

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 177  
JUNE 2023

The "Fork" Restaurants

Williamson Road's  
International & Ethnic  
Foodie Corridor

New River Valley's  
Brew Scene

Brock Art & The "TT"

Fashion Week

**vbFRONT.com**



Whitney C. Brock  
Artist

*The Foodie Issue*



 FreedomFirst

OUR LANGHORNE BRANCH IS NOW OPEN!

2102 Langhorne Rd Lynchburg, VA

We want to express our heartfelt appreciation to everyone who joined us for the grand opening of our Langhorne branch in Lynchburg. Thank you for making it such a memorable day, and we look forward to seeing members of the Lynchburg community at this new convenient location!

See more at [FreedomFirst.com/Visit-Us-in-Lynchburg](https://www.freedomfirst.com/visit-us-in-lynchburg)

Federally Insured by NCUA

# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

This month we take a look at the local retail scene, focusing on food options, craft beer (beer is food, right??) with a dash of fashion thrown in. Especially in Roanoke the number of food options has increased dramatically in recent years and as the area grows more diverse the choices of cuisine has done so as well. The dining options along Williamson Road alone is one good example and if you never get "up there" try coming out of your comfort zone now and again.

Check out the Business Cents column on investing in gold for your portfolio as well – it seems to be all the rage on those radio and TV commercials. And how about three cheers for the Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs, who made the Berglund Center the noisiest barn in the Southern Professional Hockey League – winning the championship in overtime after surrendering the tying goal to Birmingham with 10 seconds left in regulation as the crowd was ready to celebrate. Ten seconds! It was a night to remember if you were there in mid-May. Happy reading.



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor



## Construction Professional Development Courses

Virtual & In-Person Classes Available!

Register at [BuildSmartInstitute.com](http://BuildSmartInstitute.com)



- Blueprint Reading
- Mentor Train the Trainer
- Construction Management
- Project Management
- Fundamentals of Crew Leadership
- Building Technology for Property Management
- Project Supervision

701 Gainsboro Road NW Roanoke, VA

[BuildSmartInstitute.com](http://BuildSmartInstitute.com)

Call: 540.900.3340

Text: 540.900.3337

## DEPARTMENTS

- 14** The “Fork” Restaurants  
by Doug Doughty
- 20** Williamson Road’s  
International & Ethnic  
Foodie Corridor  
by Aila Boyd
- 24** Iron Tree Brewing Company  
by Jennifer Poff Cooper
- 34** Roanoke Valley’s Brew Scene  
by Shawn Nowlin
- 58** Fashion Week  
by Emma Thomas

## PERSPECTIVES

- 18** Business Operations  
by Mike Leigh
- 19** Business Cents  
by Daniel Colston
- 28** Best Job Ever  
by Jennifer Leake
- 29** Tech Whisperer  
by Zack Jackson

## REVIEWS & OPINIONS

- 38** There’s Something  
Happening Here  
by Gene Marrano
- 39** On Tap from the Pub  
by Tom Field
- 40** Reviews

## FRONTLINES

- 32** Spotlight FRONT’n About
- 42** FRONT’n About
- 50** Career FRONT
- 54** FRONT Notes

[vbFRONT.com](http://vbFRONT.com)

COVER STORY PAGE 8

# Fun without Ketchup

By Tom Field



14



34



58

“”  
The principals have marketing plans,  
but we make it up as we go. — Page 27

# SPOT A STROKE

Learn the Warning Signs and Act FAST

**B**



**BALANCE**  
UNSTEADY

**E**



**EYESIGHT**  
CHANGES

**F**



**FACE**  
DROOPING

**A**



**ARMS**  
WEAK/NUMB

**S**



**SPEECH**  
DIFFICULTY

**T**



**TIME**  
CALL 911

Act FAST in response to any of these signs to improve your chances for recovery. If you get help within three hours of the first symptom, the advanced interventional treatments and fast-track Stroke Alert program available at Carilion Clinic can lessen or even eliminate the effects of a stroke.

If you or someone else has any of the BE FAST symptoms, call 911 immediately.



# Valley Business FRONT

P.O. Box 1041  
Salem, VA 24153  
(540) 389-9945  
www.vbFRONT.com

## Staff

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

## Departmental Contacts

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

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

© Copyright 2023; Valley Business FRONT, LLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction or use of this publication in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Information within Valley Business FRONT is obtained from sources considered reliable, but cannot be guaranteed. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the ownership. Valley Business FRONT is primarily distributed to subscribers by mail, digitally and select locations throughout the Roanoke Valley, New River Valley, and western Virginia.

# JUNE



Aila Boyd



Daniel Colston



Tom Field



Zack Jackson



Shawn Nowlin



Emma Thomas

## 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.

# 2023 CONTRIBUTORS



**Jennifer Poff Cooper**



**Doug Doughty**



**Dan Dowdy**



**Jennifer Leake**



**Mike Leigh**



**Gene Marrano**



**Nicholas Vaassen**



**Zenith Barrett**  
Goodwill /  
community service



**Neal Cummings**  
Freedom First Credit Union /  
finance – credit unions



**Micah Frain**  
Frain & Cawley CPAs /  
finance - accounting



**Kevin Holt**  
Gentry Locke /  
legal



**Jeff Merritt**  
Cox Communications /  
technology



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



**Alicia Smith**  
F&S Building Innovations /  
construction



**David Todd**  
EZ Rampz /  
senior services

“

Many of the restaurant owners are first-generation Americans.

— Page 20

“

I work very hard at polishing my brand and elevating the integrity of the careers of all artists.

— Page 12

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

**twitter**  
**facebook**

Website: [www.vbfront.com](http://www.vbfront.com)  
Facebook: [vb front](https://www.facebook.com/vbfront)  
Twitter: [@vbfront](https://twitter.com/vbfront)  
Blog: [morefront.blogspot.com](https://morefront.blogspot.com)

# Fun without Ketchup

By Tom Field

Allow me to introduce Whitney C. Brock. I first “met” Whitney on social media, when her art instruction videos popped up in my feed (out of nowhere?). Here’s a local artist that really tripped my trigger. The work is stop-you-in-your-tracks (or at least pause-you-in-your-online-scrolling) good. Wow. A one-syllable response for me—increasingly rare, these days.

Then, when we decided to devote our June issue to the service sector (and this time, food and beverage), I remembered the self portrait of the artist in action, devouring a hamburger from Texas Tavern of all places. (We featured TT owner Matt Bullington on a previous FRONTcover.)

My first thought was: Norman Rockwell. To date—in 176 issues—we hadn’t presented a full and singular illustration or work of art on our FRONTcover. THIS one—I knew—I had to have. We break the photographic convention.

Thus, we snagged it. Like wiping mustard (NO KETCHUP!!!) from the corner of your mouth, it was the natural thing to do. Brock captures the essence of food as enjoyment. (And to be frankfurterly frank, she’s more of a natural, organic, healthy, and clean-eating kind of gal... so she really pulled off some phenomenal acting as a self-model.)

We slapped the Roanoke Rockwellian scene

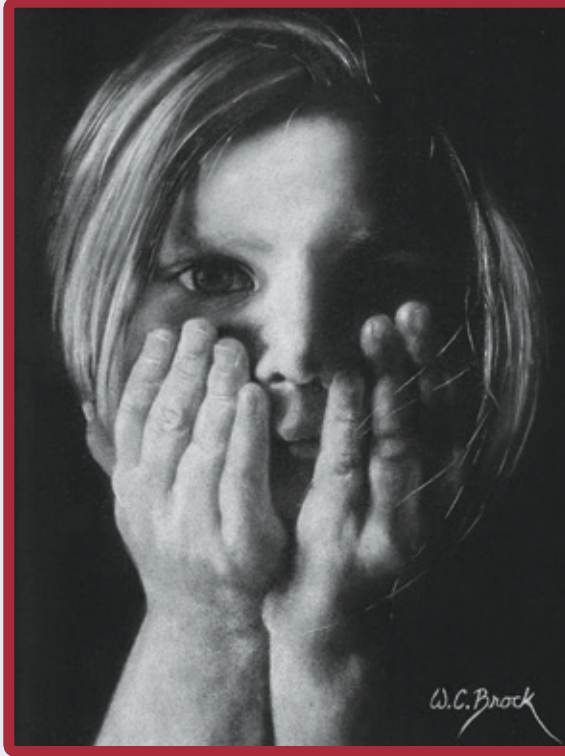


The Beginning – oil





Eminent - white charcoal



The Future - white charcoal

on our cover; and the rest is history. Except for this Q&A session. We thank Whitney C. Brock for this contribution and encourage you to check out her creations.

### How about a little background for our readers, Whitney?

I live in Roanoke with my husband John, who is my greatest fan. I'm not sure if becoming an artist wasn't just a default career because I was bad at everything else, or because I thought artists ran in the family (my grandmother took up painting in her 70's); either way, I ended up failing out of art school. Who fails out of art school? I seriously had to figure that one out. And so began my self-propelled art education journey that steered me to this point.

I firmly believe that I have no natural talent even though folks are constantly telling me this; but I do have a hard determination to not suck at art! A lot of hard work and study has brought many awards to my walls; but I have learned more in my failures than anywhere else.

### What's the story behind this Texas Tavern image?

"The 'T' Room"—oil on canvas, 20x24-inches. During the crazy Covid time, the City of Roanoke proposed a self-portrait project to local artist where 48 of us were selected to create a self portrait somewhere within the city that holds meaning for the community. After running all over the city and avoiding the obvious "star" I was about to call it quits when I saw the Texas Tavern sign—the place where so many post last call



Whitney C. Brock



Extra Bacon - oil

meals were scarfed down at 2am, after church repent filled cheesy western were sacrificed and you never knew who you might see there. Harry Connick Jr and Mike Pence and many other famous people visited the vintage metal counter that "seats 1000's 10 at a time since 1930."

So I went in and took my place at the far end of the counter and ordered a cheesy western fully loaded and explained to the other patrons what I was up to, which amused them and had them wanting to be involved. The two guys beside me were in a traveling band that played at Martins the night before and were told that the "T" Room was a must. We became fast friends as that is how it happens in the 24/7, slightly sticky, no ketchup serving cornerstone establishment of our community.

Roanoke Arts (Douglas Jackson) has all 48 self-portraits on display on the 1st floor of the Municipal Building Downtown

Roanoke, which will come down sometime this year. The "T" Room painting will be available at that time.

**Well, since we're the business journal, would you describe your business and market?**

Whitney C. Brock Fine Art [ [www.wcbrock.com](http://www.wcbrock.com) ] is my brand and represents my studio artist business, my Creative Coaching business and my instructional business. My studio work is represented by LinDor Arts and The Little Gallery on the Market in Roanoke and Steller Gallery in Jacksonville FL. I am extremely excited to announce an exhibition of my new figurative work at LinDor's this September! I am currently pursuing my Creative Coaching Certificate (a 15 month endeavor) to help others who may be struggling like I was during the many years I wasted trying to wrangle the art world. It's a crazy business this art thing. Creativity

“ ”

Who fails out  
of art school?

Girl in the Green Scarf - oil





**The Apprentice – oil**

is at an all time low globally; and I believe it is my purpose to help others emerge from the fog. Teaching is truly a passion of mine. It is not only incredibly rewarding to fundamentally change someone's life by providing the tools and instruction that enables them to express themselves, but it also keeps me grounded in the classical approach to the processes of drawing and painting in an academic environment. As an artist, I often feel my career choice undervalued as a professional occupation, so I work very hard at polishing my brand and elevating the integrity of the careers of all artists.

