

Valley Business FRONT

FOR THE UP AND COMING
AND ALREADY ARRIVED

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Parentpreneurs

Stacy Hairfield, entrepreneur,
with daughter Abigail

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WELCOME to the FRONT

When Sarah Beth Jones first suggested a story on Mompreneurs or Entreprumoms we hesitated, stepped back and considered what she was saying. The conventional wisdom was that people who were staying home with the kids and starting businesses were mothers.

But that simply wasn't the whole truth. It was—is—true that most of them are women, but they are far from an overwhelming majority. We looked around for some men to be representative of the trend and they were easy to find. Fact is that people are often working differently than they have in the past. People are creating schedules for work that fit the rest of their lives, regardless of where the work office is. We are sharing jobs, working part-time only, owning more than one tiny company and finding some of the most unusual ways to earn money for our ever more creative families.

All this is, we think, a sign of a maturing culture, one not so static and rigid, one that allows people to be who they are, work the way they work best, raise their families in healthy ways that are not proscribed by outsiders. Mompreneurs and Popppreneurs are out front in this because the one trait they have in common is that they want to spend time with kids and they want to work. They've discovered they can do both. At the same time.



Tom Field



Dan Smith

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THE PARENT/CEO



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Cover photography of Stacy Hairfield with daughter Abigail by Greg Vaughn Photography. Art direction by Tom Field.

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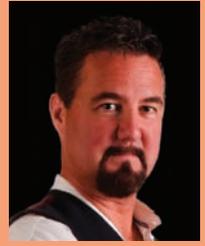
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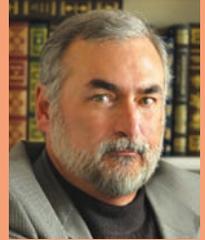
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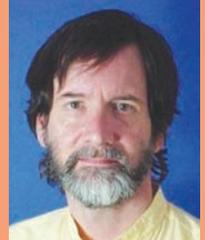
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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 58.

Editorial Advisory Board

Valley Business FRONT has organized an Editorial Advisory Board in order to help direct coverage. FRONT selected a group of 16 diverse business professionals, who will serve as a sounding board throughout the 18 month rotational term that will turn over every year and a half.

The board will be given the task of helping FRONT understand the issues and develop coverage. "We're journalists," says Editor Dan Smith, "and not business experts. This group of distinguished business professionals—whose range in age, experience, level and specialty is impressive—will give us a solid handle on how business runs and what the primary issues and key players are in this region. My guess is that our coverage of business will be especially useful because of this group of people."

CONTRIBUTORS



Kathleen Harshberger



Becky Hepler



Mary Hill



Sarah Beth Jones



Anne Piedmont



Dan Smith



Kathy Surace



Nicholas Vaassen



It took several years to figure the
hows and whys of boutique liquor

— Page 42

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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. 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 calling or e-mailing us 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.



This process
is called
‘enclothed
cognition’

— Page 22

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THE PARENT / CEO

Entrepreneurial parents: Opting for all >

Executive Summary:

Today's parents often are not having to choose between being stay-at-home parents or professionals. They want both and they make sure they have both.

By Sarah Beth Jones

Once upon a time, there were moms who stayed at home, raising the kids and keeping house as their full-time job. There were also moms who worked outside of the home, women who used the support of child care centers or nannies or extended families to cover the hours before and after school.

These days, though, the business world is expanding its definition of "possibility" at an exponential rate, creating a picture that is much more complex, and much more inclusive.

From primary-caregiver dads to full-enmeshed couples sharing responsibility for both family and enterprise, today's entrepreneurial parents are rejecting the notion that life has to fit in around working hours, and are instead using self-employment as a means to focus on their families.

SUPERMOMS

"Motherhood was always a dream," says Allie Burgin Mannon, owner of the upstart event planning business White Peonies, based in Floyd.



Allie Mannon family: “Being at home with him was my only option.”

Allie graduated from Virginia Tech in 2009 with a degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management. She loved the career that resulted so much that she experienced her first hours of labor while overseeing a wedding for clients. “The groom was more worried about me than the wedding,” she notes.

She had intended to take maternity leave and return to her 50 to 60 hour a week job until, that is, she met her son, Knox.

“He absolutely changed my world and I realized being at home with him was my only option,” she says.

Jennifer Chasse, owner of the online family resource New River Valley Macaroni Kids, worked outside the home full time while her children were young.

“Our kids were in daycare full-time from when they were each 10 weeks old, before and after school,” she says. “Part of the goal of moving [to Blacksburg] was to be able to have one of us work less.”

Prior to moving to Southwest Virginia, Jennifer, her husband Joe, and their two children lived in Rhode Island where she used her expertise in financial planning and adult and executive education to develop programming for Bryant University and work as a Financial Planning Education Specialist at Keir Educational Resources. She was also involved in numerous committees and professional organizations.

Now she’s involved in the Boy and Girl Scouts.

“““

Growing a business is slow going and I’ll worry [about the decision to start a business] but the next day, my son will be cutting a tooth and he’s so cute and I know I’ve made the right choice.

—Allie Burgin Mannon

“”

I like that my children have seen how you can always be reinventing yourself and I like how my children see that there are many different aspects to what I do for a living.

—Jennifer Chasse



Jennifer Chasse: “Part of the goal ... was to be able to have one of us work less.”

“At the last Boy Scout meeting, I was awarded a plaque for being the popcorn mom,” she says. “My husband said, ‘You can put that up next to your plaque for being the businesswoman of the year for financial services.’ It totally cracked me up!”

For both women, simply turning their backs on careers they had worked to develop and that they loved was too limiting.

“I still have professional goals,” says Jennifer. “I spent a lot of time in school and I’m glad I get to use my education and work on things that keep me sharp.”

Says Allie, “A lot of the decision to start the business was the realization that though I adored being home with my son, I craved connection with the outside world and I thrive in hospitality. I love it; I love the high pace; I love the deep connections with people because you’re often planning intimate events for them.”

For both women, the opportunity to work from their homes has allowed them to embrace the dual roles of full-time mother and busy entrepreneur.

“I feel like motherhood is my birth right as a woman, and to raise my baby is my birthright,” says Becca Imbur of Blacksburg, who also readily notes that economics played into her decision to have her daughter River when she did, and to start her businesses.

COVER STORY

"I was up at Mountain Lake doing a practicum for my graduate degree with the idea that I'd have a full-time job managing their environmental education program but with the economic downturn, they laid off all but four key people," she says.

She and her husband John had just gotten married and decided to start the family they both wanted while Becca could stay home with the baby. Her decisions to begin not one but two businesses—Wild Earth Hoops, in which she performs and teaches hoop dance, and Bimbur Books, an artisan journal-making and teaching business—were fueled by three primary factors: economics, personal satisfaction and modeling for her daughter.

John's technology-based job brings in enough income for the family's core needs but, Becca says, "The United States Department of Education really wants its money back even though there are no jobs out there."

Like Allie and Jennifer, Becca felt needs beyond what mothering could provide. "Frankly, it can be boring. I'm like, 'Okay, we're going to the playground, again. We're going to get on the swings, again. We're going to sit on the top of the slide, again.'"



Becca Imbur: "...to raise my baby is my birthright."

““”

I don't think I ever realized how much the woman is the glue that holds the family together.

—Becca Imbur



Angie Ellis: "They think I can do anything."



I love it. I want to be the person who's there. I like to wipe the boo-boos. They laugh at my jokes!

—Angie Ellis

Looking down at two-year-old River, who was flipping through a book with her tongue sticking slightly out of her mouth, Becca adds, "I want River to understand that I'm not just a mom—that's a big one. I want her to see that I'm not losing myself in motherhood."

Copper Hill resident Angie Ellis says of her six-year-old daughter Clair and four-year-old son Will, "They think I can do anything," and that's exactly what she wants them to see. "I see so much potential in them and I just want them to be able to do it, whatever it is."

Angie is the owner and creator of Little Voice, a web- and craft market-based business that makes kids' clothes, accessories and decor, but is best known for its Merry Monsters, stuffed animals with stories as distinct as their design.

Being a full-time mom was a decision she and husband Bill made when they first discussed having kids; the business sprang out of an



LeeRay Costa

innate drive to be creative, a fortuitous gift of a sewing machine from her mother-in-law, and one truly unexpected bonus gift of motherhood.

"I have confidence in my abilities as a mama; I'm good at it," says Angie, who recalls having been a deeply uncertain child and young adult. "Seeing what I'm doing with them gives me the confidence to explore other things," including entrepreneurship and her first acting role, performing with a troop that brought the play "Birth" to Floyd and Roanoke earlier this year.

For many women, the decision to tackle it all, to fulfill their desires to be fully present for their children while not entirely opting out of the workforce is the definition of modern feminism.

"Feminism used to be all about equality in the workplace but I think it's evolved into simply having the choice," says Jessica Jones. Jessica's company, Burnt Creative, is an umbrella that covers two businesses: One in which she handcrafts desk organizers and housewares and another that hosts a series of artisan markets in downtown Blacksburg.



Jessica Jones and Oliver:
"Feminism [has] evolved into simply having the choice."

“”

Finding time for everything is, the whole fake it 'til you make it thing without letting people know you're faking it.

—Jessica Jones

Taking off the cape >

In a recent poll on New River Valley Macaroni Kids, Jennifer Chasse asked readers to post about the last time they spent time with friends.

"There were a few people talking about coffee, hiking and cocktails but so many people said they couldn't remember the last time they went out with friends," says Jennifer. "I was reading it thinking, 'If you're not nourishing yourself, how can you give to your family, job or community?'"

LeeRay Costa believes this is a particularly tough issue for women. "Women have been socialized to address other people's needs first, so if a woman doesn't have a partner who encourages her to take care of herself first, it's easy to not do."

Carol Duvall suggests scheduling out-of-office time just as strictly as in-office time. "Close the doors, turn off the computers and concentrate

on what the kids are saying and doing, even if they're just hanging out and watching TV." She and her family have recently discovered MeetUp.com and attended eight different activities, including volleyball and a group hike, in their first three weeks of using the site.

Jennifer has a standing date with herself for a weekly spin class and an annual hiking trip with girlfriends. Jessica Jones sometimes trades art for massage and says that she and her husband have an evening routine that gives them both time to unwind and clear their minds. David Stanfill and his wife Angie prioritize time with their extended family.

Still, finding balance continues to be a struggle for many of these Superparents who should perhaps consider LeeRay's question, "Why do we make light of our needs to care for ourselves or act like it's a treat when it should be a way of life?"

—Sarah Beth Jones

LeeRay Costa, associate professor of anthropology and gender and women's studies at Hollins University worries, though, that this opting for all instead of opting out of some roles is creating a new set of challenges for women and the children they're raising.

"The flip side is that the mom who has her own business and is caring for the kids models the Superwoman," she says. "She has to be successful at work, she has to be a good mom and good wife, she has to be sexy—she has to do everything."

LeeRay cites a 2003 Duke University study in which undergraduate women described social pressure to be beautiful, feminine, smart and active, all without breaking a sweat. This pressure was dubbed "effortless perfection," an idea that LeeRay feels may put moms and their children, especially daughters, in a position of reaching for an unrealistically high bar.

But what about the dads?

David Stanfill: "We all pull together as a team to make it work very well."



SUPERDADS

The majority of discussion on gender disparities and gender roles has focused on women, which makes sense. After all, women are still estimated to make 77 cents on the dollar as compared to men and, as LeeRay notes, "That statistic refers to white women. The number dips lower for black women and lower still for Latinas."

Still, she acknowledges that men can also be hampered by traditional gender expectations, especially when they would



Reaching out and expanding my business through other people has allowed me a lot more flexibility and time but if I tried to do it all myself, I would never sleep.

—David Stanfill

COVER STORY

prefer to be in a caregiving role.

David Stanfill is one man who has chosen to be the lead parent.

Owner of the Roanoke-based web development company SayItOnTheWeb Inc., David was the oldest of seven children and loves being the one who puts his seven-year-old daughter Olivia on the bus in the morning and picks her up in the afternoon.

"I like that my wife is able to do what she wants to do," he says, citing her consulting work, her constant networking and the business development help she gives him. "Juggling a thriving small business and a close-knit family can be hard at times, but we all pull together as a team to make it work very well."

Though David gets comments of surprise from strangers who note his attentiveness to Olivia during their frequent daddy-daughter outings, he is certainly less of a rarity than Bruce Muncy, who faced single fatherhood while running a successful portrait studio, Muncy Fine Photography, in Roanoke more than 20 years ago.

At that time, Bruce's son Brian was 8 and his daughter Sara was 12. Bruce says that being his own boss gave him the flexibility to juggle his unexpected dual roles. "I had a little

“”

There is a lot of pressure for men to be the providers when many men would be happy to stay at home, raise the children and keep the household ... Women are so great at being entrepreneurs because they're taking some of the lessons of being mothers and applying them to business. You have to be innovative and patient when you have kids.

