

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 181

OCTOBER 2023

Project Management

Freeze Therapy

Regional Obituaries

SociaRae

Life Care Coordinators

Sinkland Farms

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*a life, a business*

FROM  
THE  
BOTTOM  
UP

Hunter Crigler  
Appalachian Property Preservation



**-HEIDI BUNDY**

**A LITTLE BIT HIPPY IN ROANOKE**

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

A potpourri of stories this month, from construction to the field of project management to social media companies helping businesses with their mission – to “freeze therapy,” and an agri-tourism business in the New River Valley that has grown its product largely through word of mouth and online posts. Not to mention a recent Gauntlet competition winner who left the fashion world behind to start a business just this year helping to coordinate geriatric care for seniors. With an aging population, expect to see more entrepreneurs addressing that field in the future.

A column by financial advisor Daniel Colston (Business Cents) provides food for thought as to investing and where to keep your money in these turbulent times, where inflation and high interest rates are not yet in the rear view mirror. We sort of pride ourselves on looking at a variety of aspects concerning the local business world every month. We hope you find this approach interesting as well. Happy reading.



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor



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# FROM THE BOTTOM UP

(or up from the bottom)

A business story. A life story.

By Tom Field



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Daniel Colston



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Jennifer Leake



Gene Marrano



Nicholas Vaassen

## 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



**Shannon Dominguez**



**Dan Dowdy**



**Tom Field**



**Shawn Nowlin**



**Michael Shelton**



**Dan Smith**

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“ Montgomery County includes Sinkland Farms in its list of reasons to move to the locality.

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

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Tom Field

Hunter Crigler

# FROM THE BOTTOM UP

*(or up from the bottom)*

## A business story. A life story.

By Tom Field

---

**A locally owned and operated foundation repair business is making a mark in the Roanoke area. It's founder and start up—that's another story.**

"Expectations," says Hunter Crigler. That's what it's all about.

He's talking about the way he conducts business. He uses the word frequently; and you even hear it from the crew.

"We have an expectations meeting," Crigler,

owner of Appalachian Property Preservation, begins. "That's when we meet with the customer and make sure everyone understands the scope of work."

That makes sense. But you might be surprised how that detail is overlooked when people work with contractors to repair or maintain



a property, he says. Especially homeowners.

For one thing, there are a lot of things his company can do. In fact, the timeline shows all kinds of construction and property maintenance activities. But recently, the business shifted to the specialization of foundation servicing and repair. The list is extensive, but for the most part, Appalachian Property Preservation performs foundation and structural repairs, crawlspace and basement water management, as well as some mold remediation in unfinished areas.

The company's clients are principally property owners directly or indirectly referred to by real estate agents, inspectors, and other contractors. The name—longer than and more geographically-inclined than the competition—is sort of a double entendre. Originally, Crigler says "preservation" meant preserving the bank's asset. That's because at the beginning, APP restored homes in foreclosure. Making them safe and presentable and saleable.

Today, "preservation" still applies for the foundation work; but why the pivot to specialization?

"The 2020 moratorium on foreclosures," Crigler says, matter-of-factly, pointing to the one reason. When

**APP's Nathan Patterson, lead carpenter foreman; Cameron Campbell, operations manager**



Tom Field



Tom Field

## Hunter Crigler

renters and homeowners were granted a reprieve from payments due on properties due to the pandemic, Crigler's business was effectively shut off. Practically overnight, the business opportunity evaporated.

That was unexpected.

But Crigler had a hunch. He saw a lot of job sites that required work on foundations and problems from water damage and other structural unsettling issues.

"It was an untapped market," Crigler explains. "We have only begun to scratch the surface." And when asked, he describes how APP is distinctive from other foundation contractors.

"The [national franchises] are limited to their own products," he says. "Whereas we can get creative and deliver whatever solution is needed. Also, we're unique on the wood working side of things. Much of the work is teachable, but when it comes to wood work, that requires craftsmanship. We have that and other skills expertise in the trades."

Lastly, Crigler cites his low overhead, compared to the other three contractors he mentions. (Pretty much the only businesses that specialize in the same sub-trade.)

And indeed, specialization was the right move, Crigler says.

"I see us having 25 employees in a few years," he predicts, based on the growth. Appalachian Property Preservation currently has ten full time employees and has been in business since 2015. Most of the work comes from realtor referrals or word-of-mouth, Crigler says... "about eighty-percent."

The projects typically involve older homes, especially those built before the building codes came out in the 1970s, he says, which addressed water intrusions in a better way. But again, there are a lot of properties with issues, even newer homes.

There's something else that's unexpected about the business: how it came about.

"I was a heroin addict," Hunter Crigler says.

He doesn't whisper it, he doesn't shout it out. It's just a flat out fact and part of his story. You detect neither shame in the past nor pride in the current accomplishment from Crigler, who is rather soft-spoken.

A man who works with "the underworld" if you will, in the construction arena... all things beneath a building... was already familiar with being at the bottom.

"I was hanging out with the wrong guys after high school."

Crigler, from Radford, went into a 15-month program at Roanoke's Rescue Mission. "I moved to Roanoke in 2010 and graduated from the Rescue Mission program



Tom Field

Hunter Crigler

““”

What I care about more than anything else is to see our employees thrive.



Tom Field

**APP crew repairs long-time water damaged joists, sill plate on a Salem residence**

“ ”

We can get creative.

in September 2011. I celebrated 13 years of sobriety this past May.”

He says college wasn't for him, but he did receive his associate degree and had always enjoyed the construction field.

He looked for answers. And he listened (something he didn't do so well as a younger man).

Two people helped him plot a new course that eventually resulted in starting his own company, and ultimately becoming a licensed class A contractor.

First, he worked with Ray Puckett, who would eventually become an investor and co-founder of Appalachian Property Preservation. Puckett had experience and a solid reputation in running his own businesses in the seniors market.

“Ray is my mentor,” Crigler says. “And he believed in me, put his trust in what I wanted to do, and is a 50/50 contributor to this venture.”

The other “tip” Crigler got, was sort of an off-the-cuff observation from friend and real estate agent, Josh Gruber.

“Josh told me that there was high demand for repairing and maintaining foreclosures,” he says.

“Two weeks later, I had my business license.”

A hint of a smile comes when he describes the early days.

"I had a Ford Freestyle station wagon with a trailer." The car was turquoise color, and the "equipment" he pulled was about as basic a set as you could have... push mower, random tools, and such.


Crigler, who now lives in Botetourt County with his wife and two young children, has expanded the business substantially since its humble beginnings in 2015. And so has his understanding and ways of operating it.

"What I care about more than anything else is to see our employees thrive. I'd rather have less of a bottom line so that our employees can provide for their families."

Crigler says he sees too many companies that put money ahead of their people.

"I focus on employees even over our clients," he says. "When employees are doing well, then clients are going to be well-served."

If you're more accustomed to the idea that "the customer is always right," that notion could be considered a bit unexpected.

A bottom-up approach. 

“ ”

When employees are doing well, then clients are going to be well-served.

APP crew at the shop





Submitted

# Local Project Management Institute chapter turns 20

By Shannon Dominguez

**This October, PMI's Southwest Virginia chapter will host its 20th Anniversary Symposium by exploring the intersection of AI and project management. "It is never too late to enter the world of project management," says one local chapter member.**

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Southwest Virginia chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI) – a significant milestone for an organization that has served as a hub for regional project professionals to connect, learn, and make an impact.

PMI-SWVA was founded in 2003 by a small group of devoted project leaders who recognized the need for a local PMI network. Their grassroots effort has blossomed into a thriving chapter

with over 350 members representing diverse industries like manufacturing, healthcare, education, and technology.

According to PMI.org, The Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, created by the Project Management Institute (PMI), recognizes skilled project managers who can lead teams through all phases of a project using various approaches to deliver strategic results. To earn PMP certification, candidates must meet experience requirements and pass a



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**Iliana Sepulveda**

180-question exam testing their real-world project management knowledge. The PMP Certification is the most recognizable, but PMI also offers other advanced certifications like Agile Practitioner, Project Scheduler, and Construction Manager.

Iliana Sepulveda, current President of PMI-SWVA, emphasizes the value of PMP Certification for her career growth by saying: "Employers tend to value the PMP certification more than a master's degree because it provides more assurance that the certified persons have the technical skills and training, they need for complex project management."

To celebrate its 20th year, PMI-SWVA has organized special events and initiatives throughout 2023. The programming kicked off in January with a look back at the chapter's origins from thought leader Michael O'Brochta. Other highlights so far include an AI projects discussion led by Chris Rhia and Christine Phillips.

The chapter is gearing up for its Annual Fall Symposium on October 20th at Roanoke

## SOME KEY INGREDIENTS FROM PMI-SWVA'S FIRST 20 YEARS

- **Fostering Connections:** Monthly meetings, study groups, and networking events (like taking in a Salem Red Sox game) bring project managers together to collaborate, socialize, and learn from each other.
- **Developing Leaders:** Workshops, conferences, and speaker sessions help members strengthen project management skills and leadership capabilities.
- **Community Impact:** Volunteer activities and outreach initiatives give back and raise awareness about the role of project management.
- **Partnering:** Relationships with regional businesses, colleges, and other organizations provide opportunities to promote the field.
- **Engaging the Next Generation:** Outreach to student PMI chapters ensures project management skills are passed on.
- **Celebrating Success:** Certification prep courses, award programs, and recognizing member achievements.

*Note: The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports a median US salary as of 2022 of \$95,370 for project management professionals, with the bottom 10 percent earning a median of \$52,500 and the top 10 percent \$159,150.*

College in Salem. This year's theme is "Synergizing AI Expertise: The Intersection of Legal, Product, Business, and Project Management." Attendees will hear from a panel of specialists exploring the profound impact of AI across diverse disciplines. From legal implications to product development to business strategy, this symposium will uncover how AI is revolutionizing industries and reshaping the role of project professionals. There are interactive discussions and workshops, and hands-on learning and networking opportunities, and with AI on the agenda it promises to be PMI-SWVA's most compelling symposium yet. Registration is now open for the full-day event on



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October 20 from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Seats are limited.

Beyond these special celebrations, the chapter continues its core offerings like monthly meetings, study groups, and outreach to student PMI chapters. PMI-SWVA's volunteer leaders and engaged members are the organization's lifeblood. Christine Phillips, a director at large who recently started volunteering, shared:

"As a project manager, I get to help people get stuff done. PMI teaches you methodologies, principles, and practices to help project managers do their job well. I decided to volunteer with PMI to be more involved with my local community and help others realize it is never too late to enter the world of project management."

PMI-SWVA is poised to keep providing exceptional value to project professionals over the next 20 years and beyond with engaged members like these. The organization


has come a long way from its early days - growing from a passionate idea into a thriving community that impacts Southwest Virginia.