**You clearly enjoy this endeavor. What trips your trigger about what you do and this creative / artistic life?**

A day in my life feels like absolute joy! Hard work, challenges and goal setting are my drugs of choice. So many things inspire me that I have to put blinders on to really focus on

projects at hand. The joy comes mainly from the magical moments when something is coming alive off of a two dimensional surface. It gets me every time. Portrait commissions are by far the most challenging, but at the same time the most rewarding. To create a legacy for a family is a huge responsibility; so my heart and soul are all in. At the end of the day when the brushes have been cleaned and the turpentine closed up, I look around my studio and express deep gratitude for being right where I am.

Art is my passion and my business. Art has many cogs in the wheel of culture and influences most things, so I certainly feel the weight of accountability. Norman Rockwell influenced our entire nation in a delightful and wholesome way that still continues today. My point is that I don't want to take it too seriously, but that moment in the Texas tavern getting my reference shot was the start of influencing all that look at the painting in whatever big or small way. 🍷

“

It's a crazy business.

”

Grandma's Quilt - oil





Doug Dougherty

Fork in the Alley

# The “Forks” are just one passion for Dave Trinkle

By Doug Dougherty

**For all the roles with which David Trinkle has been connected, he is quick to point out the one that he values the most.**

While he can be spotted many weekends at Fork in the Alley, his restaurant with street-side patio bar that attracts crowds on warm weekend nights in the Crystal Spring neighborhood, he also has a much more serious pursuit.

Although he served on Roanoke City Council for 12 years, including three terms as vice mayor, he feels that his most important contributions are in the medical field as a geriatric psychiatrist.

After Trinkle graduated from the University of Virginia School of Medicine in 1987, his career has taken an interesting path to say the least. He returned to his hometown and private practice in geriatric medicine, neurology, and psychiatry. He has served

in positions with Carilion Clinic, Carilion's Center for Healthy Aging, and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.

"I've taken up several causes," he said. "I eventually became associate dean for community and culture, which fit me pretty well at Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. I help connect students to the community in various ways."

Makes one wonder why he needed to open a restaurant. "Originally, it was a pure real-estate investment and I fixed it up," Trinkle said. "It was all about real-estate development or just owning real estate.

"I fixed up that carriage house and had it ready to rent. My whole goal was to rent



Doug Doughty

Ann and Dave Trinkle (with Doug Doughty's new puppy)

it and not operate it. I couldn't find anybody to rent it for the price I needed to pay the mortgage."

He approached a friend, Sam Aiken, who had a stall in the downtown Roanoke at the Market Building. "He sort of chuckled and

said he would do it for six months 'to get it up and running,'" Trinkle said in a recent interview.

"Those first couple years at the Fork in the Alley were very successful, so he stayed several more years. Fork opened March 17, 2005."

**JUN 2 ON THE BORDER**

**JUL 7 BRIGHTSIDE**

**AUG 4 FUZZY LOGIC**

**ROANOKE BEST OF 2023 SILVER**

**ROANOKE BEST OF 2023 GOLD**

**FIRST FRIDAYS**



Submitted

Jessica McLeese has worked at Fork for 10 years while pursuing a career in nursing

His wife, Ann, was somewhat skeptical at the time and told her husband that he was on his own. Sort of. "She's gotten a lot into it and does a lot of the day-to-day business side and putting out fires with staff," Dave Trinkle said. "We own a couple restaurants, but the model is, we try to hire good managers and stay out of the way.

"Now that we've been doing this almost 20 years, we don't live the business and don't know the business completely - but we know a lot now."

The Trinkles have been involved with other ventures such as Spoon on the Avenue, Fork in the Market and Fork in the City but it became exhausting and harder to handle over the years. "It took a lot out of us with minimal return," Trinkle said.

That's not the case with Fork in the Alley.

"It's small, but we like to have fun," he said. "At Fork in the Alley, it's almost like going to your basement. Or going to your garage. It is a garage. It's a carriage house. It's always been small but, as we were building it, the builder said, 'You ought to do this covered pavilion because you need more room.

"So, we did that and, years later, we came up into the front yard. Then, we built a bar in the front yard. It is pretty popular when the weather is good."

Former mayor, David Bowers, offered an unsolicited comment, "Dave and Ann Trinkle are the most popular couple in south Roanoke, not only because they're nice but they also own the neighborhood bar."

On many occasions, bands are setting up, as they are in downtown Roanoke at Fork in the Market, which is still owned by Trinkle.





Gene Marrano

Fork in the Alley - The Shoobies on outdoor stage

"What I would say is, it's a very cool dive bar. It gets hopping on weekends."

Fork in the Market holds an important honor in bar lexicon. "This year, I think we'll be close to tenth in the world for Pabst Blue Ribbon (PBR) volume and we're still number one in Virginia, going up against college bars and even Kroger."

Back on Crystal Spring Avenue, "We've slowly expanded," Trinkle said. "We reversed the fireplace out back and added that deck. We've added a stage out front, so it was all

kind of in waves. The bar out front came in before the pandemic and sort of saved us.

"Now we have much bigger bands. With Fork in the Market, it's sort of the same way."

There has been talk about adding a "Fork" in Vinton, not that his geriatric psychiatry will be overlooked. "That's my avocation and that's my main job," Trinkle said, "and that's where my passion is. I sort of got in the restaurant business in a roundabout way." A lot of the Trinkle's patrons at the Forks in south Roanoke and downtown are glad he did. 🍷

## HE WANTED TO MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION AT HIS JOB INTERVIEW.

We are all about the power of **transformation**. The second life of a power suit can provide someone a second chance. At Goodwill, whether donating from your closet, or searching for treasure, the journey never stops giving back.

[goodwillvalleys.com](http://goodwillvalleys.com)





## BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

### Executive Summary:

*What is the primary purpose of an employee? If you are reading this article and you also work for a company, have you considered what your primary purpose is to your organization?*

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

## Team member ROI

There are a couple small-business advisors that I follow and turn to for advice on my business, and both answer this question the same way. Every employee in an organization should be providing more value to the organization than their cost of employment. According to these advisors, each employee should provide 3-10X of value to the organization over their salary.

At first glance, this sounds like the only purpose of a company is to make money. If you regularly read my articles, you know that I believe organizations have greater purposes than that. However, every organization's primary purpose is to be profitable, or at least be economically self-sufficient so that it can continue to exist.

This might sound cold, but employees are investments by an organization. And with any investment, there must be a positive return, or the company will fail. So, the primary purpose of each employee is to provide a net positive return to the organization.

Have you considered how you help your organization add value? Are your results greater than the cost of employing you? If you left your company, would the negative impact of your departure be greater than the money saved to pay you?

Each member of an organization, regardless of position, should consider how they provide a return on investment (ROI) to their organization, and work to increase it. Similarly, leaders should evaluate if each team member is providing ROI and make adjustments to responsibilities where the ROI is not there.

Providing ROI might not always be strictly financial. Besides the obvious ways of increasing revenue or reducing costs, ROI can be provided through greater customer satisfaction, greater brand awareness, or reduced employee turnover. But if an employee can't express how he or she provides value to the organization, that employee could be at risk of a job elimination or a layoff.

Provide greater ROI to help your organization excel and help secure your own value to the company. 📌

“Each employee should provide three to ten times of value to the organization over their salary.”

## Golden opportunities: buying gold as part of your portfolio

This precious metal has long been viewed as a safe haven during turbulent times which may allow it to play a unique role in your portfolio. Read on as we delve into how gold investments work, ways you can make money from them, and offer some practical tips for anyone looking to invest in this precious metal.

### How Gold Investments Work


There are several ways to invest in gold, including physical gold (bars and coins), gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs), gold mutual funds, gold mining stocks, and gold futures and options. Physical gold is a tangible asset that investors can purchase and store, while gold ETFs, mutual funds, and stocks allow investors to gain exposure to the gold market without actually owning the physical metal. Each method of investing in gold has its own advantages and disadvantages, so it's important to discuss this investment with your financial planner.

### How You Make Money

Gold investments generate profits in two primary ways: capital appreciation and, in rarer cases, dividends. Capital appreciation occurs when the value of your gold investment increases over time. For instance, if you purchase physical gold or gold ETFs and the price of gold rises, you can sell your investment at a profit. Dividends are payments made by some gold mining companies to their shareholders, providing a regular income stream.

### Tips for the Gold-Curious Investor

- **Diversify:** Allocate only a portion of your funds to gold investments to minimize risk and ensure a balanced investment strategy.
- **Start small:** If you're new to gold investing, consider starting with a small investment in gold ETFs or mutual funds to familiarize yourself with the market.
- **Keep an eye on fees:** If you opt for gold ETFs or mutual funds, be mindful of the management fees, which can eat into your returns.
- **Store physical gold safely:** If you choose to invest in physical gold, ensure proper storage in a safe deposit box or a secure home safe to protect your investment.

Over the years, Gold has earned a reputation for being a staple in the portfolios of conservative investors. While it does have drawbacks, gold can be a valuable addition to your investment or retirement portfolio because it offers potential inflation protection and modest capital appreciation. By following the tips outlined above, you can tap into the opportunities that this precious metal presents. Of course, it's critical to consult with a financial advisor before making any investment decisions to ensure they align with your financial plan. 



## BUSINESS CENTS

By Daniel Colston

### Executive Summary:

*Amidst the ever-changing economic landscape, diversifying one's investment or retirement portfolio is widely recommended by some professionals. One such avenue of diversification is buying gold.*

*Daniel Colston, CFP®, CEPA runs a tax and investing firm in Roanoke, Upward Financial Planning, specializing in helping business owners and retirees. He can be reached at [daniel@upwardfp.com](mailto:daniel@upwardfp.com).*



Aila Boyd

Valerie Brown, Executive Director of the Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association

# Williamson Road: An International Culinary Destination

By Aila Boyd

**There's no denying that Roanoke offers the most eclectic culinary experience in all of Southwest Virginia. The hub of that culinary diversity is Williamson Road, which offers a wide variety of ethnic food options.**

Executive Director of the Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association Valerie Brown is one of the biggest champions of Williamson Road's ethnic eateries. "The road is known for being an international road. You can go from one end of Williamson Road to another and go from being in Vietnam to being in Canada—it's vast," she said.

Roanoke Vice Mayor Joe Cobb agreed. The fact that such a broad array of restaurants is congregated along one

road is quite unique for a city the size of Roanoke. "When there's a range, from Vietnamese to good old deli to Hispanic/Latino, Chinese, barbecue...it's a really remarkable culinary experience," he said.

The food options reflect the street itself, according to Brown. Many of the restaurant owners are first-generation Americans. "It's always had a touch of diversity. It was built to be a conduit between the county and the city. You had people moving in here because it



was wide open land. It's always attracted the new guy coming and needing a place," she said. "The food, the ethnicity it adds to the community."

Cobb added that the road is representative of Roanoke's status as a multicultural city. "If you want to experience the rich diversity of our community, just take the time over a couple of months to stop and eat at every restaurant along Williamson Road. You're going to get a really lovely flavor of who and what makes this city so special," he said.

One of the road's ethnic food hubs is the Lamp Lighter Mall, which has such restaurants as Sticks & Spoons Ramen Bar, The Best Pho, Lazy Bulldog Food Truck and Bistro and Wonju Korean Restaurant. The street also has a number of ethnic food marts.

Brown noted there has been an increase in the number of food trucks along the road in recent years. "It's easier. Instead of having to pay for a storefront, food trucks can move around. They can go into

other markets," she said. She's noticed that organizations and businesses have been requesting the food trucks come to their offices on special occasions instead of ordering boxed lunches.

