

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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SEPTEMBER 2023

Secure Robotics

VCCS Chancellor:
David Doré

Roanoke County
Economic Development
Director: Megan Baker

Virginia Tech Dining

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Roanoke's Poker King



Joe Scales
Ante Up



-KAT PASCAL

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

A veritable smorgasbord of stories this month, from a profile of Roanoke County's Economic Development Director one year into the job – to a guy that plays poker for a living. Cybersecurity and the future of workforce training – at least through the eyes of Virginia's new Community College Chancellor - are in the spotlight as well in September. And some interesting vignettes in our FRONT Spotlight and 'About sections – like Habitat for Humanity using concrete instead of wood framing to build walls in new houses. Who knew?

There's always some new wrinkle to uncover, as the economy avoids recession, inflation cools down and plenty of jobs have yet to be filled. Of course, there's always football – college and pro – if you just want to forget about it all for a few hours. Happy reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

““

Crooks are a major feeder of innovation.

— Page 17

discover the college

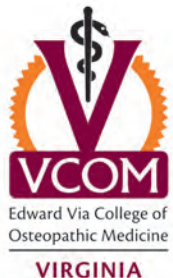
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A business. A game. A community.

By Shawn Nowlin



FRONTcover photograph of Joe Scales by Tom Field.

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SEPTEMBER



Aila Boyd



Erin Burcham



Frazier Hughes



Mike Leigh



Sam Sokolove



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



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Gene Marrano



Shawn Nowlin



Dan Smith



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construction



David Todd
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senior services

“My mom and dad taught me the importance of living with the results as long as you give the maximum effort.”

— Page 11

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 46.

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A business. A game. A community.

Roanoke's Poker-Playing Community Welcomes New Members

By Shawn Nowlin

The Roanoke poker community is a hub for serious (and not so serious) card player.



Last November, Joe Scales was faced with an important life decision – immerse every ounce of his bandwidth into his poker media company Ante Up or find another profession. The Roanoker chose the former and that decision to bet on himself has paid off ten-fold. Today, *Ante Up* produces a weekly podcast, a monthly magazine and YouTube content, among other things.

Taking over the company from the previous owners Scott Long and Chris Cosenza was a risk, but Scales had the utmost confidence in his abilities and potential. "The process started in March. There were a lot of back and forth negotiations, but eventually, everything got worked out. Trying to get a SBA loan was an ordeal all

“ ”

People do not need to be serious aficionados to join.

Poker Face

What's Joe holding? Can you spot a tell?





““”

It happens to make a fun memory, not for people to take their friend's money.

to itself," he said. "The owners were great to work with though. They knew it was going to be a process, but were consummate professionals the whole time."

Growing up in Kansas, Scales' parents instilled in him a discipline that has remained there ever since. As a toddler, he distinctly remembers being allowed to sit on his mother's lap as she played hearts, dominoes and, of course, spades with his grandparents.

"From as long as I can remember, whatever I've been



involved with, I was determined to succeed. My mom and dad taught me the importance of living with the results as long as you give maximum effort," Scales says.

"Even today, while I may not be great at everything, one thing that I can control is outworking the competition. In simple terms, poker is a strategy game that utilizes skill, but also has a social aspect to it unlike any other game." From his vantage point, the game teaches patience and how to be observant. "People have in their head that the average poker player is some guy in a hoodie wearing sunglasses and headphones. That does not match the reality. The truth is, poker players love to laugh, get together and tell jokes," Scales noted.

"For as long as I can remember, people have been hosting poker nights. It happens to make a fun memory, not for people to take their friend's money." When Scales and his wife, Lauren, went on their first date, she thought that he was going to be a *decorative gambler*. He says that such myths exist to this day. Setting the record straight, he explained, "The parts that people don't see are the stories like the one from this year's World Series of Poker where two professional players bought a terminally ill player named Cody Daniels into the Main Event. As the game went on, Cody's story spread to millions of people."

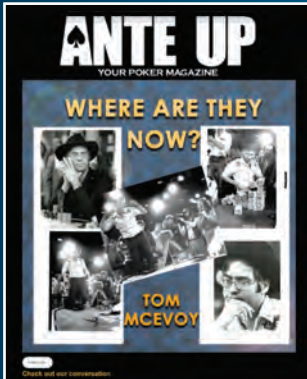
He added, "[Daniels] had been using this piece of pyrite, or 'Fool's Gold,' as a good luck charm and it became the goal of the other players to get that rock to the final table, and they did. It even ended up in the winner's photo right next to the cards he won with."

Here is a fact that not everyone knows: poker has been part of this country's story as far back as George Washington. Over the years, the poker scene has changed drastically. Virginia currently has just two casinos with live poker rooms right now, in Richmond and Portsmouth. Several other casinos under construction in Danville and Bristol may add to the total. Spades have extreme cultural relevance in certain communities. Unsurprisingly, Scales has been a long-time fixture in the local poker community. One thing he can't stress enough is that people do not need to be serious aficionados to join.

THE BIG DEAL




"Rounders," Joe Scales, says, when asked which movie about poker (there are so many of them!) was his favorite. He also cites the story of Chris Moneymaker ("yes, that's his real name," Joe says) who became the catalyst for "the Poker Boom" of 2003, when the "sport" exploded after Moneymaker—considered an average guy—won the 2003 World Series of Poker (after paying a mere \$145 entry fee). The AnteUp magazine has served the poker community beyond his expectations, Scales says; and he's particularly happy it's back up after a pause from the COVID pandemic. Another fun part of his business—the travel. At the time of this interview, he's about to jet off to Chicago and Baton Rouge.



Financial success for Ante Up came sooner than expected. "Operating the company primarily is my wife and myself, although we do have people who voluntarily write articles. Everything for us is based on ads. Ads for the magazine. Ads for the podcast," he said. "We also have poker tours where we get paid to advertise that we are going to be there."

While working hard to create quality content and expand the community are strong passions of Scales, giving back to the community excites him tremendously too. Across the country, he involves himself in many charity tournaments, with proceeds going to worthy causes. In Chicago recently, he participated in a charity that sent kids with cancer to different year-round camps.

"If there is a charity out there that may be looking for creative and fun ways to raise money, Ante Up would love to be able to help them do that. Being a poker media company is fun, but being able to enrich the lives of others is the most fulfilling," he said. Scales does not regret the time he's invested in the game of poker over the years. His biggest current goal with Ante Up is to bring even more people to the game.

"We partner with casinos, charities and other organizations to advertise their products and services. People can access all of our media from our website anteupmagazine.com or on YouTube under Ante Up Poker Media." Deal the cards. 

HOW JOE ANTES UP

+655% GROWTH in the magazine since April this year

+233% GROWTH in the podcast since January this year

21% of TOTAL AUDIENCE is INTERNATIONAL

731 podcasts averaging almost 10,000 listeners per week

145 issues of Ante Up magazine with over 18,000 readers per month

“ ”

Virginia currently has just two casinos with live poker rooms right now, in Richmond and Portsmouth.





Dan Smith

Joel Yonts: "A technologist who goes to the board room."

Protecting Us from Cyber Attack

By Dan Smith

Joel Yonts has been at the leading edge of cyber threats for decades, all the while trying to stay ahead of the criminals.

To call Joel Yonts a cop is a bit of an oversimplification, like saying Joe Biden is a government worker.

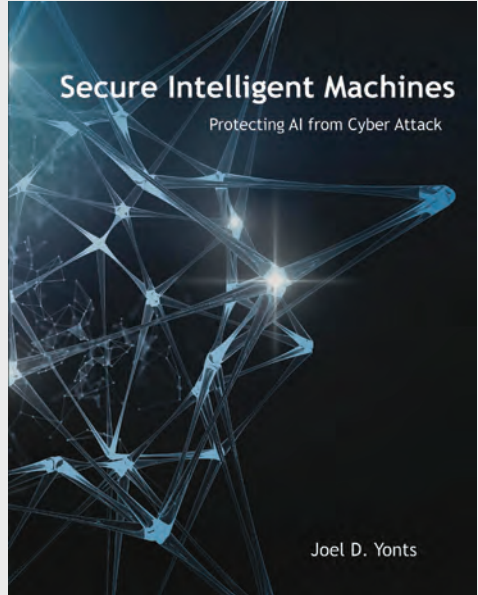
Yonts' cyber-security company, Secure Robotics, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Malicious Streams, created in 2008 to focus and research protecting Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is based in Daleville. Yonts, who lives in Roanoke, is CEO and Lead Scientist.

The Eastern Kentucky native who attended the University of Kentucky and Stanford University has been a cyber security technologist, researcher and executive in various companies for 20 years. He has built and operated cyber security networks for big companies since 2006. He is, in short, an expert in a field that is growing in importance and profile, one whose limits have not even been imagined yet.

He has worked for the FBI and other organizations assessing emerging cyber threats and has published research on malware reverse engineering, digital forensics techniques as well as serving in a wide range of technical roles protecting Fortune 500 companies from cyber-attack.

Yonts' work has been as varied, he says, as "development of a new time-of-flight mass spectrometer for laser spectroscopy," cataloging the conservation efforts for native fish in Central Virginia, research into "low-level attributes of malicious flies" and "most importantly" pioneering new cyber-attack and defensive techniques for compromising and defending AI technologies.

