railroad town and how we got our roots, as we move forward into the future – as we start hearing [about] rails to trails. There's a lot of trails around Mill Mountain. There's also this ride to remember being part of a railroad town as well."

## From discarded plastic to greenway benches >

A joint effort that involved more than 3000 pounds of recycled plastic is being turned into public benches that will be placed along the Glade Creek Greenway in Vinton. Precision Fabrics Group, Food Lion and The Daughters of the American Revolution were involved in the drive to collect discarded plastic and have the park benches built, collecting more than 3000 pounds of discarded plastic into park benches. The DAR placed recycling bins at municipal buildings to help get the ball rolling. PFG in Vinton donated discarded plastic packing materials. The first one was dedicated along the Glade Park Greenway in late May. Pete Peters is



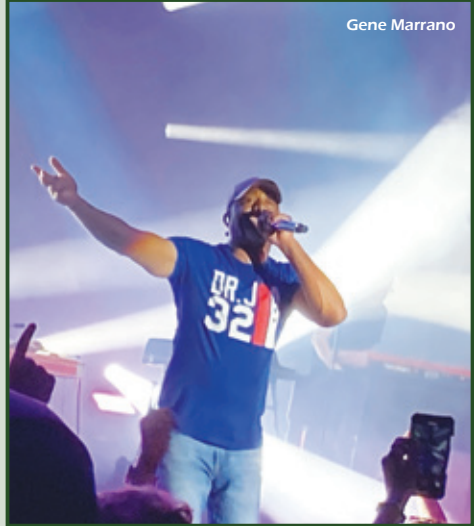
Vinton's Town Manager: "we thought maybe we'd do a bench or two and it turned out the community really came out in support." Three benches have already been installed along the greenway and the rest will soon follow. "They're really going to be great amenities along the greenway," Peters added at the ribbon cutting.



## Chris's Custard ready to roll soon >

Chris's Coffee & Custard on 9th Street Southeast is branching out - with a box truck being retrofitted and turned into a mobile custard stand that will appear at local events. Beth Woodrum is co-owner of the shop, which offers training and employment opportunities for young adults with intellectual and physical challenges: "with having a truck we're able to get them out in the community; we want the community to see how special they are and what great abilities they have. Hopefully, that will make other employers look and see, 'can we have a place where we can employ a young adult with special abilities?'"

Woodrum's son Chris - who has Down Syndrome - is the co-owner of Chris's Coffee & Custard. Noke Van Company in the 9th Street Industrial Park will retrofit the truck, which will make its debut at the Elmwood Park TacoFest in September. Through the non-profit LoveAble services and employment opportunities at Chris's Coffee and Custard, Woodrum, her staff and a squad of adult volunteers (she's always looking for more) provide training and jobs to young adults with intellectual and physical challenges.



## Life Ring Foundation concert sells out Elmwood Park >

Three-time Grammy winner Darius Rucker brought more than 4,500 people to Elmwood Park last month for a concert that raised money for the non-profit Life Ring Foundation, founded by Kelly and Jessica Woolwine. Proceeds from the Rucker concert are earmarked for the fight against cancer and Carilion's new Cancer Center that is still in the planning stages. This is personal for the Woolwines: their young daughter Charlotte has been battling cancer for several years. Life Ring has another high-powered event scheduled for this month - a weekend-long golf and entertainment event at Ballyhack Golf Club, that will be hosted by VIP guests including Julius "Dr.J" Irving, former Washington quarterback Joe Theismann, Michael Vick and Roger Clemens. At the Rucker concert Woolwine introduced cancer survivors from the stage – including Charlotte – as he urged those gathered to go beyond what they had paid for tickets by continuing to donate for cancer research.

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

## FINANCIAL FRONT



King

Farm Credit of the Virginias (FCV) announced that previous loan processor, **Allie King**, moved into the role of loan officer effective May 26, 2023. She will be working out of the Roanoke branch office. King grew up on a small hobby farm in Dickenson County before moving to Blacksburg to attend Virginia Tech, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in Dairy Science in 2020. She called the New River Valley home for the last seven years, and she and her husband currently run a beef cattle operation where they also raise hay and a vegetable garden. King joined the Farm Credit team in 2021.