In recognition of just how diverse the street's food options are, Brown came up with the idea of using a "Passport to Great Food" for the association's annual Restaurant Week. The culinarily curious had their passports stamped at participating restaurants, including Alejandros Mexican Grill, Cuban Island Restaurant, Mi Tapatia Mexican Restaurant and Bethlehem Restaurant & Grocery.

"It's like you were traveling the world. People from all over the city decided to go out to lunch. They took it so seriously. It was fun," she said. Prizes, including a \$500 voucher from the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport for a flight to any destination, were given. She anticipates holding another Restaurant Week this year.

As part of her job, Brown makes it her



[www.cfwesternva.org](http://www.cfwesternva.org)

Enabling people  
who love  
their community  
to easily  
give back.

540.985.0204



business to help entrepreneurs, like the ones running ethnic food restaurants, stay in business, which was difficult during the pandemic. Many of them temporarily closed but were able to shift to offering takeout. “People helped each other and went out of their way to go out to eat just to keep the businesses going,” she said. “It was a way to say that we value what they bring to the road and Roanoke.”

One of the biggest obstacles many Williamson Road restaurateurs are currently encountering is a lack of adequate staffing. “It’s not the lack of getting customers but keeping staff. It’s what they’re all talking about,” she said.

Despite the challenges, there are restaurants that are flourishing, like Basil Pizza, which strives to “create a synergy between authentic Italian recipes and the American Food style.” Brown remarked, “Their food is phenomenal.”


Her organization also helps the restaurants through initiatives like the recently launched façade grant program. Business owners can apply for grants ranging from \$500-\$3,000 to help spruce up their signage, landscaping, doorways and awnings. “We want to help them look inviting. If we take them seriously, the customers

will take them seriously,” she said.

Ultimately, she wants to make sure the restaurants continue to draw people from throughout the region to the greater Williamson Road area. “People come through and people will travel for good food. We see that a lot on Williamson Road. People do travel. They come from downtown Roanoke, Rocky Mount, Botetourt. People will travel for good service and to support the smaller mom-and-pop,” she said.

Marc Nelson, Roanoke’s director of economic development, agreed that the restaurants are a benefit to the city. In fact, they make his job of attracting talent to the area easier.

“When you are looking at people who want to come to a community, they often want to come to a place and find something that ties them back to their home even if it’s small. When you look at Williamson Road, that’s what it offers,” he said. “You can drive along the road and find pretty much any geography you want. You can find Middle Eastern, Halal, Latin American...it’s all along that one road.”

Because of the road’s diverse dining options, Brown often finds it challenging to decide where to go for lunch. She feels like a mother who loves each of her children and doesn’t want to choose favorites. 

# HOW MUCH BANDWIDTH DOES YOUR BUSINESS REALLY NEED?

*By Rob Spraker, Cox Business Sales Manager*

When you stop and think about it, every business – big or small – is an online business today. Whether you're running the corner coffee shop with just a few employees, or a high-tech enterprise with many employees working together digitally in real time, business internet is a critical concern. The more reliable your connectivity, the faster and more efficiently you can get work done.

Although most of us tend to use the word "speed" when talking about internet capabilities, what's being purchased is bandwidth, which is the amount of data that can be processed at one time.

A highway is a good way to visualize this, with lanes representing bandwidth and automobiles representing data. The more lanes you have, the more traffic you can efficiently handle simultaneously. Taking this example one step further, five or six-lane highways aren't needed everywhere. It just depends on the traffic; in some areas, a two-lane highway is all that's needed to keep traffic moving effectively.

The same is true for your business. While we often think "the more, the better," there's no reason for you to be paying for internet capacity you really don't need.

## **Bandwidth Rules of Thumb**

Here are some internet bandwidth "rules of thumb," and the activities they support, so you can see how these applications align with your own business needs:

- 50-75 Mbps – 5 to 10 employees, basic browsing and email activities, downloading/uploading large files, streaming.
- 100 Mbps – 10-15 employees, basic browsing and emails, IP/VoIP telephone, light cloud application activity. Just a few simultaneous video calls happening.
- 500 Mbps – Medium sized offices with 20-30 employees, with average amounts of internet usage; regular access to cloud-based applications, and simultaneous video calls are common.
- 1 Gbps – Larger offices with 30 or more employees; many devices are connected to the internet, and employees are doing bandwidth-heavy activities such as simultaneous video calls, sending and receiving large files via email or the cloud, and regular, on-going cloud computing.

The challenge is to make sure you have enough internet capacity for current – and future – business connectivity requirements, while at the same time not buying for multiple "lanes" of bandwidth that you'll never need or use. All it takes is a little due diligence to find the bandwidth "sweet spot" that's perfect for your business' needs.



Still unsure how much bandwidth your business needs? Drop me an email at [Rob.Spraker@cox.com](mailto:Rob.Spraker@cox.com) and I'll help you evaluate your internet needs, and determine what level of bandwidth offers the best value to your business and your employees.



Jennifer Cooper

# Craft Beer in Christiansburg

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

**As with a number of New River Valley businesses, it all started with friends who met at Virginia Tech. But instead of focusing on their areas of study, these guys brewed beer together for a while and “had a lot of fun with it,” said Seth Locklear, one of three co-owners of Iron Tree Brewing Company in Christiansburg.**

The idea of taking brewing professional came when he, Jansen Lee, and Stephen Peter brewed the beer for Locklear’s wedding in 2016, and “people said it was really good quality for home brewing.”

Locklear said that, after the wedding success, it took a while for all three to decide that opening a business was what they wanted to do.

There were several encouraging factors. Locklear said that the “brewery density” is light in Blacksburg/Christiansburg as compared to, say, Roanoke. At the time they started talking about opening a business,

there was only one stand-alone brewery in Blacksburg. Also, there is a large population with the university.

The partners first looked at opening in Blacksburg, but cost and availability of space were “big deterrents.” With myriad hospitality choices there, Blacksburg was “not as excited” about a new brewery. On the other hand, initial talks with the town of Christiansburg were “very positive,” said Locklear. “They made us feel like it was the right place to be,” he said.

Plus, there was a dearth of food and beverage options in downtown Christiansburg, so it





was a “good space to come into.” Iron Tree Brewing Company is still the only brewery in Christiansburg.

Then came the nuts and bolts like licensing. Plus, the principals in the business performed all the building renovations themselves. Locklear’s background is in construction, and he did everything from plumbing to electricity to finish carpentry. His wife is an interior designer, so she designed the aesthetics of the space.

Locklear is the only partner who quit his day job; he manages the day-to-day aspects

of Iron Tree, including the brewing. Lee, a mechanical engineer, lives in Waynesboro and comes to town every other weekend. A political science major, Peter has been an auto mechanic and currently works in vehicle assessment and auctions.

What sets Iron Tree apart, said Locklear, is the mindset of having a style of beer for everyone. They keep a full selection – ranging from light to dark beers, plus hard seltzer.

Iron Tree attracts a wide variety of customers. Locklear said the 3-5pm crowd is typically

## HOME BREWING

The New River Valley Brewer’s Guild is a laid-back group of homebrewers and beer lovers that meets occasionally. “De facto president” Dan McMichael said the group has always been small but was more active in the late 1990s to mid-2000s. There are still people who would consider themselves part of the guild, he said, but the gatherings now are more word of mouth driven, with people getting together informally to brew. There was a meeting in April, and the group is open to revitalization if the interest level exists. Find them on Twitter @nrvg. McMichael said there is an excellent local infrastructure for brewing in the Blacksburg store Eats, which carries equipment for beginners to advanced brewers and supports the brewing community. He also suggested NRV folks check out the “ultra-active” Star City Brewers Guild in Roanoke.

—Jennifer Poff Cooper



retirees. After work, Iron Tree pulls in a “good group of [university] faculty and staff.” The brewery does not attract a lot of students, said Locklear. Then there are travelers who find Iron Tree on the map, hop off of I-81, “get a flight, and head on their way.” A prime market is Christiansburg natives who work and live nearby. “People in Christiansburg were tired of driving to Blacksburg to do anything,” said Locklear.

Iron Tree has remedied that. Every other Tuesday is trivia night, something fun which has turned one of the most lackluster days of the week into “we can’t seat anymore,” said Locklear. Peter writes the questions for those events.

Partnering with food trucks has also been a hit. Locklear said they did not want to deal with food in-house, so it made sense.

Christiansburg was new to the food truck scene, though, and an ordinance change was required. There was, too, a permit process to allow the trucks to park on the street in front of Iron Tree Brewing Company. Locklear said with food trucks, “more people come, they stay longer, and their tabs are higher.” He tries to rotate through food trucks for variety and to keep everyone’s sales up; he said that sales dip for both the brewery and the food truck if the same truck comes several weeks in a row.

Another draw is yoga on the second Saturday of each month at 10:45am. A beer is included in the \$20 price, and Locklear tries to get a food truck to come early so that the participants can eat and drink afterwards.

Iron Tree also participates in fundraisers. “There are often groups reaching out



**ANYTIME  
FITNESS**

**SALEM**

**BLACKSBURG**

**RADFORD**

SPARTAN SQ  
375-2900

FIRST&MAIN  
951-1340

FAIRLAWN  
633-3004

**YOU'RE NEVER TOO BUSY FOR ANYTIME**

asking to do percentage nights," said Locklear, and he is generally happy to oblige, especially on slower days (Tuesdays and Wednesdays).

Before opening, the partners visited other breweries to see what worked. That's how trivia night started. The principals have marketing plans but we "make it up as we go," said Locklear.

The biggest challenges, Locklear said, include brewing enough beer and staffing. The partners "didn't know the market coming in so we were unsure as to how it was going to go, we weren't sure what expectations should be." And they were new to entrepreneurship, so they had to spin up on the business side.

Locklear said that the business has "exceeded expectations numbers-wise." He feels that two keys to that success are "putting out a good product at a fairly low price point." Additionally, the variety is attractive. Locklear said that "the experience can be different weekend to weekend." Four flagship beers stay on tap, while they switch out the other eight. There is also lemonade and root beer for designated drivers or kids. Both children and pets are welcome at Iron Tree.

Future plans are to expand to two or three times the current size by spreading into the warehouse behind their existing space, and to distribute pre-made to-go cans in a cooler "to move more product and let others know we're here." Locklear also

## ON TAP LOCALLY

- Beliveau Farm Brewery – Blacksburg
- Buffalo Mountain Brewery – Floyd
- Bull & Bones – Blacksburg and Christiansburg\*
- Eastern Divide Brewing Company – Blacksburg
- Iron Tree Brewing Company – Christiansburg
- Long Way Brewing – Radford
- The Maroon Door / Off the Mall Brewing – Blacksburg
- Moon Hollow Brewing Company – Blacksburg
- Solstice Farm Brewery – Catawba\*
- Right Mind Brewing – Blacksburg
- Rising Silo Farm Brewery – Blacksburg
- The River Company Restaurant & Brewery – Radford

From Onward NRV's website, more information on each at [www.newrivervalleyva.org/news/enjoy-craft-beer-at-these-nrv-breweries/](http://www.newrivervalleyva.org/news/enjoy-craft-beer-at-these-nrv-breweries/)

\*new additions

said, "We want to drive in lots of businesses to downtown Christiansburg and make it a fun place to be." 🍷

# More than Just Ramps.

Modular Ramps • Stairglides • Bathroom Safety/Showers  
Vertical Platform Lifts • Lift Chairs • Scooters/Power Chairs



1-855-357-7679 | [www.ezrampz.com](http://www.ezrampz.com)  
Call today for a FREE mobility consultation





## BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

**Executive Summary:**  
*Employee Engagement contributes directly to the bottom line because it retains key talent and results in greater revenue and profits.*

*Jennifer Leake CMC® is an expert in employee assessments to help HIRE RIGHT, ENGAGE EMPLOYEES, and LEAD WELL. Build a Best Job Ever culture that results in greater performance by employees and more revenue and profits for your company.*

## Your people system #2: engage employees

Two colleagues in a busy office, Michael and Addison, were discussing the topic of employee engagement. Michael, with many years of work experience, felt employee engagement hadn't changed much over the years.