Vicki Kibbe is past president of PMI-SWVA and a Cybersecurity Integration Program Manager shared: "Joining PMI-SWVA in August 2004 was a transformative decision that significantly shaped my career trajectory and personal growth. The organization's commitment to excellence, continuous learning, networking, and community engagement fostered an environment conducive to development and success. My journey with PMI-SWVA stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and dedicated involvement within a professional community dedicated to advancing the art and science of project management."

For young professionals starting their careers, PMI-SWVA provides an invaluable opportunity to build project management skills and expand networks. The organization



offers everything from exam prep courses to earn certifications to monthly meetings featuring experienced project leaders willing to mentor newcomers. At \$149 for a yearly membership to PMI Global, with many employers covering the cost, it's an affordable way to invest in professional growth.

The local chapter provides access to a community of peers, resources to boost project management competencies, and a chance to get involved with volunteering and leadership development. For recent college graduates or those transitioning into project management from any career path, PMI-SWVA has something to offer. PMI-SWVA will continue adapting to meet the evolving needs of project leaders in the region, especially as new challenges – like learning to harness the power of Artificial Intelligence – come to the forefront. 

*Find out more about PMI and the upcoming October 20 symposium here: [pmi-swva.org/professional-development/annual-symposium](https://pmi-swva.org/professional-development/annual-symposium)*



**Christine Phillips**





# FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

## Executive Summary:

*In a hyper-competitive business landscape, advertising has become a powerful force that motivates companies to set ambitious goals and invest in various marketing strategies.*

*Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at [Michael@360WealthConsulting.com](mailto:Michael@360WealthConsulting.com)*

## Creating a financial plan to achieve advertising-influenced business goals

In today's digital age, businesses are constantly presented with advertising opportunities, ranging from social media promotions to search engine marketing. While these avenues offer immense potential for growth, it's crucial for businesses to have a well-structured financial plan in place to effectively harness the power of advertising and achieve their goals.

### Setting Clear Objectives

The foundation of any financial plan geared towards advertising-influenced goals is setting clear objectives. Start by identifying specific business goals you want to achieve through advertising. Your goals should be measurable and directly linked to your advertising goals. Examples of these goals could be boosting brand visibility, increasing sales, or expanding your customer base.

### Budget Allocation

Once goals are established, allocate a portion of your budget to advertising initiatives. Consider the various advertising channels available, such as pay-per-click advertising, social media advertising, content marketing, email campaigns, and traditional media. Evaluate the cost-effectiveness and potential return on investment (ROI) of each channel to determine how to allocate your resources most efficiently.

### Monitoring and Analytics

Implement analytics tools to monitor the results of your campaigns. Remember to include the cost of these tools in your budget. It's essential to be able to track the performance of your advertising campaigns in real-time effectively. Metrics like click-through rates, conversion rates, and customer acquisition costs will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of your advertising strategies.


Flexibility is key in the world of advertising. Consumer behavior and market trends can change rapidly, and your financial plan should allow for adjustments and adaptations. Be prepared to reallocate funds or pivot your strategies. You may notice that some campaigns are more suited for your goals while others are less effective.

### Long-Term Sustainability

It's essential to think about long-term sustainability. Your financial plan should not only focus on immediate gains

but also consider the longevity of your business. Allocate resources for brand-building, customer retention strategies, and innovation to ensure that your business remains competitive and resilient in the long run.

Creating a financial plan to achieve advertising-influenced business goals is vital for continued presence and growth. Often, businesses only start searching for funds when they face lulls and then overspend to catch up. With a financial strategy already in place, your business can effectively harness the power of advertising to drive growth and secure long-term success.

It's not just about spending money on advertising; it's about making strategic investments that propel your business towards sustainable growth and prosperity. 



Your goals should be measurable...

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# Freeze therapy: *from concept to proven practice*

By Shawn Nowlin

**An alternative to addictive opioids for those with chronic pain.**

For centuries, the use of cold has been used for healing and many other purposes. Dr. James Farmer, the co-founder of the Ignite Orthopedic and Wellness Clinic at 4633 Brambleton Ave. in Roanoke, which he runs with his wife, is on a mission to help as many of his patients as possible through something known as freeze therapy.

The Iovera® System, which is used to destroy tissue by applying freezing cold during surgical procedures, is how the freeze therapy is delivered. Farmer uses this practice primarily on his patients prior, during and after their knee replacement surgery to alleviate pain. Only a handful of other doctors in the region are authorized to use this kind of technology. Farmer says it's also

an alternative to using prescription opioids, which can become addictive for the patient in some cases.

"We decided to do this so we could address a broader scope of practice in orthopedics. We offer some nutritional counseling, IV hydration and bioidentical hormone optimization," he said. "Basically, freeze therapy is a probe and the probe will penetrate the skin so we can put it right next to the nerve. Within this handpiece that we have is a cartridge of nitroxide which will get down to negative 88 degrees," Farmer continued. "That's enough to freeze the fat cells in the nerve. Once the fat dies, it can't conduct from that point out to its terminal end."

A Texas native, Farmer grew up in the City of Katy. Education has always been important to the lifelong Dallas Cowboys fan. After graduating from the University of Texas Medical Branch with a Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy, he continued his education at the Baylor College of Medicine, graduating with honors. At Wake Forest University, he completed his residency in orthopedic surgery.

During his six years in the U.S. Navy at Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, Farmer specialized in sports medicine. Before resigning his commission so he could enter civilian practice, Farmer achieved the rank of Commander. Farmer is board-certified in both sports medicine and general orthopedic surgery. Fifteen years ago, he performed the first meniscal (on the knee) transplant in the Roanoke Valley.

Farmer joined Virginia Tech's athletic department medical staff in 2009.



Submitted

Dr. James Farmer

He also currently serves as the team physician for Roanoke College, the Salem Red Sox and Salem High School. Treating migraines and managing weight loss are other ways that freeze therapy can be used. Athletes on all levels use freeze therapy to enhance post workout recovery – those tubs of icy water you may have seen.

Farmer is an athlete himself: a competitive swimmer, Farmer has won multiple medals for races at the Commonwealth Games, held every summer at Liberty University. Earlier this year, he was diagnosed with SSNHL, also known as Sudden Sensor Neural Hearing Loss. While the cause of SSNHL is mostly unknown currently, symptoms include ears feeling diagnosed, dizziness and hearing loss.


The risks and benefits of freeze therapy are well-documented. While reducing soreness after a workout and bringing one's skin and muscle temperature down are some of the benefits, complications can include bone fractures, nerve damage and skin infections. Whether or not it's worth taking a plunge is an individual decision. Before doing so though, people should first talk to their doctors.

"The downside of this treatment is it's temporary and that the nerves do regenerate daily very rapidly. So, at the most, it gives people about six to eight weeks. Having to repeat the procedure about every two months requires insurances that agree to cover that,"



Submitted

Farmer said. "Right now, most insurances are covering it once every six months if you can show a 50 percent reduction in the symptoms. If you can get ahead of things in the first month, you will typically do well in the long run."

The bottom line says Farmer, who opened his Ignite practice about a year ago as an alternative to what he calls corporate medicine: "to reduce the amount and duration of opioid use through alternative treatments." 

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# BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

**Executive Summary:**  
*It is October, and the season of spookiness is upon us. But there is one fear that haunts business owners and HR professionals year-round. Something more chilling than a ghost story—hiring new employees. Why is hiring new employees so scary?*



## Hiring new employees doesn't have to be so scary

### The Cost of a Bad Hire is Terrifying

A bad hire not only involves financial risk, but it may also lead to a cascade of problems. Lost productivity and damage to a company's reputation are just two dreaded outcomes. Multiple studies support the fact that the cost of a bad hire can be as much as 30% of the employee's first-year earnings. This can make any business owner's blood run cold.

### The Haunting Search for the Right Fit

Finding the perfect candidate can be like searching for a needle in a haystack. It's harder if you don't even know you are looking for a needle! Identifying key aspects of what you need in your open position, (things such as abilities, skills, fit to your culture and management style, and attitudes like work ethic and integrity), gives you a better chance of recognizing it when it walks in your door to interview.

### The Ghost of Turnover

High turnover can send shivers down the spine of even the most seasoned hiring managers. It's not just the cost of hiring and training new employees, it's also the impact turnover has on team morale, productivity, and company reputation and performance.

### The Phantom of a Poor Onboarding Process

You have found the perfect candidate, and then they have a terrible first impression as a new employee. Interactions and impressions they make during their first hour, day, and week have a lasting effect. A well-organized, informative, and welcoming onboarding process helps new employees feel valued and prepared for their roles.

### The Dread of Making the Wrong Choice

What if you hire someone who turns out to be completely unsuitable for the role? There is no system to guarantee you never hire the wrong person, but bad hires can be reduced with objective information gathered by employee assessments. You're alerted to dig deeper when you see red flags connected to things such as skills and fit (to the job, company, and boss) that may negatively impact performance and job success.

**Executive Overview:** *Hiring new employees is not as scary if you use pre-employment assessments for objective, supplemental information, and have the right mindset when interviewing.* 📖

Scan the QR code to download the e-book, *6 Key Mistakes When Interviewing & Hiring Employees* for ideas to strengthen your hiring system and avoid the horrors of a bad hire.



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Dan Smith

Sherry Quinley: “My biggest concern is serving the community well.”

# DEATH'S EVOLUTION

By Dan Smith

**An obituary website, founded by a hardware store executive, has a new owner and a new direction.**

Sherry Quinley can attest that even death evolves. She has substantial evidence.

Quinley's background is mostly in communications and sales (The Roanoke Times, Blue Ridge Public TV, WSLS, WVTF Public Radio, WDBJ7, schoolteacher, and marketing executive for a national church organ company), so she was more than ready when the obituaries gig popped up recently.

In 2019, Charlie Overstreet, owner of Northwest Hardware (15 stores), rebelled against the high cost of newspaper

obituaries by starting his own website that ran obits for a fraction of the local daily newspaper's cost. FRONT had a story at the time about that startup. The new business was called Roanoke Obituaries, which with some growth became Regional Obituaries in 2020.

The business continued to grow and took on funeral home partners, which helped eliminate any cost to the family seeking an online obit. The funeral homes paid those costs.

But in the fourth year, the partners in



the enterprise began to feel the pressure of a growing business outside their normal careers and talked of shutting Regional Obituaries down. Quinley, with mutual agreement, bought out her three business partners and has expanded Regional Obituaries to the Shenandoah Valley and Central Virginia. Overstreet is "still very much involved," says Quinley, and developer John Garland has become something of a mentor. Both remain on the Advisory Board for Regional Obituaries.

"My biggest concern," says Quinley, "is serving the community well. We don't want to stretch too thin. We must do this in a mindful way. Technology has been a tremendous asset to help make this possible. That means you need an excellent software engineer."

