

Valley Business

FRONT

FOR THE UP AND COMING
AND ALREADY ARRIVED

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vbFRONT.com



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Richard Rife,
Rife + Wood Architects

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WELCOME to the FRONT

It is a battle—a constant battle—if your goal is to be a little different, to accomplish the ordinary with a touch of flair. We discover almost daily, to our continued surprise and often to our dismay, that what we do here at FRONT causes quite a bit of discussion in offices where we've asked for cooperation in putting together a story, photograph or a cover design.

Control and image are issues business people take seriously and they are issues we must consider long and hard when we're looking at stories and pictures to illustrate our stories and, with the cover, our whole magazine. We have developed a reputation for creative, often sassy, always entertaining covers. Our stories often get a response like, "What's that doing in a business magazine?" followed by "Yeh, I really enjoyed that story and I learned something."

Getting to the end product, however, is not always easy. Subjects of stories want to read them before they go to press. Our policy doesn't allow that except in specific pieces and only at the direction of the editor. We don't want subjects of stories writing them. Our people are professional journalists who know how to tell the story. Same with the cover. Given the choice, marketing directors would almost always go with the safe shot of a well-dressed business executive looking directly into the camera, arms folded, face without expression. A pose of power and seriousness. A pose that tells you nothing at all worth knowing. We're likely to have some fun with that executive, make a point about our story and get the executive a lot of attention. In nearly five years, we've never had a cover subject say, "I wish I hadn't done that." We have had several who refused to pose for the cover, say later, "I wish I had done that."

Our goal here is not to make anybody look foolish or less sincere than is the case. We want to show that business is fun, challenging, fulfilling and always worth a second look. We're still telling stories and giving you interesting visuals. It's just that they aren't necessarily the ones you expect.



Tom Field



Dan Smith



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the Sun

Cover photography of Richard Rife by Greg Vaughn Photography. WWII jacket and helmet from Commando Supply. Art direction by Tom Field.

Valley Business
FRONT

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Rod Belcher



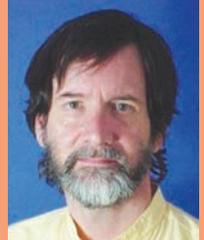
Susan Lazear



Rebekah Manley



Greg Vaughn



Randolph Walker

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



Anne Giles Clelland



Tom Field



Kathleen Harshberger



Pamela Hartle



Sarah Beth Jones



Michael Miller



Anne Piedmont



Dan Smith



Kathy Surace



Nicholas Vaassen



Alison Weaver

“”
I speak with a funny Chinese,
Bostonian, Southwest
Virginian accent

— Page 37

2012 Members

Nancy Agee Carilion (Wellness)
Laura Bradford ClaireV (Retail)
Nicholas C. Conte Woods Rogers (Legal)
Warner Dalhouse Retired (Seniors)
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Mary Miller IDD (Tech/Industry)
Ed Walker Regeneration Partners (Development)
John Williamson RGC (Tech/Industry)

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.

“”
Sometimes
the movies
get it right

— Page 33

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THE BATTLE FOR

CONSTRUCTION



Building it back >

Executive Summary:

The building industry in this region is reacting to an economy that has given it few breaks in recent years, but the survivors are adjusting, growing stronger and looking forward to what's next.

**By Dan Smith
and Alison Weaver**

As a microcosm of the national economy, the construction industry in this region is just about perfect: confused and inconsistent, full of success stories and disasters, riding on a full-throttle roller coaster and headed ... well, that's the one nobody can even guess.

This has been a cycle that has, in the reluctant words of many in the building trades, "shaken out" the weaker companies and presented new opportunities to those willing to change and adjust. There have been a lot of failures, especially among small subcontractors, and the accomplished companies stand there in glaring contrast, sometimes with a new shape. Old-line, solid builders and designers have often lost their core businesses, but have rebounded by adjusting to the new reality. They're doing work they wouldn't touch before at profit margins that, in past years, would have been considered losses. They're scrambling for jobs that often do little more than keep their subcontractors busy for a few more days or weeks.

It is, in some cases, a simple matter of survival.

Contractors often complain that their governments—even local governments—have abandoned them in favor of outsiders. Big institutions with big jobs are going to Philadelphia, to Richmond, to Charlotte for their designers and builders. The state even has a couple of laws that give big firms a huge edge in winning contracts without even having to bid for them.