Addison, who was new to the workforce, asked him why he felt that way.

Michael shared he had worked for several companies over the last 20 years. He had seen HOW people work change - fax machines to email, landlines to cell phones, paper files to digital ones. But HOW people were engaged had not.

"Why hasn't it changed Michael?" she asked.

After some thought, Michael shared, "I think it's because the heart of employee engagement is the human element. It's about creating a workplace culture where employees feel valued, respected, and part of something bigger than themselves. That hasn't changed much over the years."

According to Gallup survey in 2022, only 32% of employees in the U.S. are engaged at work. We have hovered at this 1/3 percentage for over two decades. There is little to celebrate when we move 1% - progress has been slow. It's time to move that needle.


Improving employee engagement requires a holistic approach where you:

- understand individual employee needs and preferences;
- create a culture of engagement that is consistent and sustainable; and
- provide employees with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

Engagement means employees feel connected to the organization and to each other. This happens if you:

- **Know them:** Understand each employee, their personal motivators and goals, and build strong team dynamics.
- **Develop them:** Set clear expectations, revisit and hold accountable, and address performance problems early.
- **Coach them:** Provide consistent, on-going feedback, recognize and appreciate effort, and show them a future career path and direction.

You need a system for commitment to ongoing improvement, with regular surveys and assessments to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.

My next column will discuss your third system, LEAD WELL. Let's review your current engagement system to champion employee engagement and experience the financial and emotional benefits it reaps. Contact me at [Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com](mailto:Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com). 

## Me + robot = word of mouth advertising tips

I'll admit it, I was drawing a blank this month on what topic to write about. So, after staring at a blank screen for a while and overworking my foggy brain I decided to ask the robots for help. And by "robot" I mean ChatGPT. And by "ChatGPT" I mean our future robot overlords that will eventually turn us all into plugged in humanoids like in the Matrix. Buuuut ... in the meantime we can at least use them to help brainstorm stuff!

Anyway ... a topic suggested to me by the robot was "Creating Memorable Dining Experiences: The Key to Word-of-Mouth Marketing." I'll spare you the robot-written article, and instead give you the bullet points of what was suggested ...

### Ambiance and Atmosphere

- Stellar Service
- Surprise and Delight
- Culinary Creativity
- Consistency
- Engaging Experiences
- Embrace Feedback

I liked this idea not just for the food world, but to show some of the things that create successful word-of-mouth marketing, which can truly be the most powerful and effective way to grow our businesses. Reading a great review online from somebody we don't know is all well and good, but when somebody we TRUST vouches for a company or a service, we are much more likely to be sold on that business.

And what we have here is actually a pretty great list showing us some of the most important factors of word-of-mouth marketing (and not just for a restaurant). I mean sure, "culinary creativity" is a little industry specific, but it also plays to the larger concept of coming up with creative and unique ways that our business stands out from a competitor.

Another common factor in a lot of these suggestions is how they relate to the customer's overall EXPERIENCE and how we FEEL about a business. For true business growth and evolution, it's not just about doing the bare minimum and filling an order or providing a service, it's about having your customer feel like they were part of something special.

Now to be fair, I'm not suggesting that every customer experience must feel like riding the Avatar ride at Disney (which is awesome by the way). I've never expected a life-altering experience from my lawn guy, but he also does a great job, checks in constantly, and always provides suggestions to make the lawn look as good as possible. So, guess what? He now has multiple new regular customers that have been referred to him by me. Bang!

So dear human ... take these wise robotic pieces of advice and use them to your advantage before they've been implanted via microchip directly from King ChatGPT, benevolent ruler of the universe and controller of our free will! 🤖



## TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

### Executive Summary:

*AI to the rescue for this columnist with writer's block. A sign of things to come?*

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





Tell Your Story, Announce Your News, Read Online and Share, Distribute to Customers, Advertise, Recognize Employees, Send Comments, Follow on Facebook, Sign Up for eBlast, Learn, Refer a Story or Source, Sponsor FRONT Events, Engage, Meet FRONTstaff, Enjoy

**There are so many ways to be in FRONT**  
**Call or email us for more information**

**ads@vbFRONT.com | 540-389-9945 | vbFRONT.com**



Gene Marrano



Gene Marrano



Gene Marrano

## TechNite honors 2023 >

At last month's **TechNite 2023** celebration hosted by the **Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council**, local high tech companies, entrepreneurs and STEM educators were honored for their efforts to grow the region's "Innovation Ecosystem." Also announced by Johnson & Johnson Innovation - the "Advancing Oncology Innovation Quickfire Challenge," where \$300,000 will be available to innovators in cancer research. The startup or multiple startups awarded that funding must base their research in the Roanoke or New River Valleys. A one year residency at the **Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center** with a lab bench is part of the package, as is mentoring from Johnson & Johnson companies. Applications for the QuickFire Challenge will be accepted through August 11th. Sally Allain is with J&J: "they can tap into core capabilities at the **Fralin Biomedical Research Center**, they can work at **Carilion Clinic**, the new cancer center (which Carilion could break ground on soon), this is a long term opportunity.

"The energy at TechNite reflects the energy our innovators and entrepreneurs pour into their work every day. [We] celebrate the accomplishments that are changing the world right from the Roanoke and New River Valleys," said **Erin Burcham**, President of Verge and Executive Director of RBTC. Among the highlights of the evening was the induction of **Eddie Amos** into the RBTC Hall of Fame. Amos spent his career in tech including 10 years as a Partner at Microsoft, and as a major player with Meridium in Roanoke. **Amy White**, dean of STEM at Virginia Western and **Geoff Boyer**, who teaches STEM in Craig County public schools, received the Educator Award. Others: **Chad Burchett** from Trova took home the Innovator award; **Angela Pope Dickerson** from blockchain company Bullish, Regional Leadership Award; **Alex Hyler** from CytoRecovery, Entrepreneur Award; **KlariVis**, which designs analytic tools for bankers, Leading Small Tech Company; **Intuitive Surgical**, which designs robotic surgical systems, was named Leading Large Tech Company.





## Local Colors displays Valley's diversity >

Freelance photographer, Valley Business FRONT contributor and Virginia Communications Hall of Famer **Dan Smith** spent time last month at the Local Colors festival at Elmwood Park, the annual

celebration of diversity in Roanoke, where some 100 different ethnic groups now live, play, work and own businesses. "We have more food vendors than we did last year," said Local Colors executive director **Lisa Spencer** beforehand, as the event that spans almost three decades finally emerged fully from the grip of COVID-19.





Submitted

**BIG LICK Brewing**

# Roanoke's craft beer scene continues to flourish

By Shawn Nowlin

**What makes a brewery top-notch quality? Local owners, customers provide their perspectives.**

While Roanoke is known for having the world's second-largest illuminated man-made star, the city's craft brewing scene offers a plethora of quality options inside both large facilities and comfortable quaint taprooms. Given how many options there are, it should come as no surprise that collectively, the community spends millions of dollars on beer every single year.

Whether one's preference is stout, IPA, sour or something else, chances are that one of the dozen-plus breweries (or local wineries for that matter) has it. On most nights, especially this time of the year, a sizable crowd can be found at many of the establishments. Beer is made from the fermentation of grains, then adding spices

and hops. At many of the local brewpubs the fermentation tanks are visible to paying customers.

Starr Hill, the second oldest craft brewery in Virginia, was founded 24 years ago in Charlottesville by Kristin Dolan and Mark Thompson. What started with a few regular employees selling kegs of Starr Hill from a van laid the foundation for tremendous success to follow. Since the 2002 FloydFest, the company has shared its beers at live festivals all over the Valley.

Many of Starr Hill's most loyal customers have been regulars for years. For Jessica Miller, nothing was ever the same after she experienced the brewery at 6 Old Whitmore



Shawn Nowlin

## BIG LICK Brewing

Avenue in Roanoke (near the Virginia Tech Carilion campus) for the first time. "For starters, the staff here is simply amazing. I've been to other breweries where it's clear that they don't care about putting forth any effort. Here, you just can't beat the taste, the atmosphere and the overall professionalism," Miller said. Added her friend Becky James, "There is something to be said about a brewery that is both welcoming and top-notch quality. I've been coming here for years, and I've never had a bad experience. When people ask me

which establishments they should visit to get a drink, I always make sure to mention this place."

The decision to work at Olde Salem Brewery (based in Salem with a satellite operation now in downtown Roanoke) was not a difficult one for Maggie Coffey. What most people don't understand, said the Tasting Room Manager, is just how much work is required to sustain success in this industry. "I manage all of the bartenders, bands, food and anything that the public sees

1983 ••• 2023 ••• tomorrow



Is your business ready for  
**The Entré Experience?**

Our number one goal is, and always will be,  
 Outstanding Customer Satisfaction!

**CALL TODAY TO SCHEDULE A  
 FREE COMMERCIAL SITE SURVEY**

NETWORKING • VoIP PHONES • CLOUD • BACKUP • SECURITY



[www.entre-roanoke.com](http://www.entre-roanoke.com) | (540) 989-6000

**ENTRÉ**



Submitted

**Olde Salem Brewery - with former Governor Ralph Northam**

when they walk through our front doors. That alone requires so much effort and strategy," she said. "We started creating Olde Salem Brewing Company [in Salem] in the summer of 2017 and our opening day was that November 21. Our most common purchases are the Work Hard, Play Hard Kolsch and the Township Rebellion IPA."

Asked to explain the company's relationship with the community, co-owner Kyle Franklin said, "We have a family-like atmosphere

where people can hang out, watch sports and of course, enjoy a well-crafted beer. The craft beer scene has exploded in the Valley, and I'm thankful that we are part of that conversation."

A passionate team of dedicated individuals keeps Big Lick Brewing Company afloat. Long before President Bryan Summerson (and former educator) hired Donovan Reed last year, the West Virginia native was well-versed in the industry, having interned at



Submitted


**Starr Hill Brewery**

a brewery in Fayetteville, WV. Since Reed is a beer nerd, distinct flavors are near and dear to her heart.

“Right now, we are on a 15-barrel system. Early on, we were on a two barrel system [at a much smaller location] which just got us through the week,” Reed, the Taproom Manager, said. “Two barrels are more like experimental beers; you get to have fun with it and play with it. Our 15 barrels are like our golden safety net. Brewing ultimately is a science project. It comes down to having a routine and being able to know your recipes and system.”

Unlike some other breweries, every bartender at Big Lick is Cicerone certified, meaning they have earned the trademarked title by demonstrating proven experience in acquiring, selecting and serving a wide range of beers. Parkway Brewery Company,

A Few Old Goats (AFOG), Barrel Chest Wine & Beer, Golden Cactus Brewing, Twins Creeks Brewpub and Twisted Track are some of the other local establishments that people enjoy. Jack Anderson claims he’s visited each of the aforementioned places and says the best breweries all have three things in common – unique recipes, expanded distribution and eye-catching label and logo designs. Most have food trucks on site if they don’t serve food from their own kitchens; many offer live music from local bands as well. All have become community gathering spots.