For the past 15 years, as a chief engineering security officer, he has worked "to deliver a unique top-to-bottom insight into the



Cover of Joel Yonts' new book, *Secure Intelligent Machines: Protecting AI from Cyber Attack*.

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Joel and Joanna Yonts: Crooks “are a major feeder of innovation and we have to be on constant defense.”

cyber-practices” of his clients, a vital new element in doing business.

Talk about playing ahead of the curve.

Yonts works with a number of private contractors to solve problems and even shares a home with wife Joanna, a “cyber security incident handler” for Advance Auto (where Joel was once a vice president and chief security officer). They have two children, Joshua, 23 and Gracie, 21, both of whom live in the Roanoke Valley.

Most recently, he has published a new book, *Secure Intelligent Machines: Protecting AI from Cyber Attack*, which he is using, in part, to explain the services of his company,

as well as to educate those who need the services.

Yonts describes himself as “a technologist who goes to the board room. ... I’ve always been a scientist. I told Mom at the age of 4 that’s what I wanted to do, and I’ve researched lots of different stuff. Cyber security and AI have elements of science and science fiction, forging a new reality. My book fuels passion, ushering in this change. I want to think ahead of this infrastructure, but I don’t want to get over my skis and get in trouble.”

It is important, he insists, to consider “the ethics, the human impact, but to be a strong voice in cyber security while we figure it


out. It's an arms race." Crooks, he says, "are a major feeder of innovation and we have to be in constant defense."

Innovations in cyber security and AI are coming at break-neck speed, he says, "and time to market is critical. It takes 12 to 18 months to spec, procure, and deploy a new defensive technology, where attackers can figure out something new and get to market by lunch. So, we are building defenses 18 months ahead."

AI is both a blessing and something less and it "has a uniqueness that's not like anything else," Yonts says. "The fundamental difference is that with design, we give computers logic. With AI we give the data and [AI] figures out how to use it. AI sees patterns humans can't see and, in some cases, they are so complex humans can't figure them out. ... In order to get value, we must let [AI] operate autonomously and gain efficiencies."

Fact is, though, that "there are some things we can do better (than AI) like high end artistic ability, complex environmental issues, music, movies, art."

Of his book, Yonts says, cyber security and AI are "all so new that there is little literature" about it. "I talk about how to protect data because it can be compromised. Data has to flow, so there is always inherent risk." Eventually, he says, we are facing "AI vs. AI, because humans can't keep up. Also, AI is driving massive growth in computing power and energy consumption making it a growing threat to the environment. The great threat may be our greatest hope, however. We are not on a path to ever fix it, but there is a great chance that AI can help deliver clean energy."

The book, he says, "is a business plan." And that's a start. 



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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Does everyone on the team need to know about the financials in your organization? Do they even care?

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
OpXSolutionsllc.com

Do financials matter?

As a small business owner, I love to dive into my financials. I'm analytical by nature, so I enjoy reviewing the details in my P&L statement, my margins, and my cash flow. Although not everyone loves poring over the numbers, owners and senior leaders have no choice but to firmly understand their financials or have someone on the team that does.

In my experience, most organizations do a thorough job of sharing their financial results with their employees. I've observed many all-employee meetings where the CEO or CFO shared extensive and complex financials including revenue, ratios, gross margins, EBITA, absorption rates, and inventory turns. While I understand that these leaders want to be transparent, I wish they would just stop doing it.

Most employees don't care about these metrics, and many don't even understand them. Financials mean nothing to someone selling clothing, serving customers, or making widgets. Yet leaders often act like this is the most important information to report to employees. And worse yet, leaders will sometimes hold their teams accountable to financial results when those same teams don't even know how to influence them.

Employees aren't apathetic. They do want to know if the company is profitable, growing, and stable. They do want to know if they can expect a bonus. But most importantly, employees want to know what they have to do each day and how well they are performing. How quickly does a cashier need to serve a customer? How many burgers does a cook need to make each hour during peak business? How many widgets does an assembler need to make each day?

Each month, I share with my team how our business has performed. I share how many leadership courses we sold, how many new customers we acquired, and how we rank against our peers. I also provide some insight into the overall financial picture of our business and the economy. But my margins, EBITA, and COGs are for me to understand and analyze, and not my team.

Yes, financials matter. They matter a lot. But organizations need to translate those financials into job performance metrics that are easily seen, understood, and influenced by their employees. 📊

“Owners... have no choice but to firmly understand their financials...”

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Just look at the numbers from the "Region 2: Innovation Ecosystem Review 2021-22" (vergeva.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Final-2022-Innovation-Ecosystem-in-Review.pdf):

- 12,235 regional STEM-H graduates in 2021
- 10,139 people employed by IT and Software (Q3 2022)
- 117 patents were filed in 2021

That's where RBTC Technology Talent Strategist Jason Clayton comes in. He brings over 20 years of experience in talent and leadership development expertise to the Roanoke-Blacksburg region.


He's a dynamic team member who is eager to collaborate and support our members with identifying and attracting top-notch talent.

Jason will help bridge the gap between college students earning degrees in tech-based programs with companies that have a strong need to fill jobs. He'll further support the ecosystem by helping to create programs that are designed to attract and retain tech and biotech talent for the region to bolster the impressive innovation happening here.

He's no stranger to the innovation ecosystem either. Jason has collaborated with others on various GO Virginia projects related to talent in the past and comes from higher education, where he worked on various work-based learning initiatives.

He's currently focusing on facilitation of the regional ELITE Grant and other internship programs that can help your business connect with the next generation of workers.

Prior to joining RBTC, Jason helped develop internship and work-based learning initiatives at multiple universities throughout the Southeast and upper Midwest, spanning both private and public institutions. A first-generation college graduate, Jason holds degrees from Eastern Michigan University and Clemson University.

We invite all RBTC member companies to say hello to Jason and start a conversation about their tech talent needs. 



Jason Clayton

Courtesy photo



INNOVATION

**By Erin Burcham,
RBTC/Verge**

Executive Summary:

Some of the nation's best technology talent is building right here.

Thanks to amazing higher education institutions and shifts in employment, the demand for tech talent is stronger than ever.

*Erin Burcham is Executive Director for the Roanoke – Blacksburg Technology Council
erin.burcham@rbtc.tech*

Taking it to the next level for VCCS

By Gene Marrano

The newly minted Chancellor for Virginia's Community College System wants to further align the schools he oversees with the needs of industry in the Commonwealth.



Virginia Community College System

David Doré

At the Virginia Community Colleges Chancellor's retreat last month in Roanoke, Dr. David Doré, who assumed that position in the Youngkin Administration this past April (Glenn Dubois held that job for more than two decades before retiring last year), announced what he called a new era – and a new approach for the 23 community colleges in Virginia. Doré said the VCCS would further embrace technology and flexibility to serve a “new majority of learners,” which includes veterans, parents and working adults. “The tools that we are using day to day in our classrooms and in our jobs are changing more quickly than ever,” said Doré from the podium, “continuously disrupting higher education.”

The goal: that every high school senior graduate with both a two-year college diploma and “a meaningful postsecondary credential,” that can put them in a good paying job sooner. The Virginia Department of Education will partner with the Virginia Community College system as well Doré vowed, “to propose legislation next year to remove barriers that hinder access to postsecondary programming and clearly define the path students will take to graduate with the skills and credentials necessary for a seamless transfer or immediate entrance to the workforce.” Part

of that push is making sure Dual Enrollment and the Fast Forward programs continue to grow. In fact, Doré wants to see all high school graduates also leave with either an associate degree or “a meaningful postsecondary credential that has value among employers.”


Aligning skills and training more closely with the needs of local industries said Doré, strengthening those partnerships, ensuring the high school students leave with more marketable workforce skills in place – or are able to take the next step and thrive at a community college as they polish those skills further. “We are the only provider of post-secondary education in the Commonwealth that has true statewide scope ... impacting every region of Virginia,” said Doré in his keynote address during the Chancellor’s Retreat at Hotel Roanoke.

Nearly every category of human interaction he observed has been transformed through technology. “[Community colleges] must embrace these technologies in full. Higher education has been slower than others to adapt to the digital shift. We are at a critical juncture where we must adapt.”

High on that list is the future impact of Artificial Intelligence on the workforce. The VCCS, 23 schools and 40 campuses, “must equip students with the skills they need for the modern world,” noted Doré. “This shortage of working-age adults who do not possess the skills needed

for jobs in our most in-demand fields, healthcare, technology, and manufacturing, is stumping economic growth and widening income gaps.”

Doré’s mission is to launch programs within the community college system at a faster pace to keep up with industry changes, and to further align the VCCS with Virginia’s nine GO Virginia regions, to better scale programming at the college level to meet regional job demands. The Virginia Community College System, noted Doré, remains the least funded of all Virginia public institutions of higher education – and among the lowest of funded community college systems in the country. It’s a formula that Doré says he wants to see changed by legislation in the General Assembly. “These investments will go towards recruiting and retaining quality faculty and growing the system’s successful workforce programs.”