—LeeRay Costa



Bruce Muncy and his son, Brian: "When they got sick, I would bring in the TV and 7-Up so I could keep an eye on them while I still worked."

““

I work harder and have longer hours but the enjoyment, satisfaction, freedom, personal control and income potential make it all worthwhile.

—Brian Duvall

Brian Duvall

fold-out couch in my office and when they got sick, I would bring in the TV and 7-Up so I could keep an eye on them while I still worked,” he says.

For David, being the primary caregiver for Olivia has provided a sense of work/life balance that he hadn't experienced before. “Before she came, I was up all hours of the day and night trying to get my business off the ground,” he says. “Now, the time I can devote to my business is very, very precious and I try to time everything so that I can just work during that time.”

DYNAMIC DUO

Often, the ability to have a parent who can juggle full-time caregiving and entrepreneurship is precipitated by the other parent having full-time employment outside of the home.

Brian and Carol Duvall, though, have taken a slightly different tack.

Duvall Media in Callaway began in 2006 and focuses on web-based tools for customer acquisition. Brian typically works 10 hours a day from his home office, planning his work schedule around the kids' school and activity schedules.





Duvall family: “Moving to entrepreneurship made it a lot easier to spend time with the kids.”

He helps Carol, the primary caregiver of a family made of biological, adoptive and foster kids, with readying the kids for school and prioritizing evening family time.

“Family is the top priority,” says Brian. “Moving to entrepreneurship made it a lot easier to spend time with the kids.”

Meanwhile, Carol, who worked as an accountant outside of the home before making the transition to full-time motherhood, helps Brian as the CFO of the business.

Carol says that modeling a different approach to career and earnings for the children is of vital importance. “They don’t have to be cubical warriors for the rest of their lives,” she says. “We try to point out to them that it’s the flexibility of our work that allows us to take them places in the middle of the day.”

Carol attributes their ability to juggle their overlapping roles of entrepreneurs, parents and spouses in part to their dedication to supporting one another, and to some advice she received from a mentor.

“The mentor told me to remember that Brian is not my employee or boss and that this is a marriage first and foremost,” she says. “It’s not right for me to try and tell him how to run the business even though it’s a shared business. I do things one way and he does things another way and who’s to say who is right and who is wrong?”



Misty Gregg (left) family:
"It's easier to find ways
to do it all now."



There are a whole lot
more opportunities
to work from home

—Misty Gregg

IN THE SECRET LAIR

Now that her kids are 17 and 19, Misty Gregg sells Shaklee products and preaches the gospel of healthier body and home products from the platform of her business, The Sage Soapbox. When her kids were younger, though, she ran a bookkeeping business from home, with her clients leaving their receipts and records—and later payments for her—in a basket on her front porch.

"There are a whole lot more opportunities to work from home with all of the virtual offices," she says. "It's easier to find ways to do it all now."

Marc Junkunc, assistant professor at the Pamplin School of Business of Virginia Tech, agrees, saying that the increasing access to and affordability of technology is key to modern entrepreneurs.

"People have probably been saying that for a number of years but in the last five years or less, I've witnessed technology really allow people to work remotely, whether from home or on the road," says Marc. "Technology has become so user-friendly."

Allie says her clients' willingness to have phone conferences is critical for those days when a sitter just isn't available, but the benefits to today's technological options stretch well beyond telecom and into the bottom-line.

"Something as simple as being able to send PDF documents over the Internet is replacing what people used to have to pay FedEx to do, which makes it easier for business to get to a cash-positive place," says Marc.

Technology's reach also allows entrepreneurs to both find a wider market for their niche products and to find freelancers to fill expertise gaps in their businesses.



Stacy Hairfield and daughter Abigail: "You have to let go of what normal looks like."

For example, Jess and Angie sell their handmade products on Etsy.com, the popular online handmade marketplace. David serves his clients with the help of programmers around the world.

Stacy Castello Hairfield is able to manage her business, the Southwest Virginia branch of the national health and wellness magazine *Natural Awakenings*, primarily via e-mail while she homeschools her three children and explores homesteading.

"The kids love layout week because they get some slack on the math work and get to do more creative work," she says, quickly adding that the family runs on a well-ordered schedule. "In the mornings, the kids get up and they know the drill; until about noon, we're doing chores and seed work—math, reading and writing."

Marc adds, "I think it's great because people are empowered to create the lifestyle they want and if it's to be a mother at home working from her living room so she can take care of the kids at the same time, that is actually a viable lifestyle now."

While scholars continue to study modern gender dynamics and the media continues to fill its 24-hour news cycle with stories that provoke a "mommy war" that actual mommies say is a bygone issue, these entrepreneurial moms and dads are simply creating the lives they want for themselves and their families.

"You have to let go of what normal looks like," says Stacy.

Perhaps, though, it's about creating a new normal where the choice ceases to be family or career and is instead simply, "Yes, please." 

““”

Consumers are finding it more acceptable to not have an office to enter.

—Marc Junkunc



Etiquette in the air >

Recently there was a television series, set in the 1960s, called "Pan Am." It depicted glamorous "airline hostesses," fulfilling polite, well-dressed travelers' every request, and serving beautiful meals. The series didn't have high ratings, possibly because it all seemed so quaint and out of date. That's simply not our reality today.

Overcrowded airports and planes are straining to accommodate jam-packed passenger loads. Flight delays, rude passengers, small spaces and crying children add to the stress of modern flying. These conditions can strain even the most patient of travelers. This is where our automatic good manners take over. Showing courtesy and consideration often brings out the best in others, and can diffuse tense situations.

Some tips to consider for a successful flight:

- Always act in a courteous, respectful, articulate fashion.
- Dress well. Make no mistake about this: the better dressed you are the more respect you will receive.
- Avoid wearing sweat pants, and clothes that bare too much flesh.
- Show respect for the flight attendants. They have incredibly stressful jobs.
- Do not take up more space than your allocated seat or luggage compartment.
- Claiming one arm rest if fine, but taking both is inconsiderate and rude.
- When a child pushes or kicks your seat, stand up and smile, engage both the child and the accompanying adult, and ask him to stop.
- Bathroom line cutters: smile, say "Excuse me; the line is here." Point to the end of the line and say "thank you." If a child, escorted by an adult, needs to use the restroom, it might be wise to let him go ahead.
- Loud music, loud voices, bad jokes, foul language, or other rudeness: it's best to speak to the flight attendant. You might have to request another seat, hoping the flight is not booked completely. Smile and ask nicely.
- You specified a kosher or vegetarian meal and you didn't receive it. (This won't happen on domestic flights any more, unless you're travelling First Class.) Simply smile, ask for the correct meal, and if that doesn't work, remain gracious.
- Bringing garlicky or other strongly-spiced foods on board is offensive to others.
- The chatterer next to you wants to tell you the story of his life. After exchanging a few pleasantries, simply smile (is there a pattern here?) say excuse me "I need to sleep, read, or review my speech."

Etiquette & Protocol

By Kathleen Harvey Harshberger

Executive Summary:
A few simple courtesies can make flying more pleasant (and heaven knows, it needs to be).

Bon Voyage!

Have briefcase, will travel? >

Dear Anne: My boss and I had a disagreement about strategy. Since then, when the need for travel arises, he says, "Why don't you attend that meeting/conference/trade show?" Over the past six months, I've traveled eight times; he's traveled once. I know we're a young company and sacrifices have to be made, but I have a family with small children. I don't like the sacrifices my family is having to make, too. I like the company, and I like and need the job. I just don't like the travel. Is he trying to pressure me into leaving the company?

Dear Like: Travel for business is a subject about which people have great ambivalence. Research tells us that no matter how much easier and "greener" they are, no Skype conference, no phone call and no Facebook page will result in business deals like a face-to-face meeting. In a global economy, global travel is required. We love the relationship-building and potential for business that in-person meetings create. We hate the unproductive hours that the logistics of travel take. And when we're there with business contacts, we're not here with personal contacts—our co-workers, our families, our communities. A corporate strategy definitely needs to include serious discussions that weigh the complex layers of the costs and benefits of business travel.

Serious discussions about strategy require a corporate culture that embraces—and handles—questions and answers, conflict and resolution. You sound like a realistic team player, willing to travel to some extent to build the business. Too much travel isn't the issue then. Corporate culture is.

"Honesty is the best policy" can be true when jobs are plentiful and honesty could get you fired. In the current economy, many workers are finding themselves putting up with sub-optimum work conditions and unfriendly corporate cultures just to keep the job they have. If you were honest with your boss, first about the original conflict over strategy, then directly about whether or not your presence is still wanted by him and by the company, your boss may use the opportunity to let you go. Or your initiative may begin much-needed, open conversations about strategy, including where travel fits in. You'll have to do your own cost-to-benefit analysis before you decide what choice to make. In any case, update your résumé. With Americans changing jobs an average of every four years, you may like this company, but you will like many companies in your career. 📧

Need help with a personal problem at work? E-mail your question to Anne at anne@handshakezo.com.



Workplace Advice

By Anne Giles Clelland

Executive Summary:

Travel is required in many jobs, but it often causes stress in parts of your life outside business. You have to decide if it's worth the trouble.



Business Dress

By Kathy Surace

Executive Summary:

A psychological look at the way we dress, and some surprising findings.

Looking and acting smart >

In past columns I have written about the effect that your clothing has on people around you. The clothing you choose influences their perception that you are serious, professional and capable—or not.

Now a new study by researchers at Northwestern University has shown that professional clothing affects how we perform on tasks and whether we make more correct choices than others who are not dressed professionally.

Published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, their findings derive from three different experiments. In the first experiment, subjects were asked to identify the color of a word that was spelled out in a different color. For example, the word “red” might be printed in blue ink. Some subjects wore their street clothes during the test, while others were randomly selected to wear a white lab coat. The lab coat wearers made only half as many mistakes as the other group.

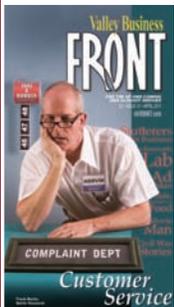
In the second experiment, subjects were asked to compare two almost identical pictures and quickly identify the slight differences. Some subjects wore the white lab coat and were told it was a doctor’s coat, some wore the lab coat and were told it was a “painter’s coat,” and some wore no white lab coat, with one hanging visibly in the room as they were tested. The subjects wearing the supposed “doctor’s coat” found more differences between the pictures than the other two groups.

In the third experiment some subjects wore the doctor’s coat, some the painter’s coat, and some wore no coat, but a white lab coat was hanging over a chair near them. They were asked to write an essay about the coat they wore or observed, then took the picture test again. Once again, the group wearing the “doctor’s coat” performed better than the other two groups.

The authors of the study, Adam Galinsky and Hajo Adam, believe their results show our thinking is affected by the symbolic meaning we attribute to the clothes we wear. This process is called “encllothed cognition,” which the authors describe as “the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer’s psychological processes.”

Given these findings it seems smart to dress professionally while competing for a job or sale. Perhaps wearing casual clothes to work has the opposite effect. If we dress in casual or tired, worn-out clothing, will we perform that way? Interesting concept and food for thought. 

To comment on Zuckerberg’s hoodie or Clinton’s no-makeup decision email Kathy@peacockimage.com.



Coming Up..

September 2012 Construction

The construction industry in our region has been quiet of late, unless you consider the complaints about major contracts going to outsiders. There's a lot going on, though, and our September cover gets you up to speed with the major players, the subcontractors and what projects are on the board.

October 2012 VTC-Research Institute

In October, our FRONTcover study takes us to the Virginia Tech Carilion - Research Institute. We seldom look at one business entity for cover stories, but with the great promise of the clinic model and its impact on the Roanoke - New River Valley region, it's time for an update.

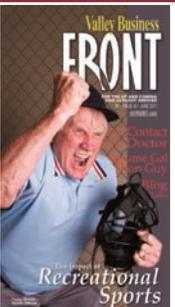
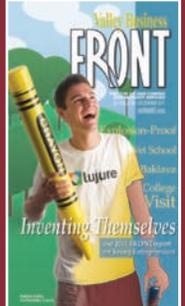
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CEO Paul Phillips with the Freedom First ice cream truck.

The essence of community >

Executive Summary:

Freedom First Credit Union in Roanoke is taking community involvement seriously.

By Gene Marrano

Being involved with the surrounding community isn't something paid lip service to at Freedom First Credit Union, which began as a banking institution for General Electric employees more than 50 years ago. FF has become a community development company, which is also in the banking business.

Freedom First is building a branch in conjunction with the West End Center

in Northwest Roanoke, a traditionally "under-banked" section of town that is home to a high percentage of low income and minority residents. It will lease the building back from West End Center, which provides child care.

Freedom First has also doled out a series of small grants to help get the community garden project off the ground in Roanoke City. The latest garden adjacent to RAM House held a ribbon-cutting in April. Other recent grants have gone to Community High School, the Rescue Mission and the Girl Scouts. Freedom First employees volunteer in community projects year-round and Columbus Day—a day when banks are closed—there is a major corporate outreach event every year. There's even a multi-colored ice cream truck that Freedom First trots out on special occasions.