“People know quality when they experience it. A company cannot make it in this industry without support from the community,” Reed said. “There is a reason why some breweries and wineries make it and others don’t. Oftentimes, it’s not that complicated to figure out why.” 

## BUSINESS BANKING SOLUTIONS

*Customized to fit just right*



You've put everything into this dream. Choose a partner equally committed to success with all your business banking essentials under one roof.

- ✓ **Checking, Savings, & Investment Accounts**
- ✓ **Business Visa® Credit Card**
- ✓ **Business Auto Loans**
- ✓ **Commercial Mortgages**
- ✓ **Secured and Unsecured Lines of Credit**

Talk with our Business Services team today to learn more about banking products that work as hard as you do.



[memberonefcu.com](http://memberonefcu.com) | 800.666.8811

Federally insured by NCUA  
Membership Eligibility Required






## ROA plans for future growth

Any renovations and expansion at Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport is still some time away and it all starts with updating the Master Plan, then getting a sign-off from the FAA. The public weighed in at an open house held last month as well, not the last time they will be asked for input, no doubt. Mike Stewart is executive director of the Airport Commission - before that overall plan goes to the FAA for review airport officials wanted to hear what those who fly out of ROA had to say.

Existing conditions at the airport and a vision for its future were the focus - along with details from the draft Master Plan: "when you talk about the runway extension, we know that's going to be a multiyear process," says Stewart, "it's going to take a lot of preliminary work. You want to try and get this thing on paper. It's not just a planning document; it's also somewhat of a funding document. At the end of the day, you want to try and keep the cost down to the airlines and to this area. We want to try and get ourselves positioned to whatever grants and federal or state funding that might be out there."

That runway extension (envisioned to span via a bridge over I-581) would also allow for larger planes - to and from different destinations perhaps - at Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. "We have to operate towards what the forecasts say the region's going to grow to and forecast the [airport] traffic along with that," adds Stewart, who came aboard at ROA last year. "There are a lot of smart people in this region that think we can have very explosive growth based on what's going on in the economic development world - or even the tourism world for that matter."

As ROA fights to keep local fliers away from other airports in Greensboro, Raleigh, Charlotte etc. where the longer drive is offset by more flight options and lower ticket prices, increasing the choices available right here in the valley is also an economic development engine that can help attract prospective employers as well. "Most of this kind of work doesn't happen overnight," Stewart cautions about plans for expansion of runways, additional gates etc. at ROA. Stay tuned. 

THERE'S  
SOMETHING  
HAPPENING  
HERE

By Gene Marrano

### Executive Summary:

*It won't happen overnight, but the Roanoke Valley's air hub is betting on economic growth as it makes long range plans.*

“It's not just a planning document; it's also somewhat of a funding document. We have to operate towards what the forecasts say...

## Emerald Isle takeaways

I suppose it's an obligatory thing to do—to share insights when you return from any trip abroad. I told myself this particular venture would be one far removed from work. (I didn't even activate my mobile phone for international use; only checking in briefly at night with the lodging's wifi. And what kind of business publisher does THAT?)

Anyway, I'll limit all the stories and observations to just two—as difficult as that is to do. And I'll make these two insights brief and about business as well as separating them to one positive and one somewhat negative.

### Number One: Size

Americans have a reputation for BIG. Mostly, Americans are chided for that, too. We do too many things (if not EVERYTHING) in a big, loud, perhaps even obnoxious way. Well guess what? I'm kind of okay with that. Although I find the small and compact charming and endearing; some things, I must admit, are just better when they're bigger. I wasn't worried about damaging my rental car myself, for example; but when I see even the locals smashing and scraping up against each other—it just confirms it to me: the roads are just too small. Too small for even the smaller vehicles. There are no 53' trucks scampering down the “highway” (that's super nice!); but Jaysus, at least make the lane wide enough for your side view mirror on your already tiny car. I'll take the wide-open-spaces of USA's bigger roads, bigger cars, bigger appliances, bigger structures and interiors. The food? Yeah, we're too big on most of our portions here. But it's kind of a gobshite mess to cram everything and every person up against one another like we're all still 5'1” in medieval times. (And there are as many BIG local strapping fellows and gals in Ireland as there are here.) Another size fact: the larger the town, the smaller the dog.

### Number Two: Networking

Here's where our friends across the pond beat us. In a BIG way, speaking of size. The Irish know how to socialize. Indeed, this is one stereotype and generalization that is absolutely true. I found the most serendipitous random gatherings of two-or-more-folks to be more socially engaging than almost any American function. We might match that energy in some sporting events or select concerts; but few American activities come close to the camaraderie you see in any Irish setting. The pubs, ummm... yeah for sure. But you “see” conversation every place. And whereas you might feel (well, I do) that you are interrupting when you make that first statement in a group of everyone chattering... over there—you're immediately drawn in to the group. It's an amazing phenomenon that takes four times the amount of alcohol over here for that to happen. I used the word “networking” here, because that's how we keep identifying this as a necessary business skill here; but the Irish have no need for formality in that definition. Good cheer and conversation is a birthright that just doesn't require development or workshops. My wife, Emily, and I (who normally kind of stick to ourselves) found ourselves caught up in many happy exchanges as if among friendships that would take much, much longer to “develop” here.

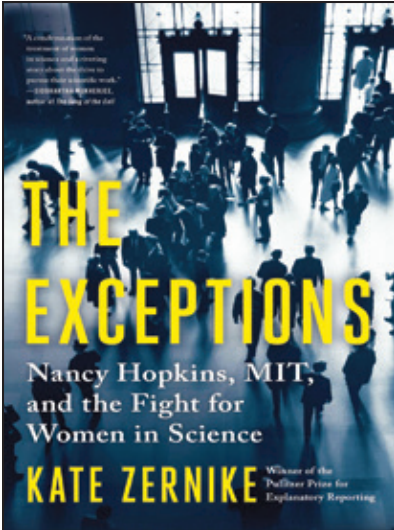
And there ya' have it. Call it blarney if ye want; but I swear to you it be true. 



## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:**  
*Travel notes on business  
from our publisher's  
recent adventure.*



Stock

## FRONTReviews >

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

### *A long, hard fight with progress made*

The battle to get more girls and women interested in pursuing STEM careers is well documented but in the 60's and 70's the fight was a much tougher one, with women pursuing high level positions seeking research positions in the medical field that battled discrimination and blatant sexism in what was a boys club; a very formidable obstacle. *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science* by Kate Zernike (Scribner, 2023), a Pulitzer Prize winner for Explanatory Reporting, lays it all out in meticulous and often infuriating detail. Getting a seat at the table – not to mention precious lab space and coveted grants - for Hopkins and the other women profiled often meant forming alliances with other females, sympathetic male colleagues and the threat of lawsuits.

These women were indeed brave pioneers and as the ratio of female-to-male researchers and scientists edges toward parity now, today's younger women owe a debt of gratitude to these intrepid warriors of an older generation, many of whom made important breakthroughs in the medical field despite a myriad of obstacles.

—Gene Marrano

### *Upscale eatery in old Firehouse*

If you haven't checked out what's going on inside the old fire station #1 in downtown Roanoke take a peek some night. TexTur, which manufactures unique, upcycled furniture on 9th Street Southeast has opened a dazzling showroom that is an interior designer's delight. The boutique hotel upstairs is outfitted with TexTur furnishings and is certainly a unique experience. Then there is "Stock" – the cool, upscale go-there-to-impress restaurant. The bar is dazzling, the lighting and ambiance is just right; you can watch the chefs do their stuff at center stage while you nurse a beverage or wait for an order. The food is a bit pricey, and the portions weren't overwhelming, but the charcuterie board was very good. Great place for a date or a night out with your significant other, or just a friend. Give it a try when you're ready to take the overall dining experience up a notch.

—Gene Marrano





Food Hut



Donnie D's

## *From food truck to Food Hut*

Occupying a small space attached to Golden Cactus Brewing in the west end of downtown Roanoke, the folks at Food Hut have a good thing going. I've had the Cuban sandwich twice; the menu can change from time to time and currently shows offerings like a curry burger (that sounds good), some unique sandwiches and sides with exotic names as well. Flavor seems to be the name of the game with Food Hut and the nice thing is you can order at the window and head inside to Golden Cactus for a craft beer. They'll deliver your order. The fries were good too. Give it a try, Food Hut is almost like a stationary food truck and a welcome addition to downtown Roanoke's eclectic cuisine offerings.

—Gene Marrano

## *Donnie D's is it*

Every now and then some new restaurant will open up in a community and it immediately takes off and becomes one of those places everyone talks about. Such is the case of Donnie D's Bagels & Deli in Daleville (Botetourt County). Known simply as Donnie D's, the joint ain't exactly new anymore, but it still feels like one of those best new places. Look closely at the name and logo, and you might see that "NY Style" tag; but it doesn't matter that it really does match

my experience with the Big Apple's version... ain't no southerner gonna pass it up just because no gravy or grits are spilling off the plate. Donnie and Ashley and the crew at this shop serve it up right, I'm telling you.

If you live near Daleville, it's all you can do not to stop off every morning; and if you live further away, you'll find yourself going out of the way just to snag this slice of perfection. Though so many of us love that "everything bagel" I've found a new love I can't resist... the cheddar cheese bagel. Good lord. Slap anything you like on that baby. And speaking of that, the menu is everything you could want; so good, I wish they had stickers so I could track it until I've had every offering. Donnie D's has gone mobile, too; so keep a look out for that and other business opening news that might be around the corner. One big bad bagel-y warning: Donnie D's is appropriately open every day, from 6am to 3pm, where they make it all from scratch. I've seen more than one poor, luckless soul frustrated and sobbing real tears at the locked door when they showed up a tad too late. (Donnie D's has announced they will open a second location on Brandon Avenue in Roanoke this Fall)

—Tom Field

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



## Forks, corks, and umbrellas >

The Blacksburg Partnership's annual **Fork & Cork** was held April 22 at the Historic Smithfield Plantation on the Virginia Tech campus. Although the weather skipped between rain-no rain-sun-no sun, that didn't deter the wine enthusiasts as there was no noticeable difference in the usual crowd and draw to this popular festival. Once again, the event presented local and regional wines, ciders and spirits as well as food trucks, culinary and other merchant vendors, and live music. Said one first-time attendee, "This is the best; I would still enjoy it if it snowed!"

## City of Champions receives state grant >

The **City of Salem** has received nearly \$55,000 from the Virginia Tourism Corporation Marketing Incentive Program that will be used this calendar year for promotion and marketing of the **Salem Fair**, the **Salem Half Marathon**, **Longwood Park** music events, and **Salem's antique shops**. The Salem Fair's \$20,000 grant will enhance advertising efforts in Southwest Virginia, Richmond, and Northern Virginia. The Salem Half Marathon's \$14,887 award will help organizers attract runners from Raleigh, Richmond, and Charlotte to participate in races and experience Virginia's Blue Ridge. The \$20,000 Destination Marketing Grant will bring music lovers from other areas into Salem to enjoy "Jazz in July" and "Pickin In The Park". A portion of this grant will be used to elevate the profile of Salem's various antique shops that regularly lure out of town visitors into the city. Said Carey Harveycutter, Salem's Tourism Director, "from the fair's



midway to the music performer's stage, to the back booth in one of our fabulous antique stores, we want our patrons to have a first-class experience. These generous grants will help us enhance all of these events and activities."