With thousands of technical jobs going unfilled in Virginia alone and the cost of four year colleges beyond the reach of many, at least right out of high school, graduating with a certified marketable skill and/or a two year associate degree courtesy by way of dual enrollment is on the agenda said the Chancellor, who wants the VCCS to address what he called three prominent gaps in the system: educational achievement, technology, and skills. “We must be aligned to the key [business] sectors of our state.” 






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I get a lot of calls off of my real estate signs from my listings. It's a great marketing tool to have your sign on a property, building, land, or in the front yard of a home. Having your name and brand out in the public eye is key in real estate. Always try to vet the calls from the signs and find out as much as I can about their needs and if they have a realtor. If someone already has a realtor, they should have their realtor call me instead. Realtors are trained to handle issues with the home like repairs, pricing, moving, items in the home, and much more. If these become discussed between the buyer and selling agent or even the seller without both agents discussing all matters.

Things can become misconstrued and turn into 'he said, she said.' According to real estate attorney Doug Wilson Jr. of The Wilson Law firm in Roanoke: "If they haven't signed an exclusive buyer's agent contract with another agent you can deal directly with them. If they have, you should tell them that you need to work through the other agent. Only agents are bound by ethics rules. Not the public." Here's a good one for you. Recently I had a house in Roanoke for sale. We had 3 offers. I was in the middle of negotiating the best offer (much more than the rest) with my client. All of a sudden, my client receives a message from the buyer of the much lower offer complaining he was upset she didn't take her offer.

My client called me and began to question herself. I made it clear not to talk to her and spelled out our much better offer to her. Her realtor should have called me. It put a bad taste in my client's mouth. Her chances of winning the deal were low, but now, a lot lower. The key is not to go behind the sign as it leaves everyone on all ends blind to the situation and usually in frustration. Use your realtor to navigate properties and not just yourself. 

REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:
The key is not to go behind the sign.

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New Speed, New Store, New Plans: Cox Upgrades Come to Roanoke

Cox Communications has a long-standing history of investing in its network, its products, and the communities it serves, and recently, Roanoke got a healthy dose of each. Cox recently announced the opening of a cutting-edge retail store in Roanoke, along with the availability of the company's new mobile offering and network enhancements that will deliver significant speed increases to existing customers. Jeff Merritt, Cox's market vice president in Roanoke, noted the significance of the store's impact on the Roanoke community.

"Cox has long understood that its relationship with customers is built on their trust in us to do right by the communities we serve," said Merritt. "And what better way to showcase this commitment than at our incredible new retail location on Towne Square Boulevard, and with new investments in exciting products and network upgrades that benefit consumers regardless of income bracket."

The brand-new store is located at 1414 Towne Square Boulevard, NW, at the intersection of Towne Square Boulevard and Rutgers Street, and provides a dynamic shopping environment for customers to explore high-speed internet products, home automation solutions, exciting entertainment packages, and the company's newest offering, Cox Mobile. This store replaces the former location near Valley View Mall.

But it's not just an upgraded shopping experience that Cox is delivering; the company has also upgraded its network. In fact, Cox just doubled the speed of its most popular tier from 250 Mbps to 500 Mbps. With no change in price, 75% of its customers receive a half-gig or more. In the last 10 years, Cox has invested more than \$11 billion in network and product upgrades to deliver some of the most powerful internet, TV, phone, smart home and mobile services and will continue making multibillion-dollar annual infrastructure investments over the next several years.

Customers interested in learning more about Cox products and services can stop by the new store at 1414 Towne Square Blvd NW, go online to www.cox.com, or call 1-800-234-3993.

Baker continues Roanoke County's positive economic development momentum

By Aila Boyd

Almost one year in, Megan Baker is bullish about the future.

Since assuming the role of economic development director for Roanoke County 11 months ago, Megan Baker has been working to continue the momentum of her predecessor, Jill Loope, who held the position from 2011-2022.

"Jill really did lay a nice groundwork for where we're going," Baker said.

Her move to the Roanoke Valley was necessitated by a promotion her husband

received from the National Weather Service, this time working out of Blacksburg. Coincidentally, the promotion came at the same time she discovered the Roanoke County job.

Upon coming to the area for the first time, she was struck by the scenery. "I remember touching down in the plane for my first visit here and just looking around—it was stunning," she said. "I went to high school in Asheville, North Carolina, so it was really nice to be surrounded [again] by the mountains."

Baker came to Roanoke County from Peachtree City, Georgia, where she was president of the Fayette County Development Authority. The work, she said, was similar to her new role with Roanoke County, namely leading business attraction efforts, overseeing business retention and real estate development. One of her big economic development wins during that time was spearheading the development of a 600-acre business park.

Baker explained that the process of business attraction starts with understanding a community's assets. "Having that message... What is your county/community's unique selling points to really make yourself stand out," she said. "Every community is different. Whether you have the beautiful outdoor destination that Roanoke County has, or you have really good utilities that an industry seeks, just really making yourself stand out from all of the competition."

Workforce considerations is something to consider when it comes to business attraction and retention, she said.



Megan Baker

“Workforce is a challenge everywhere. Our employers can’t find people with the essential skills and the dedication,” she explained. “We’re collaborating with our educational partners...Roanoke County Public Schools, workforce development organizations to figure out how we’re going to meet that demand.”

The county school division’s apprenticeship programs helps address workforce challenges, she said. Notably, she stressed, they expose high school students to the work opportunities that are available to them locally.

Site development is also an important consideration for business attraction, she noted. “Speed to market has become more critical as businesses want to get up and running as quickly as possible,” she said. “They want to know the site is zoned, the utilities are there.” The 110-acre Wood Haven Technology Park will play a key role in attracting new businesses, she added.

Looking ahead, Baker said the county has three neighborhood center plans, including the 419 Town Center at Tanglewood.

She characterized the 419 Town Center as being a “success story” of mall redevelopment. The catalyst was the Carilion Children’s Pediatric Medicine expansion in the former JCPenney space, followed by more than 10 restaurant and retail openings. Transportation improvements have also been performed at the center to promote pedestrian flow and bicycle lanes. “Those are all key elements in really establishing those centers where people can go and they can shop and they can dine,” she said. The county is working with the new owner of Tanglewood to investigate other possibilities, such as living spaces.

“We continue to build on the centers. We’re building on those centers we have and then continuing to look at other areas in the community,” she added.


Another potential area of opportunity she sees is the continued development of the county’s outdoor amenities. She pointed to expanding the greenways and the continued growth of Explore Park as playing a significant role in that effort.



[Megan Baker] has built a great team around her and is quickly focusing on Roanoke County's unique selling points. Her team is working with the Roanoke Regional Partnership and Virginia Economic Development Partnership to help tell the story of our region and its assets for doing business and living here. She's a great ambassador.

— Martha Hooker, chair of the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors

As for regional collaboration with other neighboring economic development directors, Baker said she has a good working relationship with all of them. She doesn’t view herself in competition with other directors because her efforts focus on tapping into the unique attributes that Roanoke County possesses.

“We share corridors. I don’t see it as competition. I see it as what happens in Salem is good for us. As we continue to have this positive development, this positive momentum, I think it just elevates us all,” she noted. 



Megan Baker (center) meets with delegate Joe McNamara



SMALL BUSINESS TOOLKIT

By Sam Sokolove

Executive Summary:

When it comes to fundraising, it's not just about getting money. It's about building connections and nurturing relationships.

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

Unlocking the potential of fundraising: Juliette's journey

Have you ever been so motivated by someone's words that it stays with you long after they've spoken? That's what happened to Juliette Landeros-Anaya when she listened to (disclosure, my boss) Bonnie Chavez, CEO of Roanoke-based Building Beloved Communities LLC, speak last year to a group of young adults at Virginia Tech. Bonnie's talk focused on empowerment and setting goals, inspiring Juliette. But it wasn't just the talk that stuck with her – it was Bonnie's offer to help ambitious individuals achieve their big dreams.

Juliette, a senior at Lord Botetourt High School, had a strong desire to make a positive impact on her community. Motivated by this drive, she decided to take Bonnie up on her offer. She asked Bonnie for financial assistance to bring her vision to life: a project called "A.I.M High." This initiative motivated and empowered English Language Learner (ELL) students at Read Mountain Middle School with goal setting.

Juliette's journey to create A.I.M High started with a simple yet impactful idea – a book drive. Drawing from her experiences and recognizing the specific needs of ELL middle school students, Juliette was determined to provide these young minds with the tools and inspiration they needed to dream of a better future.


The highlight of Juliette's project was the A.I.M High Conference, which brought together a diverse group of speakers from different fields, such as education, entrepreneurship, and community leadership. These speakers shared their personal stories with the students and highlighted the importance of setting goals. The conference was a huge success, leaving a lasting impact far beyond its scheduled date.

Juliette's creation of the A.I.M High Conference isn't just a testament to her passion, determination, and ability to collaborate – it's also a story of fearlessly asking for financial support. Alongside the support from Bonnie and Building Beloved Communities, Juliette also reached out to local corporate sponsors, showing that seeking help is a powerful step towards making positive change.