## LEGAL FRONT



Turner

The Roanoke-based Virginia law firm Gentry Locke has announced that **Patricia B. "P.J." Turner** has joined the firm's Richmond office as a partner in the Commercial Litigation and Construction practice groups. "P.J. is a highly regarded litigator and we are pleased to welcome her to our team," said Gentry Locke Managing Partner Brett Marston. "As we grow in the Richmond and Hampton Roads areas, we look forward to P.J. being involved in guiding our clients in those parts of the state through complex projects and disputes."

Spilman Thomas & Battle (Spilman)



Carroll



Lockaby



Harf

announced that **Jeremy E. Carroll**, **Michael W.S. Lockaby**, and **Julian F. Harf** have joined the law firm's Roanoke team. Carroll joins as a Member. His primary areas of practice are local government law, civil litigation, employment law,

land use and zoning, school law, government contracts, and public finance. Lockaby also joins the firm as a Member. His primary areas of practice include local government and public entity representation, infrastructure, land use, affordable housing, public finance/bonds, public-private partnerships, and economic development. Harf joins Spilman as a Senior Attorney. His primary area of practice is litigation, with an emphasis on the defense of local government entities, public officials, and commercial entities.

## EDUCATION FRONT

Roanoke College has named **Brian D. Reed** as the inaugural vice president for student success and the Roanoke experience. following a robust national search. Reed will be responsible for shaping a "student-ready, student-first"

- 
- Relationship Banking
  - Business Lending
  - Merchant Services
  - Treasury Management



Reed

culture at Roanoke College and providing leadership for an integrated and inclusive student-success experience at the College. He was formerly associate vice provost for student success and campus life at the University of Montana.



Campbell

Roanoke College has selected **Curtis Campbell** as the new director of athletics. Campbell has 23 years of experience working in intercollegiate athletics, including DA at Morehouse College

in Atlanta, and DA at Western Oregon University, Tuskegee University, and Stillman College. Roanoke College is a charter member of the Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC), and the Roanoke Maroons program has 20 NCAA Division III teams. Campbell will report to the president and serve as member of the president's cabinet.



Pender

After 17 years as a faculty member, **Kelly Pender**, the professor of rhetoric and writing

is now the chair of the Virginia Tech Department of English, a position she assumes after serving as interim chair since December 2022. Before becoming interim chair, Pender served as the department's associate chair from 2016-22, and she served as the director of the rhetoric and writing Ph.D. program from 2013-16 and from 2020-23.



Seeber

**Chelsea Seeber** has been named director of communications and marketing for the Virginia Tech

College of Engineering. She now leads the planning and execution of a comprehensive communications and marketing plan for the college that aligns with university-wide strategic goals and initiatives. Seeber joined the college in January 2022 as the communications manager for the Bradley Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. Prior to joining Virginia Tech, she worked as the communications and marketing manager for Huntington Bank's West Virginia Region.

**Ken Smith**, chief operating officer for the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, will become the chief operating officer of the Virginia Tech Foundation (VTF) on August 15. Smith

*Have a career announcement?*

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



## Bank of Botetourt



# CONTRIBUTORS

**Zenith Barrett** is the Vice President of Business and Community Engagement for Goodwill Industries® of the Valleys in Roanoke. She has been with Goodwill for eight years. She holds a Masters in Public Administration from Columbus State University and a Bachelors of Science in Psychology from Virginia State University. Zenith is a native of Massachusetts and lives in Roanoke with her husband, Richard and daughter, Lauren.

**Beth Bell** Owner, Bell Media, Events, & Branding is the Publisher of Macaroni KID Roanoke, Account Executive & Events Curator for Leisure Media360, former columnist for Valley Business FRONT, former Executive Director of the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce, and President of FemCity Roanoke. Beth loves helping local businesses and nonprofits shine in the spotlight, grow, and thrive.

**Aila Boyd** serves as the editor of "The Fincastle Herald" and "The Vinton Messenger" and coordinates social media for the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce. She holds an MFA in writing from Lindenwood University.

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

**Neal Cummings** is senior vice president, commercial lending at Freedom First Credit Union. He brings over 25 years of experience in commercial and retail banking, commercial real estate lending, and small business development. The Commercial Lending team at FCCU provides local underwriting and personalized services that benefit a variety of individuals, operating businesses, and non-profit organizations.