The statistics tell part of the story. Residential building permits for localities in this region have declined significantly. Botetourt County, during the 2007 building boom, issued 137 permits for \$25.8 million. That had dropped to 55 permits for \$11.6 million by 2011. Montgomery County saw 675 permits for \$90.6 million in 2007, but that fell to 129 permits for \$27.5 million by 2010. In Roanoke tax credits have led to a mini-boom downtown where rehab projects have created a new downtown living dynamic. The city is also experiencing a boomlet (66 percent increase in permits), mostly for small

COVER STORY



projects (decks, bathrooms, kitchens and the like). It keeps contractors and designers busy. It does not assure a strong future.

Roanoke Building Commissioner Jim Shawver says, "Dollar values are down but the number of building permits is way up. People aren't doing the \$40 million dollar projects, but they're doing lots of smaller projects. The downtown projects continue to spur growth. A prime example is the new Community School building [on Campbell Avenue near Williamson Road]. The school is on the ground floor and there are apartments above. It's extending the downtown core area."

Shakeups have been the norm of late. AECOM, the largest contractor in the world (it has a big Roanoke outlet) has suffered a number of layoffs. Breakell, one of the most honored companies regionally for its environmental commitment, has had some financial setbacks and is looking at its operations. J.M. Turner, an old line firm, has a new partner. SKANSKA, which finished many millions of dollars worth of work for Carilion, has left town. Tax credits boosted window replacement and air conditioning companies in 2010 due to energy tax credits, but the credits ended and so did the boom.

Homebuilding is slow and foreclosures continue. There is a glut of available homes on the market. Still, apartments are going up at a furious rate in old buildings in downtown Roanoke.

There is a \$27 million Center in the Square project in downtown Roanoke and another \$60 million federal project at the Poff Building. Roanoke County is spending \$23 million on a middle school and additions to an elementary school. Elmwood Park will soon get an amphitheater and Countryside Golf Course could eventually see an infusion of cash if the neighbors are ever satisfied with the city's plan.

As architect Richard Rife of Rife + Wood says, "There are pockets of recovery and other pockets that are still in recession. Depending on which pockets you're working



Richard Rife, principal architect of Rife + Wood in Roanoke plays our determined wartime leader, holding his plans as he surveys the battlefield in front of him.





We have a large mill shop where we can build and make anything customers want. The shop has kept us going.

— Randy Likens, *Ideal Lumber, Roanoke*



Up until recently, with the stimulus funds, we were seeing more government business . . . Generally, spending in the government sector has been constant, but we're seeing that on the wane. The private sector seems to be spending more, relatively speaking.

— Dan Webster, *Ferguson & Associates, Vinton*



Alison Weaver

Randy Likens

in, the economy is pretty good or it's pretty bad."

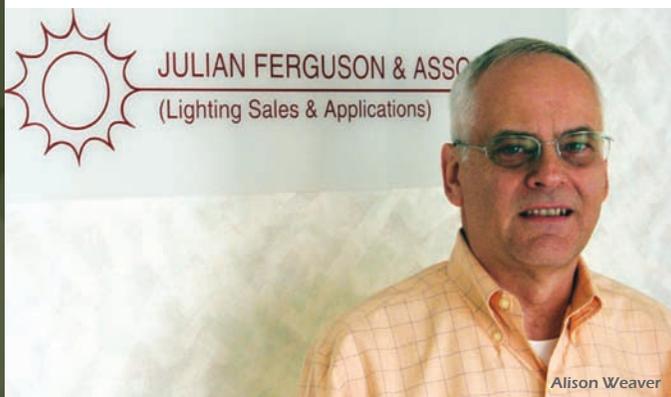
Here's a look at the important affected areas of the building trades:

SUPPLIERS

Randy Likens, manager of Ideal Building Supply in Roanoke, says—bluntly—"We had a few spurts in March and April, but in June it dropped off. I'm not a negative person, but I don't think it's going to get back to what it was five or six years ago for a very long time . . . I saw it slow down during the recession of Jimmy Carter's era, but this is far worse than that. I always thought that Roanoke would escape any significant downturn because we're so diversified with the railroad, the hospitals, industry and so forth."