The "mindful way" these days is stretching the geographic boundaries to Harrisonburg and Charlottesville. Quinley has teamed with Roanoke's WDBJ7, WHSV.com, NBC29.com and Cardinal News in recent days, expanding circulation exponentially (260,000 page views a month on the Regional Obituaries site and up to six million page views a month on WDBJ). Those new partners pay in-kind with banners and local commercials on their television stations. Cardinal News directs readers through its Newsletter and a substantial subscriber base. Many funeral homes have jumped on the wagon fully, but "some are holding out," Quinley says.

At the end of March, Quinley got calls from the Charlottesville TV station asking about the service. "They said, 'We have our own website; do we really need this?' Funeral directors said this, and NBC 29 wanted


to duplicate WHSV and WDBJ, both Grey stations, carrying obits on their websites to help fill the gap, as newspapers in both readership and circulation had created a gap for letting people know about obits. I said, 'Yes! People don't want to look at 15-20 websites'" to find the obituary they are interested in.

There are occasions when the family of the deceased pays for the obit (albeit a fraction of the newspaper cost). "If the body is donated and no funeral home is involved, for example, the family pays," says Quinley, "but if the family is strapped and can't afford the cost, we will do it [for free]."

The way the company works is to post full-length obits (no word limit) with as many as three photos on regionalobituaries.com and on the partners' sites (media and funeral homes) simultaneously. Obits are added or updated throughout the day and they are online indefinitely.

The business "is not making millions," smiles Quinley, but it is pulling in from \$160 to \$600 a month from the funeral homes taking part, depending on their size, and keeping her busy editing, posting and marketing the site.

She deems the enterprise a success because "everything is changing, and you have to be flexible. We ask, 'How can I help?' The goal is to make this as viable as possible so we can continue to grow. Slow and steady." "We want regional obituaries to be the place people go to find out who has passed away in the community. With good media partners, this is a realistic goal."

Death, Quinley says unequivocally, "has become my life." 



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## BUSINESS CENTS

By Daniel Colston

**Executive Summary:**  
*"Muni Bonds," short for municipal bonds are an underrated, hidden secret right now for many reasons.*

*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).*

## Why muni bonds are hidden gems right now

With market uncertainty, it can be advantageous to invest in a bond versus a stock because bonds are completely different investments than stocks and have the advantage of not being as susceptible to market movements. Whereas a stock is a "piece" of the company, a bond is simply a promissory note that the company or municipality will pay you back your money, plus interest.

Bonds are attractive right now because of the rise in interest rates. This time last year they were paying 1-4%. Now they are paying 5-9%. In fact, this rise in interest rates is part of the reason that the stock market is struggling to gain traction. Investors are seeing that they can make 5-9% return with a bond that has less implied risk than a stock. Typically individual bonds do not go down in value as stocks do, though a bond fund or ETF can be more susceptible to market movements, as we saw in 2022 where stock and bond funds both tumbled together due to the Federal Reserve's rapid increase in interest rates.

There are all types of bonds including government bonds, corporate bonds, high-yield bonds know as "junk bonds," and municipal bonds. Junk bonds are not necessarily junky, they are simply called that because they are offered by less established companies. Because of the extra risk that investors take on to buy a "junk bond" there is a risk premium applied. In other words, junk bonds pay more to investors because they can be more risky.


I like high-yield "junk" bonds because they pay higher dividends, but I prefer municipal bonds even more because not only can they also pay high dividends, but also because those dividends are federally tax free; and depending on which state you live in, they can be state income tax free as well! A muni bond is offered by a municipality such as a city or state. The funds are raised typically to build a bridge, pave a road, or renovate a state park or building, etc. The tax code incentivizes investors to invest in these projects because they are for the common good. The incentive is that you don't have to pay tax on the dividends! This can be a huge tax benefit, especially for high earners in high tax brackets.

As an example, let's assume you're in a 32% tax bracket, plus 5% VA state income tax (approx.) and have the option to invest in both a junk bond or a muni bond:


- Junk bond paying 9% interest = 5.67% after-tax yield
- Muni bond paying 8% interest = 8% after-tax yield because it's tax-free!

This of course is assuming you're investing in a taxable

account. If you're investing in a retirement account, then your taxes are deferred and this doesn't apply. Even better, if you're investing in a Roth IRA, those are after-tax dollars in a tax-free growth account so the junk bond would be a better play in this scenario.

Muni bonds can be an attractive investment because of their tax-free qualities and are worth considering for your portfolio. This is not advice specific to your situation. It is always a good idea to talk about this with your tax or investment advisor before making any decisions. 

“Bonds are completely different investments than stocks and have the advantage of not being as susceptible to market movements.







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Gene Marrano photos

Erika Jones

# SociaRae Inc. covers a number of bases

By Gene Marrano

**A local small business owner can help with everything from running social media platforms to promoting food trucks and mentoring.**

In her “spare time” Erika Jones manages the new Roanoke College food truck, which we ran a picture of here recently. In the meantime, her SociaRae Inc. business, created last year, is another example of the entrepreneurial spirit that has been nurtured over the past decade or so in the Roanoke Valley. Jones offers social media support and management – figuring out when an audience is most active on social media, how to keep them engaged and coming back, posting relevant content.

Drawing on that background, Erika Jones is also an administrator for the Roanoke Food Truck Finder Facebook page, which allows (for free) local food trucks to post where they will be – but also permits those seeking food trucks for their event, brewpub, etc. to reach business owners who operate them.

Jones also calls herself a mental health advocate for clients, drawing on her education with degrees in Psychology and Criminal Justice with a concentration in Legal Studies earned at Roanoke College. “I have about 15 years of mental health background,” notes Jones. She spent time as a counselor in elementary schools and managed a Psychosocial Rehabilitation program where she educated adults on independent living skills.

“The goal of the company is to deliver realistic answers to everyday obstacles – whether you are looking to book people for an event, to mental health support; if you need help with running social media, you need to take a Serve Safe class (for food prep handlers). Offering a variety of services to the community.” Jones calls the services she

provides via SociaRae “affordable and accessible.” That’s often a goal for those that need help while watching their own bottom line.

Mentoring for a flat rate where someone might need to just “vent about things, [or] have business ideas that are stressing you out,” for example. How to better communicate with colleagues – a bugaboo for many companies small or large – is another offering. SociaRae also features package deals that include mentoring/counseling/ managing/referring and booking, which Jones says is popular as “a weight taken off their shoulder.”


The COVID era added another layer of stress that Jones detects in some of her clients, with people losing jobs, and the fear some had of rejoining groups after the pandemic isolation. “I feel like a lot of people lost their social skills ... when we all sat out home.”

Struggling to using social media to promote a business for example is something Jones says she sees “across the board,” although some older clients who don’t use Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook etc. on a regular basis can find it especially challenging. She offers a “basic 101” course but can also step in for small business owners that just don’t have the time to master it themselves. Keeping pages active by posting on a regular basis is a good start. If someone goes to a platform where the newest post is a year old, they are likely to be turned off, notes Jones. “I want them to stay relevant.”



Erika and daughter Acacia Rae

Jones decided it was time to do her own thing after working for other people and not fully realizing the benefits of what she calls her “blood, sweat and tears.” The name SociaRae is also a nod to her young daughter Acacia Rae (acacia is a tree found in warm tropical climates). “We love being out in the world [as social people].” Connecting people to what they need to be successful is at the root of her mission with SociaRae.

Good coping skills are a plus for those leaving the more corporate world behind like Jones did to strike out on her own with SocialRae. “If you believe in yourself and are willing to put in the work – and can understand there are going to be setbacks – you can be successful. If you believe in yourself, you can make anything happen with the right resources.” 

See [sociaraeinc.com](http://sociaraeinc.com) for more information.



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# FROM THE BIG APPLE TO THE STAR CITY . . . AND A NEW LIFE AS AN ENTREPRENEUR

By Gene Marrano

Life changed after 9/11 for April Jones and began her journey towards a new career

April Jones was living life in the big city: after graduating from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in fashion merchandising, she worked in the men's apparel industry in New York for seven years. Life changed after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks brought down the World Trade Center. Jones says from her office in the Empire State building she watched the second hijacked plane barrel into the South Tower.

That changed her perspective on what was important, and she soon departed New York City to get closer to her Virginia

home, first during a teaching stint in fashion merchandising at her alma mater, VCU. Two years later after meeting her future husband they moved to Roanoke. That's where April Jones started her journey towards the business she just launched in August after finishing 6th out of 45 Gauntlet participants who elected to move on to the competition round (out of 113 applicants).

A stint working in the admissions department of an assisted living facility for seniors locally let her to a realization: there was a lack of information and direction on the resources available when it came to geriatric care



April Jones (left) with Annette Patterson from The Gauntlet



April Jones


coordination in the valley. That has led to the launch of Vinton-based Life Care Coordinators LLC with Jones as the CEO, working with associates that have more than a decade of experience in helping seniors, caregiving adults and families to cope with the transitions of aging and chronic diseases. For its clients, Life Care Coordinators will assess, plan and advocate health care services so seniors “can live a better life,” says Jones.

It’s a far cry from the glitzy, super-charged fashion industry in the hubbub of New York City for Jones, but it’s her mission now, inspired she says by a family of educators and entrepreneurs, especially her grandfather, father and brother, who have operated their own successful small businesses. Her 12 years in the assisted living world made her realize that while she did her best, “there were way more needs than I was able to fill.” She saw her own family’s senior members struggle to find the services they needed for starters and did what she could.

A talk with her husband earlier this year about a career pivot inspired Jones to enter the Gauntlet business mentoring and competition conducted annually by The Advancement Foundation, where the end result for those startups and small businesses that make it to judging stage typically walk away sharing \$300,000 or more in cash and in-kind services. The Gauntlet spurred Jones to do the research; she found out, for instance, that while there were 6-8 firms in the Charlottesville area offering the type of geriatric care coordination services she wanted to

offer, the Roanoke area had just one.

“I see a huge need for it in our community, to help seniors with anything from finding a lawn care company that’s not going to take advantage of them ... all the way to having someone at their side in the hospital if they don’t have a [family member or advocate] close by.”

Twelve years in the health care industry after moving back to the area helped April Jones realize the “different silos” of services that are available for seniors here. Her mission now is to break down those walls. Then there is what insurance will pay for – and what insurance policies won’t cover. “You don’t know what you need until you’re in an acute situation. My goal is to help people plan. Plan for the what if and when (her company slogan), not for the what now? Don’t wait for an acute situation in the hospital.” A hospital case manager may have twenty other patients to help coordinate services for at the same time she says, meaning, “you have about five minutes to decide what services you want and need.” That’s where April Jones says her concierge firm will step in with personalized one-on-one services for senior clients and their families. It’s a far cry from New York City and that fateful day 22 years ago on a clear, blue sky day in lower Manhattan, but in her new role as a Professional Care Manager Jones looks forward to helping families and caregivers with the transitions of aging – and doing so gracefully. 