The NAACP chapter in Roanoke has named Freedom First its Corporate Citizen of the



Gene Marrano

Year and it won the statewide Dora Maxwell Award for Social Responsibility. Freedom First has also partnered with TAP for its Responsible Rides program, making car loans available for low-income people.

The credit union's vision statement may sum it up best: "We are dedicated to developing sustainable solutions to community challenges at the individual, neighborhood and regional levels."

Paul Phillips, who became the President/CEO in 2000 at age 35, points out that credit unions were originally formed in Europe as community development institutions, serving farmers, textile workers and other who were not traditional customers for banks.

That focus on community development was all but lost, says Phillips, when credit unions came to the United States, aiming to compete with traditional banks. "What we did

at Freedom First was to step back [and decide] at our core we're a not-for-profit cooperative that was originally chartered to solve community challenges." Helping disadvantaged groups is a focal point says Phillips, and "the need has never been greater."

A Community Development Financial Institution designation from the United States Treasury Department (CDFI) helped cement that commitment to the disadvantaged. Working with community partners to solve some of those problems keeps Phillips energized. "We embrace that [and] really wrap it into our mission."

Based at the Valleypointe industrial park, where a 4,500 square foot addition was recently opened, Freedom First is also growing beyond Roanoke with a branch in Daleville in the building that used to house the Blue Collar Joe's donut shop.

There are three branches in the New River Valley among the total 10. Growth has occurred in mergers with the Virginia Tech and Carilion Clinic credit unions, which now fly the Freedom First banner. Total assets in the 2011 annual report are more than \$250 million; Freedom First employs around 160 people.

Freedom First has "carved out portions of our loan portfolio," to serve low income residents looking to purchase homes, according to Phillips, working with organizations like Community Housing Partners in Christiansburg.

"Most non-profits struggle with funding," says Phillips. "What makes the credit union business model so powerful is [that] we are the funding source. We're able to generate retail deposits to help fund our initiatives."

For Paul Phillips and Freedom First, the right way to do business means being heavily involved in the communities they serve. Named as one of the best places to work in Virginia, Phillips believes the focus on community has much to do with that: "We give meaning to work. It's not just about used cars and checking accounts. It's about helping people." 



Gene Marrano

Attorney Neil Birkhoff: "More user friendly for trust administration purposes."

New power to make trusts better >

Executive Summary:

The new "decanting" statute dealing with trusts is not thoroughly clear yet, but what is clear is that the game just got easier.

By Gene Marrano

Beginning July 1, Virginia joined a growing list of states that grant "decanting" power to trustees. A decanting statute gives

trustees—overseeing an irrevocable trust for someone else—the authority to modify drafting errors in the original trust, which may contain a large sum of money or property, securities, valuable patents or trademarks, etc. Trustees can name a different trustee, change the trustee succession and transfer the assets into second trust for the beneficiary who has become disabled and qualifies for a second needs trust.

Before the trust decanting statute was approved by the Virginia General Assembly and signed into law, changes to the trust had to be approved by a court or by the beneficiary, which might be impossible

if they became incapacitated. The Virginia Bar Association advocated for the change.

There are limitations to the new statute, which only applies to irrevocable, non-charitable trusts, as noted by Woods Rogers tax attorney Neil V. Birkhoff. "There are literally dozens of different types of trusts for all types of needs," says Birkhoff. "There is certainly a body

needs trust is being created;

- A beneficiary with a "future interest" in the original trust cannot have that interest accelerated in a new trust and any fixed income or annuity benefits cannot be reduced in a second trust.

There are some new tax benefits in the decanting statute to preserve marital and charitable deductions under terms



I'd be a little hesitant to use [the decanting statute] in a lot of circumstances. There are too many gray areas.

of trust law that further defines and limits what a trustee can and cannot due."

Many trusts he says, are not subject to the new decanting statute. They've been around for decades. Virginia became the 14th state to adopt one, making the Commonwealth "more user friendly for trust administration purposes," according to Birkhoff.

Here are the basics:

- A second trust created cannot add new beneficiaries not in the original trust;
- Any limits to the level of distribution must be similar, except where a special

of the original trust. Birkhoff says the IRS has not weighed in yet on whether there may be exposure to further taxation in some instances when assets are transferred from an original trust to a new one. Income, estate and gift tax consequences are a possibility. Until those issues are resolved, "I'd be a little hesitant to use [the decanting statute] in a lot of circumstances. There are too many gray areas."

A 60-day notice is required before the trustee can use the new power to decant. He must also spell out terms of the second trust and the effective date when the decanting

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power will be employed. A trustee or beneficiary can use that 60-day period to bring an action in court—for or against—the planned decanting.

Birkhoff hasn't seen many irrevocable trusts that were prepared poorly but the statute provides a safety net. Trustees cannot be sued for not using it; Birkhoff says the new law is "silent" on what happens if a second trust goes awry.

Prior to 2006 irrevocable trusts in Virginia were "pretty much set in stone," says Birkhoff, although a trustee could go to court. In 2006 the Uniform Trust Code (UTC), adopted by Virginia, gave trustees some authority to modify irrevocable trusts but in most cases it still required court approval or unanimous consent of the beneficiaries.

"The decanting statute moves the next step beyond that and now says

trustees can make a lot of changes ...without court approval," Birkhoff points out. They also do not need the approval of the grantor (who originally set up the trust) or the beneficiaries.

The ability to modify a trust set up incorrectly or to remove limitations hampering its administration are the biggest benefits he sees. "They'll be able to do that in a fairly flexible manner now." Birkhoff's best advice? Get it right the first time.

Trustees can use decanting powers address changes in circumstance—beneficiaries who are more financially sophisticated perhaps or have special needs due to a medical condition. "The beneficiaries still have a right to say no, you can't do that," says Birkhoff, but where that isn't the case the new decanting statute can make life easier for trustees. 



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Becky Hepler

Dr. Zenny Ng with his service dog, Grace, at the Study Break in Newman Library.

Studying our 'best friends' >

Executive Summary:

Vet school program at Tech is trying to figure out how animals and their owners interact best.

By Becky Hepler

Dogs and cats have been interacting with humans for over 30,000 years, but what is the impact of this relationship to both them and us and why is it important? Those are the questions that Centaur is studying.

Centaur is an academic center in the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. Founded in 2004 through a gift from the Metcalfe Foundation as the Center

for Animal Human Relationships, the center studies the impact and benefits of the human-animal bond. That is accomplished through education, research and community service.

Just this past November, Dr. Bess Pierce, who joined the vet school several years ago to run the Community Practice residency clinic, assumed the director role of the newly revitalized center. With an advisory board drawing from the vet school, Virginia Tech, VCU, Penn State and the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work, the idea is to look into all the ways animals and humans interact and then share that knowledge. It will be of use to veterinarians, workers using animals in their jobs and with the general public.

The center has crafted a curriculum for veterinarians that combines a residency in clinical practice (the animal equivalent to



Becky Hepler

Dr. Bess Pierce with her Serbian tri-colored hound, Bella.

family practice medicine) with a master's program that focuses on human-animal bond studies. Coming out of this program, a vet would be better trained to handle the unique issues of service animals as well as have more insight into how people and animals interact. "As vets, we are advocates for the animals," says Pierce.

Research is also a central theme in Centaur's mission and the current project certainly promotes animal health in the context of the human animal bond. Dr. Zenithson Ng completed the vet school's first canine-feline residency and master's degree in human animal bond studies.

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He has become a co-worker in Centaur conducting an experiment to study stress levels in dogs, especially in service dogs to see the impact of the work on the animal.

While there is lots of research on the positive effects of animals on humans, Pierce says there is not as much looking in the other direction: "Service animals have been riding high on a wave of recognition and utilization and we are most interested in learning the limits of a therapy session, the kinds of stress might an animal experience and what benefits the animal gets."

The remaining aspect of Centaur's mission is service. One effort is the VT Helping PAWS (Pet Assisted Wellness Service). It is a training program for pets and owners that certifies the animals are obedient and polite enough to visit hospitals,

nursing homes and child care centers.

Recently there was a visit to Newman Library on the Virginia Tech campus to provide a study break for students the evening before the start of exams. "I wasn't even at the library, I was studying in my room, but I had to come over so I could get a dose of cute," says sophomore Travis Roth, scratching the ears of a grateful golden retriever.

Pierce acknowledges the biggest challenge for the center, besides the never-ending funding search, is to stay focused. "There are so many opportunities for us. What we are trying to concentrate on is building a solid foundation so the center survives no matter who is at the helm," she says. "Overall, though, the work of the center is an exciting opportunity for us and is a chance to further serve the mission of the college." 



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Executive Summary:

You can patent just about anything.

The question: Should you?

By Michael Miller

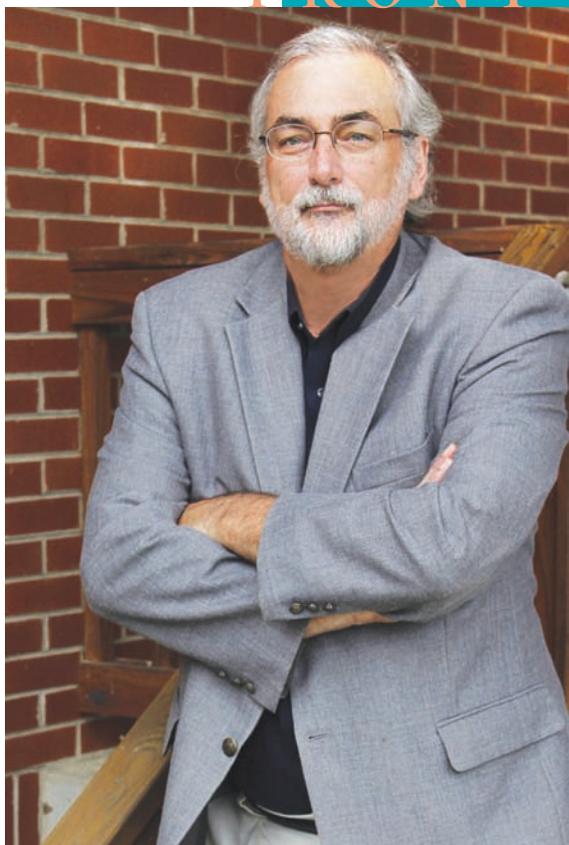
Researchers at Oklahoma State University have apparently discovered and filed a patent application on a new cut of steak.

Seriously? How does one claim that there is a cut of meat on a bovine that has not yet been eaten by human beings?

Well, it turns out that maybe you can employ the sometimes-insane rules of being a parent to do crazy things. Like, for example, there is a U.S. patent, #4,605,000, that describes a helmet filled with green plants, sealed to your head and shoulders. Presumably the plants release enough oxygen to allow the wearer to breathe, if for some unknown reason he cannot breathe without a sealed helmet of some sort. There is no discussion of how one would water the plants.

The idea behind a patent is to encourage creativity by rewarding an inventor with a temporary monopoly to prevent others from practicing her invention for up to 20 years. That way, inventive types can have a chance to make some money. Since the advent of the technology economy, patents have become a sort of currency to the high-technology business world. Law firms now scour the patent office for opportunities to sue companies for infringing a patent that neither they nor the inventors is actually practicing. These people are often referred to as "Patent Trolls," a term that relates not to ogres living under bridges (although that may also be true), but to a type of fishing.

This may seem silly to you, but think of it



Michael Miller

this way. Last year, Nortel sold its wireless communications patent portfolio for \$4.5 billion, and it is widely rumored that Nokia receives \$5 for every iPhone sold around the world. Also, a recent International Trade Commission barred Samsung from importing new smartphone models due to potential patent infringement with Apple. So, it's really big business, especially for small companies who might have no tangible assets beyond their patents.

But what about the steak? Well, the patent application apparently describes what knife cuts a butcher would make to a certain muscle on a steer to produce what is now branded as the "Vegas Strip Steak." It apparently disproves the adage, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas," because soon you will be able to purchase the new cut in select restaurants.

In the meantime, I'll just say that there certainly is a lot of beef product here, but it seems to be more of the type that you use to fertilize your lawn. 



Mary Hill

Sumiko Wilson: 'I know crazy.'

'The best crazy lady we ever had' >

Executive Summary:

OK, so we're dealing with a little rhetoric here. Still, Sumiko Wilson of BCDS and Orion Ventures sets high levels for being interesting and accomplished.

By Mary Hill

By training, Sumiko Wilson is a psychologist. By profession, she's the insane insurrectionist at a warzone checkpoint.

Okay, that may be a bit misleading. She's actually owner of the Roanoke County-based building contracting firm Orion Ventures and program analyst for BCDS, a military training company owned by her husband, Will Leaman. That said, Sumiko did play the insane insurrectionist at a warzone checkpoint on TV.