Dan Webster, a VP at Ferguson & Associates in Vinton, a lighting company, is seeing a rebound of sorts. "Since 2008—which was kind of the watermark—things slowed. 2010 and 2011 were two of the slowest. Since the first of the year, things have rebounded to some extent."

Adjustment is the name of the game, says Webster: "We used to work on small-to-large commercial, industrial and governmental jobs that go out for bid. There are fewer of those. What we are seeing is an increase in discretionary projects among smaller contractors for smaller businesses



Dan Webster

Alison Weaver

across the spectrum of retail, industrial, etc. Educational facilities are still making improvements, too.”

Steve Chisholm, president and owner of CMC Supply in Roanoke says “things are fairly steady” in plumbing and electrical supplies and services, which includes irrigation systems, well pumps, sewer systems and the like. But, he says, “There’s a stronger market in hospitality—Holiday Inn Express, etc. Federal money is coming to an end. But when you add it all together, what we see is a slow, steady growth. It’s a whole lot better than a slow, steady decrease.”

One bright spot about the sluggish economy is that it helped CMC expand, says Chisholm. In January CMC bought Rocky Mount Supply. “The owner and president of the company had gotten to the situation and age where it was time to get out. The president was in his early 70s and ready for retirement. The owner was older and in assisted living. The company’s Bedford and Rocky Mount branches serve both sides of the lake, which was a very attractive area for us to expand to. Smith Mountain Lake took a pretty big hit, but it’s not going to be down forever because it’s such a desirable place. The silver lining was that the price was better now than it would have been five or six years ago. And, the electrical side gave us an added avenue for growth.”

Diversification has been important. “One thing that’s helped us to weather this storm is that we’ve added a lot of different products to our inventory,” says Chisholm. “We’ve always been careful to be diversified but we’re more willing to focus on new areas if they’re doing better than traditional ones.”

Dave Creed, branch manager at State Electric’s corporate HQ in Christiansburg, says wholesale electric supply has “definitely not seen a recovery. There’s a bit more commercial construction just because ‘tis the season.’ We’re seeing an upswing in custom homes and we’re seeing much more remodels,” but “residential is not the biggest part of our business. Our primary business is

New Privately Owned Residential Building Permits

Roanoke City



Roanoke County



Botetourt County



continued on Page 13



We're seeing much better activity in all price ranges.

— Brad Graham,
Boone Graham Thomas,
Roanoke



in industrial maintenance and repair. During 35 years in business, I have not seen residential building be this slow for this long."

CONTRACTORS

Brad Graham, co-owner and principal with Boone Graham Thomas Home Builders and Developers in Roanoke, the product of a 2011 merger, specializes in single-family, upper end homes, no-maintenance villas and custom homes costing \$1 million and up and he says, flatly, "We're slammed right now."

That's homes for people transferring into the area, for family homes, and a big demand for low maintenance villas among the aging population.

Graham says they're starting to see some trickle-up from buyers who took advantage of the \$8,000 federal tax credit. "That spurred sales in the \$200,000-ish price range and now they're looking to sell and move to larger homes."

Jack Avis, vice president of Avis Construction in Roanoke, says old line companies like his often fall back on their history. "Our most significant opportunities have been repeat business with former clients," he says. "Former clients have always been an important source of revenue, but, in this economy they have been invaluable."



Dan Smith

Jack Avis: "We just aren't seeing the opportunities for bidding or negotiating that we were seeing at the beginning of the year. We are not sure if there was pent up demand earlier in the year, but it does seem to be slowing across the entire market."



Todd Morgan: “Unfortunately, the breadth and depth of the Great Recession weeded out some historically strong performers. Short term, we’ve seen a number of firms taking work too cheaply, with limited manpower, which has caused cash flow problems that ultimately impact performance and quality.”

Some losses have not been expected. “There is very little government business being let,” he says. “In past downturns, the public contracts have been a good source of work for contractors. A lot of public entities have gone to construction management where they negotiate mostly with large multi-national construction firms. This change to negotiated work for public projects has forced us to look for more private work.”

Competition, says Avis, “has been intense.” He says, “We have seen a natural thinning mainly from firms taking work too cheaply early in the downturn ... Companies that may have taken work too cheaply have learned that they cannot continue to do so in the long haul ... [However] we are not seeing the major swings in contractor or subcontractor pricing that we were seeing at the beginning of the recession.”