See [lifecarecoordinators.com](http://lifecarecoordinators.com) for more information.

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## Artspace considers Riverdale project, other sites >

A Minnesota-based non-profit called **Artspace** was in Roanoke last month, talking to local artists, city officials and others, while also surveying local properties that could be redeveloped as working studios and affordable living spaces for artists. **Kelli Miles** with Artspace spoke at one possible redevelopment site during a public meet-and-greet - the 9th Street Southeast Industrial Park now part of the mixed-use Riverdale project: "Roanoke as a whole was just vibrant from the moment we landed – the passion in absolutely everyone that we talked to," said Miles. "It's just so unique – such a pride in the community. Riverdale – just the potential at this site." Other Roanoke properties being considered by Artspace include the former Walker Foundry, one near Melrose Plaza and another along Williamson Road.

**Douglas Jackson** is Arts and Culture coordinator for the City of Roanoke; he was at building 9B1 with around 100 or more other people watching the Artspace presentation last month: "we're really working hard to support the arts community in Roanoke. We believe that a community of individual artists working together, living near each other is a really positive thing for neighborhoods. Artspace has a very specific and proven affordable housing strategy for artists – to help create these communities." Artspace, as the developer, has turned older properties into artists colonies elsewhere and has consulted with a number of Virginia localities as well. Those present at last



Gene Marrano

month's event also took on-the-spot surveys via an app that also gave Artspace some insight into the level of interest in such a project. Based in Minneapolis, the non-profit has developed older properties all over the country as affordable and sustainable spaces for artists and arts organizations.

Developer **Ed Walker** and partners plan to transform the former American Viscose plant site into the mixed-use \$50-million dollar, twenty year Riverdale project (his last big undertaking vows Walker) – which he hopes will also include an artist colony: "my impression is that they like what they're hearing and they're feeling very favorable. The City Manager [**Bob Cowell**] spent two hours with them walking around, that's very meaningful. Whenever you've got local government that is really representing to third parties [and] outsiders, 'hey we're all in,' that signals to them that it's a good partnership." A number of local artists have already rented space at the 9th Street industrial park in the past. The Artspace team took home all of the input received and their experiences at the sites they toured – and will assemble a final feasibility report for local stakeholders.





Gene Marrano

## The Maestro staying right here >

Maestro **David Stewart Wiley** will remain at the podium and as music director. Wiley and the **Roanoke Symphony Orchestra** have agreed on a 4-year contract extension. Wiley has been at the helm of the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra for more than 26 years. The RSO's unique collaborations have made Wiley – and the RSO - well known across the country. The RSO launched its 2023-24 season in late August with the annual free concert at Elmwood Park - Symphony Under the Stars (Southwest Virginia Ballet also took part) – and the masterworks/pops concerts debut this month. “The honeymoon stage is

still in effect, and I am so grateful for that,” says Wiley, who also leads an orchestra on Long Island (NY).

Wiley points out that the Picnic with the Pops series – symphonies taking on rock music for example – is a rare bird. “These were innovative things that we did.” As was tapping into what he calls “the mountain tradition here in Virginia’s Blue Ridge.” RSO executive director **David Crane** adds that “there isn’t a kind of genre of music that he has not introduced to Roanoke through his long tenure.” Crane also points to the community outreach and education programs where DSW and the RSO musicians have led the charge. “It’s exciting to see that we are going to continue on.”



## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
*It's a Latin phrase meaning "let the seller beware." A local Realtor wants home sellers to be fully informed on what they need to know before putting their house on the market.*

## Caveat vendor

Stacey Porter has teamed up with area experts in home selling and financing to offer a series of free seminars that started last month and will continue in October at local libraries. More could follow if the turnout and interest is there. During the Selling Smart workshop, Porter, a local REALTOR with EXP Realty, says attendees will learn some of the nuances and information they may not have been privy to. In addition, requirements change often, especially over the past two years, she adds.

"Specifics about disclosures, inspections, marketing, and most importantly money - and we are going to talk about it for their property," says Porter. Attendees will also learn how to use their property, or perhaps one they've inherited, as a rental asset. Participants will receive a free printed and bound home equity report and net worksheet based on their property.

The 6:30-7:30pm workshops continue this month at the Glenvar Library (October 12) and the South County Library (October 16). Register ahead of time at [Equitybuildersworkshop.com](http://Equitybuildersworkshop.com). Contact Stacey Porter at [hello@equitybuildersworkshop.com](mailto:hello@equitybuildersworkshop.com) with any questions about the workshops - or the selling process. Getra Hanes with Atlantic Bay Mortgage will take part and says she is "excited to help participants of this workshop save money and build wealth with unique tools and customized reports."

"There's tons of information," out there for first time home buyers says Porter, who "really get their hands held through the process, "but not a lot of education for first time home sellers." For example, notes Porter, certain upgrades made just before putting a home on the market may pay off with a higher sale price, others she suggest (like new kitchen cabinets) not so much. Being "on the other side of the table," for the first time means there are things that must be disclosed to a potential buyer and their Realtor - and issues that don't need to be revealed. Guidance on selling a family home is another topic on the table.

Painting the whole house shouldn't be a top priority in many cases either says Porter - people often come in and redo it anyway, meaning you've just spent hundreds if not thousands of dollars that might not offer a return. Concentrate on the big things: the a/c, the heat and the plumbing need to work; the roof shouldn't be leaking. "The electrical needs to be in good shape." Sounds like the Equity Builders Workshop series could be a revelation for some prospective sellers. 🏠



Submitted  
Stacey Porter

## Let's strike! Or not.

Ok, it's feather-ruffling time. It's just an opinion, but it's probably not going to go well. Some of the things one person sees as completely reasonable, another sees as totally unreasonable. Oh, well. At least it's timely. We like it when our opinion columns address current affairs.

### REASONS TO STRIKE

**When the working condition is unsafe and can be changed or improved.** (No company should intentionally place employees in harm's way. I'm not sure something along the lines of air-conditioning in delivery vehicles applies, but yes, I could even accept that as a plausible reason in critical environments, when the solution is probably not that difficult.)

**When the pay is below average compared to others doing the same job.** (A company should be free to set wages however it wants, but we do have labor laws; and I'll reluctantly accept low wages as an acceptable reason to strike, in lieu of not having a true free market.)

**When the product or service provided is unsafe for the consumer and can be changed or improved.** (One shouldn't work for a business he/she believes causes harm; but if it's revealed a change would result in a safe or less-harmful output and the company is ignoring it, yes, that's a good reason to interrupt operations.)

### NOT REASONS TO STRIKE

**When the pay gap between employees and senior and C-level management is considered too large.** (Stock/share-holders determine/approve compensation models. Models could certainly be adjusted, plans revised; but that's a function of design—and what a great idea it would be if more companies were built with smaller gaps or employee-owned and similar models. NOTE: For tax-payer-funded industries, egregiously wide pay gaps shouldn't be there in the first place. The tax payer is a proxy shareholder. A school administrator should not make ten times more than a teacher, for example, if there's no other funding than tax dollars).

**When to work.** (It's just unreasonable for unions and employees to set the hours, when and how many. We already have labor laws that protect employees from working too long. Other improprieties are also addressed by those laws. There is overtime pay, extra pay or benefits when working difficult times.

continued on Page 36



## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

### Executive Summary:

*There are good reasons—and not so good reasons—for employees to shut down operations.*

## Field / On Tap

from Page 35


To demand specific shifts or reduced hours—particularly when it’s different than same or other businesses is not a good reason to interrupt operations.)

**When the benefits demanded are greater than others in the same or similar industries or markets.**

(It’s unreasonable to stop working if you’re employed by a company that has the same—or better—benefits than others in that same industry or market. I don’t know how much simpler I can say that; and for the life of me, I don’t see how that would ever be an unreasonable position. The same goes for pay; if you’re making more than others in your industry or market, don’t strike for even more.)

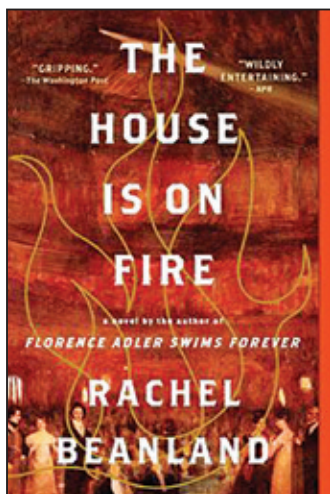
In other industries and systems, we have ways of calling out the things that most of us would easily consider to be unreasonable. In the courts, we have the idea of “frivolous lawsuits.” Everybody knows what that means; and though far too many frivolous cases still appear, we have a name for it. And in some particularly egregious examples, a person bringing a frivolous case can be penalized—if not by the court, by public opinion. Even in sports, we have things like the “flagrant foul.” Intentional stopping of the game because a player can do that by breaking a rule. Players are called out for that.

Unless I missed it, this doesn’t seem to be the case with unions and strikes. Employees striking and shutting down operations because they don’t have pink cupcakes in the breakroom every day might sound silly. But that doesn’t mean some of these other actual demands aren’t just as frivolous or unreasonable. We should have a “pink cupcake” designation for unreasonable strikes.

Today’s unions would have a lot more validity, if not respect, if they would stick to reasonable actions and protections for their members. 

## Clarification

Virginia Tech Dining Services lists 6.9 million transactions during the academic year (over 7 million for the full fiscal year). In our September report, we were given a figure that did not include the total department. Also, Turner Place at Lavery Hall was not included in the descriptions of dining centers.



## FRONTReviews >

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

### *A true event retold as historical fiction*

72 people died in the Richmond Theatre Fire in 1811, including the sitting Virginia Governor, a former U.S. Senator and other government officials. 54 of the 72 killed were women. A former slave who had purchased his freedom in the Confederate south saved numerous lives, in large part by catching people when they jumped from third story windows after a backstage accident. A chandelier over the stage lit by candles came too close to a curtain that caught fire, leading to widespread confusion, trampling – and charges that some men pushed many women out of the way as they tried to escape from the theater.

It's all told in historical fiction with a host of subplots by Rachel Beanland in *The House Is On Fire* (Simon & Schuster, 2023), and it's a good yarn. Told via four main characters in alternating chapters, by a woman of privilege, an enslaved Black woman, an enslaved

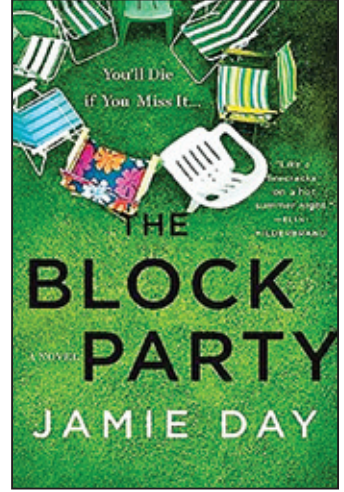
blacksmith looking to purchase his freedom, and by a young would-be actor and stagehand at the theater who is pressured to cover up the real origin of the deadly fire. Does the truth win out in the end? You'll have to read *The House Is On Fire* written by Beanland, who resides in Richmond.