Community leaders who actively participate in fundraising often get to talk directly to potential donors. This is a unique opportunity to share their story, values, and accomplishments. By building these genuine connections, community leaders create trust and friendship that can lead to long-lasting partnerships. These partnerships go beyond money – they can also result in volunteers getting involved, receiving support in the form of goods or services, and even spreading the word about the cause.

If asking for donations feels intimidating, there are ways to overcome that fear. Role-playing exercises, workshops, and mentorship opportunities can boost confidence and help refine fundraising strategies. It's also an opportunity for fundraisers to remind donors - especially corporate sponsors - that budgeting for charitable giving is not only socially beneficial but there are tax benefits and greater market visibility to be gained.

Budgeting for this planned expense can look like time (direct volunteerism), talent (board service), and treasure (cash donations).

Juliette's journey is a shining example of how passion, determination, and seeking support can lead to incredible accomplishments. Her story shows that fundraising isn't just about money – it's about building a community to make the world a better place. 



Fundraising [is] about building a community to make the world a better place.

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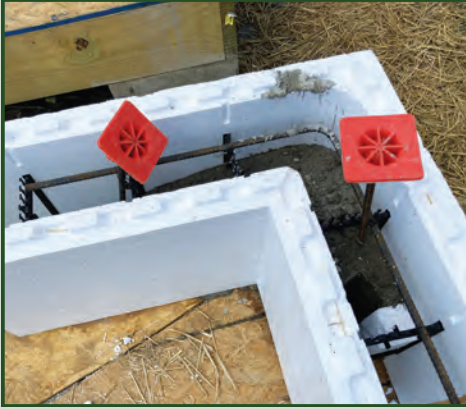
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Gene Marrano

Habitat offers concrete solution to affordable homebuilding >

Habitat for Humanity in the Roanoke Valley has been around for decades but a build taking place in Southeast Roanoke is a first. It almost certainly won't be the last of its kind. Since 1986 Habitat for Humanity-Roanoke has built over 280 affordable homes for local first-time owners who must pay the mortgage after contributing their own "sweat equity," along with other volunteers. Now for the first time low-carbon homes utilizing insulating concrete forms (ICF) to construct the walls is going up on 14th Street Southeast. Brian Clark is the construction director for Habitat-Roanoke: "with stick framing [wood] walls they get really big and heavy. Sometimes if you're doing a full set of walls, you really do need 15 people at a time. For this build we really can kind of with 4 or 5 or 6 [people, mainly volunteers] if we needed to."

Clark says Habitat concrete wall houses aren't necessarily lower cost than all stick-built houses - they were at times when lumber went sky high during the pandemic - but long term those who move in will save on utilities and insurance costs. Angela Brown and her family will own this unique house when it is completed. Nationwide since 2021 Habitat for Humanity has built almost 70 homes that feature concrete walls. "The use of ICF technology will provide greater savings to the homebuyer in future years," says Betty Jean, senior director of Community Engagement at Habitat-Roanoke.

The concrete is poured into Styrofoam forms that also act as insulation - lowering utility bills when compared to stick-built walls featuring wood. Habitat calls their house on 14th street southeast a sustainable, non-combustible concrete building system. Because readi-mix concrete has a short shelf life, the suppliers for Habitat's concrete wall homes are nearby - giving the local economy a boost as well. Local sponsors include Roanoke Cement, Rockydale Quarries and Titan America.



Gene Marrano



EnVision Center also a job resource >

A ribbon cutting at the **Roanoke EnVision Center** in late July; the center in northwest Roanoke is focused on providing HUD-assisted families access to support services to help them achieve their goals and needs. Mental health counseling is also one of the services provided. The EnVision Center offers college opportunities in conjunction with Virginia Western Community College, job readiness and computer literacy courses. The EnVision Center, which has been open for several months at the old Melrose Library site, also provides access to mental health counseling.

Eric Sichau is President and CEO for the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce; he noted that the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority operates the EnVision Center, as well as the Lansdowne public housing complex across the street, among others. Community partners at the EnVision Center also include Carilion Clinic, the Harvest Collective, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, and Family Service of Roanoke Valley. "All of those pieces come together to support the community, the region and [can] be a solution for folks that would like that assistance to make their lives better. It all goes back to workforce development. We probably have some future entrepreneurs that will be working through this center."



Virginia Tech

Plant Forward

Feeding Hungry Hokies

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Change is a constant in Virginia Tech's Dining Services, including new faces and concepts.

Brian Grove, Senior Associate Director of Dining Services, says Virginia Tech Dining Services is a self-operated food service with 48 different dining concepts. The franchised restaurants, which are operated by Tech, include Chick-fil-a, Dunkin', Pizza Hut, Au Bon Pain, Qdoba, Bruegger's Bagels, and Jamba Juice. All other concepts are self-branded created by Dining Services. There are currently five major dining centers: Squires Food Court, Dietrick Dining Center, West End, Owens Dining Center, and Dietrick Dining Center. Dining Services also operate two food trucks. Southgate Food Center is its production facility that operates a bakeshop, pre-prep (vegetable and fruit prep and Grab-N-Gobble to-go products), and warehouse.

Paul Magnant, Associate Director of Dining Services, is "thrilled" to be a new part of this.

Magnant applied for his position at Tech several years ago, but the timing wasn't right. More recently, he was seeking a career move when the same position opened up. He jumped at the chance.

"It provided exactly what I wanted at this point in my life," said Magnant, who had been in the Washington, D.C., area for about 20 years.

Overall, Dining Services averages around 40,000 transactions per day, and last year the total transactions were just above 2.8 million, said Grove.

"It takes a great team to serve that many meals," he continued. "Our commitment is that there is an assistant director and an executive chef that oversee the front of house and back of house in each of the

THE WEST WING IN REAL LIFE

Paul Magnant believes that if you treat people correctly, opportunities will happen.

He was once at a restaurant association reception in Washington, D.C., where an intern at the White House (under George W. Bush) expressed the need for help hosting a Christmas party. Magnant and a colleague "did the dinner and it went off flawlessly." They were rewarded with a tour of the White House, where Magnant strangely heard his name called out. He was recognized by a sailor who had worked in a Florida restaurant under Magnant, and Magnant had an impact on this sailor's successful career as a cook in the military.

Soon Magnant received a letter offering him the chance to be a celebrity-guest chef at the White House, no doubt compliments of the sailor connection. Magnant was given the opportunity to prepare a menu and production for the entire staff and daily visitors (over 140) on May 14, 2008, in the White House



Darren Van Dyke

Paul Magnant

Dining Room. While he cannot disclose much about his experience for security reasons, he did say it was surprising that the kitchen used daily is tiny; the second, larger kitchen is used for state dinners and that is only a few times a year.

major dining centers. There are two registered dietitians that oversee the food production management system, which includes the recipes and tracking allergens. It is truly a collaborative effort throughout the organization."

Grove continued, "Our business model

is to meet budget, but if there is money made it is reinvested into the program. Dining Services is here to provide a great dining experience on our campus."

Magnant has oversight over Owens Food Court and Hokie Grill, and will manage Perry Place at Hitt Hall, which will be the

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Virginia Tech

Student in Dietricks

sixth major dining center when it opens in 2024. Magnant also oversees chefs, providing leadership from his knowledge and past experience. That has led to an “unusual camaraderie.” He has found collaboration and feedback among chefs to be very powerful. Magnant said that giving chefs the freedom to create and innovate is the best way to motivate them and is his favorite part of his new job of seven months. He noted that the chefs are all doing a “superb job,” especially given the intense nature of their work.

Magnant believes in treating his chefs well, both on principle and to promote good outcomes.

“I have never been a pan-throwing, screaming chef,” he said.

Said Grove, “Staffing is the biggest challenge that continues to hinder us from running smoothly. Our teams are persistent and are one of the best around the country.”

Witness Magnant’s eight-page résumé, which details 45 years’ worth of culinary education, experience, and certifications.

“I’m a bootstraps person,” he said of working his way up the professional ladder.

He began his career as a pot washer at Disney World in college. While finishing a double major in psychology and hotel and restaurant administration at Florida State University, he worked in dining management. He went on to earn an MBA, take doctorate classes, and hold myriad jobs that included being Senior Health Inspector for the State Department.

Today, Magnant said, the number one collegiate dining trend is “destination dining.” This can mean six to eight restaurants under one roof with a variety of cuisines. There is everything a student could want, from an all-you-can-eat at Dietrick to a steakhouse called Chops.

“This is not your parents’ cafeteria,” he said. “It’s like a food court on steroids.”

The goal is to provide high quality, healthy choices. New trends are toward allergy sensitive and gluten-free products, said Grove, with executive chefs and dietitians

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collaborating on those special diets. Magnant said there is a goal of making 30% of offerings plant-based. Authentic cuisine that aligns with international students also trending, Grove said.

“Some may view [these] as challenging, but they should be viewed as exciting opportunities to provide experiences and ensure the wellbeing of the students,” said Grove.

Dining Services’ training not only promotes good food but also great service.

Magnant said, “It’s all about morale and making students satisfied. We are keenly aware that every move needs to result in positive experiences for students, faculty, and staff.”