President Todd Morgan of 100-year-old MB Contractors in Roanoke sees a light: “Teaming has been our most significant opportunity over the past two years. We partnered with a minority contractor for the two new schools we’re building in the City of Richmond and we are a trade contractor for the Signature Engineering Building at Virginia Tech. This is not something we had looked to in the past, but over the past few years we have been diversifying our avenues for generating revenues in order to remain successful.”

Morgan says MB is addressing the low price issue: “We have taken additional

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New Privately Owned Residential Building Permits



Montgomery County



Salem





Dan Smith

Sheldon and Troy Henderson

control measures and reduced the number of projects our project managers would typically handle so they can keep everyone accountable and catch any problems before they impact schedules and quality.”

Sheldon Henderson, president of G&H Construction in Roanoke, laughs at the question and says, “Opportunities? There haven’t been many. The best opportunities have been to evaluate how we operate as a business and our people operate. We have an opportunity to get better, to do a lot of things we haven’t done well.

“We are doing things more economically. We’re looking at new types of work that we didn’t know if we could still handle. We still do things in the \$1 million to \$8 million range, but we’re going smaller, too. We’ve kept people busy and felt good we could do it. It’s been a bright spot.”

The work, says Henderson, is “in education: Virginia Western, Virginia Tech, all the ODAC schools. We’re doing a couple. Roanoke County is building schools and there’s municipal work. We’ve done a ton of new fire stations. West Virginia is booming because of the new emphasis on gas wells. They need a great deal of infrastructure. Over near Beckley, somebody gave the Boy Scouts about \$150 million to develop 10,000 acres.”

Working, he says, is the goal: “We look at it all as good jobs now. Nothing is going to get us rich overnight these days.”

Bob Fetzer, president of Building Specialists in Roanoke, sees team building as “some of the most significant opportunities that we have had presented to us ... This approach to building allows you to have an open book, working with the client to maximize their building program within their budget.”

He says the “historic” downturn has forced dramatic change, including laying off good employees ... and streamlining business to meet current work volume and demand. There have also been some outstanding suppliers, and subcontractors—some of them being second and third generation companies—that have had to dissolve.”



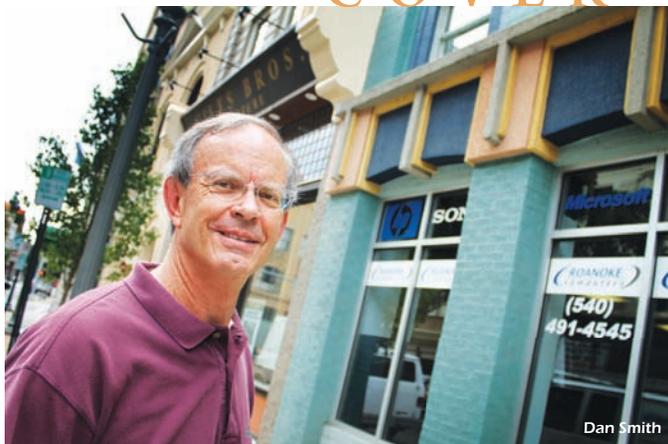
More risk and less reward. The profits simply are not there. People are taking work at less than they were four or five years ago. Staying profitable has been a challenge. We are getting our people to be more conservative and more cost conscious.

— Sheldon Henderson,
G&H Contracting,
Roanoke



It certainly has been a lean and challenging time in the construction industry.

— Bob Fetzer,
Building Specialists,
Roanoke



Ken Ferris

Fetzer sees opportunities in residential and commercial sectors, in universities and medical centers, high technology, as well as in energy. On the flip side, "Some firms are bidding jobs just to provide cash flow. Larger firms are now pursuing work that they would not ordinarily do, resulting in additional pressure on smaller contractors."

Ken Ferris is a high tech guy who has become a Roanoke developer, often as a partner in renovating buildings for housing. He says there is promise in that market, "assuming you buy the building at a good price and try to maximize tax credits. Commercial opportunities seem more risky unless a building is pre-leased.

"Residential condos are very difficult because of permanent financing for purchasers due to FNMA/Freddie Mac regulations since the market collapse."