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How so?

Anthony Bourdain, host of the Travel Channel's "No Reservations," was seeking hazardous environment training for himself and his crew prior to touring Kurdistan. His search landed him at BCDS's off-road driving skills complex in West Virginia. Sumiko took on several roles for Bourdain's training exercise—most of them requiring a generous measure of fake blood smeared down her face.

"You're the best crazy lady we've ever had," the man heading Bourdain's security team told her. "Are you an actress?"

"No," Sumiko deadpanned, "a psychologist, so I know crazy."

Her psychology education comes in

handy, she says, for other parts of her job with BCDS—even on the days she's not engaging in a fake fire fight with a TV show host.

"It's very helpful when you're managing 30 some employees," she says. "You're dealing with a lot of different personalities." In fact, one BCDS employee who is still actively engaged in part-time military work calls Sumiko just to download after a difficult mission or the loss of a friend. "It's a whole different aspect of psychology," she says.

The largest part of Sumiko's job with BCDS, though, is organizational. More often than not, she's stationed at the Roanoke headquarters trying to figure out where the company can save money

continued on Page 38



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continued from Page 35

and negotiating complicated government contracts. The red tape portion of her work has demanded "a steep learning curve," she says—not surprising since military bidding requires knowledge of the Federal Acquisition Regulation, a complicated government tome with almost as many pages as there have been years since the birth of Jesus Christ.

Both Sumiko and her husband Will were serious off-road hobbyists when BCDS incorporated in 2004. The original idea was to teach civilians interested in motor sports, but "it's really too costly for the enthusiast," Sumiko says. "Where the business took off was in the military."

BCDS offers a range of intensive courses in off road driving, field mechanics, anvil rock training, armored Humvee rough terrain driving, and mobile force protection. It has a short course in how to use a manual transmission, since so many drivers lack experience with straight shift vehicles. The company's 100-acre complex near Lewisburg, W. Va., has a dozen trails with names like "Bruiser," "Slippery Hill," "Grubster," and "Mad Dash." The idea is to prepare military workers for experiences they might encounter in hostile terrain. In one course exam, for example, trainers take a vehicle out in the woods and disable it. "They pop the tires, turn it upside

down ... They might drive a knife in the radiator," Wilson says. "The students then have to locate the disabled vehicle, diagnose it and fix it ... sometimes at night."

Sumiko is now using her knowledge of government bid processing to rethink Orion Ventures, a property rehabilitation company she founded over a decade ago. "When we had our daughter (Kyoko), Will and I started flipping houses so we could both stay home," she says. "The housing market has been difficult lately, so we haven't done much [with Orion Ventures]."

That might soon change. When BCDS was recently contacted about the possibility of taking on a government contract to teach house building skills to soldiers, Sumiko passed, but she did start looking at government contracts available for small business contractors.

"I kept seeing contracts that small businesses could fulfill, but there wasn't a single bid," she says. "There's this need that's not really being fulfilled." Additionally, as a woman-owned and minority-owned (Sumiko is of partial Asian heritage) small business, Orion Ventures qualifies for government preferences for certain jobs. "If there's a need," she says, "I can fill it ... So I'm taking what I've learned about government contracting and what I already know about contracting, and I'm making something happen." 

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Navigating the Chinese mine field >

Executive Summary:

PassageMaker, with its global sales office in Salem, helps medium-sized companies safely manufacture in China.

By Randolph Walker

Unscrupulous elements in the Chinese business world are not subtle when it comes to ripping off product designs.

When the BlackBerry smartphone was hot, "I saw RedBerries and BlueBerries," says Whitwell (Whit) C. Kelly. "Instead of saying 'BlackBerry' across the top it said 'RedBerry.' The plastic molds were identical."

Theft is a huge problem, he says. "It's so easy to copy anything. The Chinese are experts at hacking into people's computers and downloading data."

But some thieves are even more brazen—they bribe factory managers to copy your product using your molds and your designs.

Helping companies do business successfully in China is Whit's goal as director of global sales for PassageMaker. The company's assembly plant is located in Shenzhen, China, outside Hong Kong, while Whit directs sales from his home office in Salem, under the name of PassageMaker North America.

The company website, www.psschina.com, explains the name: "Just as a passagemaker ship provides a safe and secure journey for its crew and cargo as it sails around the globe, our company PassageMaker Sourcing Solutions protects our clients' intellectual property, achieves their desired quality and maximizes savings as products are sourced in the 'dangerous foreign waters' of China."

Founder Mike Bellamy, a U.S. citizen, owns



Christine Kelly

Whit Kelly: "If you feel you cannot survive unless you go offshore, why not do it with someone who has your interest at heart?"

PassageMaker China through a Hong Kong holding company. He has about 200 employees in China, says Whit, including about 10 to 15 foreign nationals. The rest are Chinese.

In the 1990s PassageMaker began sourcing metal hardware and injected plastics in China. Whit, 41, met Bellamy in 1997 in a Chinese language class at the University of South Carolina, where both were in business programs. Whit was working for his family business, Salem Vent. "At the time we were sourcing stuff in Taiwan. He asked if we wanted to source some stuff in China. We gave him some stuff to source and it grew from there." Salem Vent became PassageMaker's first big client.

Whit, a Salem native and Roanoke College graduate, went full time with PassageMaker in 2008. He oversees sales teams serving China, the United States, Canada, Mexico,



PassageMaker's assembly plant in Shenzhen, China.



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Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and India. "My day moves with the clock," he says.

If a product is made in large enough quantities to be sold at big box retailers, "you need to source in China but you need to do it the right way," says Whit. A typical PassageMaker client is big enough to sell products through Target and Walmart, but not large enough to have its own China office. In addition, he says, "a typical PassageMaker client is someone who is concerned about protecting its intellectual property and ensuring the quality of the product."

PassageMaker's core business is assembly, but it can also handle sourcing. For example, PassageMaker might assemble a vacuum cleaner based on a proprietary design, and also source the components. The

parts could come from anywhere but they mostly come from China.

PassageMaker appears to have a unique business model. "I have not run across anybody that's doing it the way we are doing it," he says. The company does not disclose revenues, Whit says, but it's growing, and is debating whether to open another assembly center.

The Taoist philosophy of traditional China teaches cooperation with change, rather than resistance.

"The jobs are going to be outsourced, period," Whit says. "The housewife or the buyer at Ford Motor Company are demanding a lower price all the time. My view is, if you feel you cannot survive unless you go offshore, why not do it with someone who has your interest at heart?" 

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Jamie Oliver

Not so dirty after all >

Executive Summary:

Dirty Karma was a cute name that had nothing whatsoever to do with the real karma that helped produce a successful business in the New River Valley.

By Becky Hepler

Lifestyle Spirits was born out of a wistful conversation among friends on what it must be like to make money by having fun. It happened at a Virginia Tech football tailgate party.

Seven years after that party and a year



What we're trying to promote is a lifestyle, in which you work hard, play harder and are not afraid to get dirty.

and a half from the time the company was founded, the guys still have their day jobs, but the company is turning a profit selling its Dirty Karma Vodka and Dirty Karma SOL, a citrus-flavored vodka. Its brand of Work Hard, Play Harder and Don't Be Afraid to Get A Little Dirty is gaining recognition.

Jamie Oliver was brought into the company in 2011 as a business consultant to help set up the mechanics of the business and he did such a good job the partners asked him to stay on as executive officer.

He explains the history:

The four friends, who are all from the New River Valley, include J. T. Smith, Brant Waldon, Lance Reynolds and Nick Rush. They work in serviceable but unglamorous careers such as insurance and construction, so an afternoon of tossing around ideas about how to have a cool career was a pleasant diversion. The most popular idea to come out of that discussion was to make a product that enhanced their fun, Oliver says.

It took several years of research to figure the hows and whys of boutique liquor and Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverages regulations and to develop a business plan. Then it was time to come up with a formula they all liked and that made their product distinctive, in this case, an all-organic vodka made from wheat rather than potatoes.

Not wanting to take on the multimillion dollar task of building a distillery, the company tapped Temperance Distillery in Michigan to make the product and drafted Roanoke Valley advertising

agency Neathawk Dubuque & Packett to create the branding and bottle design (for which NDP won a Gold Addy recently). In May of 2011, Lifestyle Spirits was on line and could be found regionally in Virginia ABC stores.

“We’d done the technical challenge list—got the product, got the bottle, got the distiller, in the ABC stores,” says Oliver. “Now it’s time to start focusing on marketing so that when consumers go into the store and are faced with so many choices, they say, ‘Do I want Gray Goose or do I want Dirty Karma?’” To that end, the company has lately been sponsoring events like The Comedy Club at 628 Main in Blacksburg and has been appearing at the Downtown Merchants’ Up On The Roof socials.

Dirty Karma has switched to a more regionally oriented distributor that will get the product into stores in at least 11 more states, along with Virginia and now Alabama, where Dirty Karma has been available since February. There are also plans to join a Virginia trade delegation to China to look into international distribution

deals. Long range plans call for eventually building a distillery and tasting center in the region. Shorter term plans call for additional flavors of vodka and maybe venturing into whiskeys and bourbons.



Bottles from Lifestyle Spirits

It has been a slow, meticulous process, but the founders and Oliver are pleased with the results. In this first year, the company has shipped 1,000 cases, each containing 12 bottles of its product. Recently, Dirty Karma won a bronze medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. Its reception in local bars and restaurants has been positive. Tabitha Nickell, bartender at Blackstone Grill in Christiansburg, says her customers try it because it’s a local product, but continue to order it because it tastes good.

“What we’re trying to promote,” says Oliver, “is a lifestyle, in which you work hard, play harder and are not afraid to get dirty. Your spirits reflect this same lifestyle. At the same time we would be remiss if we didn’t remind people to use our product responsibly. Drinking to excess is not who we are.” 

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Dan Smith

Susan Williams: “Every time federal and state funding come up for discussion, my heart stops.”

Aging agency remains elderly’s champion >

Executive Summary:

The LOA’s Area Agency on Aging slogs along with its army of volunteers making sure the safety net remains there for those older than 60.

By Dan Smith

Susan Williams loves to tell the story—with a wink and a twinkle—of how old Doc Huff fell down that treacherous back stairway, broke his neck and died, but refused the leave. “People who’ve stayed and worked after hours here tell stories,” she says. “They hear him.”

The 98-year-old yellow brick house on Campbell Avenue in Roanoke was built by Dr. Ira Huff in 1914 and used as his home and office for years. The hospital out back was torn down decades ago—though quite a bit of it remains underground, leaving the large swath of land unusable. That’s where the LOA Area Agency on Aging used to hold its annual picnics, until the obvious dangers of sinking land became too much to ignore.

The agency has been in the house since 1982 and 68-year-old Susan Williams has directed it for the past 24 years, watching it grow into a \$3 million institution with 16 full-time and 30 part-time workers and more than 200 volunteers a day.

This is one of those hands-on, head-down organizations that—in military terms—has its boots on the ground. The agency takes care of old people. It’s that simple. Rich or poor, working or retired, with family or alone, those older than 60 can count on the LOA’s Area Agency on Aging to provide everything from meals and baths to insurance counseling and a variety of personal services that enable many of them to live at home when they couldn’t without the services.

Few talk about the community economics of an organization like this, but Susan Williams will. “The small investment in us saves money,” she says. “If hospitals had to deal with the Medicaid problems we see, we’d all have to pay for it. If emergency rooms were filling up with the people we work with, medical costs would rise even quicker.” If the agency weren’t active, family members would often have to quit work to care for the parent. The organization’s services not only make it possible for the elderly to retain some freedom longer, but the volunteers monitor

those living at home in case they fall, have a stroke or suffer some other malady that could leave them helpless and dying.

Meals on Wheels, its best-known service, delivers tons of hot food to the elderly, ensuring at least one hot meal and a smile every day. Those with pets even get a packet of pet food, courtesy of the SPCA and delivered by the LOA because those pets are often the elderly person's only consistent companion.

"Every time federal and state funding come up for discussion," says Susan, "my heart stops." For good reason. She pointed out a recent complex political back-and-forth at the state level before the cuts wound up being small. With budgets being severely slashed at every level, that means less money to work with in this vital area. The state most recently cut the budgets of 10 of the 25 LOA Area Agency on Aging's budgets, all of those cuts coming in the more rural areas of southwest and southeast Virginia. The agency relies on the state for 30 percent of its funding. United Way, donations and the federal government account for the bulk of the remainder, with the feds chipping in the most.

The services are not just for the poor, though the poor most often take advantage. Susan says income makes no difference, but the wealthier clients often pay some

for those services mostly on a voluntary basis.

Among the more important services offered by the agency is counseling for those qualifying for Medicare and Medicaid, helping work through the rabbit's warren of paperwork which can intimidate an accountant, much less a confused and frustrated old person. There's also the vital program that enlists an ombudsman to investigate complaints about eldercare facilities, a safety issue that is often overlooked by others.