**Dan Dowdy** is the business development director for Valley Business

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

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

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

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

**Mike Leigh** is president of OpX Solutions, LLC, a performance improvement company that helps organizations pursue operational excellence. A retired naval commander

and former GE manufacturing manager, he has extensive experience in leadership development and process improvement. [Mike@OpXSolutionsLLC.com]

**Gene Marrano** is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. "Best one on one interview" award from Associated Press of the Virginias for his interview with former Roanoke County Chief of Police Howard Hall. [gmarrano@cox.net]

**Jeff Merritt** is vice president of Roanoke operations for Cox in Virginia. He is responsible for leading employees and the day-to-day operations across the Roanoke market. He holds leadership roles in a variety of organizations including Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia, Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, and Virginia Cable Telecommunications Association. He resides in Roanoke with his wife and two children.

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

**Michael Shelton** is a Registered Financial Consultant, tax specialist, and owner of 360 Wealth Consultants. His firm specializes in providing retirement planning and wealth preservation strategies for business owners and astute individuals. What really has the locals excited, though, is his groundbreaking, proprietary software,

designed to streamline accounting and wealth planning for business owners of medical practices, real estate properties, and construction industry businesses. [Michael@360WealthConsulting.com]

**Sam Sokolove** is the Senior Consultant and Director of Government Contracting for Building Beloved Communities, which works to help non-profit organizations grow. [sam@buildingbelovedcommunities.com]

**Alicia Smith** is vice president of F&S Building Innovations in Roanoke. She grew up in the construction business and has served in multiple capacities, currently managing all sales, design, production and marketing of the residential division. She's also the president of Build Smart Institute and serves on several boards, community and church organizations. Alicia enjoys lake-life living and fun times with her family (husband and two daughters) and friends.

**Dan Smith** is a Roanoke-based writer and journalist, former editor of FRONT, whose new novel (8th book) NEWS! will be out this summer. [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

**David Todd** is the owner and president of EZ Rampz / Mobility Solutions, based in Roanoke, and serving Virginia and North Carolina primarily; but also nationally. The business rents, sells, installs, and services products that resolve mobility issues, including walkways, ramps, stair glides, platforms, lifts, chairs, grab bars, etc. He's a graduate of Virginia Tech; married with three children.

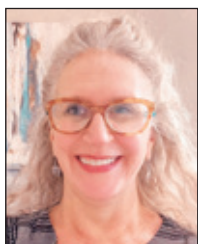
**Nicholas Vaassen** is a graphic designer with 20 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]





**Smith**

has been part of the Innovation Campus team in Alexandria since moving there in October 2020.



**Mays**

**Allison Mays** has been named the director of the Virginia Tech Southwest Center in Abingdon. Mays previously served in a number of roles at Emory & Henry College, including most recently as director of government relations. At the Southwest Center, she will assume the responsibility of extending Virginia Tech's research, engagement, and graduate credit programs in the region. The center offers a variety of programs and services, including workforce and economic development, K-12 STEM education, and community outreach.

## WELLNESS FRONT

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem has hired **Andrew Welcome** as chief operating officer for the 506-bed



**Welcome**

acute-care medical and surgical facility. Welcome comes from HCA Florida Mercy Hospital, a 488-bed facility in Miami, Florida, where he served as vice president of operations and ethics and compliance officer. Prior to Mercy Hospital, Welcome spent several years at HCA Healthcare's Sunrise Hospital and Medical Center and Sunrise Children's Hospital.



**Gilbert**

In 2021, **Larissa Gilbert**, then an LPN at Showalter Center in Warm Hearth Village (WHV), received a \$1500 scholarship from the Warm Hearth Foundation Employee Growth & Development Fund to pursue her undergraduate studies in nursing at New River Community College (NRCC). In April she earned the NRCC President's Award for Excellence in Nursing, and this May she earned her Associates in Nursing Degree and RN License. She will now be the Clinical Coordinator at the Center which offers

residential and Assisted Living. Gilbert started working at WHV in 2015



**Layman**

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has appointed **Tim Layman** as chief nursing officer for the 146-bed medical and surgical facility. Layman brings 17 years of experience and is a board-certified nurse executive whose expertise spans tax-paying, private, and university-based healthcare systems in operations, business, clinical medicine, and finance. Layman has had a long career within HCA Healthcare, most recently at Terre Haute Regional Hospital, a 278-bed facility in Terre Haute, Indiana, where he served as chief nursing officer.

## MUNICIPAL FRONT



**Hull**

**John Hull**, executive director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, has been named to the 2023 list of North America's Top 50 Economic Developers.