—Gene Marrano

### *Former Judge's newest page-turner*

Retired Circuit Court Judge Martin Clark has written a handful of best selling books dealing with some aspect of the legal system he saw from the bench during a 27 year career in Patrick County. *The Substitution Order* was a bestseller; he's been lauded by the New York Times, Washington Post, New York Times, etc. Now comes *The Plinko Bounce* (Rare Bird Books, 2023), about a murder case where the suspect seems to confess – but on a technicality about being read his Miranda rights the suspect could walk – and he may not even be the guilty party after all. It's a page-turning whodunnit with a glimpse into the courtroom world and the public attorneys that often work long hours. As Judge Clark told me, his goal is not to educate people thoroughly about the justice system in this country, but to provide a glimpse at that world and use it as a springboard to good storytelling. He scores on that account with another good yarn in *The Plinko Bounce*.

—Gene Marrano



## *Bibliophilia's treasure chest*

Finally! I had heard of **Green Valley Book Fair**—a book store (warehouse) in Mount Crawford, VA for years. But every time we were near the place, we were on our way to somewhere else. One fine late summer day, out of the blue, we decided to take a little day trip there.

Worth it!

Oh, my. Books galore. But discounted like you would not believe. The three books I reviewed below? Under \$10 (total). And yes, they have the new releases, too. All genres. The pet-friendly buildings (that's my dog, their picture—they take pictures for social media every day, I think) are delightful to stroll through. Just don't forget to get a cart (or at least a basket) at the entrance. You'll want it.

Tip: One great idea to make it truly a day trip: there's an excellent winery (CrossKeys Vineyards) practically next door. Isn't it interesting that those two businesses ALONE make Mount Crawford a destination attraction?

—Tom Field

## *Shallow 'hood*

*The Block Party* (St Martin's; 2023) was mildly entertaining. Quite mildly. I grabbed it because it was new, it seemed promising in a fun, lightweight way, and it had an incredible lineup of those front page endorsements from truly gifted writers.

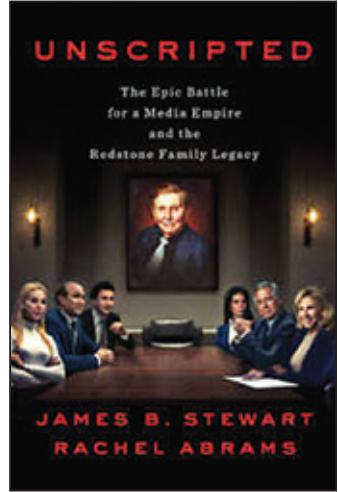
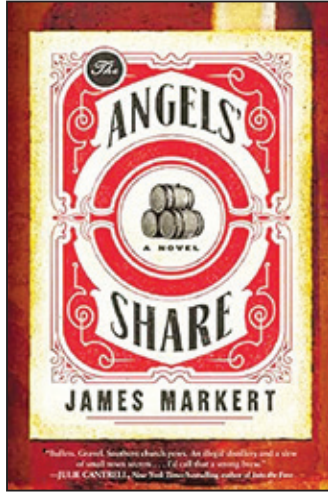
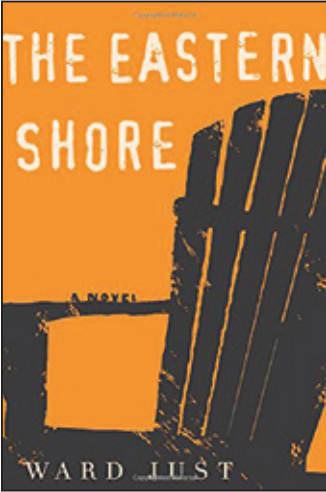
We have basically a neighborhood cul-de-sac, some struggling marriages, teenager angst, and a murder or two. Oh, and a pesty pest control man (thrown in for comic relief). Sadly, the reading was blah—even if the plot had possibilities. One of the few times I can say a short made-for-television movie would have probably worked better than this written attempt at a story.

—Tom Field

## *Disjointed plot, notwithstanding*

This happens in music all the time: the tune is wonderful, but the lyrics not so much; or the words are fantastic, but the music itself is bad or doesn't match up to the message. The same thing happens in literature from time to time. In *The Eastern Shore* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 2016) by Ward Just the mismatch is one of plot versus writing. We're greeted to the idea of a story—principally about a newspaper editor who makes the decision to expose the sordid history of one of the town's well-respected business men—an ethical dilemma worthy of a solid plot. However, the structure of this novel diverges to various life stages of our narrator, and we completely lose the story development.

Plots certainly don't have to be linear, you can have flash-backwards-and-forwards, or even sub plots or concurrent plots, and such. But this one reads as if our writer put the work-in-progress aside at times, and picked it back up, forcing a reassemble.



That said, I can't deny the writing is... well, really good. The character development is exceptional. I just wish the story about an editor would have had an editor recommend an improvement of all the disjointed parts.

—Tom Field

## Familiar swirl

Rather than share anything about the storyline (it's a good one); I have to share something funny. I'm reading *Angel's Share* (Thomas Nelson; 2017) by James Markert, and after about the third description of bourbon making, I sensed a familiarity. "You know," I said to myself, "Every time one of these descriptions comes up, it sounds like I'm on 'The Bourbon Trail'..." the Kentucky tourist experience where you get to hop around the distilleries to hear their stories and sample their wares. The phrases about "nose" and "notes of vanilla and caramel" oak barrels and "bung hole" positioning (seriously)... seemed to be direct utterance from today's bar tenders on the Trail. So, what did I discover after I finished the novel—in the Historical Notes and Acknowledgments? The book was the result of our author's Bourbon Trail visits. (He happens to live in Louisville, too.) I was pretty dang tickled with myself. I think it was because I couldn't quite accept that the characters from the western fringe of Appalachia and during the mid-twentieth century would talk about their craft in the same way we hear at today's refined and polished

up public distilleries. Still, (pun intended) it's a fun read. With notes of folklore.

—Tom Field

## Media mogul story sounds like fiction

The late Sumner M. Redstone was a force in the media universe well into his 90's before his death a few years ago, as the founder of what became Paramount Global, which included CBS, Showtime, MTV, Nickelodeon, Simon & Schuster etc. As he declined Redstone battled with his own on succession (this story would make a great miniseries), gave away tens of millions of dollars to several younger women who may or may not have had his best interests at heart - some accused them of being gold diggers - etc. etc. It's all told in vivid detail in *Unscripted: The Epic Battle for a Media Empire and the Redstone Family Legacy* by James B. Stewart and Rachel Abrams (Penguin Press, 2023). There's board of director scheming and players who sought to stay on Sumner's good side. A peek inside a wealthy, dysfunctional family from two Pulitzer-prize winning journalists. Fans of *The Morning Show* on Apple TV might like *Unscripted*.

—Gene Marrano

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



## Look, it's Elton and Billy! >

Dr Pepper Park at the Bridges held the "Face 2 Face" concert on Sept. 15 featuring tributes of the two longstanding most popular piano players and storytellers Elton John and Billy Joel. An enthusiastic crowd was greeted to a vast playlist where it seemed at times nearly everybody knew all the words. Elton John first rose to fame in the mid-1960s and Billy Joel hit big in the early 1970s—so the audience appreciated an extensive discography. As expected, the concert was a big hit, and attended by all demographics—not just old folks, since the songs are classic, prolific, and ubiquitous.



## Donning their aprons >

Contestants on a "master chefs" program? Not exactly. **Family Service of Roanoke Valley** held its Ninth Annual VIP Dinner at Hidden Valley Country Club on September 7th. Part of the event featured nine partnered "local celebrity" pairs, who were selected by FSRV to fundraise and champion the cause (and "serve" as entertainment). Sponsored by over a dozen local business and organizations, the dinner was organized by FSRV's **Jill Sluss** and team and hosted by WFXR anchor **Amanda Kenney**. FSRV director **Linda Hentschel** shared the mission—mental health, therapy, and counseling services for individuals and families struggling in our community. 2023 "Champs" included the winning pair for the fundraising: **Franny Apel** and **Hannah Hopkins** of the Junior League of Roanoke Valley, as well as **Madison VanDuyne** of GlamHouse Day Spa and **Tay Whiteside** of Lift Arc Studios LLC; **Dr. Ally Bowersock** of RunAbout Sports Roanoke and **Julie Casey** of Bread Run Roanoke; **Joe Cobb**, Vice Mayor of Roanoke City and **Taylor Cobb** of Summer Musical Enterprise; **London-Ray Dykstra** of Hustle/Haven; **Jess Downs** of Gatewood Rose Botanicals; **Baraka Kasongo** and **Elizabeth Hord** of Volatia Language Network; Delegate **Sam Rasoul** of the Virginia House of Delegates and **Tom Field** of Valley Business FRONT; **Nicole Terrill** and **Greg Terrill** of Txtur and Fire Station One; **Don Halliwill** and **Tammy Halliwill** of Carilion Clinic as well as bonus champions **Armida Valles-Klute** of Carilion Clinic and **Paul Klute**. This year's VIP Dinner raised over \$12,000 (net total \$41k for the campaign).





## Botetourt expansion >

A Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer release announces that **Dunkin' Donuts** has signed a lease and plans to open a location at a newly constructed building in front of **Orchard Marketplace Shopping Center** along Roanoke Road (Route 220) across from Daleville Town Center in Botetourt County. The 500 square foot building that will house the national doughnut chain is currently being built and will include drive-through facilities. There is available space for up to two other commercial tenants.

This marks a continued trend of recent commercial development activity in Daleville, including a **Dairy Queen** currently under construction at Daleville Town Center and expected to open this fall, as well as a new **Road Runner Express** tunnel car wash, which is under construction on the lot adjacent to the new Dunkin' and is expected to open later this year. Other recent announcements include a new **Hampton Inn** hotel, which is currently in the preliminary phases of construction at Daleville Town Center, and a 240-unit luxury apartment complex underway at the site of the former Howard Johnson motel, recently razed in preparation.

## Warm Heath breaks record >

The **Warm Hearth Foundation** kicked off its annual fund drive recently with the 10th annual Cheeseburger in Parrot-dise fundraising event. Thanks to the support of sponsors, local businesses, volunteers and guests, the record-breaking event raised more than \$53,000 to provide vital programs for seniors at Warm Hearth Village through the Neighbors In Need Fund.