ARCHITECTS/ENGINEERS

Monica Rokicki-Guajardo of Better BuildingWorks works at making homes and businesses energy efficient with energy audits and the upgrade work that follows. It is a new business that has found a solid niche quickly.



Dan Smith

Monica Rokicki-Guajardo

“ ”

Financing for rental residential is readily available for a good project.

— Ken Ferris,
Roanoke developer



“ ”

Change is more difficult for some than others, even when it's for the better. But those companies who embrace it will see profits rise.

— Monica Rokicki-Guajardo
of Better BuildingWorks,
Roanoke



It's sad to see skillful, experienced professionals without jobs and struggling.

— Gwyn Gilliam,
Gilliam + Katz, Roanoke



Dan Smith

Craig Balzer

"Consciousness is building, particularly among the demographic that we call 'smart people with smart money,'" she says. She and partner Barry Martin have more than 20 "clients on our waiting list for audits and retrofits." Businesses are coming with the program, too. "In fact, they may be a bit ahead," she says, "because of the obvious impact on the bottom line."

Rokicki-Guajardo insists that "The shiniest options are not usually the most cost effective. In fact, usually the 'boring' stuff needs to be done first. It's all about getting the building envelope and processes tuned up. Then, the new normal lowers costs and extents of things like solar panels or new, high performance technology."

Craig Balzer of Balzer and Associates in Roanoke is seeing "quite a lot of new projects in a wide range of types. ... The bulk of what we are experiencing is in the renovations/additions/retrofit/adaptive reuse markets." The Roanoke office is getting some of the downtown work, as well.



Dan Smith

Lora Katz and Gwyn Gilliam

COVER STORY

There are some high hurdles, he says: "The expense in developing new sites has escalated along with extremely tough conditions securing loans to finance the construction continue to hamper new 'ground up' projects. ... The private sector is struggling through the 'new normal' as best it can and most everything we are seeing requires owner occupancies, large cash amounts up front and lengthy financing approvals prior to starts. A/E firms need to be able to move from one 'sector' to another without too much specialization in any one particular area."

Though owner/contractor/architect partnerships are becoming common, "We find it generally difficult to sell our clients on this partnering [because they] want confirmation that they are getting the very best value. Most of the time they do not really know what that means."

Gwyn Gilliam and Lora Katz, a couple of veteran architects, recently founded Gilliam + Katz in Roanoke—smack in the teeth of the wounded economy. They've seen its effects first-hand. Gwyn (who had her own firm for 15 years) was laid off by AECOM in Roanoke and Lora has moved through a couple of jobs.

Gilliam says that "Up to 25 percent of architects were out of work at some points. Competition has been much more intense during this period and still is highly competitive on many projects."

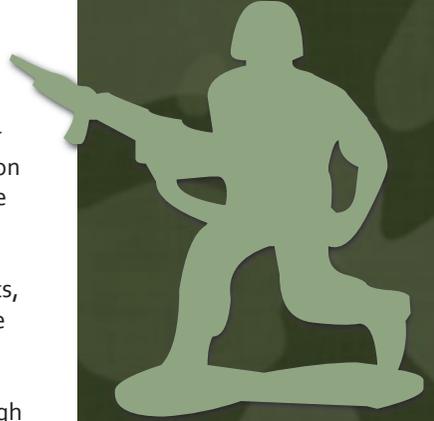
Katz says a combination of old and new clients has "afforded us the ability to move out of the basement of Gwyn's home and ... into new space in downtown Roanoke." She sees "renovations and additions dominating the market. There is a lot of pent up need for renovations that many have been postponing through the economic downturn, but as the economy improves they do not want to miss the less expensive current construction market."

Cecil Doyle, Mid-Atlantic Region executive for AECOM in Roanoke says, "The need to become more efficient is no



Cecil Doyle

Dan Smith



““”

We should not kid ourselves by thinking the business environment will revert to 'the way it was.' It's simply not going to happen. In reality, this may be one of the 'opportunities' that comes out of the economic downturn—forcing the industry to become more efficient at what we do. That's a good outcome.

— Cecil Doyle,
AECOM, Roanoke



Dan Smith

Martha Chester

longer an option, but an imperative, regardless of the economic environment. Like many of our clients, the design profession is also adapting to doing more with less, and the current downturn has helped to hone that skill. But here's the most important point—we need to get used to this mode of operation because it's here to stay; it what's known as the 'new normal.'"