The list is produced annually by Consultant Connect, a national consulting firm focused on connecting economic developers with site consultants. Hull has worked at the Partnership for 13 years, serving in the executive director role for the past two. He previously served as the director of business investment and director of market intelligence. The Roanoke Regional Partnership attracted more than \$1 billion in investment and more than 6,000 jobs with Hull's assistance in leading market intelligence and business investment functions. In 2022, he led the Partnership's five-year strategic campaign, exceeding its fundraising goal of \$3.6 million by nearly \$500,000 in just three months. Since the pandemic and under Hull's executive leadership, the Partnership has assisted in facilitating expansions and attracting several new employers including Munters, Green Thumb Industries, and STS Group, among others which have resulted in 950 new jobs and \$260 million in investment.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*

*Vinton budget includes money for development projects*

Vinton Town Council’s adopted annual budget for fiscal year 2023-2024 of \$14.2 million which includes \$1.3 million allocated for a variety of new projects. A focus on redeveloping underutilized properties for the highest and best use includes the Walnut Avenue parking lot, which will create approximately 80 new parking spaces behind the Vinton Farmers’ Market in the heart of downtown Vinton. “Our downtown is booming,” says Assistant Town Manager Cody Sexton, “folks are coming in and investing in businesses and restaurants in our downtown [including 107 South Pollard, which should open this summer] and we have needed additional downtown parking for some time.” New projects also include planning for a new multi-generational park and public-private partnerships such as the redevelopment of the former Cleveland Mart into a mixed-use space with a commercial unit and seven new residential units. The Glade Creek greenway will also be expanded towards its eventual terminus at the historic Gish Mill mixed-used redevelopment.

*Roanoke City graduates new teen apprentices*

The 5th cohort of the City’s Teen Apprenticeship Program has graduated. The program provides young residents, ages 14-18, working through Rapid Engagement of Support in the Event of

Trauma (RESET) with an opportunity to gain practical skills and job experience in various City departments such as Facilities, Fleet Management, Parks & Recreation, Stormwater Management, and Transportation. Teens are offered a paid opportunity to learn valuable job skills. The 5th cohort graduated 11 teens – 37 total graduates to date. The program is part of the Star City Safe Initiative, a Whole of Government approach to prevent, intervene, and mitigate youth violence in the City of Roanoke.

*VCT asks for support*

Virginia Children’s Theatre (VCT) in Roanoke – which bills itself as “the commonwealth’s only professional theatre solely dedicated to youth, schools and their families,” – has announced an emergency fundraising campaign focused on retiring debt that the theatre has accrued related to rising costs for their mainstage productions.

Rising production, labor, and materials costs, audience numbers not returning to pre-pandemic levels, and the end of government funding have all contributed to the theatre accumulating the current mainstage production debt. The immediate need for funds will help VCT to keep the stage alive and make plans for the future says VCT Managing Director Jeanne Bollendorf: “we want to be transparent

about our current situation, but we cannot forge this next path alone. This is a heartfelt plea to the public: we are in need of your help and financial support in order to continue serving area youth. We must raise the necessary funds to go forward.”

*Football coming to RC*

Roanoke College has raised more than \$1.3 million in funding that will allow the school to move forward with plans to reinstate football as a varsity sport and add co-curricular varsity cheerleading and marching band programs. Approximately \$300,000 of the funds raised were contributed by local corporate sponsors. The College’s current plan recommends minimizing costs with a conservative investment and upgrading existing underutilized facilities. Alumni Field will be used for practice and the Bast Center will be upgraded to accommodate locker rooms, training facilities, offices and a weight room. The plan is for Salem Stadium, a 7,157-seat facility near Roanoke College’s Elizabeth Campus, to be the site of future games. A club team will launch in 2024 with a varsity program as part of the Old Dominion Athletic Conference scheduled to start in the Fall of 2025.

*Free tuition at Ferrum College*

College President Mirta Martin has announced the Panther Promise, the new free tuition initiative for the 2023–2024

academic year is already making a positive impact for over 200 new and returning qualifying Virginia students. Rising senior Ashley Patrick will be one of the recipients of this new initiative. A native of Moneta, she is majoring in music with an emphasis on performance. The Panther Promise will impact Patrick because her goals will be more achievable, and she won’t have to worry about the financial burden of pursuing a higher education degree. “The Panther Promise takes the fear out of setting goals and worrying about having enough money to finish reaching them,” said Patrick.