The 16,000 square foot Village Center was transformed into a tropical island getaway complete with steel drum music, tropical beverages, pirate booty at the silent auction and nearly 300 lively partygoers. "The silent auction is always full of great pieces of beautiful works of art. This year's scavenger hunt was a great way for attendees to get to see the beautiful building and get to interact with new friends," said resident **Mary Scesney**. *(Editor's note: the original Parrothead Jimmy Buffet passed away on September 1)*





Anne Sampson photos





## Our golden showcase >

The **Beaver Dam Sunflower Festival 2023** was held over two weekends in September; and the crop showed up in perfect, glorious fashion. As did the crowds—who frolicked among the tall flowers (600,000 of them), and the over one hundred craft and food vendors, such as **Piper Lane** and her “Magpiper” business as well as the wine bottle / wind chime booth (shown above). Hay rides, children’s activities, and live music complemented the experience, which was truly a showcase of excellence in agritourism for Botetourt County, our region, and Virginia.



Beth Bell

## Market Gallery turns 20 >

Twenty years ago, what they describe as Roanoke's Oldest Fine Art Galley opened on Market Street. Three years ago, it moved around the corner at 22 Campbell Avenue and now the **Market Gallery** has celebrated its 20th anniversary with a ribbon-cutting last month. **Cathryn Hankla** is an artist and co-president of the Market Gallery: "every independent artist, if they are selling and exhibiting work, they are small businesspeople. It's unusual for those entrepreneurs to come together collectively to benefit other artists, not just themselves ... and the community."

Artists on exhibit at the collective keep 80% percent of the sale price, which Hankla says is well above the norm (50%). The larger space the Market Gallery moved into a few years ago around the corner from its former home has meant more room for larger are pieces and for classes. Visit through November and sign up for a drawing where the grand prize is two-thousand dollars' worth of original fine art. The larger space has allowed the Market Gallery to display bigger pieces and to have room for classes as well.



Dan Smith



Monique Duncan

## Kendig nominee introduced two years ago >

**Monique Duncan** (Monique Duncan photography) was profiled by VBF contributor Dan Smith almost two years ago in December 2021. This year she was nominated for a Perry F. Kendig Award, an annual program jointly held by Hollins University and Roanoke College. The award winners in several categories will be revealed in early October.



VT

## Concrete - who knew? >

**Alexander Brand**, assistant professor in the Charles E. Via, Jr. Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at **Virginia Tech**, has received a \$600,000 National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) award to understand the physicochemical interactions between water and the primary components of cements to clarify how concrete works. Cement, when reacted with water, makes up the binding phase of concrete. But cement production is currently the third-largest carbon dioxide source in the world after emissions from burning fossil fuels in the energy and transportation sectors.

Brand's research clears a path for scientists and engineers to design new materials for a more sustainable and resilient concrete. With concrete being the most widely used construction material in the world, Brand's research could ultimately transform civil infrastructure. Every year, 4 billion tons of cement and 28 billion tons of concrete are made around the world. According to Brand, this amount of concrete far outweighs the use of other materials, including steel at 1.9 billion tons, aluminum at 0.08 billion tons, and plastics at 0.39 billion tons.

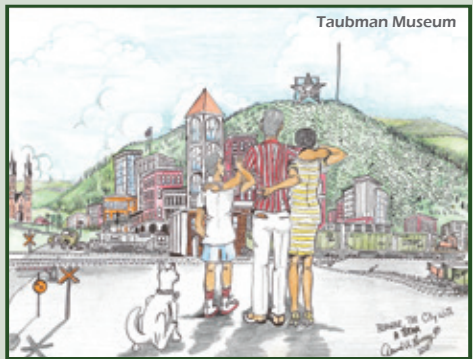


Gene Marrano

## Chris's Custard gets wheels >

**Chris's Coffee and Custard**, located in the 9th Street industrial park in Southeast Roanoke, has gone mobile as well. The business hires young adults with special abilities and serves frozen treats and coffee out of their eatery. Thanks to donations from local organizations, the company was able to purchase and renovate a food truck which will be able to serve their products on the go at public events in the surrounding communities.

Chris's mom, **Beth Woodrum** is a co-owner with her son, who has Down Syndrome: "it's been a long time coming. [With donations] we were able to purchase the truck and also some of the equipment. We are just so excited about getting out into the community." The newly renovated "Custard Truck," is now scheduling events, debuting at Taco Fest in Elmwood Park and the Beaver Dam Farm Sunflower Festival in Buchanan last month.



## Memories of a once-thriving district >

Around 200 pencil and ink drawings and detailed written descriptions of what was being captured by the artist - the heyday of **Gainsboro** and the northeast Roanoke neighborhood where the Berglund Center now stands - is the focus of a new exhibition at two downtown museums. **David Ramey Sr.** drew from memory as an older adult detailed street scenes - entertainment districts, local marketplaces, friendly cops walking the beat from his younger years. The Harrison Museum of African American Culture now features around 100 of Ramey's drawings through March 31st, the other 100 are at the Taubman Museum of Art, where **Karl Willers** is the Chief Curator: "these were real people that David Ramey knew from his life and from his childhood. He was drawing pretty much up until the end of his life." Many of the more than 1600 structures lost to urban renewal in northwest and northeast Roanoke during the 60's and 70's are captured in the images and written narratives by the late David Ramey Sr., in "*Gainsboro Road and Beyond.*"

## Carilion cuts a ribbon >

**Carilion Clinic** celebrated the opening of its newest Family and Community Medicine office at the corner of Route 419 and Starkey Road with a ribbon-cutting last month. Dr. **Michael Jeremiah** is Carilion's senior vice president and chair of Family and Community Medicine: "we continue to get requests about the need for more of our patients who are seeking out their own primary care physicians. This [Tanglewood] corridor is no stranger to the Carilion team and the services that we provide."

Jeremiah says the medical team that will work onsite at the new primary care office had input into the design, looking to make it more efficient and practical. The new Family and Community Medicine site is adjacent to Carilion's Velocity urgent care center, so some services can be shared. Patients are now being accepted; there are eight exam rooms on site, in what was once the former location for Barrel Chest.



## More housing in downtown Roanoke >

What was once deeded as a hunting park in Southeast Roanoke, **Woodland Park** is now the newest addition to Campbell Avenue. Following other similar projects on Campbell (the Lawson Building East, the Pinnacle Financial Partners regional headquarters and Big Lick Junction), **Hist:Re Partners'** latest venture aims to expand the center of the City. Situated at 605 Campbell Ave SE, Woodland Park offers 35 1-bedroom, 1-bath apartments.



"With a special focus on preserving the heritage of the neighborhood, we seek to provide more housing options for the growing downtown community," says **Lucas Thornton** (pictured with Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lee and Vice-Mayor Joe Cobb). "This corner of Southeast provides the best of both worlds, a natural landscape with a little bit more space and amazing access to downtown," says Thornton, who has several other residential projects downtown completed or in the works. "We hope this project helps people better understand and appreciate Southeast and downtown."

*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.*

## EDUCATION FRONT



Weiss

Roanoke College is hosting its first American Council on Education Fellow.

**Robert Weiss**, a professor in the Department of Geosciences at Virginia Tech, will spend the 2023-24 academic year working with and learning from Roanoke College President Frank Shushok Jr. and his leadership team. Weiss requested placement at Roanoke College to learn about innovation in the small, liberal arts college sector.

Established in 1965, the ACE Fellows Program is designed to strengthen institutional and leadership capacity in American higher education by identifying

and preparing faculty and staff for senior positions in college and university administration. Weiss joined the faculty at Virginia Tech in 2011 and currently serves as professor of natural hazards in the Department of Geosciences, director of the Academy of Integrated Science in the College of Science, and director of the Center for Coastal Studies in the Fralin Life Sciences Institute.



Dulemba

Hollins University's Office of Graduate Programs and Continuing Studies has named **Elizabeth Dulemba** as the new program director for the university's graduate programs in children's literature, writing, and illustration. She will provide leadership for and oversight of the

university's existing children's literature programs and develop new initiatives. Dulemba has over three dozen books to her credit; three of her recent picture books as illustrator were written by New York Times best-selling author Jane Yolen and her newest title, *Teacup*, is published under the pseudonym of Bae Broughton, after the street she lived on in Scotland. Previously, Dulemba was program director and associate professor of illustration at Winthrop University and has served as a visiting associate professor in the M.F.A. in children's book writing and illustration program at Hollins each summer over the past decade.



Shepard

**Brennan Shepard** has been named chief

of staff for University Operations at Virginia Tech. As chief of staff, Shepard will provide increased flexibility to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, overseeing the day-to-day administrative functions and engaging across campus and beyond. Shepard was most recently director of financial planning in the Office of Budget and Financial Planning and has served in various roles in the Finance Division over the past 15 years.



Budowle

**Rachael Budowle** has joined the Virginia Tech Honors College as an assistant professor. Budowle said she hopes to bolster the capacity of the Honors College to facilitate collaborative and

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transdisciplinary experiences, enabling students to learn by affecting meaningful change around complex and pressing social and environmental challenges. A cultural anthropologist, Budowle's work focuses on a range of resilience, sustainability, justice, and equity issues.

## TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Bertino



Szurley

5Points Creative has announced two recent additions to the team. **Anna Bertino** and

*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.

**Madeline Szurley** have been hired as Associate Account Leads to help assist Account Leads, manage client projects, and provide internal support. A graduate of George Mason University's Honors College, Bertino holds a B.A. in Communication. Szurley has a B.A. in International Studies and Communication from Hollins University.



Webber

Reid's Fine Furnishings has announced the newest addition to their team, **Sarah Webber**. With an extensive

background in retail and a deep connection to the Grandin Village area, Webber brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to enhance the shopping experience for Reid's customers.

## MUNICIPAL FRONT



Booth

**Scott Booth** will become the new Chief of Police for the City of Roanoke, effective October 31. Notable accomplishments during Booth's tenure as Chief of Police in

Danville, Virginia, include transitioning from the highest per capita violent crime rate in 2017 to a 35-year low in all crime in 2020. "I believe that what works is community policing and creating an environment that is reflective of the City of Roanoke," Booth says. Booth holds a bachelor's degree in human resources management and leadership studies from the University of Richmond, a master's degree in criminal justice from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a doctorate in criminal justice from Pennsylvania Western University.

**Christopher "Chris" S. Lawrence** has been named Montgomery County's Deputy





**Lawrence**

County Administrator, effective Oct. 16. "Chris definitely brings the leadership, experience and skills we were looking for in the role. He is an excellent addition to our leadership team, and I look forward to working with him," said Angie Hill, current Deputy County Administrator. Hill will assume the County

Administrator role on November 1.

Prior to joining Montgomery County, Lawrence was the Deputy Town Manager for the Town of Blacksburg for the past seven years. Prior to joining Blacksburg, Lawrence served as Town Manager of Vinton, from 2008 through 2016. Prior to that he served in various in Blacksburg.

### NON-PROFIT FRONT

Total Action for Progress (TAP) has hired Dr.