Kissito International Healthcare is planning a new Program for All inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), which will include medical monitoring and other services for those who qualify for Medicaid and Medicare. Many physicians are refusing to take new Medicare and Medicaid patients because "Rates paid them by the government have not gone up and doctors are not wild about" being underpaid. New Horizons Healthcare and the Center for Healthy Aging at Carilion work with LOA in these instances. A "huge need" for dental care remains, she says.

Like so many social services agencies, LOA is struggling in difficult times that affect us all. But you get the idea that Doc Huff may be looking out for some of these clients. 

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Children's Etiquette Classes forming for the Summer



Cheryl Lunsford holds her electric guitar for her "Beatles" class, though on the performing circuit she's known for her acoustic.

Have guitar, will teach >

Executive Summary:

An award-winning guitarist, it's teaching music that allows Cheryl Lunsford to do what she loves to do, and survive.

By Tom Field

Musicians love to see their musical instruments in good hands. Talented, caring, passionate hands. You get the feeling the parents of the kids at a summer morning guitar camp in Fincastle feel the same way. Their children are in good hands.

On the one hand, you wonder how a professional musician can handle a group of youngsters just learning to place their little fingers on the fret and pick and strum with the other. The sound of a dozen children trying to make sense out of The Beatles "Norwegian Wood" for the first time is enough to make Norwegians and all other nationalities run off screaming to the woods. But then, if you really listen, you hear something underneath. A subtle pattern, some notes from one boy's guitar that are actually running the right

direction, a girl who's laying down chords that actually fill the right spot.

And if the expressions on the faces of the kids aren't enough to keep you sticking inside, then the person in front of all of them will. It doesn't take eight notes in to realize it's the teacher who really provides the glue.

Cheryl Lunsford is a singer-songwriter and award-winning guitarist who puts the great passion of her life right out there on her sleeve. Music's in her blood; and you see not an ounce of frustration as she smiles, nods, instructs, and encourages the young souls in front of her. Whether or not they are budding protégés or just musically-inclined enough to press the play button on an iPod.

The guitar teacher and business owner (www.TheGuitarDojo.com) projects her positive vibe even as she also knows all too well the "starving artist" syndrome. When music is what you love, you might want to nod your head with Todd Rundgren, whose lyrics ring out, "I don't wanna work; I just wanna bang on my drum all day." But as a single mom (with a son in college and a daughter who just got out of college) the reality calls for the electric bill, groceries, and gas for the car. The kind of things rock stars don't sing about, but blues artists play in full living color.

"Everybody has an iPod; everybody loves music," Cheryl says. "But they're not willing to pay for it. When the economy tanks, music is the first to go. Parents [of kids who could take music lessons] have to make choices."

She likes to play out (rock, jazz, blues, country), but says the Roanoke area doesn't have a lot of venues. She supports herself by teaching; and though it's a struggling enterprise, there are benefits to both performing and teaching.

"Teaching and studying music is great for keeping you whole. I teach children, adults and seniors; and when you add to that the wide range, from a person with a learning disability to someone who's gifted, the challenge really strengthens you."

Cheryl says at any given time, she's teaching up to 50 students, and about half of her current group is adults. She has a special interest for girls. She says she is one of the few female guitar players who is winning and placing on the national guitar circuit in a traditionally male-dominated field.

"Girls are often forgotten," Cheryl says. "A lot of women get sabotaged."

She says minorities have difficulty breaking into the guitar circuit, too. One of her students was the first African-American to win in one guitar contest; and she says the already

legendary guitar craftsman Wayne Henderson (from Grayson County) was so taken by the accomplishment, he gave the young man one of his guitars valued at \$10,000.

But the benefit of performing is there, too.

"Playing out is different [than teaching]," Cheryl says. "It really keeps you sharp."

Being sharp is a requirement when you play where Cheryl plays: at the opening of the Taubman Museum; at events and venues such as the Gateway of Crooked Road; or even in restaurants and clubs in the area, such as Pomegranate (Troutville) or Waller's Marina (Smith Mountain Lake). A professional takes every performance seriously; and Cheryl Lunsford treats every stage she finds herself on as an opportunity to serve her audience.

If the primary tool of your trade is... a guitar? That just may not be the easiest way to support yourself in Southwest Virginia in 2012, no matter how accomplished you are. But until they pry that six string from her gripping fingers, she's going to keep playing.

There's an audience—including a dozen kids in a basement home studio in Fincastle on a summer morning—who's glad about that. 

Hear a sampling of Cheryl Lunsford's songs at www.ReverbNation.com/cheryllunsford



Tom Field

Guitar Camp for youngsters at Cheryl Lunsford's home studio in Fincastle.



Dan Smith

Tracy Williamson shows off one of her specialty swim suits; this for a child.

For swimmers only >

Executive Summary:

Tracy Williamson's Swim Shop in Roanoke County caters to teams and the growing numbers of water aerobics participants and if you think that's a small group, you'll want to look again.

By Dan Smith

It wasn't like Tracy Williamson didn't know what she was getting into. The Swim Shop had been operating in Roanoke for more than 10 years when founder Vickie McKinney had an automobile accident and couldn't continue in the business. Tracy and Victoria Blake bought in, based on what they'd seen.

What they'd seen was a small, exclusive, very successful retail shop that sold high-

end swim gear to competitors mostly. That wasn't such a small market as you might imagine if you're not in the region's swim culture. A typical Monday night dual swim meet between swim clubs in the area draws in excess of 2,000 people, about 400 of them swimmers. The rest are family and friends, often people who pay for the swim gear for the swimmers.

Tracy, 46, had come up without a lot of advantages and had worked all her life. She started by volunteering at an animal shelter and wound up running it. She went to college part-time so she could work. "I learned to do a lot without money," she says, smiling.

She finally married and she and her husband wound up in Florida where he had a successful business (TEC Cellular), which he sold, but he remained employed there with the opportunity to live where the family wanted to live. "I didn't want to go back to New Jersey [where she grew up]," says Tracy, "so we chose to live in Roanoke." And she fell into the

swim shop. Her kids were already swimmers, so she knew the culture.

Tracy, who had been a pretty good country softball player, had been a Boy Scout and Girl Scout leader, coached soccer, T-ball and softball, knew about youth competition and all the gear that is necessary to field a team. That, of course, applies to swimming, as well, where people don't wear much, but what they wear can be pricey.

Her shop sells competition swim suits for girls at \$60 and for boys at about \$40. Practice suits, made of a more durable material, are \$40. Goggles (and if you have a young kid swimming, you might want to buy them by the case because of almost constant loss) cost \$16. Hand paddles are \$40, snorkels \$40 and fins \$30. You can spend \$275 on a senior competition suit and \$100 on goggles, but most don't get that far.

Still, in this region, there are thousands of swimmers and families forming a customer base and Tracy is reaching out across the miles into Martinsville and Lynchburg and this past year even pulled in a team from Williamsburg.

Here is the only swim shop in Roanoke and people know about it because Tracy shows up at meets and her customers recommend her consistently. "We do well with customer service," says Tracy. After Stonegate Swim Club won the local association meet last year, it wanted some fancy suits and was offered a deal by an opposing company, says Tracy. She didn't flinch. "We told [Stonegate's coaches] what to ask: a sizing kit, what the suits are made of, when they'll arrive. That sort of thing. We helped them a



Dan Smith

Hunting Hills swim coach Annette Patterson gathers her troops. The suits in this photo are from the Swim Shop. The red suits (Stonegate Swim Club) were bought elsewhere for the first time, but the caps are Swim Shop caps.

good bit and I expect them to be back with us next year."

She can deal directly across the miles simply by sending sizing charts and filling orders by mail, so the Williamsburg crowd gets the same service as those at the Roanoke Country Club.

It's not just competitive swimming that sells gear, either. Water aerobics—especially among the aging population—is growing exponentially as its health benefits become widely known and those taking part are choosing to buy suits that go out of style before they wear out.

Swimming is one of the largest participation sports in the region and its simple recreational value has been here for many years. It continues to grow and Tracy, for the moment, has a virtual monopoly as a specialty shop. You can buy suits elsewhere, of course, but what she's selling is a lot more specific than a stylish cut. 

'Cool chicks' in the marketplace >

My View

By **Dan Smith**
Editor

BLOG: [fromtheeditr.blogspot.com]

Excutive Summary: *Laura Bradford and Sharon Rapoport have a new business, Left Brain/Right Brain, that reflects their differences beautifully.*

In the past couple of months, Roanoke has seen a couple of all-star pairings of women in business: architects Lora Katz and Gwynn Gilliam with Gilliam + Katz and now Sharon Rapoport and and Laura Bradford with Left Brain/Right Brain.

We've written about the former, featuring two of the very good architects in the region. The pairing of Sharon and Laura is not as obviously natural, but it should be every bit as dynamic in the way opposites attract and often complement each other.

Sharon is the right brain of the business name, an outrageously talented marketing and advertising genius who has worked with national accounts for years. Though it isn't obvious from her resume, Laura is the left brain, the techno wiz who's at home cranking up a computer and running numbers. Laura is the founder of the nationally significant *claire v.*, which designs and manufactures (in Southeast Asia, using land mine victims as labor) upscale purses and the small Roanoke boutique *Polished*, which employs women in addiction recovery.

Laura was the first winner of FRONT's For the Right Reasons business award, having to do with why one is in business. Still, the first thought of Laura's credentials settles over the purse design, not the fact that her background is in IT, which she loves.

A little over a year ago, Laura and I had a discussion about how she could get back to her first love, IT (me mostly listening and Laura finding her own solution). Soon after that, she called Sharon. "She called me and said, 'We should know each other,'" recalls Sharon. The initial lunches were casual and "we didn't talk business. I thought, 'What a cool chick.' A couple of months later, I knew I was going to need a business partner ..." and the rest is a partnership.

They determined that with all their mutual national and international business experience, they would "want to embrace this region." They started talking business over lunch. Both have been deeply involved in community affairs and each lives here because she wants to, now because she has to. Sharon was getting an amicable divorce from her long-time husband, John, her partner in *The Farm* and Laura was married, raising little Harper, running two businesses and was soon to be pregnant again. Perfect time to start something else.

They looked at strengths. "I was a client forever," says Laura. "She was a provider." That is client and provider of business information to potential customers. Sharon discovered that "we completed each other's experience." Laura knew business structure and the details that a right brain would find tedious. Sharon was

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A parking we will go >

By Tom Field
Publisher

On Tap from the Pub

You learn something every day.

I just recently found out those large boxes with numbers and slots mounted on poles in certain lots in downtown Roanoke are, in fact, collection systems where people pay to park. Apparently, there are “pay-to-park” places in our fair city, where you pull in to a space, say it’s number 17, then you actually put a \$10 bill (or whatever) in the slot marked 17. I always thought those boxes were some kind of lottery game or creative fundraiser for the homeless or something. I never took the time to check them out. What a novel idea.

What a crazy idea, too. I never pay to park.

My wife calls me the George Costanza of metro driving. I know how to find a parking space. Where some people relish in shooting that 14-point buck, or winning the Pulitzer, or some shiny medallion in the Olympics, or some other incidental achievement, I don’t mind bragging that my tactical skills in seeing and capturing that elusive parking spot up ahead or three blocks over on a opposite direction one-way street, are really quite phenomenal. Driving the big white SUV or little blue convertible—it makes no difference. I will zip in, U-turn on a dime, or parallel park (without the new fangled systems on cars that do it for you) like a world-class expert. Even if no one else in the car with me ever applauds.

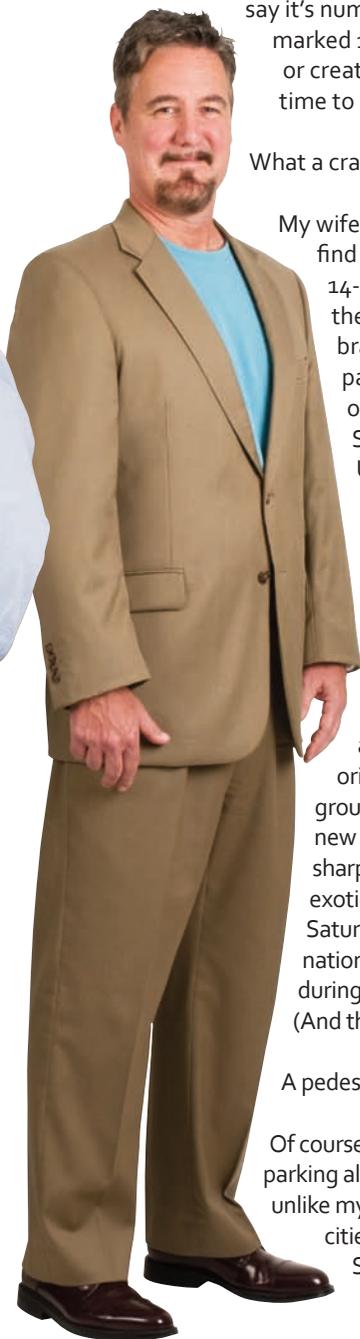
In my 33 years of legal driving, I have amassed a grand total of only \$37 in parking fines. If that’s not a noteworthy accomplishment, I don’t know what is.