## NRV localities host senior games >

A total of 155 senior athletes, aged 50 years and older, participated in 30 events, with medals awarded to all first, second, and third place finishers in each age division at the 2023 **New River Valley Senior Olympic Games**. The NRV Senior Olympic Games were held the week of April 24 and organized by the parks and recreation departments in Montgomery County; the Towns of Christiansburg and Wytheville; and Radford City.

From Badminton to Wii Bowling and several events in between, the 155 senior athletes visited several locations throughout the New River Valley for daily competitions throughout the week. "We had the privilege of hosting this year's event," said **Amanda Terry**, Montgomery County's Active Adult/Senior Recreation Program Supervisor. "This is one event we all look forward to annually. It's great to see so many active adults who are young at heart have the opportunity to compete and fellowship together."



Submitted



Submitted

## Healing Ceilings >

**Friendship** senior living and rehabilitation, participated in Healing Ceilings this year, a partnership between the **Taubman Museum** and **Carilion Clinic**. This is the second year that Friendship has participated. Studies have shown that art within the walls of hospitals can improve blood pressure, lower anxiety, and decrease pain medication intake or even length of stay of patients looking at the work. Many patients react well to depictions of natural scenes and calm waters. In April, Friendship residents spent two days dedicated to painting ceiling tiles that were displayed last week at the Taubman. They will now be placed around Carilion Clinic, including their Children's, Oncology, and Cardiology facilities.



## Volunteer Montgomery Awards \$1,000 Scholarships to health care students >

The **Volunteer Montgomery** (formerly known as RSVP) Scholarship Committee reviewed nine applications for this year's \$1,000 scholarship awards. The scholarships were awarded to **Erika Miyazaki**, a student from Blacksburg High School who will attend the University of Virginia to pursue studies in nursing, and **Carson Gilmore**, a student from Blacksburg High School who will attend Rice University to pursue a degree in kinesiology. *Photo: (L to R) Erika Miyazaki, Scholarship Recipient; Executive Director of NRVCARES Andi Golusky; Volunteer Montgomery Coordinator Mandy Hayes; and Carson Gilmore, Scholarship Recipient.*



## Dan knows bikes >

**Dan Lucas** of **Cardinal Bicycle** is one of a handful of people nationwide with a Master Level Turbo Technician designation from Specialized and a Level 2 BICP Mountain Bike Skills Instructor. Lucas, who has more than a decade in the cycling business, is the Rider Experience Manager at Cardinal Bicycle. Lucas underwent training and testing this winter and spring to earn both certifications. The Master Level Turbo Technician credential is the highest level of certification from Specialized to work on e-bikes and Lucas is one of only a handful of people in the nation who have completed the 4-level training program. "Dan brings skills and expertise and passion that you won't find anywhere else," said **Whit Ellerman**, Owner of Cardinal Bicycle. "He'd rather celebrate a great ride than the work he's put in, but his dedication to cycling shows in everything he does."

## VWCC's latest articulation agreement is with RU >

A signing ceremony at **Virginia Western Community College** last when the two-year school signed an articulation agreement with **Radford University** – allowing biotechnology students at Virginia Western to be guaranteed admission at Radford. Virginia Western will develop an associate degree program in biotechnology that aligns with requirements at Radford University. It's all part of the efforts to make the region a bio-tech job creator. Dr. **Bobby Sandel** is the president at VWCC. "It gives opportunity for our students to be able to transfer seamlessly with a real 2+2 [years to bachelor's degree] to their biology department. The key to us is that [**Bret Danilowicz**] has opened his arms up for the community college and our students to have an opportunity at Radford University."

*(Pictured with Sandel at center: VWCC Dean of STEM Dr. Amy White at left; Radford University president Bret Danilowicz at right)*



Gene Marrano



Submitted

## LG Alleghany goes nuclear >

**LewisGale Hospital Alleghany** recently unveiled its new Nuclear Medicine SPECT CT equipment at its **Low Moor** campus. The testing can help better evaluate and diagnose Parkinson's Disease, thyroid, and parathyroid hyper/hypo activity studies, cardiac stress, skeletal imaging, gastrointestinal imaging, among others. It combines a Single Photo Emission Computed Tomography (SPECT) with a traditional Nuclear Medicine Scan. The result is a test that shows the function of the organ system (NM) combined with the detailed anatomy of the body (CT). This aids clinicians in diagnosing certain conditions and overseeing treatment plans. "These new tests offer the latest technology for imaging patients at LewisGale Hospital Alleghany, and underscores our investment and commitment to this community," said **Tom Elmore**, LewisGale Hospital Alleghany imaging director. "The equipment cuts the exam table time for the patient in half for most exams."



## Iconic mural refreshed >

The late **Dorothy Gillespie**, a native of Roanoke, was a renowned sculptor who was widely exhibited around the country. But she was also a painter and today her mural on the outside wall of the building on 2nd Avenue in downtown that also houses the 2 Chill Restaurant was celebrated again yesterday after it was repainted and restored to its former glory by two local artists. Roanoke Vice Mayor **Joe Cobb** at a rededication ceremony: "the arts in so many ways tell the story of our city. I moved here 22 years ago. I've always seen this mural. I didn't realize until I saw the renewed colors just how truly magnificent this mural is. Its been a mainstay here since 1979." A grant from the Roanoke Arts Commission and funding from the owner of the building where Accentuated Forms in Space is located helped restore the Gillespie work, which was described as "abstract impressionism."



Gene Marrano

## Dawgs take home first title in front of 5400 at Berglund Center >

Days removed from their overtime win over Birmingham that clinched the Southern Professional Hockey League championship, the **Roanoke Rail Yards Dawgs** paraded the SPHL President's Cup through downtown Roanoke Saturday before taking part in a pep rally at Berglund Center. **Robyn Schon**, the venue's GM, says it'll be hard to come down from the high of watching the team secure a title. "We've not experienced something like this in our generation. Its just the most awesome feeling. I can't wait for October to get here and our Dawgs to hit the ice again." Robyn Schon is no hockey novice - she once worked for the NHL's Detroit Red Wings

It's the Star City's first pro hockey championship since 1974. Team chair **Jaime McGinn**, a former NHL veteran, says he always believed the city would accept the Dawgs when the team arrived 7 years ago. "I think there was hockey hungry people [in Roanoke] but they had a bad taste in their mouth (see Express, Vipers). We asked would you ever go again? We had to do it properly and it took time but what a wild ride over seven years for us, what we've been through [like a one season COVID hiatus], the ups and downs." Jamie McGinn took over the chairman role from his father Bob before the start of the season that just ended with a title under head coach **Dan Bremner** for the Dawgs, which set attendance records this past season and drew well over 4000 loud, loyal fans per game.





Ian Price



## A better bus stop >

For a second time **Valley Metro**, **The Town of Vinton** and the **Vinton Breakfast Lions Club** have come together to build a modern looking, covered bus stop in the town; the newest is at Lakeside Plaza Shopping Store where Kroger is located. Vinton Town Manager **Pete Peters**: "public transportation is very important to us, not only ... within the town limits but it also connects us with downtown Roanoke. A lot of our workforce comes from Roanoke, and they ride the Valley Metro in [to Vinton]. A lot of our businesses and restaurants in particular rely on Valley Metro." Peters said supply chain issues and then a partial rebuild after the new Lakeside bus stop was hit by a vehicle delayed today's official launch. The local Lions Club raised around \$30,000 for the joint project. A remodeled bus stop at Precision Fabrics Group on West Virginia Avenue was the previous joint project also involving the Lions Club.





## Virginia Tech, Roanoke City students ponder life in outer space >

Concerns were mixed among 150 **Roanoke City** elementary school students gathered at the **Virginia Tech Roanoke Center** as they pondered making a new home 240 trillion miles from Earth. Some worried about taking up resources needed by other forms of life, others asked about the possibility of hostile neighbors, and some fretted about what the chickens aboard their spaceship would eat. The third, fourth, and fifth graders were all participating in the Roanoke Center's ACE: Association for the Colonization of Exoplanets program, which challenges students to plan the settlement of a rocky, Earth-sized planet in another solar system.

"Students receive specialized mission parameters based on the engineering discipline that inspires them: aerospace, agricultural, biomedical, civil, electrical, or mechanical," said **Ashley Sloan**, the center's lead STEM instructor. "They then use real data that NASA has collected about the exoplanet, TRAPPIST-1e, to identify opportunities and challenges and how they should proceed to colonize this new world." ACE is one of several programs offered by the Roanoke Center that provide hands-on learning in science, technology, engineering, and math. The students are all part of Roanoke City's PLATO program for gifted students. They grappled with problems such as traveling through space, growing food, fighting disease, and developing clean energy sources while building their own prototypes for devices that would help the fledgling colony survive.

*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.*

**TECH/INDUSTRY  
FRONT**



**Gilmore**



**Sellari**

Now in its 11th year of business, Firefli, a Roanoke-based digital studio specializing in brand and product, has embraced remote work culture as its team grows to include talent from across the United States, including California, Texas, Florida, and Virginia. New hires include **Gary Gilmore**, Vice President of Brand, **Will Sellari**, Creative Production Lead, **Ashley Perez**, Interactive Art Director,



**Perez**



**Senesac**



**Schober**

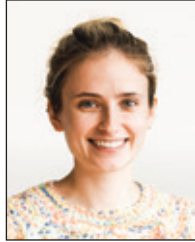


**Cornthwait**

**Emily Senesac**, Web Writer and Producer,



**Larson**



**York**

and **Sara Schober**, Administrative Assistant. Recently promoted are **John Cornthwait**, President + Chief Operating Officer, **Sarah Larson**, Project Manager and **Carly York**, Art Director.

**FINANCIAL  
FRONT**

First National Corporation has announced that **W. Todd Ross** has been hired as Market President for the Roanoke Valley Region. He is responsible for all lines of business



**Ross**

banking, and business development, while partnering with other core functions such as retail, treasury, and mortgage banking. Ross has over 30 years of banking experience in the Roanoke Valley Region, including leadership and production roles with several regional and local banks.

**EDUCATION  
FRONT**



**Springer**

**Paul Springer** has been named the new head of Virginia Tech's

**LOCAL LENDERS. YOUR NEIGHBORS.**



**Purchase | Refinance | Construction**

**540-591-5000 • www.vamtnmortgage.com**

Department of Human Development and Family Science. Since 2007, Springer has been a faculty member in the Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he also serves as associate dean for student success. He will start at Virginia Tech on July 1.



**Barrett**

Virginia Tech Dining Services has added new leadership for dining facilities.

**John Barrett** is the new associate director of Dining Services and Dietrick Hall. Barrett has been with Dining Services since he attended Virginia Tech as a student, starting in 1990 as a catering employee. **Katey Carr** is the new assistant director of Turner

## 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.



**Carr**

culinary world, having trained as a chef and held many management positions. Among his accomplishments, Magnant has been a guest chef at the White House.



**Magnant**

Place. Carr has worked with the Dining Service since 2009. She graduated from Virginia Tech with a degree in hospitality and tourism management. **Paul Magnant** is the new associate director of Owens Hall. Magnant has over 40 years of experience in the



**Skow**

**Dane Skow** has joined Virginia Tech as the university's new associate vice president for research computing. Skow succeeds Terry Herdman, who retired from Virginia Tech last year. Skow oversees operations for high-performance and research computing

infrastructure and services at Virginia Tech, and leads the Division of Information Technology's Advanced Research Computing unit, which administers the university's primary high-performance computing resources including large-scale data storage, visualization, and consulting services for the research community. For the past 11 years, Skow has also run his own HPC consulting firm, Dane Skow Enterprises, helping clients in big data and analytics industries.