Grove said COVID changed the landscape greatly. Salad bars were one alteration during the pandemic, going from “serve yourself” to “made for you;” salad bars have since reopened. The biggest change was the use of an app to order food ahead of time, which significantly increased during the pandemic. It is still used today at strong levels; last year 36% of transactions were placed through Grubhub.

“The campus was very fortunate to have had Grubhub in place before the pandemic,” said Grove.


Dining Services was not immune from experiencing supply chain issues with food, supplies, and equipment. It adapted by changing service and food products. Today, things are almost back to normal.



Virginia Tech

Brian Grove

The future is full of strategic plans. Perry Place at Hitt Hall is being constructed and staff are planning for the opening in spring of 2024. Student Life Village is in the formative planning stages and will add 5,000 new beds, two new dining centers, recreation facilities, and academic spaces. It will be a 15-plus year process to see this new part of campus completed.

Said Grove, “Dining Services is always up to the challenge to traverse the ever-changing and growing landscape on campus. Most of us get exhilarated to plan the next dining centers. Dining Services will continue to evolve to ensure we meet the needs of our students.” 

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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
Comparing business to poker is hardly a stretch; but the machinations behind both are eerily similar.

When to hold 'em... fold 'em

The thing about poker (our lead story) is that it's all about expected value. Risk versus reward.

I'm not a poker player. That's just what I gleaned from the movies. And after chatting with Joe Scales, it certainly looks like a ton of fun. (A skill worth picking up, perhaps. Now, don't be calling me up for your Saturday game night, boys and girls, in your quest to take advantage of rookies who are encouraged to bring their wallets. I can see one of you now, who loses too often and too much, saying out loud... "Sure, Tom! You should join us!" while thinking inside... "I'm finally gonna win somethin.'")

Which reminds me of the other thing about poker: It's a pretty perfect analogy for entrepreneurs, going in to business.

Joe confessed to me that when he was quite young and just taking up the game, he realized something. His friends back then really weren't all that good at it! He learned—really learned to play the game—and discovered he could do well at it.

With skill.

How much is skill and how much is chance might be the question many of us are asking.

The market—like the card table—presents the same question, doesn't it?

The entrepreneurs I know attribute more—way more—to skill and tenacity and competency and smarts. Especially the younger ones.

But there's no denying chance is also involved. Luck, if you will.

Older entrepreneurs will often confess that luck or timing had far more to do with their success than they first realized.

You can't just force a win each and every time. You work with the cards you're dealt.

Or... now listen closely, grasshopper... you work with the hand others think you have.


If skill and chance both contribute to the success or failure of your business, maybe strategy and perception are also competing in the background.

I think it's the wise player who accounts for both. Make that all four.

Best chance for the pot, anyway.

But what do I know? What am I holding?

Not much. Right?

Or....? 

No bog turtles were hurt during this production

The company behind FloydFest, Across the Way productions, has received a final permit approval to develop its new Festival Park – and has confirmed the music and outdoors multi-day event will be back next year at the new site in Floyd County. It comes after the festival was dark this year, its stormwater management plan not approved by the deadline set. The state did not sign off until after the late July dates that FloydFest 2023 was scheduled for – the first without co-founder and Creative Chief Kris Hodges as part of the mix. No doubt though he had already programmed most if not all what was on tap this year. CEO John McBroom says they are trying to figure out (with the help of COO Sam Calhoun, etc.) what performers come back in '24.

McBroom says loyal FloydFest fans will return next year in droves after the unexpected hiatus this summer. “That has been probably one of the most heartfelt things that we have experienced. We had about a 70 percent rollover [2023 tickets not refunded but applied towards 2024], which in this industry is pretty much unheard of. We’re going to have a very limited amount of tickets to go on sale in November for next year.”

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources also raised concerns that there might be bog turtles on the land, which was purchased under the company name Hill Holler LLC. But no turtles were found in the wetlands off US 221 in Check, and the stormwater management permit was signed off on last month. Organizers say after a year of careful planning, they will be protecting wetlands at the new property. “The nearest documented bog turtle was found 13 years ago approximately two miles upstream on Meadow Run from this property,” McBroom said in a news release.

McBroom also says VDOT has also given the okay to get started on new roads into the Festival site as well – about two miles of roadway in total says McBroom, well known as a guitarist and vocalist with bands like Blue Mule and GOTE. He also admits that moving to the new site from just off the Blue Ridge Parkway to a piece of property off Bent Mountain Road was a bigger task perhaps than they realized. Beginning in 2024 day patrons and campers can all park on the same property as the Festival, which is bound to be a hit. The first permanent stage/adult libation area/viewing deck will be up by next summer says McBroom.

Another difference – the topography is flipped – performers will play on stages at the bottom of the large bowl, parking is towards the top of the hill. Loyal FloydFest fans, lovers of great music, the outdoors and sometimes the slightly odd, will just have to wait until next July to see how it all shakes out. 🍷



THERE'S
SOMETHING
HAPPENING
HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Moving FloydFest to its new home proved to be a harder task than perhaps was anticipated.

FRONTReviews >

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

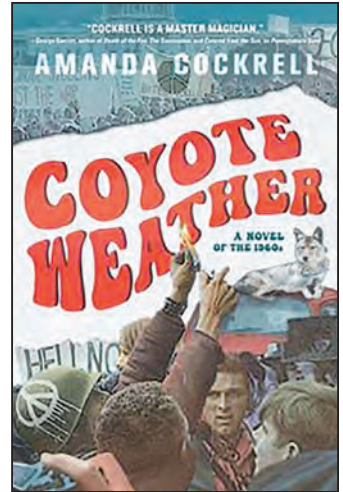
Vietnam and the '60's front and center

The former director of an MFA program at Hollins University focused on children's literature, Amanda Cockrell has written a very adult novel about the intertwined lives of young people caught between the culture wars of the late 1960's and the ongoing Vietnam War, as young men waited for their name to be called up in the draft, for a war most didn't believe in. *Coyote Weather. A Novel Of The 1960s* (Northampton House Press, 2023) almost reminded me of the early scenes in *The Deer Hunter*, before the young men out bonding are sent to Southeast Asia. *Coyote Weather* – the coyotes are always lurking in the California hills – winds up as the draft winds down and President Nixon announces a troop drawdown and then a withdrawal. Meanwhile life and love goes on back home in the California hills. Cockrell spins a good yarn and sets the scene well – what it must have been like for many young people more than 50 years ago.

—Gene Marrano

Following in big footsteps is hard

The longtime and well-respected host of NBC's *Meet the Press*, Tim Russert, died suddenly just two days after touring the Vatican while on vacation in 2008 with his wife, *Vanity Fair* award-winning writer Maureen Orth, also an Emmy winner for a documentary she was involved with. Also along was their son, Luke Russert, newly graduated from college and, he admits, raised in a life of privilege. Then, without much experience NBC News hired him as a correspondent, where he would wind up covering the White



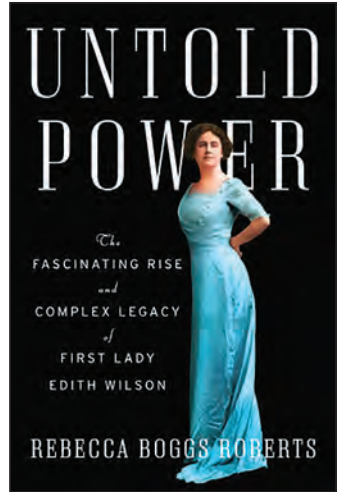
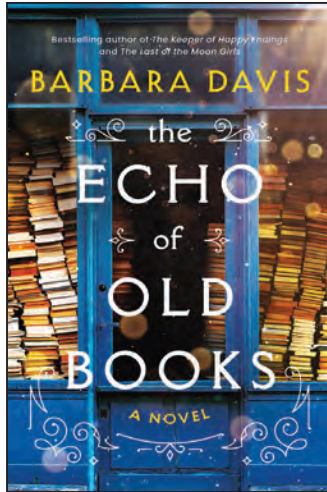
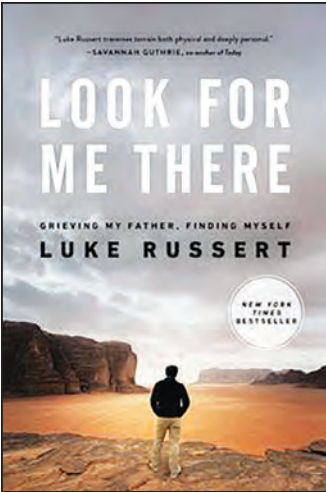
House, working to overcome early criticism that he was hired simply because his last name was Russert.

But trying to live up to his father's legacy, at the same time missing him dearly, took Luke Russert away from the news business after eight years – and ultimately to a journey around the world to find himself. Russert details that trek in his new book, *Look for Me There. Grieving My Father, Finding Myself* (Harper Horizon, 2023). "Look for me there," is what his father used to tell him when Tim was away on assignment. The book works best for three quarters as a vivid travelogue of the journey Luke took around the world (bankrolled largely by his father's will and by his mother, who joined him on several legs of his multi-year soul-searching trip.) *Look For Me There* bogs down when Luke Russert sours on the whole thing and then turns to examining his life in very personal prose. But I guess that was really the point of writing it, as he ponders his next stage in life.