**Johns**

**David Johns**, as the agency's newly hired director of fund development. This position will make it possible to fund more services and programs for people in need in the 11 jurisdictions TAP serves throughout southwest Virginia. Johns spent many years as a professor of religion and philosophy,

teaching in Ohio and Indiana. He became increasingly involved with organizational leadership and became a college vice president in southeastern Kentucky. Most recently, Johns also served as president of Ferrum College.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano*

“” We don't want to stretch too thin. — Page 25

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# NFL Super Bowl Winner Champions Digital Literacy

Children in Roanoke City Schools kicked off the school year with a visit from former NFL wide receiver and Super Bowl Champion Malcolm Mitchell. Mitchell is a graduate of University of Georgia, played for the New England Patriots in the 2017 Super Bowl, and founded the Share the Magic Foundation, whose mission is to transform children's lives through literacy. Mitchell partnered with Cox to share a message of encouragement, resiliency, and respect along with the importance of reading and digital literacy.

"Growing up, I believed that football was the most important thing in the world. Once I got to the University of Georgia, I realized that the most self-empowering tool a human being could possess is the ability to read proficiently," Mitchell said.

Mitchell has chosen to collaborate with Cox to amplify the need for internet access among students, particularly in multicultural areas, as the critical foundation for education, training, and the jobs of tomorrow

"For today's kids, having an internet connection is vital," said Mitchell. "Cox's Connect2Compete program offers an affordable option for families, and my hope is that more kids can find joy and passion in reading and writing like I have with greater access to technology and online tools."

Cox is committed to ensuring children have the tools necessary to succeed today and in the future. As part of this commitment, Cox currently offers several affordable internet programs to qualifying households, and it's crucial that local communities help promote adoption of these resources so that families can get the connection they need. Learn more at [www.cox.com/digitalequity](http://www.cox.com/digitalequity).



# 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.

**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. [cooperjpp1@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.

**Shannon Dominguez** is an active member of the Roanoke Writer's Group and is currently writing a book called, "Cult Life: A Memoir about Growing Up as a Jehovah's Witness." She is passionate about sharing authentic stories and believes there is power in the art of storytelling. [Shannon.Nicole.Dominguez@gmail.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).

**Jennifer Leake** CMC® is an expert in employee assessment, Emotional Intelligence, and founder of the Best Job EVER company culture system. When you HIRE RIGHT, ENGAGE EMPLOYEES, and LEAD WELL, the results are greater

performance by employees, and more revenue and profits for your company. [Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com]

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

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

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

**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.

**Dan Smith** is a veteran journalist and member of the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame, a winner of numerous press association awards, the Small Business Journalist of the Year, two Perry F. Kendig Awards and the Arts Council of the Blue Ridge's Literary Award. He is author of eight books, including the recent novels "NEWS!" and "CLOG." [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

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

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

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### *Higher ed, higher numbers*

Many colleges and universities in our region have reported high admission numbers for the new school year / semester. Some of them share record-breaking stats, either the highest in a long time or highest ever. The initial list includes: Emory & Henry, Liberty University, George Mason University, Virginia State University, Virginia Tech, University of Virginia, and UVA Wise, with other institutions expected to report in October.

### *Goats grazing in Buchanan now*

**A Few Old Goats** (AFOG) brewery in Roanoke is opening up a second location at the Factory Flats in Buchanan—tentatively scheduled for the first quarter, 2024. Owner/operators are using the acronym BFOG to distinguish the new venue.

### *Radford bunch brunch*

**NRV Railroad Express Café** has opened in Radford at 1019 East Main Street. The restaurant, specializing in breakfast, sandwiches, and wraps, is operated by Mark Bernier and Willie Smith and will be opened daily 6am to 2pm.

### *Chamber members tops*

The **Virginia Chamber of Commerce** was recognized as “Best State Chamber of Commerce in the Nation

for Member Services” by the National Association of State Chambers at the 2023 Annual Conference in August.

### *Salem serves wine aficionados*

**Stave & Cork** has opened on Main Street in downtown Salem (mid-September), Wednesdays through Sundays. The specialty shop offers boutique wines (from Virginia and abroad), charcuterie varieties and panini sandwiches.

### *RC scores high again*

**Roanoke College** is one of the nation’s best institutions for undergraduates, according to The Princeton Review. The education services company spotlighted Roanoke in the newest edition of its annual guide, “The Best 389 Colleges: 2024 Edition” (Penguin Random House).

Only about 15% of the nation’s four-year schools are picked for profiles in the book. The Princeton Review chooses colleges based on data collected from annual surveys of 2,000 higher ed administrators on their institutions’ academic offerings. The company also reviews survey data from students who report on their experiences at their institutions.

### *Fat Tire teams up with Go Cross*

Professional and amateur bike racing

returned to Roanoke as **Virginia’s Blue Ridge Go Cross** to kick off the national USCX cyclocross race series last month. September 16-17. This fast-paced, spectator friendly event thrust Virginia’s Blue Ridge into the national cycling spotlight and caught the attention of New Belgium Brewing, maker of Fat Tire Ale and one of the fastest-growing craft beer producers in the U.S. New Belgium Brewing recently expanded their manufacturing footprint to include a brewing and packaging facility in Daleville.

With this move, Fat Tire became the presenting sponsor of the Go Cross race series. Professional, amateur, and junior cyclocross racers from across the United States and Europe descended on Roanoke for Go Cross, which was also the first race in the professional cyclocross racing season known as PROCX. Continuing its prestige, Go Cross was again part of the USCX series—comprising the top four professional races in the United States and live-streamed on Global Cycling Network, Discovery+, and Eurosport.

### *Big grant for Blacksburg pharma firm*

The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, one of the institutes that make up the National Institutes of Health, has awarded \$295,294 to **Biotherapeutics, Inc.**, located in Blacksburg, for their project titled,

“A First-in-class Topical Immunoregulatory Therapeutic for Psoriasis.” Congressman Morgan Griffith said in a statement, “millions of Americans suffer from autoimmune diseases, including psoriasis. This grant from the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases will help Biotherapeutics in their work to find a topical relief for those suffering from psoriasis.”

### *STEM grant for Hollins*

**Hollins University** has been awarded a grant of \$999,998 from the National Science Foundation Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Program (NSF S-STEM) to educate the next generation of diverse, highly skilled leaders in the STEM workforce. Grant funds will support the development and implementation of Hollins’ Artemis Scholarship Program for Women in STEM, which is named for the Greek goddess of the hunt and signifies the pursuit of knowledge and acknowledgment. NASA’s Artemis mission to land the first woman and first person of color on the moon.

Hollins’ Artemis Scholarship Program is for undergraduates majoring in biology, environmental science, chemistry, and mathematics. “The NSF grant will be used primarily to fully cover for high-achieving, academically talented Artemis scholars, providing each with a full cost of attendance

scholarship to Hollins University,” said Assistant Professor of Biology and Environmental Science Mary Jane Carmichael, the principal investigator for the initiative.

a vital role in Hawaiians’ financial well-being during difficult times, and this organization supports the people who make credit unions function for their members.”

*Member One pitches in*

**Member One Federal Credit Union** has donated \$5,000 to the National Credit Union Foundation (NCUF) CUAid disaster relief program, which is working with the Hawaii Credit Union League on disaster relief efforts in Maui, Hawaii. The Foundation’s CUAid disaster relief program is the ‘People Helping People’ philosophy in action — every penny donated to CUAid goes directly to credit union volunteers and employees affected by natural disasters.

“We’re honored to partner with the NCUF in their efforts to support those who have experienced this loss and to support their efforts to rebuild,” stated Alex Lucas, VP of Community Impact for Roanoke-based Member One. “Credit Unions play

*Ag grant for Craig County*

Governor Glenn Youngkin has announced the latest awards from the Governor’s Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund Infrastructure Grant program. Three projects will receive \$127,500 in competitively awarded, matching grants for new community infrastructure development projects that support local food production and sustainable agriculture. Among them Craig County, which receives funding to support the construction of a farmers market with public restrooms in the town of New Castle. Craig County and the town of New Castle have only one small grocery store and residents must travel a minimum of 20 miles to access the nearest farmers market. The new farmers market

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will provide another avenue for locally grown produce to be sold within the surrounding community. The application is a joint effort between Craig County, Craig County Economic Development Authority, and the town of New Castle.

*Broadband funding*

Virginia has announced plans for closing the digital divide, outlining a strategy for connecting to high-speed, affordable broadband that will allow Virginia to access a \$1.48 billion federal allocation to deploy high-speed internet networks to areas without broadband. The **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment** (BEAD) program is part of the federal Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act. These funds will be prioritized to reach the

estimated 160,000 remaining unserved homes, businesses and community anchors in the Commonwealth that are not yet in a broadband deployment project area. The Department of Housing and Community Development’s (DHCD) will administer the Commonwealth’s \$1.48 billion BEAD allocation to build upon the work of the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) to reach the remaining unserved regions of the Commonwealth.

*Governor appoints more local Board members*

To the Board for Architects, Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, Certified Interior Designers and Landscape Architects: **Helene Combs Dreiling**, FAIA of Roanoke, Founding Principal,

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The Plum Studio, Ltd.; President, The Three Aspens, Ltd. To the Board for Waste Management Facility Operators: **Donald W. Lawhorne Jr.** of Bedford, Director of Public Works, Town of Bedford.

To the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities: **Melanie Rice** of Roanoke, parent, self-employed. To the Apprenticeship Council: **William Dunn** of Boones Mill, Business Agent, Local 10 Plumber & Steamfitters. To the Safety and Health Codes Board: **Michael Everett** of Christiansburg, Scale and Instrumentation Technician, BAE Systems.

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#### *Not going away*

A rumor going around Salem was that Bob Rotanz and his fellow owners were going to sell the iconic **Mac & Bob's** restaurant on Main Street that he helped launch shortly after leaving Roanoke College – where his goal gave the Maroons an NCAA lacrosse championship in 1978. Ain't so says Rotanz: "a lot of people have been talking to us about Mac & Bobs being sold - some have actually been congratulating us. No, we have not been sold. So, you'll be seeing [us] at the restaurant here as usual." Rotanz felt compelled to set the record straight in a video posted on Facebook.

---

#### *Workforce grants*

Nearly \$2.3 million in workforce development opportunity grants were awarded for 22 projects throughout Virginia in

late August. Each grant has a local matching component. Grant recipients will focus program efforts on boosting outreach and education for youth, providing technical and soft skill training, and increasing work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and apprenticeships. The programs are designed to help disadvantaged youth and help remove barriers of entry for individuals seeking meaningful employment. The **Greater Roanoke Local Workforce Development Area** received more than \$511,000 of that total to be spread over several training programs.

---

#### *New eatery in Vinton*

In recent years it was a storefront church and then the intimate Star City Playhouse. Now, in Vinton's resurging downtown. **Pollard 107 South** - a take on the restaurant's location at 107 South Pollard Street - is open. Pollard 107 South is part of the restaurant group that owns Awful Arthurs and Cast Plates and Pints. It's open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday.