So when Downtown Roanoke Inc.’s Sean Luther and others talk about the advantages of changing “Market Square” to a pedestrian-oriented plaza, I could cry about the loss of my cherished hunting grounds. Instead, I know I’ll just adapt. In fact, the best hunters seek out new places all the time, if for no other reason than to keep their skills sharp. I do this every time I embark on a safari to the real challenging exotic places. Like Blacksburg or Charlottesville on a football home game Saturday. Williamsburg on a summer vacation weekend. Richmond on a national concert tour evening. Norfolk waterfront or Old Town Alexandria during a street festival. Northern Virginia on a... well, on any day. (And these are just the hunting spots in our own state.)

A pedestrian plaza can be a grand idea.

Of course, the circumferential (I just made that word up) and specified parking allowances must be established (and well-defined for non-experts, unlike myself). Such a thing is possible, we know, because it’s working in large cities in Europe, Canada, and South America. But it also works in Boston, San Francisco, and in celebrated form in Madison, Wisc. And if you

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Dan Smith

Laura Bradford (left) and Sharon Rapoport

Smith / My View

from Page 50

the “talent.” Sharon says, “We had to come up with a name that helped decide what we are.” Left Brain/Right Brain.

At one point, Laura said she had a lot of background in Excel. Sharon interpreted that as “egg salad” and wondered what the hell egg salad had to do with anything. Here sat the gap, one that was being filled quickly. They were on top of formulating business strategy—for clients and for themselves—that would allow them to “go out and face the

Field / On Tap

from Page 51

can convert New York City’s Times Square by completely rearranging the parking configuration (as it happened in 2009) then nothing is impossible. You don’t want to mess with NYC drivers. The Star City is not New York City, but the smaller scale should be viewed as a smaller challenge. Instead, we close one small area (Roanoke City Market Building renovation and Blacksburg’s downtown Main Street section) and you would think we turned the world upside down.

Along with the parking, merchant and business concerns must be addressed. Business operators prefer to manage their own traffic—by drawing customers in from the products and services they provide—not by having some municipality control the flow. While a walking plaza may generate a nice festive and cultural vibe, we all must understand such a design affects a stock-broker differently than a restaurant. Some downtowns tackle this by simply alternating

world,” says Sharon. The portal, they both knew, “is via the web. It is a digital pathway and almost everybody needs it,” says Laura. She saw that “many opportunities would open. We had to think strategically. A medium-sized business didn’t have time for this.” So, you have marketing and technology working in concert, equal partners giving equal attention to new realities and creating what Laura calls the “integrated approach.”

Sharon says the truth is that most companies have these functions, but “they are compartmentalized. We want to blur the lines of the compartments.” The clients are those who “get it” from the start. “They will let us go,” says Laura. And go, they will.

“I love this business model because it’s not typical,” says Sharon. “The clients who get it will not be typical.” One of those is Kissito International, the Roanoke-based agency that feeds the world’s hungry and attends some medical needs, as well. LB/RB was asked to come by and talk. They clicked instantly and “like, ca-choo, there was this whole campaign, an overarching strategy” says Sharon. “We were so excited.”

One other little item that worked for them: One’s a Virgo, the other a Pices. They’re opposites on the astrological chart and word is they succeed together. 🍷

between vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Austin, Texas closes and opens its most popular downtown streets, depending on the activity (like turning a faucet on and off). If it’s a permanent pedestrian plaza, the commercial and residential locales will eventually adapt to something different than it is today. What makes sense to our vitality, will probably come down to a matter of personal preference. From an economic perspective, a multitude of options could be maximized to produce a sustainable system, whether it’s vehicular or pedestrian-based, public or private.

I love the idea of walking around a plaza or square. I hate getting hit by a bus or some old lady trying to parallel park her Cadillac Eldorado. I’m no longer amused by that bald-headed neck-whipping dude who has passed by me a third time as he circles the block looking for a free space.

Give it up already, George. Here’s a fiver. I see spot 17 is available. 🍷

Letters

I really enjoyed the story in your June issue on grocery stores, a seemingly mundane subject made interesting by your full coverage of the marketplace from Kroger to Tinnell's.

I was reminded of my first job as a bagboy at the old Mick-or-Mack store on Peters Creek Road, an experience that taught me valuable lessons in customer service. The manager, Marvin Pedigo, made it a point to greet every customer and make sure they knew their business was appreciated. As more and more retailing moves to the impersonal nature of an internet transaction, quality customer service and personal interaction becomes more rare and more appreciated by customers.

I also enjoyed your story on guitar repairman B. B. Rierson. The Front covers a wide spectrum of businesses, from Kroger and its 338,000 employees to Rierson's one-man shop. That's just one reason I'm looking forward to next month's issue.

Richard Rife
Rife + Wood Architects
Roanoke

Thank you so much for the inclusion of Tinnell's Finer Foods in your grocery article from this month's Valley Business Front. It was a wonderfully written piece and I loved the perspective from which you approached it.

Adam Markham
Tinnell's Finer Foods
Roanoke

I always look forward to and enjoy reading your magazine each month. The format is so well thought out and perfect to stick in my bag to take along with me. I always enjoy the various topics of business you choose to cover. So many times, you answer just the questions that I am curious about but

don't usually get covered by other sources. I also appreciate that you select a number of views to cover each subject matter. You have a gift for discussing business in a truthful yet often amusing way. Your articles help us realize that our community is made up of business men and women who have a passion for their work and the people they serve. I appreciate your coverage on so many aspects of the business that often are overlooked and I have so many favorite sections that help me stay current in the often quickly changing business environment! Thank you for keeping me "in the know" and keep those great articles coming.

Rhonda Morgan
Executive Director
The Arts Council of the Blue Ridge

Valley Business FRONT is my choice of magazines when I'm looking for an afternoon of informative, relaxing, or just plain entertaining reading. Unlike most stuffy business publications, FRONT is witty, innovative and cutting edge, right down to it's format. Instead of the cumbersome large magazines and floppy periodicals, FRONT is a convenient size that always travels easily with me on my long road trips or short lunch breaks.

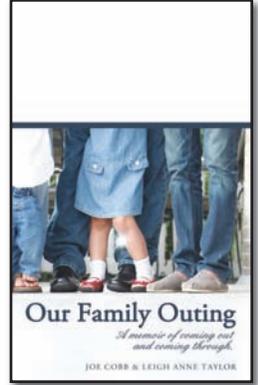
But one gets more than just the brick and mortar and profit and loss accounts of local businesses in FRONT. FRONT is about the people behind the business, and the how and whys of what fails and what succeeds. Seasoned and budding writers present a fresh, intelligent, and honest perspective on what is happening around me.

Pam Hartle
Consultant
Roanoke

Send letters to news@vbFRONT.com or any FRONT contact of your choosing (page 6). Submissions may be edited. You can see, read, print any current or back issue online at www.vbFRONT.com

Books @ the FRONT >

Following are book recommendations from our publishers and business people in the Roanoke and New River Valleys who are inveterate readers. Readers are invited to submit 150-word reviews of books you've read during the past six months. Our goal is to recommend good books on any topic and in any genre. Send reviews to Editor Dan Smith at editrdan@msn.com



Healthy, happy people

When Leigh Anne Taylor married Joe Cobb, she knew that she had found a man who shared her love of the church and her dreams for a family. She did not know that he had spent most of his life hiding from his attraction to men.

Our Family Outing (Total Publishing and Media, \$19.95) was co-authored by the Southwest Virginia-based ex-spouses and shares the intimate story of the crises and catharses that led them from a seemingly average family to one that includes not only Joe, Leigh Anne and their two kids, but also Leigh Anne's second husband, Joe's partner James, and the two young children born to the men via a surrogate.

At a time when GLBT issues are often boiled down to picket signs and Bible verses, *Our Family Outing* is an inspirational reminder of how love and openness can lead to healthier people, happier children and a more expansive definition of family.

—Sarah Beth Jones

On the environment

Roanoker James Morton Turner, son of contractor Jay Turner and an assistant professor of environmental studies at Wellesley College, has written a definitive work on the importance of wild places in this country. Turner's approach in *The Promise of Wilderness: American*

Environmental Politics Since 1964 (University of Washington Press, \$39.95) is to look at the history and politics of environmental movements and to examine the government's role in maintaining these special places— if, indeed, it should have one, as many argue it should not.

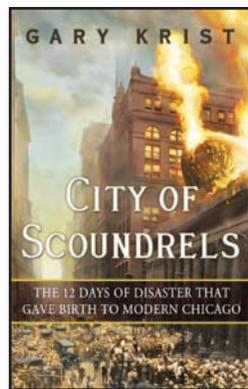
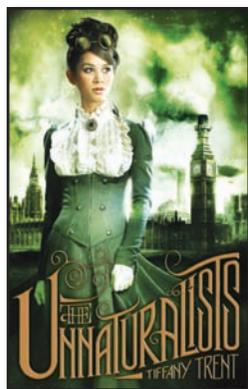
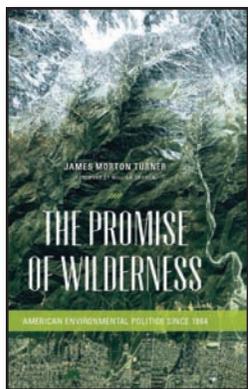
In more than 500 pages, complete with illustrations, Turner shows us how the arguments have evolved to reflect newer, often harsher, realities that face us all. This is an impressive work by a refined intellect.

—Dan Smith

Otherworldly

New River Valley resident Tiffany Trent's latest novel, *The Unnaturalists* (Simon & Schuster, \$16.99), is an action-packed tale set in New London, an alternative Victorian universe where the saints are Darwin and Newton. Vespa Nyx, the novel's heroine, loves working in her father's museum cataloging Unnatural creatures but faces pressure to lead a more conventional life. Syrus Reed is a Tinker, a member of the underclass whose family is sold into slavery. Syrus and Vespa's stories intertwine, and soon the fate of the only world they've ever known is at stake.

Don't let the science fiction/fantasy setting intimidate you—Trent is a master storyteller, and she's done all the hard work to ensure that you will easily be



transported into this world.

Trent's earlier work includes the *Hallowmere* novels, a young-adult fantasy series set during the Civil War.

—Laura Purcell

A powerful tale

In *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward (Bloomsbury, \$15), a destitute dysfunctional family gathers strength to face the wrath of Hurricane Katrina. They could never have prepared enough for what occurs in this story.

Esch is 15 and pregnant. She is promiscuous out of desperation, without the courage to say no. One in particular, she adores. He is willing to partake of her body, but has no feelings; she is something to be tossed aside. Esch realizes how little she is thought of when the pregnancy becomes obvious to him. She is devastated.

Esch's brother lovingly adores his pit bull Chinah in twisted form; he fights her against other dogs in vicious battles. Her father loves his children as he drinks the years away and causes them to live in fear. The hurricane is coming to rip their house from its foundation, love from their hearts. A National Book Award winner, the tale is captivating and powerful, disgusting, and heartbreaking.

—Heather Brush

Chicago on the edge

Gary Krist's *City of Scoundrels: The 12 Days of Disaster That Gave Birth to Modern Chicago* (Crown, \$26) will have you quickly reminiscing about the marvelous *Devil in the White City*, but that will fade quickly as this one takes on a helter-skelter life of its own. Talk about cramming in summer-read plotlines. How about a race riot and a transit strike, a blimp crash into a bank (burning those inside), and a child murder case of the "Crime of the Century" variety all in 12 days of 1919.

Add the fact that Chicago is about to collapse and you have a stem-winder. Krist has written for a number of prestigious periodicals and has written several novels. This one, though, didn't need to be made up. It happened, even though this reads like fiction. It is paced like "24 Hours" and Krist gets to the heart of each of these matters with some fine writing and impressive research. Good read.

—Dan Smith

(**The reviewers:** Sarah Beth Jones is co-owner of Nary Ordinary Business Services in Floyd and a contributor to FRONT. Laura Purcell works at Virginia Tech and is a freelance writer in the New River Valley. Heather Brush is a professional artist, living in Rocky Mount. Dan Smith is FRONT editor.)



Dan Smith

Investment and growth >

Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine head **Michael Friedlander** (standing) introduces those making an announcement about the new Valley Ventures Limited Partnership investment fund for early-stage businesses in this region July 17. The announcement was part of a day of announcements and brainstorming (other photos) at the Roanoke-Blacksburg Innovation Blueprint at VTC. The \$15 million fund was put together by Carilion Clinic, Third Security



Dan Smith

Skybox >

Mary and Jim Miller of Blacksburg join in the conversation at the Creekmore Law Firm's evening in a Salem Red Sox skybox in early July. It is a favored pastime for many area businesses.