—Gene Marrano

Way TMI

In a word: overwritten. In a few more words: somebody done tried too hard. I labored through it, but indeed I did finish Barbara Davis's *The Echo of Old Books* (Lake Union; 2023). The idea—how books convey everything to us (even via their physical state)—was a compelling one for me to explore. But our storyteller here just went too far overboard. She takes the plot of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and thickens it so much, you begin



to second guess what other tragedy or melodrama is going to befall any one of our four principle subjects; because you know it's going to be something. That's right, we have two parallel storylines (so make that two Romeos and two Juliets), which is not a problem. It's just overkill and forced to the point of a sappy romantic soap operatic disaster.

One main character experiences so many unbearable tragedies, our narrator should have just made her a black cat, walking under a ladder, pawing over a broken mirror. The worst flaw, however, was the basis of the overarching plot—a miscommunication. Letters were switched, but we are asked to believe there were no salutations or “to whom” provided. So, you're going to write a letter, but not identify who it's for, AND what you're going to say applies equally to the recipient—one with good news, one with bad news. That one part (the basis for the entire novel's conflict) was like the trick long-running television soap operas did to keep a series going: let's just introduce an identical twin sibling, who no one knew about. Throwing in layers of sub-stories and parallel plots—in this instance—only messed it all up. Even Shakespeare didn't add to the vials of poison—the love affair revealed itself.

—Tom Field

The first woman president?

Most of us know by now that when President Woodrow Wilson was incapacitated by a stroke for five months in 1919, that news was kept as far from the public as possible, and

that Edith Bolling Galt Wilson played a large hand in keeping the Wilson Administration on track. Some have even called her the first female President, but Edith Wilson always insisted she never made any decisions in that capacity, she merely acted as gatekeeper for the husband she adored, allowing only the most crucial issues to reach his desk at the President recovered. Rebecca Boggs Roberts lays it all out very well in *Untold Power: The Fascinating Rise and Complex Legacy of First Lady Edith Wilson* (Viking, 2023).

Edith Wilson, a direct descendant of Pocahontas who spent her formative years in Wytheville, was determined to be an independent free thinker from the start, even running a very successful jewelry business in Washington, DC after her first husband Norman Galt died. She was the first women driver in DC to tool around town in her own electric car. Woodrow Wilson's first wife had died too while he was in the White House. He and Edith met, courted (she put him off for months at first) and finally married the next year. She became a famous figure in her own right. He died in 1924 out of office; Edith died on her husband's birthday in 1961, not long after meeting President Kennedy. Roberts, who will speak about *Untold Power* in Roanoke next month at a History Museum fundraiser, has written a very readable tale.

—Gene Marrano

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

Submitted



Cox Mobile at Town Square >

Cox Mobile is now available in Roanoke. A new retail store opened up at the end of July (its own building at the Town Square shopping complex adjacent to the airport) at 1414 Town Square Blvd (Rutgers Street entrance and intersection). This is an exclusive mobile phone service for Cox Internet customers. Plans include 'Pay As You Gig' and 'Gig Unlimited.'

"Cox Mobile gives our customers what they asked for – a simple, flexible, and reliable mobile experience wherever they go," said Jeff Merritt, market vice president, Cox Roanoke.



Warm Hearth giving >

The **Walmart Community Grants Team** and **Facility #1292** (Christiansburg) has again awarded a \$1000 grant to the **Warm Hearth Foundation** for the Micah's Program at Warm Hearth Village (WHV). The program provides fresh produce, gardens, shelf-stable food, personal care supplies and pet food to village seniors who meet Federal low-income guidelines who shop at no cost at Micah's Pantry. "Micah's Pantry serves 120 seniors each month. "This program is a vital service to our seniors living on social security income alone," said **Karen Nelson**, Warm Hearth Associate Director of Development.



Courtesy of VT

More Hokie beer >

A new member has been drafted to Hokie Nation's official beer lineup. **Fightin' Hokies Hefeweizen** is now available in select Virginia grocery stores, restaurants, and independent bottle shops across Virginia on draft and in 16-ounce cans. The seasonal hefeweizen can be found using Hardywood's beer finder throughout this fall season.

This traditional Bavarian wheat beer developed by faculty in the **College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Department of Food Science and Technology** as part of Virginia Tech's ongoing partnership with **Hardywood Park Craft Brewery** — follows Fightin' Hokies Lager and limited edition sesquicentennial dry-hopped amber ale All Hail to Thee. a portion of the proceeds from sales of Fightin' Hokies Hefeweizen will go to support scholarships.



Tom Field



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42 years of Steppin' Out >

Downtown Blacksburg Inc presented the 42nd Annual **Steppin' Out** street festival on August 4—5. The multi-block event in Blacksburg once again featured a popular lineup of arts and crafts and a variety of merchandise from more than 200 diverse vendors, along with food and musical entertainment. The weather was sunny and hot, but the crowds remained happy.



Member One opens new LDC >

Member One Federal Credit Union celebrated the grand opening of its new Learning and Development Center (LDC) located on its Roanoke corporate campus with a ribbon cutting event in late July. The renovated building, which is formerly the Main Branch facility and Human Resources department, officially began hosting employee training classes in February. The facility is now ready to officially welcome members of the community for free financial wellness and education programming.

"The result is a modern, centralized hub for everything training, learning, and professional development related," said **Jean Hopstetter**, Senior Executive Vice President of Member One. "This project manifests our commitment to Member One's mission: to help our members, employees, and communities flourish." In addition to employee development, the Learning and Development Center will be a place where Member One will host community educational events, through technology or in person, where people of all ages, from any background, and at any point in their financial journey can go to learn, share, ask questions, and enter into relationships that support financial well-being.

"This is not just a building; it's a beginning," stated **Alex Lucas**, Member One's Vice President of Community Impact. "We hope that members of our community will grow to see this as a trusted space where they can learn about personal finance and build positive relationships that will help all of us grow a more financially stable and secure region." The Member One Learning and Development Center is located at 202-C 4th Street NE in Roanoke. Members of the community can view and register for free in-person seminar and webinar financial education offerings anytime online at memberonefcu.com/seminars.

Pictured (courtesy photo) Members of Member One's executive team and Board of Directors, as well as Eric Sichau, President and CEO of the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce, watch as Ashley Ratliff-Ives, Vice President of the Member One Learning and Development Center, cuts the ribbon.





Ribbon finally cut on greenway >

The **Roanoke River Greenway's** "missing link" we described last month is missing no longer. Roanoke City and Greenway Commission officials cut the ribbon in late July on a one-mile section that connects the greenway all the way from southeast Roanoke to Salem. City Manager **Bob Cowell** says the next step is building stronger greenway connections to Roanoke neighborhoods: "this is kind of the backbone, now we start making this reach into the neighborhoods so it gets closer and closer to people who can actually start using it - not just for recreation but actually to commute on [the greenway] as well." Cowell also said the ribbon-cutting culminates a quarter century of planning and perseverance—not to mention support from City Council as projected completion costs kept rising over that time. The 1-mile "Bridge the Gap" section of the Roanoke River Greenway now connects all of Roanoke City with Salem, where work continues to finish their segment of the Roanoke River Greenway.



Brewpub update >

Big Lick Brewing Company now has wine on tap for those preferring that form of adult beverage. Local winery **Virginia Mountain Vineyards** is supplying several types of wine that pour from this tap at the BLBV bar. And just down Salem Avenue past 5th Street in downtown Roanoke, within sight of Big Lick and **Golden Cactus Brewing** is **Blind House Beer**, open for several months now. Blind House specializes in lower alcohol content brews, what is known as a "session beer," the idea being you can drink several during one visit while enjoying the company you keep.



Dog Bowl adds show >

A large crowd came out in August to listen to Lazy Man Dub Band and the headliner Bumpin' Uglies at the Dog Bowl, the outdoor music venue created by **Black Dog Salvage**. Scheduled to end last month, they've added another Dog Bowl concert instead with the Anders Osborne Duo featuring Jonathan Sloane on September 24th, as part of the 5 Points Music Sanctuary outdoor series. "Osborne's six-string virtuosity, inventive musicality, and poetic songcraft underpin an ever-expanding three-decade catalog celebrated by fans and critics alike," according to 5 Pts.



RC food truck >

Erika Jones manages the new **Roanoke College** food truck, which offers a variety of options (including some favorites found in the RC dining hall), with plans to offer Maroons merchandise at some point in the near future. "We do have a specialty RC cookie that we sell sometimes at special events." "Our goal is to have a menu that is delicious, affordable, fast and doesn't compete with anyone else." Jones says part of the plan for the RC food truck was to get the school's brand off-campus and into the community. "Anything we can do to bring excitement, to get enrollment up, to get faculty and staff excited, that was the plan. We all know the food truck market started to boom within Roanoke over the last couple of years." The Roanoke College food truck will be on hand for Roanoke County's annual Touch A Truck event at Green Hill Park on September 23.



Gene Marrano

Latest outdoor mural >

Jon Murrill's handiwork can be seen under bridges along the Roanoke River Greenway in Southeast Roanoke, where he merges nature and the essence of that working-class quadrant of the city into big, bright wall paintings to liven the urban path for runners, walkers, bikers, skateboarders and others. Murrill's latest work was taking shape late last month at the Rivers Edge sports complex, with Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital as a backdrop. The muralist was also seeking members of the community to pitch in with the painting, as he did for the greenway projects previously.