Martin said the Panther Promise is a natural continuation of Ferrum College’s legacy of offering an accessible, affordable and excellent education. “We are a dynamic learning community where students enter with promise and leave with purpose. Our students, faculty, staff and alumni are known for their commitment to service and community action, as expressed in our College motto, Not Self, But Others. These are not words on a page— it’s our way of life,” said Martin. Martin also encouraged students dreaming of a four year college experience for fall 2023 to go ahead and apply.

*VT goes to next round*

The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF)’s announcement that Virginia Tech was

selected as one of 34 semifinalists for the inaugural Regional Innovation Engines competition, which could result in millions of dollars in research funding. Launched by NSF's new Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP) and authorized by the CHIPS and Science Act, the NSF Engines program uniquely harnesses the nation's science and technology research and development enterprise and regional-level resources, looking to catalyze robust partnerships that positively impact the economy within a geographic region, address societal challenges, advance national competitiveness and create local, high-wage jobs across the country.

"[I'm] thrilled to see Virginia Tech advance to the next round of selection for a grant made possible by the CHIPS and Science Act," says U.S. Senator Mark Warner, one of the CHIPS and Science Act's biggest promoters. "This law is going to help us create jobs, strengthen

our supply chains, and remain globally competitive. Virginia is ready to play a key role in that."

*New department planned at VTC SOM*

The Virginia Tech Board of Visitors has approved the establishment of a Department of Neurosurgery at Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. The new department will help advance the field of neurosurgery with cutting-edge research while addressing the growing demand for specialized care in the area. The Department of Neurosurgery will be instituted with the approval of the State Council for Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). "The creation of a new Department of Neurosurgery will be a significant milestone in the growth of the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. Over the past decade and within the Department of Surgery, Carilion Clinic expanded its neurosurgery program to include experts in adult, pediatric, endovascular, and complex spinal

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neurosurgery," said Lee Learman, dean of the medical school.

*The summer of SML*

Smith Mountain Lake businesses are enjoying the increase in traffic as the weather gets warmer. The number of visitors historically remain high from Memorial Day weekend to the end of summer. Executive Director of the Smith Mountain Lake Chamber of Commerce, Andy Bruns, says Smith Mountain Lake expect to stay consistently busy through the summer months. "During the summer there are things going on every single weekend. We take advantage of the 3-4 month period."

While the lake attracts visitors from all over the country, it is a big attraction for Roanoke

and Lynchburg residents as well. He also says during the pandemic that for locals, Smith Mountain Lake "did very, very well. It was one of the safe places to go on vacation." In addition to boating, Bruns says visitors can enjoy live music, great food, two beaches as well as hiking and golfing.

*New Advance Auto store in NRV*

Advance Auto Parts has opened a new location in Christiansburg at 35 Conston Avenue NW. A ribbon cutting in late May was attended by local dignitaries, including representatives from Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and Montgomery County Sheriff's Office. Said David Pauly, Advance's district manager: "Advance has such a rich history in this area,

**JULY 8**  
BANANAS AT LARGE

**JULY 14**  
BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

**JULY 22**  
FIVE SHADES OF GRAY

**AUGUST 5**  
BEN TROUT'S PARTY BAND

60's 70's 80's 90's  
2000's

**Daleville town center**

given the company was founded right up the road in Roanoke. Our team is excited to get to work by providing friendly, expert advice and quality auto parts to residents, especially heading into the summertime and peak travel season.”

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#### *DRI spotlights outdoor dining options*

If you are looking to eat or drink outside, all the spots in Downtown Roanoke where you can do so have now been collected into one place. It's the first time Downtown Roanoke Inc. is offering the warm-weather-outdoor-seating page which is broken up into a few sections online. Vice President of Marketing and Communications Jaime Clark: “this is actually the first specific guide that we've put together around outdoor dining.” A website redesign last year says Clark gave DRI “increased capabilities,” to offer more content, like blog-styled feature posts. There's also a “Condensed Outdoor Dining” section which is made up of places with limited outdoor seating, such as maybe two tables on a sidewalk. See the DRI website for more details.