Chrissy Sensabaugh does HR and social media for the new eatery that offers several selections of steak among other fare: "we are known for seafood at Awful Arthur's, so we brought a little bit of [that]. When we talked to people in Vinton, they said we would love to have steak. We have six different choices of steak for people to choose

from. One of our cooks is actually a vegetarian so he came up with a couple of vegetarian dishes. Something that I haven't seen anywhere in Roanoke or Vinton on any menu. We just wanted to have a little bit of something for everybody."

---

#### *VTC marketing award*

**Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC)** has received a national tourism industry award for its "Heart & Soul" campaign, an initiative aimed to promote Virginia as a welcoming destination for Black travelers and increase visitation from this travel group. VTC was recognized in late August with the prestigious National Council of State Tourism Directors (NCSTD) Mercury Award for Digital Campaign during U.S. Travel Association's annual Education Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO) conference in Savannah, Georgia. The agency's DRIVE Tourism program was also recognized as a finalist for the Mercury Award for Community Engagement.

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#### *Henry County business expansion*

**Press Glass Inc.**, the largest independent glass fabricator in Europe, will invest \$155.2 million to expand at the Commonwealth Crossing Industrial Park in Henry County. The company will construct a 360,000-square-foot addition to its existing facility to expand its U.S. presence and manufacture glass

for the commercial construction industry. The project will create 335 new jobs. "With this expansion, Press Glass will make the largest single capital investment by a business in Henry County's history," said Governor Glenn Youngkin. A \$2 million grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund will assist Henry County with the project.

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#### *Bird still on door*

A new bird graphic appears on the popular restaurant in Salem, replacing the previous Blue Apron and Red Rooster Bar. **Brood Restaurant & Bar** (opened mid-July) brings another high end dining option, with patrons already expressing enthusiasm for the culinary delights of chef Ted Polfelt.

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#### *Ambassador program is one year old*

September marked the one-year-anniversary of Roanoke's "Downtown Ambassador Program." **Downtown Roanoke Inc's** Jamie Clark said as of last month they've more power washed 98 projects, cleaned up 736 biohazards, weeded 749 block faces, and relocated 5,720 scooters. "The team is all in brightly colored matching uniforms, very easy to identify. That way people know they can ask [them] questions, seek assistance if they need it – and see the work they are accomplishing across [downtown]." The Downtown Ambassador program is currently on a two-year pilot program,



funded by DRI, the City of Roanoke and other downtown stakeholders. Local business outreach and keeping downtown streets and sidewalks cleaner is also part of their mission. The program is administered by Block By Block, which serves more than 120 urban districts, parks and transit systems nationwide.

*Floyd Citizens get more WiFi*

**Citizens Telephone Cooperative** recently completed an installation of two additional free public WiFi locations, earning the company recognition as a Smart Rural Community Provider by the NTCA Broadband Association. The free WiFi is now available at the Floyd Parks & Recreation just off Route 8 as well as the football field, tennis courts, track; and in

the new and old gyms at Floyd County High School. "Having public WiFi enables Internet access when needed and will help when tournaments are taking place," says Jacob Agee, Director of Floyd's Parks & Rec. Fans and visitors to Floyd County High School can enjoy WiFi via a free connection at the football, baseball, and softball fields, and parking areas any day after school starting at 3pm. The community can have access at any time on weekends.

Donna Smith, CEO and General Manager of Citizens stated, "Whether you are enjoying the Town's music venues, sporting events at the Parks & Recreation fields, or events at Floyd County High School, Citizens has a connection available." The free WiFi—working over

1Gbps fiber—will complement other events as well, such as the Arts & Craft Festival. FCHS Principal Barry Hollandsworth said the public WiFi ensures safety and does not infringe on the school's network.

### *Bedford business boom*

The **Town of Bedford** is on the move with several projects, including a proposed new Dunkin' on East Lynchburg Salem Turnpike, a new Royal Farms in the Harmony Town Center (fried chicken is a specialty), approval for 130 new housing units between Fuqua Mill Road and Independence Boulevard at Ole Dominion Boulevard, and the rezoning of the area surrounding the prospective Hampton Inn by Hilton hotel, which will be located on Burks Hill Road at Tiger Trail

near the National D-Day Memorial. That hotel is expected to be open in about two years and is situated on the gateway to Centertown Bedford.

These initiatives says Mary Zirkle, the Town's Director of Planning and Community Development, "demonstrate the Town's dedication to fostering economic growth and enhancing community well-being, evolved from creating an environment that encourages private investment. Overall, the Town anticipates these initiatives will stimulate the local economy, increase job opportunities, and enhance the Town's appeal to both residents and visitors, further making Bedford an attractive and relevant small town."

*Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field*

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# “The Granddaddy of All Festivals”

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

**That compliment about Sinkland Farms’ Pumpkin Festival is the type of feedback that “makes it all worthwhile,” owner Susan Sink said.**

Sinkland Farms, an agri-tourism business located in Christiansburg, is best known for its annual Pumpkin Festival, now in its thirty-second year. It also began a summer Sunflower Festival three years ago and an Easter Egg-stravaganza this year (they ran out of eggs, but “who knew 3,000 people would come?” Susan Sink said). Other popular events include weddings, corporate parties, customer appreciation days, birthday parties, reunions, Christmas parties, baby showers, and even end of life celebrations.

Recently, Sinkland Farms won the SWVA Tourism Award of Outstanding Attraction of the Year from the Friends of Southwest Virginia. Sinkland was nominated by Renee Beran, a professional photographer who shoots seasonal sessions in the picturesque

setting. Sink feels that Sinkland’s growing success has been boosted by numerous awards it has received (see sidebar).

Sink said she takes pride in everything Sinkland Farms does: in the venue being a magazine-worthy showplace, in providing local entertainment and employment, in its pumpkins being larger and fresher than those found at big-box stores. She added that Sinkland Farms contributes to the economic development and appeal of the area; Montgomery County includes Sinkland Farms in its list of reasons to move to the locality.

“I have looked, and no other festival has all that we offer for a \$15 admission fee,” Sink said of the Pumpkin Festival.



Keeland Griffith Photography

**Susan Sink**

## SINKLAND FARMS ACCUMULATES ACCOLADES

- “Most Outstanding Attraction”  
by *SWVA Tourism*
- “The Most Unique”  
by *Blue Ridge Outdoors*
- “Best Pumpkin Patch”  
by *Virginia Tourism*
- “Best Farm to Visit”  
by *Blue Ridge Outdoors*
- “Best Special Event Venue”  
by *Virginia Living*
- “Platinum & Gold” by *Bridebook*
- “Top 10 Epic Wedding Venue”  
by *Only in Our State*
- “Top Wedding Venue”  
by *Virginia Living*

Sinkland Farms now hosts 40,000 visitors annually for the Pumpkin and Sunflower Festivals combined. People come from all over the Commonwealth as well as from other states. Sink mentioned folks Google “attractions” and choose Sinkland Farms as a side excursion off Interstate 81.

Sinkland Farms is unique, Sink said, in that it has something for every age to enjoy, “from toddlers to grandparents.” This includes kid-friendly activities like a playground and live animals, as well as a tap room, wine offerings, and live music for grown-ups. She added that



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Submitted

the growth in college student visitors has been “astronomical.”

The venue’s tagline, “It’s a family tradition,” holds true. Sink said couples have told her they wanted to get married at Sinkland Farms because it had been special to them while they were dating, and many people come back year after year.

Agri-tourism is a relatively new concept in America. It means bringing people to the farm to enjoy the experience, said Sink. Sinkland began its foray into this business even before the phrase was coined with a pick-your-own strawberry patch.

“It is a new way for farmers to engage,” said Sink. “It has saved so many farms as an avenue to bring money to the farmer.”

Sink is thankful for the rise in agri-tourism and Sinkland Farms’ growth in particular, as she said costs have “skyrocketed” on everything from labor to agricultural products.

Originally run as a dairy farm, Sinkland Farms moved into agri-tourism after Sink’s husband, Henry, died in 2007. She had neither the knowledge for, nor the interest in, running a dairy operation. Looking at the assets of the farm, including its pastoral scenery, and at how other farms nationwide were combating the downturn in the farming industry, stimulated Sink’s desire to bring people to the farm.

Today, Sink and her new husband do the back-end work themselves. That includes everything from deciding what to sell in the on-site shop to bringing in the animals. There are no full-time employees. Part-timers assist as needed: “we call and they come,” said Sink. She is grateful for their loyalty and treats them well. In addition, her three grown children pitch in.

“It’s a family affair,” said Sink.

Marketing has changed drastically during the time Sink has been hosting the Pumpkin Festival. No longer is it newspaper-centric. Sinkland Farms now has a large social media campaign with Facebook and Google ads, supplemented by ads in The Roanoke Times and on local television stations. Sink, who has a background in development and communications, said the key is doing “a little bit of everything.” Advertising is expensive, so she largely relies on word of mouth.

She said, “The positive experience of customers is the most precious marketing.”

Sink has kept up with the times in other ways as well. Customers can go online to buy tickets. She has created myriad special events, such as Hokie Spirit weekend when the Hokie Bird and other Virginia Tech representatives visit the farm. It’s the biggest weekend of the season, Sink said. She is currently trying to set up a similar event with Radford University.



Jennifer Poff Cooper

Wanting to be of value to the community is an important component of Sinkland Farm's culture. It has a non-profit arm called Sinkland Farms Agricultural Education Center. Sink emphasized that the 8,000 children from 102 school systems who visited the farm last year did not just play, but learned about farming and where their food comes from.

The Sinks also aim to be good neighbors. A huge challenge at the Pumpkin Festival, in particular, is traffic congestion, and Sink has worked hard to address the issue. She has extended the festival hours to spread out traffic, enlisted engineers to offer suggestions, and hired off-duty officers to direct traffic on the busiest weekends (the middle four).

Sink feels her business is "steps ahead of many places" with other concerns. The sheriff has assessed security, and now an undercover officer walks the grounds. Sinkland employs nurses for emergencies.

Fortunately, Sink said, the worst thing that's happened is bee stings: "We give the kid ice cream and spray medicine on the sting."

Not having a written business plan but going with her "gut reaction" has served

Sink well. Though she wants to keep the farm at the forefront of the community's mind moving forward, she currently has no plans to add another festival to the busy calendar. But, she laughed, "You never know what might come to me in the middle of the night." 🍷

*For more information, see [sinklandfarms.com](http://sinklandfarms.com).*

**Author's note:** Sinkland Farms was formerly owned and operated as a dairy farm by my grandfather, J. Edwin Keith, who sold it to Henry Sink upon his retirement. Sinkland Farms and Susan Sink are now my neighbors.



Jennifer Poff Cooper

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