Gene Marrano

More Pickleball courts >

Six new outdoor Pickleball courts painted in bright colors at **Walrond Park** in northeast **Roanoke County** made their official debut with a ribbon cutting last month. An app being used to help schedule local Pickleball games – usually played in a doubles format – now has close to 2000 members on it. Walrond Park has a number of older pickleball courts that are also scheduled for some upgrades. Carter Turner is a former tennis pro who has been playing Pickleball for the past six years; he says the Roanoke Valley has become known as a hub for the game: “we have a high percentage of our citizenry that play pickleball (think table tennis on a larger outdoor court maybe, played usually in a doubles format.) A lot of really good players now are doing well at regional and national tournaments. These [Walrond] courts get us closer to being able to hold a regional tournament, which will draw people from all up and down the east coast.” Roanoke County Parks, Recreation & Tourism now has 15 pickleball courts in its inventory; other localities have or are planning to add additional courts as well.

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

EDUCATION FRONT



Januchowski

Ronald Januchowski, DO, FACOPF has been appointed dean of the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM)-Virginia campus. He started at VCOM-Carolinas when it opened in 2033 and is a Fellow of the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians and a professor in the Family Medicine Department of VCOM. A graduate of the New York College of Osteopathic Medicine (1993) he served in the Army at Fort Bragg and completed his residency at Womack Army Medical Center. He retired from active duty (Colonel) in 2001, and went into private practice in North and South Carolina, serving

as chair of the Family Medicine Department at Spartanburg Medical Center, as well as chair of the Institutional Review Board. Dr. Januchowski is a member and past-president of the South Carolina Osteopathic Medical Society.



Reznikoff

The Virginia Tech College of Science has named **Sarah Reznikoff** as chair of its Department of Mathematics. Reznikoff started the position last month and comes from Kansas State University, where she was a professor of mathematics, directed the graduate program, and previously served as interim associate dean of the graduate school.

Sandee Cheynet has been promoted to the role of associate



Cheynet

vice president for Human Resources at Virginia Tech. She has served as assistant vice president of talent for Human Resources since June 2021. Cheynet leads the HR Talent Team, which includes communications, compensation, employee relations, Hokie Wellness for employees, onboarding including conviction checks, talent acquisition and recruiting, and talent development. Her new role also includes leadership of HR's policy and compliance and systems and analytics functions and serves as the deputy to Vice President for Human Resources Bryan Garey, representing him in university wide strategic initiatives.



Burrows

Mary Burrows is the new director of the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station at Virginia Tech. Burrows also serves as the associate dean for research in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. "My goal is to support this culture, encourage it, and help it continue to thrive," said Burrows, who comes to the university from Montana State University, where she spent 17 years as an Extension plant pathologist and the past three years as the associate director of Montana Agricultural Experiment Station and Research Development.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

Dan Bryan has been promoted to Media Director by 5Points



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Bryan

Creative. Since working with the agency for eight years, Dan Bryan has supported the firm's clients by providing marketing support, service development, and media relations. Prior to the recent promotion, Bryan was based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, but he has recently moved to Roanoke, where he will manage and develop 5Points Creative's media strategy, planning, and placement services. Bryan also served as a full-time firefighter in Chattanooga.

WELLNESS FRONT

Carilion Clinic has named **Biraj Patel**, M.D., and **Thomas Kodankandath**, M.D.,

Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to 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.



Patel

Carilion's Stroke program, founded in 2009, was previously led by James Schmidley, M.D., and Sidney Mallenbaum, M.D.

Patel joined Carilion in August 2014 and serves as Section Chief of Neurointerventional Radiology and associate professor at Virginia Tech Carilion

School of Medicine. Vascular neurologist Kodankandath joined Carilion in August 2021 with expertise in stroke prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and post-stroke care and serves as the program director of the Neurology residency program.

Compiled by Gene Marrano



Kodankandath

co-medical directors of Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital's Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center. Carilion provides life-saving procedures for hemorrhagic and ischemic stroke, neuro-intensive care, and the full gamut of post-stroke rehabilitation.

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Bank of Botetourt



CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

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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

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

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

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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. [shawnnowlin1989@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 novels, including the recent novels "NEWS!" and "CLOG." [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

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

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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Friendship recognized

Friendship, a senior living and rehabilitation organization, has been selected for both first and second place recognitions in the 2023 D. A. “Woody” Brown Community Involvement Awards for the categories of “Facility Newsletter” (first place for Friendship Health and Rehab Center South) and “Special Event” (second place for Friendship Health and Rehab Center North). For over 30 years, the Virginia Health Care Association - Virginia Center for Assisted Living (VHCA-VCAL) has acknowledged the outstanding activity programs that involve, entertain, educate and enrich the individuals in their care. Friendship will be presented with those awards during the annual VHCA-VCAL banquet in Roanoke this month.

Pro Bono honors

Charles B. (Charlie) Phillips of Salem, Virginia, has received a 2023 Pro Bono Publico Award from the American Bar Association (ABA), the top honor given by the ABA in national recognition of pro bono volunteerism. Phillips was nominated for the award by John Whitfield, executive director of Blue Ridge Legal Services (BRLS), the legal aid society where Phillips donates his time helping legal aid clients.

Since retiring from his law practice in 2018 at the age of 80, Phillips immediately began

volunteering around 30 hours a week in the Roanoke office of BRLS. Since then, he has closed more than 1,500 cases, including over 200 in litigation. Phillips is a former Commonwealth’s Attorney for the City of Salem and maintained a private practice for 50 years.

Sovah brings program to Roanoke

The Sovah School of Health Professions is partnering with the Roanoke Higher Education Center (RHEC) to make its nationally accredited imaging educational programs, available to those living in the Roanoke Valley. Sovah Health will begin training Roanoke area students in ultrasound technology to help meet the growing demand for sonographers.

The Sovah School of Health Professions, an affiliate of Sovah Health (a regional health care delivery system), is developing a new satellite location at the RHEC, where the school will offer its accredited diagnostic medical sonography program beginning January 2024. Including prerequisites, the two-year, full-time course of study will lead to an Applied Science associate degree in general Diagnostic Medical Sonography (A.S. DMS). This educational track will offer training in Abdominal Extended Sonography, Obstetrics and Gynecology Sonography, and Vascular Sonography. The satellite location will include a classroom and

lab, with opportunities for clinical training in sites around the Roanoke Valley.

Tourism awards

During the fourth annual Celebrate Tourism Summit held at the Wytheville Meeting Center recently, Friends of Southwest Virginia hosted the Southwest Virginia Tourism Awards Ceremony, to recognize outstanding work within the tourism industry in Southwest Virginia. Friends of Southwest Virginia honored to present 38 awards in a number of categories that reflected tourism marketing, visitor services, special events, and tourism leadership.

The Tourism Awards were open to tourism organizations, tourism and economic development individuals, and tourism-related businesses located within the 19 counties and four independent cities of the Southwest Virginia region. Among the honorees were Floyd County Tourism, Visit NRV, Franklin County Economic Development, Sinkland Farms (outstanding attraction), FloydFest and the Floyd Country Store. Peggy White from Pulaski County was named Outstanding Tourism Leader of the Year.

Graham-White in Salem to expand

Wabtec Corporation (NYSE: WAB), a manufacturer for the heavy rail and rail transit industries worldwide, will invest \$2.7 million

to expand its existing Graham-White facility in the City of Salem, to accommodate the relocation of its pneumatically controlled braking systems manufacturing lines. Virginia successfully competed with Missouri, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Mexico for this project, which will create 38 new jobs.

“As a leading global provider of transportation solutions, we are proud of our long history of manufacturing excellence in Salem and delighted to be expanding our operations there,” said Mike Fetsko, President of Wabtec’s Freight & Industrial Components business.

A good place to learn

Eddy Alexander, a full-service marketing and growth strategy firm headquartered in Roanoke, has been named a 2023 Top Virginia Employer for Interns. This recognition from The Virginia Talent and Opportunity Partnership (V-TOP) recognizes employers statewide who provide high-quality and meaningful internships and learning opportunities to students.

Eddy Alexander’s internship program “The Quarry” is a career launch ten-week summer program designed to help translate academic skill building into on-the-job learning experiences and portfolio development. Competitively placed interns form a cross-disciplinary team and work together to gain a deeper understanding

of what goes into marketing, public relations, advertising, and multimedia production in a fast-paced professional setting.

Eddy Alexander President Jennifer Eddy says, “the programs started as just a seed of an idea and has built ever-increasing momentum, strength, and brand recognition year-after-year.” Other organizations noted for their intern programs include Virginia Tech, the City of Roanoke, Torc Robotics, Brown Edwards and Company, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Pulaski River Turtles Baseball, Card Isle, Robertson Marketing, Marsh McLennan Agency, and the Western Virginia Water Authority.