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#### *Grucci to expand*

Officials with fireworks company Grucci, which also produces pyrotechnic devices for the United States military, announced yesterday they plan to put five million dollars toward expanding their assembly, storage, and distribution facility in the

ShaeDawn Industrial park in Dublin. Company CEO Felix Grucci said the project will add 45 new jobs. “We had a need to expand [our] our fireworks operations [and] our military manufacturing operations. Our business is growing, and this state gives us that opportunity.” Governor Glenn Youngkin was also on hand for the announcement last month, saying it's not only a win for the company but also for the Commonwealth and the local community. New York-based Grucci made its way to Virginia back in 1997, when they opened up shop at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant.

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#### *Virginians feeling better about the economy*

Virginians are feeling better about the economy as inflation slows down - and the labor market remains robust for those seeking new jobs. Dr. Alice Kassens is a professor of economics at Roanoke College and a senior analyst for the school's Institute for Policy and Opinion Research: “that's very good news. People when they're optimistic about the economy tend to spend more because they're less worried about the future. If they're worried about the future they may not go out and buy stuff, they may sock it away for that rainy, terrible day that may be coming.” In fact, the Virginia Index of Consumer Sentiment that Roanoke College measures quarterly via a statewide phone and online survey increased in the second quarter of 2023 to its highest value

since November 2021.

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#### *Pathfinders donates toward Vinton greenway expansion*

Pathfinders for Greenways - the volunteer group that provides sweat equity and raises money for the Roanoke Valley's growing system of “urban trails,” has donated \$60,000 for construction on the Glade Creek Greenway to Vinton officials. At a Town Council meeting last month, Mayor Brad Grose expressed gratitude: “obviously a great contribution financially but more than that, [it's] just a great addition to our community.” Grose thanked Pathfinders for the contributions made all over the valley to the expanding greenway system. Construction on Phase 2-B of the Glade Creek Greenway in Vinton should get underway this month

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#### *First business class hotel in Bedford*

The Town of Bedford has approved an agreement with a developer to bring a new, first of its kind business-class hotel near the D-Day Memorial and US Route 460. The town has signed an agreement with developer DDay Omstay LLC, to build the business class hotel which will feature 85-rooms and 100-person meeting. Jonathan Buttram, chair of the Economic Development Authority says this is a big win for the town as well as Bedford County.

“Bedford County is the fifth largest county in

the state of Virginia, and [it] does not have one business class hotel,” Buttram noted at a Town Council meeting last month, “it's a big deal.” It will also feature a 100-person meeting room. Bedford Mayor Tim Black says the hotel will bring more business to the town and county. The developer hopes to open the hotel by summer of 2025. Black said he looked forward, “for people to come and have a place to stay as they tour our county and our town, and a boost it will provide to our other businesses in town – our restaurants and shops.”

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#### *Falling Creek gets a GO for more funding*

The GO Virginia State Board has announced approval of a new Region 2 project for the Falling Branch Corporate Park Phase II Regional Site Development project in Christiansburg, to build on a regional 35-acre site, raising it from a Virginia Economic Development Partnership Tier 4 to a Tier 5. The project will entail grading one 20-acre graded pad; installing water, sewer, natural gas, and stormwater; extending electricity; and constructing a road leading to the site. Collaborators on the project include Montgomery County, the Town of Christiansburg, the Montgomery Economic Development Authority, and Onward NRV, who will assist with marketing the site.

The priority business targets for this project include advanced manufacturing,

transportation and autonomy, life sciences, data centers, and high growth software development companies. The GO Virginia board approved a total of \$324,000 in state funds for the project, which is leveraging \$4,585,359 in non-state sources. "Raising Falling Branch Corporate Park Phase II to a Tier 5 would greatly enhance the site's marketability and help to address the low number of Tier 5 sites

across Region 2," said Brian Hamilton, the economic development director for Montgomery County. "Our goal is to work with companies, mainly existing industry, and have them grow in the community. Existing industry is the heart of Montgomery County."

*BoCo business grows*

A \$1.4 million expansion for a new product line at Altec Industries in

Botetourt County. Altec - maker of everything from electric utility to tree care equipment—has been part of Botetourt County since opening in 2001 and the Head of Economic Development for the county, Ken McFayden says state money is helping make the expansion on almost eight additional acres possible. "This is the ninth expansion of Altec in Botetourt County since 2001. That is a significant sight that

the partnership and the resources and assets that we have available ... are what they're looking for." He adds that Altec is already hiring for the 150 new jobs being created by it. Lights, signs, and contractor equipment are among the many offerings from Altec Industries.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*

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Demand has grown significantly because of geo-political events.

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