## SENIOR FRONT

Friendship senior living and rehabilitation has announced the appointment of **Nicole**



# 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.

**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.

**Daniel Colston**, CFP®, CEPA runs a tax and investing firm in Roanoke, Upward Financial Planning, specializing in helping business owners and retirees. [daniel@upwardfp.com]

**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 FFCU provides local underwriting and personalized services that benefit a variety of individuals, operating businesses, and non-profit organizations.

**Doug Doughty** is retired after spending 45 years at the Roanoke Times. After graduation from UVA in 1974, he was hired as a hockey beat reporter by the Roanoke Times. Many of his early assignments involved covering the Salem Pirates Class A baseball team when he witnessed — and later wrote about — the death of Alfredo Edmead

in a collision with one of his Pirates teammates. Doughty later became the UVA beat reporter, covering football, golf, lacrosse and a host of other sports, including the Cavaliers baseball team when it won the NCAA championship with one of his sons on the team. Doug Doughty is also a member of the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame. [doughtysports@aol.com]

**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]

**Micah Fraim** is a top-referred Certified Public Accountant and business finance strategist who is well-connected in the regional business community and nationally recognized. Publisher of The Little Big Small Business Book, he also publishes a blog at www.fraim.cpa/blog and is frequently interviewed as a business financial expert in national media channels. [micahfraim@fraimcpa.com]

**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).

**Zack Jackson** is the host of the K92 Mornin' Thang radio show on WXLK and co-founder of The JG

Agency, a freelance marketing and creative consulting department for small businesses. He can be reached at [zack@thejgagency.com]

**Jennifer Leake** CMC® is a Certified Management Consultant, showing companies how to build Best Job Ever cultures. A certified expert in a wide range of assessments, she equips companies to better hire, engage, and lead so employees LOVE what they do, ENJOY who they work with, and RESPECT who they work for. (Jennifer@AssessmentPros.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. He also now hosts and co-produces "Business Matters" on Blue Ridge PBS. [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.

**Shawn Nowlin** is an award-winning writer, photographer and content creator. In addition to the Roanoke Tribune, his byline has also appeared in ColorsVA Magazine and the Salem Times Register, among other publications. Born and raised in Roanoke, Virginia, Shawn is a proud product of the Star City. [shawnowlin1989@aol.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.

**Emma Thomas** is a Roanoke native and 2022 Hollins University Graduate. She works for WFIR News Talk Radio as a reporter. [thomasek432@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]



**Miracle**

**Miracle** to lead as the Director of Home and Community Based Services. Prior to joining the Friendship team, Miracle has 12 years' experience working with this population in many

different capacities. She most recently worked as a Senior Memory Care Director before relocating from Maryland and joining the Local Office on Aging. When Miracle is not working, she's enjoying the outdoors hiking with her husband and dog.

## NON-PROFIT FRONT

**Rebekah Meadows** is the new Chief



**Meadows**

Executive Officer for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia, based in Roanoke. She is a familiar face at BGCSWVA, having served the organization in multiple roles throughout her 11-year

tenure. Meadows served most recently as Senior Director of Programming and held the role of Interim Chief Executive Officer following the departure of Michelle Davis, who left to work for the national organization.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano*

“ ” It's about having your customers feel like they were part of something special. — Page 29

# BIGGER. THAN. EVER.



5/12 - Lynyrd Skynyrd Tribute: Tuesday's Gone | 5/13 - Parmalee  
 5/19 - Van Halen Tribute: 84 & Def Leppard Tribute: Excitable | 5/20 - Jo Dee Messina  
 5/26 - Warren Zeiders | 5/27 - KIX | 5/31 - Jackson Dean  
 6/3 - Chase Matthew | 6/9 - Dave Matthews Tribute



### Smart Citizen

The community of Floyd announced today that Citizens Telephone Cooperative (Citizens) was recently named a Smart Rural Community<sup>SM</sup> (SRC) provider by NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association. SRC is a national network of communities powered by innovative rural broadband providers that are building a brighter future for small-town America. The program promotes rural broadband and its role in supporting innovative economic development, effective education, efficient energy distribution and use, state-of-the-art health care, and other important issues for rural America.

### Layman larger

Layman Distributing is expanding in a major way in Salem. The company announced a nearly \$7 million investment in its new facility off Apperson Drive that will also add 42 new jobs. The 75-year old wholesale and woman-owned business provides products and services convenience stores, restaurants,

institutions and similar retail outlets.

### Griffith on broadband Part 2

Congressman Morgan Griffith wants to know why so many people in rural areas do not have access to broadband. Griffith represents the 9th district of Virginia. As the Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations he led a hearing last month on broad band deployment. According to Government Accountability Office statistics he cited, at least 17 percent of rural Americans lack access to fixed broadband. Griffith said the federal government is throwing money at the issue with little success.

“There’s potential for overlap [of government programs], duplication and conflicting messages,” said Griffith from the committee dais. “Current federal efforts to increase broadband access involve more than 100 programs administered by 15 federal agencies – and yet millions of Americans still lack access.” The Government

Accountability Office noted reports that US broadband efforts are not guided by a national strategy with clear roles, goals, objectives and performance measures. Much of the 9th district is rural. The Commonwealth of Virginia is also working to solve the lack of broadband, announcing recently almost \$60 million in grants to support broadband access to more than 29,000 homes.

### The final frontier for Tech, Mason

Virginia Tech, together with partners from George Mason University, has been awarded a \$2 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) Through the agency’s Computer and Information Science and Engineering Community Research Infrastructure (CCRI) program, researchers will develop distributed, mobile space and terrestrial networking infrastructure for multi-constellation coexistence. Principal investigator Jonathan Black, along with fellow Virginia Tech engineering faculty, has teamed with George Mason

University to develop a network test bed called SpaceNet for the industry standard technology behind internet satellite constellations. This project is built on the initial trans-Atlantic test bed developed through a Commonwealth Cyber Initiative-supported program in collaboration with the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom.

### More Broadband less red tape >

U.S. Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA, 9th District) has introduced the Barriers and Regulatory Obstacles Avoids Deployment of Broadband Access and Needs Deregulatory (BROADBAND) Leadership Act, legislation aiming to streamline deployment of broadband infrastructure. “Bridging the digital divide requires the rapid deployment of more broadband infrastructure. The BROADBAND Leadership Act will facilitate this goal by removing regulatory obstacles and requiring more timely decisions by government entities overseeing the permitting of broadband projects,”

# Putting you **FIRST**

- ✔ **Customized** banking solutions
- ✔ **Hi-tech financial tools** at the right price
- ✔ **Established bankers** providing a **uniquely personal business banking** experience

**FirstBank**   
there's power in one®

540.473.2761 | [fbvirginia.com/business](http://fbvirginia.com/business)

**Committed to the Roanoke Valley**

said Griffith. The BROADBAND Leadership Act would streamline permitting processes for telecommunications service providers by preserving state and local zoning authority subject to "reasonable limitations," states a release from Griffith's office such as shot clocks and cost-based fees, to ensure providers receive an answer on their application in a timely manner.

---

### *New River Vendors Village Opens in Pembroke*

A unique specialty shop featuring locally made artisanal and Appalachian crafts has opened in downtown Pembroke. The shop offers a collection of handmade gifts, including a variety of textiles, woodwork, stained glass, jewelry and other fine crafts. Vintage and antique treasures are part of the mix, including home decor reimaged for a new life. The shop is the vision of Awesome Blossom owner, Tami Quesenberry. "I wanted a place where we can create together and share our gifts," she stated. "Each item in

our shop is a work of art, and we are proud to support local artisans who are keeping creative arts alive," shared Bonnie Cranmer of BGreen Designs. Cranmer is a 2021 graduate of the business accelerator program, The Gauntlet. She makes handcrafted herb and flower infused paper and is a partner in the New River Vendors Village. "The gift shop is open Thursday - Sunday and is located at 619 Snidow Street, Pembroke.

---

### *Explore Park expands amenities*

Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism held a ribbon cutting ceremony last month to celebrate improvements that include Treetop Quest's Chick Pea courses and a new playground at Explore Park. Treetop Quest, Explore Park's aerial adventure and zipline course, launched three new courses in 2022 including two Chick Pea courses for ages 4 to 6 "which features lower obstacles for the kids, to get adjusted to the belay safety system they will experience

## *Have an announcement about your business?*

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

once they're older on the 7-and-up courses," says Alex North with Roanoke County, and an expanded Course 2A to feature a 9-element extension. Explore Park's new playground was made possible through partnerships and donations provided by Friends of the Blue Ridge and Roanoke Valley Guns and Hoses Hockey.

---

### *Goodwill announces additional partners for Melrose Plaza project*

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys welcomes another new partnership for Melrose Plaza. Goodwill is partnering with Enteros Design for the professional design and construction services of Melrose Plaza, which will offer a full-service grocery store, retail banking center, adult high school with free childcare, and a holistic community

wellness center. The new Melrose Plaza will be located at the existing Goodwill Roanoke Jobs Campus. Enteros Design will transform the current Goodwill mission and administrative offices into the new community center; also collaborating with Roanoke-based Civil Engineers at Mattern & Craig and Mechanical Electrical & Plumbing Engineers at Ascent Engineering Group on Melrose Plaza.

---

### *Area artisans set up shop in Bedford*

Two local entrepreneurs have come together to open a retail shop in the Town of Bedford, featuring a variety of local vendors in one location. Taylor Dowe is a co-owner: "we have a little consignment in there, [and] handmade goods from 40 local artists, anywhere from Roanoke, Bedford, Botetourt, Salem and

**Switch your business to First Bank.**

*Let's grow together!*

PETER JESSEE



SANDRA CRAFT



TERESA FRIDLEY



surrounding areas." The HomeGrown Co. is at the intersection of Main and Bridge Streets across from Centertown Park in downtown Bedford.

*Dr. Pepper Park gets a boost*

After being awarded a \$5000 matching grant in 2022, Dr. Pepper Park at The Bridges has now received \$10,000 from the Virginia Tourism Corporation "marketing leverage program." Dr. Pepper Park president Waynette Anderson says it will support the music venue's "Bigger.Than.Ever" 2023 campaign: "the musical diversity that we're bringing to the valley this year, there really is something for everyone. With more shows we have to spend more money on advertising. This grant is really helping us."

Anderson says the Park's digital marketing campaign this year is focused on attracting a wider audience of people to the venue. "We're bringing a lot of people to the valley from the region and out of state.

By us doing back to back shows like we're doing almost every weekend ... that increases hotel stays and brings in a lot of revenue."

*Rotanz a Hall of Famer*

His goal clinched a national lacrosse collegiate championship for Roanoke College in the late 70's and then Bob Rotanz went on to co-found Mac & Bob's Restaurant in Salem. Rotanz has now been inducted into the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame: "it's just overwhelming," he said during the ceremony in Virginia Beach. "I owe this award to all my teammates, Roanoke College and my great coach Paul Griffin. I'm so honored to represent Roanoke College here tonight."