Chamber creates foundation

A local chamber has taken a big step towards providing for its community. The Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce has announced the

formation of their newly created 501 (c)(3) non-profit. Khari Ryder, Executive Director of the Chamber, will add the role of Secretary of the Chamber’s Foundation. He says creating a non-profit will allow the organization to provide charitable contribution benefits to private donors—and open themselves up for government funding: “some Chambers were actually inceptioned as 501 c-3’s.” He says the idea of launching a non-profit foundation in Botetourt County preceded his arrival.

“A number of entities ... wanted to make donations as a charitable contribution but the Chamber did not have a 501 c3 designation.” Foundations can also receive grants and other funding opportunities as well noted Ryder. Ryder says creating an education endowment for local students is among the chief priorities of the Foundation; in addition, he says it will take over organizing the Botetourt Chamber’s annual Golf Tournament, which raises money to fight

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food insecurity within the County

Friendship absorbs Richfield Living

Friendship and Richfield Living, two local major players in the full-service retirement community sector are joining together under the Friendship banner. Richfield Living’s campus in Salem, which offers a new Town Center, Independent Living, and Rehab Center, and two Assisted Living locations with a dedicated Memory Care Unit, will continue to maintain its name and not-for-profit status under the Friendship umbrella. Joe Hoff is the President and CEO for Friendship Retirement: “we have two organizations that basically do the same thing.” Looking to merge

with another non-profit 501 c3 was another motivating factor says Hoff. “Together we have 160 years of experience serving seniors. We [now] have stronger financial footing to provide that care.” The new entity under the Friendship banner will serve over 1,500 residents and employ more than 1,000.

Blueway expansion

The Roanoke River “Blueway” that coincides with development of the adjacent greenway is coming into a sharper focus as plans for several points of river access and special features on the river start to take shape. Katie Slusher is the planning and development coordinator for Roanoke City parks and recreation. An in-river park stretching



from the bridge at Wasena Park down to Smith Park along the Roanoke River Greenway, will include river access for boaters, paddlers and tubers is in the works: “we’re really talking about are those features where doing small manipulations [will] constrict and concentrate the flow, mostly in places where there already is a ripple or small whitewater feature.”

Two million dollars in American Rescue Plan Act funding and a million dollars from the city will help pay for the In-River Park but Slusher says they still need to raise another million or find grant funding. Completion is expected by 2026. Launching perhaps by this fall is a separate ADA-accessible kayak/canoe/float launch near the 13th Street SE greenway parking lot in Roanoke City; that was funded from a separate grant.

AMNB merges with Atlantic Union

First Roanoke-based Hometown Bank was

bought out by Danville-based American National Bank & Trust Company. Now AMNB will merge with Richmond-based Atlantic Union, which is anticipated to take place in early 2024. American National Bank CEO Jeff Haley on a conference call: “yes the name changes and there’s a lot of legal things that go on to put these companies together, but this is a way for us to continue what we do in the 11 markets that we serve - and to expand our community banking services.”

Two members of the American National board of directors, Carilion CEO Nancy Howell Agee and Joel Shepherd from Virginia Furniture Market, will join the Atlantic Union board. The CEO for Atlantic Union, John Asbury, said that in cities like Roanoke where there are both Atlantic Union and American National branches in close proximity there may be some consolidation that takes place. “This is the culmination of a long friendship between the two companies,” said

Asbury, “we view it as a very logical expansion of Atlantic Union Bank.” Both banks are well over 100 years old he noted during the late July conference call and “share a common history ... and a very compatible culture.”

Feeding Southwest Virginia summit

Elected officials including Congressmen Ben Cline (6th District) and Morgan Griffith (9th), along with Roanoke Delegate Sam Rasoul, joined a community conversation hosted by Feeding Southwest Virginia last month. Among the topics discussed were investment in programs that help reduce hunger in the 26 county, 9 city region FSWVA serves, and the upcoming federal Farm Bill that includes SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance Program. The Farm Bill has to be reauthorized every five years. “It will not solve all of the problems, no. It can help a little bit here, a little bit there. It takes a lot of people contributing money, contributing

food,” said Griffith of the Farm Bill, adding that it’s also about making sure more people have access to jobs that can help pay their bills – including what they budget for food.

The amount of food donated to Feeding Southwest Virginia measured by tonnage has dropped 8 percent from 2018; meanwhile the percentage of food that had to be purchased to keep the shelves stocked – instead of being donated – has risen from 9 to 17 percent over the past 5 years.

OnBoard program cited

During a City Council meeting last month, a special recognition for the Roanoke Regional Partnership’s new OnBoard ROA program - designed to help attract and retain more young talent. Julia Boas is director of talent strategies for the Regional Partnership: “while doing my research one of the things I discovered was that less than one percent of students that graduated

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from Virginia Tech in 2022 came to work in the Roanoke region upon graduation. That's [in] the entire region – less than one percent.” The On Board ROA eight-week summer program aims to integrate interns, new hires, and remote workers with regional employers - and local amenities.

City Market Building wants feedback

With a refresh on the horizon, officials at the

Roanoke City Market Building are looking to hear what the community wants out of the historic building in the future. The Board of Directors are working with a consulting firm to ensure that the downtown Market Building will have a place in Roanoke's future. Elliot Broyles, Executive Director of the Market Building Foundation, says that's where the community comes in: “it's a cornerstone of the market area and we would love the

community to help with input.”

Broyles says the foundation hopes to keep up with the evolving tastes of visitors -- including possible entertainment needs like comedy shows and ax throwing. Take the survey now through September 11th at citymarketbuilding.com home page link.

Respondents will be entered into a drawing to win prizes courtesy of Downtown Roanoke Inc. Look for other ways to

provide public feedback on the building's future soon. “Downtown Roanoke has certainly changed,” says Broyles, “we've seen a transition from a lot of downtown workers to a lot of downtown residents – and workers. I think this is the perfect time to reevaluate, reset the focus on what the next phase of the City Market Building is.”

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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PARK
AT THE BRIDGES

From Goth to Delightful Fashion

By Dan Smith

Bat Vest celebrates her dark side by designing the bright look with flair.



Dan Smith

Bat Vest showed up at Local Colors celebrating her Mexican heritage's Day of the Dead.

Bat Vest's own fashion preference stops people on the street who want to know the how and why, but the dark, striking Goth look is a personal statement. The 21-year-old's clothing line is quite different.

Bat, whose given name is Kirsten and who prefers the pronouns "they/them," will be one of a group of local designers (Bat's own BATZ, plus Liberated State, Rosemary St. Jacques and La De Da) at an event that was recently postponed and is still in the planning stages. Her photography recently won a platinum award in *CommunityVotes* Roanoke. Her personal collection will be released in September.

"I've made clothes all my life," Bat says, "mostly upcycling fashion, fun alternatives. A different folklore inspires it." Bat carries a pad and doodles designs. Goodwill and other second-hand shops are often Bat's haunt. "I take basics and modify them: sheets, pillowcases, wedding dresses."

"Different" is a word that hovers over Bat almost constantly, though there is an odd conventionality involved, as well. Bat, for example, operates the floral department at a Kroger store in the Roanoke Valley and she trained herself in flower arranging after she was hired. She was once a ballerina. She graduated from Virginia Western Community College and had a fine art photography concentration before finishing in general studies.

Bat's personal look is singular and dark. The recent Local Colors, which celebrates Roanoke's ethnic diversity saw Bat show up in what is not much of a stretch for this young rebel: a Day of the Dead outfit (complete with red roses on the breast),

honoring their family's Mexican heritage.

Bat's evolution began reasonably enough: as a Halloween costume. The designs have evolved over time and now concentrate on the light, the cheerful, the delightful. The biggest challenge: "finding time to design and make the clothes. I just got an apartment with my boyfriend and I work fulltime [at Kroger]."

When possible, she haunts the used clothing stores on a weekly basis "to get inspired. ... I do some sketches to find out what will work." What works is often ecologically friendly, as well as creative.

Bat's lack of conventional expression always found support with Mom and Dad. Her mother died two years ago, but Bat's father "always encouraged me and told me to do what I wanted, that he was proud of me. [Mom] bragged about me."

While all this is swirling around Bat, the next goal is to "put together a model collective" for Roanoke Valley models. Bat's VWCC friend Abi Carins has joined



in the effort, called Unseelie Court (fairies that rule over the fall and winter), and they were both recently part of the Roanoke Fashion Week event.

Ultimately, Bat wants to take the show on the road to Seattle, birthplace of her look, of grunge, and "big city vibes." 🖤



Bat Vest



Bat Vest

These two photos are part of Bat Vest's portfolio

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“ ”

I have never been a pan-throwing, screaming chef. — Page 32

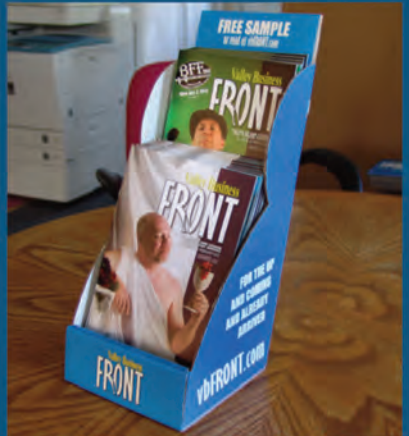
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