There is a strong need in infrastructure, says Doyle and "this situation will only worsen with time. At some point we will have to bite the bullet and take a meaningful action such as increasing the gas tax to properly fund transportation. A strategy of that magnitude is required to provide funding that truly makes a difference on a sustainable basis."

Martha Chester, president of Hughes Associates in Roanoke believes that this region is often "slow to realize the emergence of a recession ... Unfortunately, once the recession has affected our region we are equally slow at recovery."

She sees opportunity here in renovated properties, roads, healthcare and taking care of Baby Boomers' needs, though "more companies are competing for fewer jobs. ... There are somber challenges for construction companies in our current economy. We have seen companies with strong reputations and decades of service to our region close their doors."

Competition is intense, Chester says: "Projects that previously would draw a response from 5 or 6 firms now have responses from as many as 20-plus firms. Layoffs and salary decreases are becoming commonplace.

"The construction companies that seem to be thriving are the companies that bid projects at close to zero profit and



Clients are not looking to feed the local economy but instead will hire from outside of our region to save a small percentage without consideration that the local company they could hire would be putting money back into our local economy.

— *Martha Chester,*
Hughes & Associates



COVER STORY

have therefore kept a good quantity of work, which I would consider surviving; I don't actually regard anyone in our region as thriving."

Richard Rife of Rife + Wood in Roanoke sees an economy that is "still slow, but slowly improving. Some construction market sectors are moribund, but I think most sectors have hit bottom and are starting a climb up. The stimulus money helped for a while, but it's pretty much spent."

Rife + Wood traditionally has specialized in renovations, but "right now most of our workload is in new buildings. I can't really explain why, other than some new projects that were on hold for a long time are now moving forward. In general, I look for the next few years to be tilted toward renovation."

He points out that "unemployment in my profession is the highest I've ever seen in my professional lifetime. A number of my competitors are struggling and have had severe staff reductions. Rife + Wood has been able to maintain things without any staff cutbacks through the recession, but we're in the minority in that regard."

John Garland of Spectrum Design is one of the shining stars in renovation in the Roanoke Valley—downtown—and elsewhere. He, obviously, has a positive view of what's going on. "Construction seems to be on the upswing in our area and costs seems to be going up. The pool of subcontractors has thinned and profit margins for those remaining has been very low or at a loss, just to stay busy and all are waiting for the pick-up in construction so they can make up for lost time."

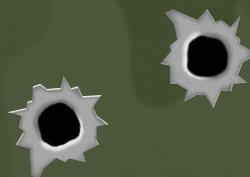
Still, he's seen a lot of failures among masonry, steel, electrical companies, residential GCs, sitework contractors and plumbers. Garland has projects underway and is looking for more. He recently took a look at the five-year-vacant Boxley Building downtown, but funding has not been available for its conversion. He sees a very real problem with "Congress's stalemate and the inability to achieve anything particularly tangible regarding the budget. Thus, this economy." Young people who want to rent are driving a strong apartment market.

And it is a market that continues to define and re-define itself, preventing most players from becoming bored. 



We are chasing a number of substantial projects at the moment, three of which are in the \$20 million-plus range. If we land one or two of these projects, which the prospects are good for, we will be loaded up.

— John Garland,
Spectrum Design,
Roanoke



more on moreFRONT

Who's Got That Contract?
Are local contractors excluded from state contracts?
For road and school construction projects, you might be surprised at the bidding process.

Read our special brief on the subject at:
www.morefront.blogspot.com (Sept 1 posting)



Dan Smith



The rules for volunteering >

Most of us have extraordinary demands on our time: children, challenging jobs, travel schedules, church, and civic responsibilities. There's an expression, "If you want something done, find a busy person to do it."

Volunteering helps professionals make contacts that make them visible in their community, which in turn, can advance careers. Volunteering helps develop compassion towards those who are less fortunate. There is an enormous sense of satisfaction that comes in helping people or organizations that need assistance.

Volunteering can be a lot of fun, too. It can open doors we've always wanted to go through. Volunteer for a cause that makes you happy. It may or may not be in your field. Choose something that gives you satisfaction.