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

FRONT 'N ABOUT



Tom Field

Artsy Jazzy >

Salem Art & Jazz in July was held July 21 at Longwood Park. The annual music event introduced art into the mix this year with about a dozen artists exhibiting. The musical lineup included Star City Swing Band, Ocie Davis and the Ocie Three, Emme St. James, Lenny Marcus, Scott Walter & the Jazz All-Star Band.



Christina Koomen



Talkabout >

The Taubman Museum of Art's Talkabout at the beginning of July drew a full house to discuss the museum's future. Much of the talk centered on regionalism and how the museum could serve local artists and the region's public.

CONTRIBUTORS

Anne Giles Clelland is the founder of business news site Handshake 2.0 (handshake20.com) and President and CEO of Handshake Media, Incorporated, makers of Handshake mobile applications. She is co-founder of She Chooses (shechooses.com), the social network for women. [anne@handshake20.com]

Tom Field is a creative director, marketing executive and owner of Berryfield, Inc. in Salem, and co-owner of Valley Business FRONT magazine. He has written and produced programs and materials for local and international organizations for more than 30 years. [tfield@berryfield.com]

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Mary Crockett Hill is the author of several books, most recently *A Theory of Everything*, winner of the Autumn House Poetry Prize and an educator. She lives in Elliston. [marycrockett.hill@yahoo.com]

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Gene Marrano, a former sales and marketing executive in various manufacturing fields, is one of the most prolific journalists in the Roanoke Valley. He not only writes for several publications, but he has a television show ("Interview With Gene Marrano" on Cox Channel 9) and a radio show ("Roanoke This Week with Gene Marrano" on Fox Radio 910). [gmarrano@cox.net]

Michael Miller is senior licensing manager for Virginia Tech Intellectual Properties in Blacksburg. His consulting company is Kire Technology. With more than 25 years as an inventor and technology consultant, working with Fortune 500 companies and startups, he screens businesses for the World's Best Technology Showcase and mentors tech startups through Development Capital Networks and the National Science Foundation. [mbmiller2@gmail.com]

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Dan Smith is editor and co-owner of Valley Business FRONT. A native of Asheville, N.C., he has been a journalist for more than four decades and has won many journalism awards (writing, photography and design). He is a member of the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame and was a 2009 recipient of the Perry F. Kendig Literary Award. He was Virginia's Business Journalist of the year in 2005. He is the founder of the Roanoke Regional Writers Conference. [dsmith@vbFRONT.com]

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Greg Vaughn is an award-winning Roanoke area photographer for more than 30 years whose work has appeared in local and international publications. [greg@gregvaughnphotography.com]

Randolph Walker graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a journalism degree in 1983. He has been a daily newspaper reporter in Roanoke and an advertising copywriter for the Edmonds Packett Group. He is now a freelance writer as well as a performing musician and guitar teacher. [rwalker25@cox.net]



Mary Hill

July 2012 > Contributor of the Month

Mary Hill has considerable experience being honored for her writing. She can add FRONT Contributor of the Month to her resume now. Her story on James Glass and his unusual approach to his contracting business is typically Mary: beautifully written, full of useful information, containing a good understanding of what's going on. Mary is a much-honored poet and educator whose poems fairly sing. Her work on our July issue sang, as well, and we're happy she is one of us. You can read Mary's current and back issue articles at vbFRONT.com



Swimming is one of the largest participation sports in the region

— Page 49

Positive trends continue >

Economic indicators in the Roanoke and New River Valleys continue to move in the right direction. While the region followed state and nation trends in unemployment in May (up from April, down from May 2011), unemployment is down and more people are working than a year ago. Home prices and sales also are improving. If it doesn't always look like it month to month, a long view does show an improving economy.

Unemployment/Employment

Unemployment rates in the Roanoke and Blacksburg Metropolitan Statistical Areas in May were down from the same month in 2011, but are up slightly from April as college students and graduates start to enter the workforce. For that reason, it isn't surprising that the month-to-month jump was higher in the college-dominated New River Valley. The region followed the state and national trends of rising unemployment rates from April to May and falling rates over the year. Unemployment in the combined region fell at a faster rate than Virginia's (6.0 percent in May 2011 to 5.5 percent a year later).



| | UNEMPLOYMENT | | |
|------------|--------------|---------|--------|
| | May 11 | Apr. 12 | May 12 |
| Blacksburg | 6.9% | 5.5% | 6.3% |
| Roanoke | 6.4% | 5.8% | 5.9% |
| Combined | 6.6% | 5.7% | 6.0% |

Fewer people unemployed means more people were **employed** in the region in May than a year ago, though the number

of people working did fall from April to May.

| EMPLOYED | | |
|----------|-----------|----------|
| May 2011 | Apr. 2012 | May 2012 |
| 227,465 | 235,413 | 232,702 |

Initial unemployment claims for the region fell 20.6 percent during Week 24 (June 8-14) from the same week last year, bettering the 14.0 percent drop for the state as a whole. Within the region, the Blacksburg MSA held steady, while the Roanoke MSA saw a 26.2 percent drop.

| INITIAL UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Week 24 2011 | Week 24 2012 |
| 465 | 369 |

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

Real Estate

Home prices in the region rose from April to May, but are down from a year ago. Since January, however, the average home price has gone up by 16.9 percent, a slightly faster pace than national average home price have risen over the same period (15.2 percent). The number of homes sold in May was up from April and a year ago.



| HOME PRICES | | |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| May 2011 | Apr. 2012 | May 2012 |
| \$186,821 | \$180,457 | \$182,461 |

| HOMES SOLD | | |
|------------|-----------|----------|
| May 2011 | Apr. 2012 | May 2012 |
| 338 | 340 | 340 |

Sources: Roanoke Valley Association of REALTORS & National Association of REALTORS

—By Anne Piedmont,
Piedmont Research Associates



Dan Smith

Paige Hodges: “If you’re a creative person, the divide is not always so neat.”

‘You have to be who you are’ >

Executive Summary:

For Paige Hodges, grant writer for Center in the Square, who she is, is a lot of things, all of them important, most of them creative.

By Dan Smith

You can tell when Paige Hodges is off on a mental poetry expedition. It happens occasionally, when her brain needs a break, when she’s stuck for a word or phrase or an idea. She stops, adjusts her mind and writes, reads or imagines a poem. It can be any kind of poem; it’s the form that soothes, not just the words.

Paige is a 28-year-old grant writer who has pushed herself to the front ranks of that discipline in the Roanoke Valley in just a couple of years. She’s one of those hotshot creative writing graduates from Hollins University—Pulitzer Prize U, it’s often called—who wound up doing something besides winning the prize for poetry (which Natasha Trethewey recently did, adding to the legend).

Paige is the grants and foundations officer for Center in the Square, where she’s been for just short of a year. She spent three years writing grant programs successfully for Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) and became director of resource development for Virginia CARES. Center has to do with arts funding, the other two agencies work with the poor and downtrodden. The difference in goals, she says, is negligible: she’s trying to fund worthy projects and she puts her heart into each carefully considered word.

Julie Goodman of Center in the Square says Paige “is not afraid to explore new ideas or think outside of the box. She takes the time to work on unique collaborations with artists, educators and business leaders in order to make a program worthy of funding and valuable to the people it serves. She has a passion for the arts and her community that is truly infectious.”

Paige is trying to convince people who have money to give that her programs are worthy of their funds and she knows hers is one of a pile of grant applications they’ll have to read. Most have a safe sameness. Hers, she tries to ensure, are original and creative, something the reader will want to stick with for a bit and maybe bite into, at least partly because it is interesting in a world that isn’t always that.

That’s the Hollins education. Looking for a sparkly in a coal mine.

There’s also the Protestant work ethic. “I thought I might be a poet,” says Paige wistfully. “Reality and Protestantism interfered. It tells me I must work and earn money.” So, she takes the poetry breaks and strokes that gene.

“If you’re a creative person,” she says, “the divide between your creative life and your working life is not always so neat.” And so, she finds writing grants can have its moments of brilliant creativity. She also has the music. Guitar. Good buddies who jam and play in places where people listen. Sometimes, she says, “I’d rather be playing the guitar.”

All during these vocational and avocational moments, Paige’s cerebral palsy (she was also born far ahead of schedule) lurks in the background, generally not offering much help or hindrance, but always there. Sometimes it’s painful, other times just a pain in the butt. She walks with difficulty, but she thinks with a clarity that is rare. She doesn’t like talking about the condition because she’s “afraid of the preciousness” that often accompanies “handicapped person does good” stories. The way she was raised, she emphasizes, there “was no difference” between her and others and she insists on that now.

Her attitude: “It’s living, not survival. I don’t see it as a struggle, except when pain enters ... My perspective is that I’m able to see the struggle. I’ve always felt I’d make my own way.” She stresses that one “can’t slump. You have to be who you are.”

Part of that purpose right now is finding money for Center in the Square’s new aquatics program that will surround the new aquarium in the renovated building. She has not yet had great success at Center, but she’s still new. At TAP, she was almost wildly successful, bringing in bundles of cash for homeless veterans. The Integration Program she wrote had “so many moving parts that it took a month and a half to write.” Ask the vets if it was worth the effort. You’re likely to hear a cheer.

Her “parting shot” before leaving TAP, Paige says, was “one of my most successful” in that it took a temporary employment idea, added a little collaboration and created a program. She left TAP to work with people who arguably were in narrower straits than even the TAP clients: prisoners who wanted to rejoin society. That meant creating a program to help them with unemployment, resumes, reunification with families, medical assistance and a whole range of living issues. She says she’s passionate about working with those who need her help and one might imagine why.

She is so locked into the help mode that even today—with a full-time grant-writing gig—she’s putting in 15-20 hours of her own time in some weeks freelancing to help the ex-offenders.

Arts vs. compassion? “The skills [for the job] are the same,” Paige says. “You state needs and how to meet those needs.” You have to “write with clarity. A clear evaluation plan is huge.” And there’s this: “A good idea is a good idea no matter if you are writing for an arts organization or an anti-poverty agency.”

The answers to questions on grant applications are basically the same, she says. “You state what you have and what you wish for” and you do it creatively. Which is pretty much a boiled down version of how Paige lives. 

Career FRONT

FINANCIAL FRONT



Wood



Fisher



Brizendine

Banks

StellarOne has named **Edna Wood** manager of the West Salem Financial Center. **Betti Fisher** and **Janine Brizendine** have

been named personal bankers at the branch.



Agee



Hundley



Martin

Valley Bank announced the following promotions to executive vice president: **Andrew B. Agee**, **Mary P. (Gill) Hundley**, **Edward C. Martin**, **Connie W. Stanley** and **Kevin S.**



Stanley

Meade, who has also been appointed Chief Operating Officer.

Embrace Home Loans in Salem has named **Pamela Snead** a mortgage lender.

Keith St. Peter is a new IT specialist and **Kathy Mills** and **Leah Anderson** have been named tellers at HomeTown Bank in Roanoke.

Kimberly Snyder of Valley Bank has graduated from the ABA Stonier Graduate School of Banking at the University of Pennsylvania.

First Citizens Bank in Roanoke has named **Joshua Bradley** as a business banker.

Farm Credit & Country

Mortgages has named **Steven Bowman** a loan officer in its Roanoke office.

Freedom First has added **Carl Humphries** as assistant VP for marketing in Roanoke.

HomeTown Bank in Roanoke has promoted **Rachel Cripps** to financial specialist.

LEGAL FRONT

Firms

Ann McGee Green of the firm of Anderson & Desimone has been named president of the Salem/Roanoke County Bar Association.

Matthew Pollard of the office of the Commonwealth's Attorney is immediate past president; **Holly Peters** of Holly S. Peters in Salem is first vice president; **Scott Geddes** of Osterhoudt, Prillaman, Natt, Helscher, Yost, Maxwell & Ferguson in Roanoke is second VP; **Bryan Meadows** of GEICO

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secretary treasurer; **Sarah Jane Wells** of Warner & Renick in Roanoke judge advocate; and **John Koehler** of law clerk to Senior Justice Lawrence L. Koontz, Jr. of the Supreme Court of Virginia.

WELLNESS FRONT

Awards

Dr. Jennifer Rathmann of Tuck Chiropractic Clinic in Blacksburg has been named the 2012 Woman of the Year by the NRV Express Chapter of the American



Rathmann

Business Women's Association (ABWA).

Education

CMR Institute



Spencer

in Roanoke, a pharmaceutical educator in Roanoke, has named **Clara Anne Davis Spencer** of Carilion Clinic to its

Board of Directors.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

Steel

Precision Steel Manufacturing in Roanoke has named **Debbie Honaker** its HR manager.

Joy Sutton



- Former WDBJ TV Anchor/Reporter
- TV Host, "The Hour of Joy"
- Howard University and Virginia Tech graduate
- Vibe Radio Listener

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Career FRONT

DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Feron



Noll



Garland

Architects/Engineers

Spectrum Design of Roanoke has named **David Feron** a mechanical engineer. **Kelly Noll**, an interior designer, has passed the National Council for Interior Design Qualification exam. **Mark Garland**, a civil engineer sign, passed the Professional Engineer exam.