*Senior living center recognized again*

Brookdale Roanoke has been recognized by U.S. News & World Report as Best Memory Care among senior living communities across the nation, the second

year in a row the senior living community has been named to this list. Residents and family members were surveyed in thousands of Independent Living, Assisted Living, Memory Care, and Continuing Care Retirement Communities across the country. Events, food & dining, caregiving, management and staff were surveyed. The "Best Senior Living" category was added to the U.S. News & World Report listings in 2022

*Community garden coming to Vinton - soon*

Just a couple of doors down from Earthworks Pottery on South Pollard street in Vinton, Carrie Poff and a landowner who wants to remain anonymous are putting together a garden for those in Vinton who don't have one of their own. Poff, a local artist and owner of Brown Hound Tree Service, says she hopes the garden will provide more than just food to the community: "with the cost of food rising I think that more and more people are

becoming interested in being more self-sustaining. We want to provide an opportunity for people in Vinton to do so. It will also be an educational space." Poff says they're still laying down the foundations of the garden, so they won't be moving anyone into the plots until next spring.

*Mama Jean's finds a home*

A local barbecue/taco/cheesesteak etc. favorite is taking the leap from food trailer to brick and mortar after construction costs halted their initial plan to turn a home on Sanford Avenue (near Colonial Avenue in Roanoke) into a sit-down restaurant. Mama Jean's Barbecue has announced they'll be taking over the building on Brandon Avenue that used to house Jimmy V's. Owner and operator, Madison Ruckel, says they're excited about the new spot: "it's actually much larger than what we had. We were building just a starter place. This place has a large dining area that we would not

**THE KINGS**  
JUN 3

**NO FENCES**  
The Ultimate Tribute to Garth Brooks  
JUN 9

**BOCO FOOD TRUCK RODEO**

**Five Dollar Shake**  
Fuzzy Logic & Food Trucks!  
JUN 17 5-9PM  
extended hours event

**BANANAS AT LARGE**  
REUNION SHOW  
JULY 8

**Daleville**  
town center



have had. There's a lot of room to grow, park, and smoke our meats on site."

*Kaine partners on bipartisan bio-med bill*

U.S. Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Tim Kaine (D-VA) have introduced the Accelerating Biomedical Innovation Act, which would establish a network of universities to work with the private sector on the development of FDA-regulated products that

could be used to combat potential public health emergencies. "One of the many crucial lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of investing in countermeasure technologies—such as vaccines, tests, treatments, and personal protect equipment—that can save lives," said Kaine. "This commonsense, bipartisan legislation would support the university research [at UVA for example] we need to stay at the

cutting edge of those technologies."

*Dog Bowl partners with 5 Points Music Sanctuary*

5 Points Music Sanctuary is moving its outdoor live music series this summer to The Dog Bowl at Black Dog Salvage, which will also help raise money for 5 Points. Christa Stephens is with Black Dawg Salvage: "tickets online is exciting; the VIP area is exciting. [5 Points, which has its

indoor venue on Walnut Avenue SW] is known for producing memorable events. We're thrilled just to partner and help support the 5 Points Music Foundation and all the good works that they do." FloydFest favorite Abby Bryant and the Echoes is up next on June 3, with several other monthly shows planned after that. Reserve tickets on the 5 Points website.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano*

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

discover the college  
*inspired*  
by its mission

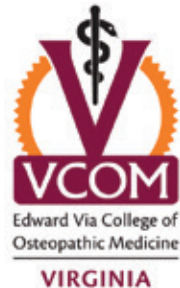


At VCOM, we are inspired to bring physicians to rural and medically underserved areas of southwest Virginia and the Appalachian region.

Our medical school based in Blacksburg, Virginia, trains students who are inspired to bring care to those most in need.

Visit us online to find out how you will be *inspired...*

[www.vcom.edu](http://www.vcom.edu)



For a copy of our Outcomes Reports, please see [www.vcom.edu/outcomes](http://www.vcom.edu/outcomes). ©2021 Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. All rights reserved. VCOM is certified by the State Council of Higher Education to operate in Virginia.



Courtesy photo

Crystal McBroom (left) and Erica Jenkins (right) in the Tattoo Experience show.

# Pulling Threads

By Emma Thomas

**For the past four years, Crystal McBroom and Erica Jenkins have pulled together threads across the Valley to put on a show that highlights the region's fashion industry.**

Mirroring the offerings of major cities like New York and Milan, Roanoke's Fashion Week is a multi-day ode to all things fashionable. But one thing that sets this show apart from others like it – its emphasis on elevating models and styles that embody the region's diversity.

Long before they teamed up to make Roanoke's Fashion Week a reality, McBroom and Jenkins were both deeply steeped in the fashion world. Crystal McBroom bought the Downtown Roanoke Boutique, La De Da, in 2019, after working there since 2008. Since then, the owner/operator has juggled running the store, raising children, and more recently, Fashion Week. She says her staff helps to keep all those balls in

the air, "They helped backstage, they helped with marketing...I really have an excellent team and that's how I ended up juggling my end of the process."

Erica Jenkins, meanwhile, has had a front row seat to the ever-evolving nature of fashion since she started her career as a model in 1985. Watching the industry shape itself into the one we know today has lent her the mantra that helps keep Roanoke's Fashion Week on the cutting edge – despite being far flung from more fashion forward cities, "You have to be open; you have to be willing to change. The culture changes all the time – you have to be willing to change with the culture."

The pair's official partnership began just



this year, though McBroom and La De Da have been a part of the show since its inception, “This year Erica put me on as part of her team, and we ended up putting on our own fashion show in conjunction...with the main show she usually does. We did some model calls at the store as well, so we were definitely more deeply involved this year than we had been in the past.”

Jenkins says that’s because, after three Fashion Weeks (it was in mid-April this year), she had learned the value of having a team behind you, “I’m also learning how extremely important a true team is. You can have anybody to help you, but not everyone believes in you...so, it’s important to have a team that believes in your brand as much as you do.”

Jenkins wanted to ensure that her shows display changing attitudes about what makes fashion. This year, that meant the addition of a tattoo show – highlighting the works of local tattoo artists with hand-painted clothing – and a drag show – which had local Queens strutting down the runway for a chance to be crowned Queen of the Runway. She says it’s important to her to make sure the show represents many different styles, “We have a ton of people who love fashion in Roanoke, and a lot of people have their own style – which I love. And that’s what makes fashion...you don’t want everybody to be the same, you want people to be different.”

McBroom says it’s safe to say that this week’s Fashion Week was the biggest

## ANYTHING BUT ORDINARY Frain & Cawley CPAs

TAKE YOUR BUSINESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

We won't just SAVE you money – we'll help you grow your business fast! Contact us to hear how!

**MAKE MICAH & DAVE SAVE YOU MONEY**



**FC** 325 MOUNTAIN AVE SW  
ROANOKE, VA 24016  
FRAINCPA.COM  
540.314.0345



Submitted

yet, “both of the big shows were full, so it’s almost like we will need even larger venues if they continue to get bigger – which is a great sign.”

But that’s not to say that the week went off without a hitch. Partially, Jenkins says that’s just the nature of planning a major event like this, “The week of Fashion Week we had four drop out. But then we picked up five! These are things that happen with every show. You just kind of have to prepare for that; you have to have your plan B’s.”


According to McBroom, though, this year was especially tough as the local industry struggles to find a way back to itself after the Pandemic. “Some people weren’t able to participate this year because, as you know, everyone’s having staffing issues.”

Besides affecting staffing, she adds that the Pandemic also had a marked effect on buying trends in the Valley, “...the sweats and things became very popular in 2020-2021. But moving into 2022 and now, they’re tired of it. People want to be exciting, they want statement pieces, but they still want them to be comfortable, so that is the challenge.”



Submitted

At this point, McBroom says the boutique business in Roanoke is uncertain. But she’s hopeful for a future with wider offerings than what’s currently available, “I would probably not open a store myself right now. I would wait and see what else is going to happen perhaps...but there’s definitely room for growth, I think we could use a lot of diversity in our local retail establishments.”

Despite all that it took to get the show off the ground this year, Jenkins and McBroom say they’re both excited for the future of Fashion week. Jenkins left it at this, “There were shows in-between that I actually even had to cancel...but we persevered; we got through it, and we’re here now. I’m grateful for that.” 

# FRONT NETWORK

Serving the Roanoke Valley Since 1983

Quality Daytime Care



**ADULT CARE CENTER**  
OF ROANOKE VALLEY





Thank You to these organizations that so generously support our mission. **(540) 981.2350**  
**accrv.org**  
2321 Roanoke Blvd. | Salem, VA 24153



**Christine A. Smith, CDFA®**  
Financial Advisor

**Smith & Associates**  
A financial advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC

**Blacksburg, Roanoke, Daleville Locations**  
ameripriseadvisors.com/christine.a.smith  
CA Insurance #0F69689

  
Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. Member FINRA and SIPC.



**BERRYFIELD**  
MARKETING & MEDIA  
do tell.

**TOM FIELD**  
PRESIDENT  
PO BOX 1041  
SALEM VA 24153  
**540 389 9945**  
540 798 9945 (M)  
TFIELD@BERRYFIELD.COM  
BERRYFIELD.COM



**Brown Hound Tree Service**

We have the **PEOPLE SKILLS**  
EXPERIENCE  
EQUIPMENT  
REPUTATION  
to take care of your property

**540-525-9787**  
brownhoundtreeservice.com



**ELLIOT**

**Electrical Excellence**  
~ Since 1946 ~

www.davishelliot.com  
(800) 755-6702

**Davis H. Elliot Company, Inc.**  
Full Service Electrical Contractor

““ We try to hire good managers and stay out of the way. — Page 16

**Put your Business Card  
in the FRONT for only \$149!**  
**Email ads@vbFRONT.com or call 540-389-9945**

# ADVERTISER INDEX

Adult Care Center .....	61	EZ Rampz.....	27
Ameriprise Financial / Christine Smith .....	61	FirstBank.....	54-55
Anytime Fitness.....	26	First Fridays .....	15
Berryfield .....	61	Fraim Crawley & Co CPA .....	59
Brown Hound Tree Service.....	61	Freedom First Credit Union .....	2
Carilion Clinic.....	5	F&S Building Innovations / Build Smart Institute .....	3
Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia .....	21	Goodwill Industries of the Valleys ....	17
Cox .....	23	MemberOne Federal Credit Union....	37
Daleville Town Center .....	56	Ridge View Bank .....	BC
Davis H. Elliot Company .....	61	Sponsor Hounds / Dr Pepper Park ....	53
Entre Computer Center.....	34	VCOM.....	57
		Virginia Business Systems .....	63
		Viginia Mountain Mortgage .....	50-51



You can go from one end of  
Williamson Road to another...  
Vietnam to Canada. — Page 20

## Get Your FRONT

### PRINT MAGAZINES

- **By Mail**     \$36/year (save 25%)  
vbFRONT.com (Distribution)
- **Free Sample Issues While Supplies Last**  
16 W Church Ave "Crafteria" (downtown Roanoke)  
coffee shops • clinics • chambers/tourism • libraries

### ONLINE

[vbFRONT.com](http://vbFRONT.com)





# Virginia Business Systems

---

## Fast Forward Office Technology

Helping Virginia Businesses grow  
through technology and superior service

### Our Services

Printers and Multi-Function Copiers  
Commercial and Industrial Printers  
VoIP Phone Systems  
Interactive White Boards  
Document Management Solutions  
Managed IT Services  
Managed Print Services



Roanoke | New River Valley  
Lynchburg | Charlottesville  
Richmond | Hampton Roads  
Shenandoah Valley

800-887-1683

[www.VAbusinesssystems.com](http://www.VAbusinesssystems.com)



**A reliable financial  
partner by your side.**

**That's how  
Carrie's changing  
business banking.**



**Carrie McConnell,  
President**



**LEARN HOW: 540.314.9650 | [RidgeViewBank.bank](https://RidgeViewBank.bank)**