I remember a successful construction company owner who volunteered his time with a community theatre. When asked to build sets, he replied, "I'm a builder by day, I want to be an actor by night." He made a fine actor in the local community theatre for many years. The added bonus for the company was that, when it needed money or materials, our builder/actor was the first to open his wallet. He said that being a part of the group gave him great pleasure, and that he always got back much more than he gave.

Tips for volunteer board members:

- Treat your commitment seriously.
- Always attend scheduled meetings.
- Do your homework.
- Arrive on time and stay until the end. Staying for a few minutes and then dashing off is simply bad form.
- Listen to and be responsive to the paid staff.
- Keep an eye out for future board members: new blood invigorates an organization.
- Be up front about what you can and cannot do financially. Taking on board responsibilities often includes the expectation of a financial contribution.
- Boards need contributors, and also need talented, energetic, members.

Tips for fundraiser organizers:

- Obtaining speakers doesn't stop at getting a "yes."
- If you are responsible for obtaining a speaker for an event, once someone agrees to volunteer her expertise and time to speak at your event, you must treat her like gold.
- Make sure she knows exactly the name, purpose, time, and place of the event.
- Confirm and reconfirm.
- Be there to greet your guest, and introduce her to key people. 

Etiquette & Protocol

By Kathleen Harvey Harshberger

Executive Summary:

Being a volunteer can be enormously fulfilling. If you abide by these rules your chances of success are improved greatly.

The 'almost psychopath,' successful boss >

Dear Anne: I was reading a review of *Almost a Psychopath* by Ronald Schouten and James Silver about the applications of the authors' findings to the corporate world. I started to feel the hair rise on my neck—they were describing my boss! He charms and manipulates his way into the hearts and minds of his employees, ruthlessly steps on and over them to achieve his goals, then completely lacks empathy for them if they complain, grandly extolling his accomplishments. The terrible paradox is that our company is wildly successful because of his leadership. The work is fascinating, the salaries are high, and the benefits extensive, but interactions with my boss frustrate me to the point of ruining every day. How can I keep this great job but still work for an "almost psychopath"?

Dear Neck: The very qualities that make deals happen in business can be deal-breakers in relationships. A true psychopath is dysfunctional and automatically breaks rules, wreaking havoc in organizations and damaging its people. In contrast, an "almost psychopath," as the authors define one, is functional. She can strategically calculate the costs and benefits of compliance with, or defiance, of rules. The aim of the "almost psychopath" is to achieve power and its manifestations—status, influence, public success, or money—whatever is the motivator. When power is the goal, what people can do is part of the equation, but not how they feel. Business may flourish but relationships don't when people are only valued partially.

When working for a successful boss who wants power, uses artificial warmth or any means necessary to get it, and lacks compassion for the people who assist her in achieving power, your skills, not you, are all that's important to your boss. You might wish things were different, but they're not. Can you accept that your boss does not, and will never, value his relationship with you—and might even be unable to have relationships at all?

If so, you can then step back and decide whether or not the behavior of your boss is a deal-breaker for you. If you need your boss to value you and his relationship with you, the frustrations will mount. Can you get your very normal, human need to be in mutually valuing relationships met through your business, personal and community networks? If so, take your mind, not your heart, to dealings with your boss. You protect yourself, are no longer frustrated by wanting the boss to provide something you know she cannot, and reap the benefits of working for a successful leader, albeit in a relationship-less state. 

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:
Sometimes you simply have to separate yourself from the issues of human relationships in order to be happy at work.



Comfortable clothing for the professional >

The most common reason for dressing too casually in the office is the need for comfort while working.

Fortunately for men, professional menswear is fairly comfortable and trends are subtle from season to season. Most men conform to professional attire guidelines, except for occasionally opting not to wear a tie or wearing too-casual jeans or shoes. Women, however, are bombarded each season with various trends, the expectation to look fashionable, and their own desire for comfort. It can be confusing and impossible to know what is appropriate.