Vass

Michael W. Vass of Wiley + Wilson in

Lynchburg has earned his Certified Commissioning Authority (CxA) certification through the AABC Commissioning Group.



Linkous

Stephen Craig Linkous of Gay and Neel in Christiansburg has passed the Virginia and National Land Surveying Examinations and is now a licensed surveyor.

Awards

Lindsey Eversole, Global Partnership Manager of VT KnowledgeWorks, recently completed the National Business Incubation Association's Incubator Management Certificate Program.



Cohen

Adam Cohen, co-founder of Structures Design Build in Roanoke, has been named Best Green Designer by the Virginia Sustainable Building Network.

Software

Meridium in Roanoke's **Charles Fisher**

has been named a fellow of the Society for Technical Communications.

Organizations

Lindsey Eversole of VT KnowledgeWorks in Blacksburg has completed the National Business Incubation Association's Incubation Management Certification program.

RETAIL/SERVICE FRONT

Wine Sales

Roanoke Valley Wine Company in Roanoke has hired **Kimberly Akers** and **Clement Brown** as sales consultants.

Consulting

Tastefully Simple in Roanoke has named **Thelma Coffey** an independent consultant.

OTHER FRONTS



Peters

Advertising/PR

Lindsey Peters has joined the becher agency (tba) in Roanoke as public relations assistant account executive.

Chambers

Joyce Waugh,



Waugh

president of the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce, has been selected as the Chamber Executive of the Year by the Virginia Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives.

Non-Profits

Family Service of Roanoke Valley has named **Sharon Jarrett Thacker** president & CEO of the 110-year-old organization.

Organizations

Downtown Roanoke, Inc. has named **Glenn Hager** of CCBCC, **Anna Karbassiyoon** of Sir Speedy, **Jill Lovejoy** of Advance Auto Parts, **Bill Poe** of Poe and Cronk, and **Leesa Wilcher** of WSLs-TV to its board of directors.

The Historical Society of Western Virginia has name its new board of directors. Members are: **Alison Stone Blanton** of Hill Studio; **Ben Chapman** of NS Corporation; **Wilburn Dibling** retired; **Louise Forsyth** retired; **Nelson Harris** of Virginia Heights Baptist Church; **David Helmer** retired; **Scott Hengerer** of Ameriprise Financial; **William Honeycutt** retired; **Jim Humphrey** of Mountain Car

Company; **John Kern** retired; **George A. McLean Jr.** attorney; **Gwen Mason** of the Department of Justice; **Tommy Moore** of Botetourt County; **Charles Price** of Payne Construction; and **Linda Thornton** an education consultant.

Junior League of the Roanoke Valley has named the following officers: president, **Amy Foster** of Roanoke College; president-elect, **Macel Janoschka** of Frith Anderson & Peake; administrative VP, **Michelle Pendleton** of Advance Auto Parts; recording secretary,

Susan Stanley-Zahorchak of Rockydale Quarries; finance VP **Brandi Dagley** of Forest Pharmaceuticals; community VP **Emily Fielder**; communications VP, **Victoria McDade**, community volunteer; membership VP, **Lindsey Kirby** of Finks Jewelers; nominating chairwoman, **Allison Masinter** of the Secret Ingredient; fund development VP, **Kimberly Burrows** of DePaul Community Resources; sustaining advisor, **Julie Wheeler** of Better Business Bureau of Western Virginia; and community VP **Emily Fielder**

of Virginia Tech.

Spas

Innovations Salon & Day Spa has named **Kaylee Green** as a designer.

Advertising

AAF Roanoke (www.aafroanoke.org) has announced the following officers for 2012-2013: **Chris Dodd**, President (and Virginia State Governor); **Tom Field**, Vice President & Programs Chair; **Ariel Clark**, Secretary; **Allan Mower**, Board Member At Large; **John Cornthwait**, Communications Chair; **Matt Brown** & **Stefanie Brown**, Public

Service Chairs; **Liz Munn-Lively**, Membership Chair; **Kym Davis**, ADDY Chair; **Krystal Proffitt**, Media Auction Chair (and National Ad 2 Chair); **Jamal Millner**, Diversity Chair; **Colleen Dresser**, Finance Chair.

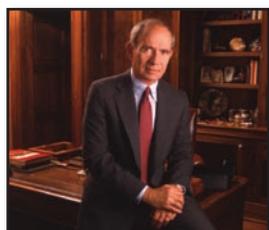
Ad 2 Roanoke (www.ad2roanoke.org) has announced the following officers for 2012-2013: **Monica Jones**, President; **Monica Fritz**, Vice President & Communications Chair; **Hillary Pitts**, Membership Chair; **Blair Peyton**, Online Communications Chair.



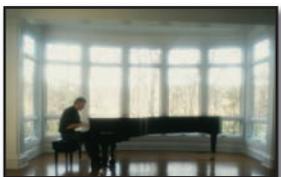
ADVANCE AUTO



MEDECO



BERTRAM FIRESTONE



BRUCE HORNSBY



ROANOKE TIMES



ROWE

gregvaughnphotography.com

FRONT Notes



Delta Dental

Rural program launched

Carilion Clinic in Roanoke will launch a three year program to improve the health of patients in rural Virginia through better management of their medications. The program will be funded by a \$4.1 million award from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation. The award is part of CMS's Health Care Innovation Challenge, a \$1 billion

fund to support initiatives that have the potential to improve care and lower the overall cost of healthcare.

The Carilion Clinic project will focus on improving the management of medications for patient in 23 underserved rural counties served by Carilion New River Valley Medical Center (CNRV), five community hospitals and 17 primary care practices.

RMH grades well

The Leapfrog Group, a national hospital rating organization, released its first ever "Hospital Safety Score" report that grades hospitals with an A, B, C, D, or F letter grade to reflect how safe hospitals are for patients. **Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital (CRMH)** received an "A" grade, making CRMH among the 729 hospitals that received the highest rating out of more than

2,600 hospitals graded nationwide.

New dental program

Delta Dental of Virginia in Roanoke has launched the Delta Dental of Virginia Foundation to help improve the oral health and, subsequently, overall body health of all Virginians. "The Delta Dental of Virginia Foundation will provide grants to organizations that work to improve the

"Power To The People"

Wind turbines at the new William Fleming High School Stadium will generate a portion of the power required to run the stadium. When the turbines produce more power than the stadium uses, the excess power will flow backward through the meter into the APCO grid for use by other APCO customers. The Stadium's electric bill is in turn reduced by the amount of power returned to the APCO grid.

Rife + Wood ARCHITECTS
Roanoke, Virginia 540.344.6015



essential access to dental care and oral health education that people require as part of their overall health care,” says Delta Dental President/CEO George Levicki.

also joined TowneBank Mortgage as loan officers and will all be located in the Roanoke office.

CHP honored

Community Housing Partners (CHP) of Christiansburg has received a 2012 Innovator Award winner by Southern Growth Policies Board of the CREATES program. Innovator Awards are presented annually to one organization in each of Southern Growth’s 13 member states in recognition of initiatives and organizations that are improving economic opportunities and quality of life in the region. The

Have an announcement about your business?

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

New bank in Roanoke

TowneBank Mortgage, a division of TowneBank with assets of \$4.4 billion, has expanded into Roanoke. Denny Early Jr. will serve as senior VP and regional manager of this new region and will be based in Roanoke.

Debbie Montgomery, Brad Vaughan, and Donna Vaught have

2012 Innovator Awards recognize initiatives that are successfully preparing Southerners to meet the workforce needs of a globally-competitive business sector.

RGC dividend

RGC Resources in

Roanoke has declared a quarterly dividend of \$0.175 per share on the Company’s common stock. The dividend was to be paid on August 1, 2012 to shareholders of record on July 13, 2012. This is the Company’s 273rd consecutive quarterly cash dividend. It comes on the heels of one of the warmest

So much more.

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- > [Huge Roanoke Contract Goes to Another Outside Firm](#)
- > [New Regional Investment Firm Announced](#)
- > [Roanoke All-American City for 6th Time](#)
- > [Virginia Tech Names First 6 to Entrepreneur Hall of Fame](#)
- > [Ferrum College Impact Set at \\$93 Million](#)
- > [Roanoke Native Fights To Preserve Civil War Battlefields](#)

morefront.blogspot.com

So many FRONTreaders just can’t get enough in our monthly magazine. “Give us more!” they say. Well, we say, “OK.” Read more stories and latebreaking updates on our moreFRONT blog.

- > [New Rural Outreach for Carilion Clinic](#)
 - > [Carilion Receives A Grade in Report](#)
 - > [TowneBank Moves into Roanoke Market](#)
 - > [Tech’s New Budget a Third Less Than a Decade Ago](#)
 - > [Virginia Tech Research Spending Continues to Rise](#)
 - > [MedExpress, LewisGale Sign Agreement](#)
 - > [Economic Developers Meet at Virginia Tech](#)
 - > [New Survival Kit from Mountain Shepherd School](#)
 - > [First MEDCottage Sale Completed](#)
- and much more (of course; hence, the name)**



Sarah's Place will take over the old coffee shot at Patrick Henry.

winters on record.

Breakfast / lunch at Patrick Henry

Sarah's Place, a grab-and-go eatery serving breakfast and lunch opened in August at the Patrick Henry in downtown Roanoke. Owner/caterer Amy Carter named the restaurant after Patrick Henry's first wife, Sarah Shelton.

Access wins award

Access Advertising & Public Relations in Roanoke has been awarded a 2012 Silver Telly Award by the international Telly Awards and Silver Telly Council for a television spot produced on behalf of Carpet Factory Outlet. The Silver Award is Telly's highest recognition.

Air service upgrade

Delta Air Lines and **USAirways** in Roanoke

are refining their services, dropping some services and adding others. The three daily flights to LaGuardia in New York (USAirways) is over, but it has been replaced by a single flight on a larger plane. Delta has also assigned a 122-seat Airbus to one of its six flights from Roanoke to Atlanta. The other flights have 50 seats.

All-American City

The National Civic League has named **Roanoke** a 2012 All-America City, marking the sixth time it has earned the distinction - a feat achieved by no other city. Other years the city has won include 1952, 1979, 1982, 1988, and 1996.

Tech picks inductees

The **Virginia Tech Faculty Entrepreneur Hall of Fame** has inducted its first class of honorees. From a

pool of more than 50 nominees solicited from across the campus, six university faculty members were selected: Vinod Chachra of VTLS, Richard Claus of NanoSonic, Fred C. Lee of the Center for Power Electronic Systems, Arvid Myklebust of Phoenix Integration, AVID Aerospace, and Theta Tech Solutions, James Rancourt of Polymer Solutions, and Tracy Wilkins of TRANSPHARM.

"As faculty members, they have been accountable for making substantial contributions to three elements of the mission of Virginia Tech: teaching, research, and service," said Robert Walters, vice president for research. "As entrepreneurs, they have taken their passions, dreams, time, and effort to create products and services to improve the quality of life for our citizens and for the interests of the nation. They have enhanced our local and regional economies and created

high-quality jobs, particularly here in Southwest Virginia."

Ferrum's impact

Ferrum College contributes in excess of \$93 million annually to the local economy according to the results of a recent study. The findings show a strong impact in Franklin County, Roanoke and the surrounding region generated from student and employee spending as well as philanthropy and the College's day-to-day business activities.

First & Main sold

Blacksburg's prominent downtown shopping center **First & Main** has been sold by Wells Fargo to an unidentified group of Virginia Tech alumni, according to published reports. Members reportedly do not want to be identified. The center has a number of vacancies and has struggled since

it was completed four years ago.

New restaurant

1906 Ale House, owned by Dan Brown who has been with Fork in the Alley and Fork in the Market, has scheduled a September opening in the former Isaacs in Grandin Village. The restaurant has a tentative menu of deli sandwiches and entrees. Isaacs was a popular dinner spot that was suddenly and unexpectedly lost as a

tenant in the building.

Line shut down

BAE Systems at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant in Dublin had to shut down a production line for several days in early July because of a chemical leak that demanded cleanup.

Chapter 11 OK'd

A Chapter 11 reorganization plan by the senior retirement

facility **The Glebe** in Botetourt County has been confirmed by a federal judge in Roanoke. The deal will include the infusion of more than \$2 million from the owner, Virginia Baptist Homes Foundation. This was the third plan submitted by The Glebe. Two previous plans were denied. The Glebe has 220 residents.

New tech consortium

Introduced at Virginia Tech Carilion Roanoke

campus in mid-July, **Innovation Blueprint 1.0**, a working agreement among educators, community builders, municipal officers, and others is a new initiative to foster economic development and regional promotion in the areas of science and technology.

Compiled by Dan Smith and Tom Field

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“”
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referred to as ‘Patent Trolls’

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