Consider these alternatives to some common workplace wardrobe comfort dilemmas:

- Flip-flops may be comfortable in warm weather, but they're very unprofessional.
- Women, instead, should try dressy sandals with a low wedge heel, or kitten heels, which are pumps with one-inch spiked heels. These have a feminine appearance, look good with dresses or slacks. They are low enough to be comfortable all day. Or, try ballet flats in dressy fabrics or a dressy loafer for a professional look.
- For men, never consider flip-flops for the workplace if you're a professional. On casual days with khakis, consider a more casual leather loafer or a boat shoe works, but when wearing a suit always wear a dress shoe. Work boots and sandals are never appropriate with business professional attire.

Revealing tank tops or spaghetti-strap tops should be worn only if topped with a jacket or cardigan, making them office-appropriate. Showing too much skin is unprofessional. Instead choose short-sleeved tops with a modest V or scooped neckline.

Ties can be uncomfortable for many men and more workplaces are allowing men to forego the tie. However, it's still important to wear a collared shirt tucked into belted dress pants or khakis that look sharp and professional. A jacket worn over this outfit with no tie can still look very professional, yet relaxed.

Jeans are assumed to be acceptable for casual days and many people prefer to wear jeans constantly. However, a comfortable alternative is trousers in a casual fabric such as khaki, linen, or cotton instead of jeans. Jeans, if allowed in a professional workplace, should be dark-washed, unadorned and pristine.

We all like to be comfortable while working and it's tempting to wear our favorite casual clothes to work. However, comfortable alternatives to flip-flops, jeans, and revealing shirts exist for those who care about their appearance and their careers. 

Business Dress

By Kathy Surace

Executive Summary:
You can accomplish comfort in the office without being a slob.

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A T T O R N E Y S A T L A W



Michael Miller

Greg Kadlec: “Sunshine helps to keep things above the table.”

The Kadlec transparency >

Executive Summary:

Greg Kadlec, a Virginia Tech professor, is trying to simplify an investment game that is often rigged against the investor. He’s concentrating on disclosure.

By Michael Miller

Are you a Wall Street investor?

Well, if you have a 401k retirement plan, you are. That’s because your 401k allows you to select the way your money is invested among stocks, precious metals, mutual funds and a number of other options. Normally, your choices are based on the performance of each type of investment offered by your plan. You can do a little homework and see which investments are creating the best return.

What you may not look at closely, though, are the fees charged by the fund managers

to make the transactions for you. Those fees might make the difference between choosing one investment over another. But sometimes, the game is rigged, and that is the subject of a recent study co-authored by Virginia Tech Professor of Finance Greg Kadlec.

The world of high finance can sometimes be baffling to normal people. Kadlec’s recent study effectively reduces the complexity down to a simple phrase: Honesty is the Best Policy.

The Kadlec study centered on the effects of disclosure on agency conflicts. For example, fund managers have always known that if their management fees are larger than those of a competing fund, investors will choose the fund with the lower fees. These fees are charged by the managers to complete the investment transactions, but often include items that would generate suspicion in an investor, such as expense accounts for extravagant perks. In order to hide those items from investors, managers often shunt them into “soft money” which is not reported as an expense. That way, the investor never sees the true amount of the fees and therefore makes an investment choice based on incomplete information.

Kadlec's study showed that providing full disclosure of fees in a fund actually increases the performance of the fund. This is because it forces managers to be efficient in their management practices, which reduce the load on the transactions. Basically, they perform better with less overhead when somebody is watching what they do.

"It's not rocket science," says Kadlec. "We've pretty much always known this should be true, but until now there's never been any data to back up the intuition."

Kadlec started professional life as an industrial operations engineer and was once an operations research analyst with American Airlines prior to joining Virginia Tech, where he is now the R.B. Pamplin Professor of Finance. He earned his advanced degrees in finance from Purdue.

A 1999 study by Kadlec investigated the way certain investors took advantage of late trading and market timing to make below-value purchases. The study, which was presented to the Securities and Exchange Commission, revealed the prevalence of the practice and was eventually used by then New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer in his investigation of several mutual fund companies, now known as the "2003 Mutual Fund Scandal".

Kadlec's latest study is no less important, focusing as it does on hidden fees affecting millions of American's retirement funds, among other things. The study shines a little light on the way investments are made, and could be an important element in educating investors.

As Kadlec says, "Sunshine helps to keep things above the table." 

Sharisse Brookins



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- *Mother of two*
- *Graduate of Central Michigan University*
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Lisa Martin

efforts and installed energy efficient devices.

The amended version of the proposed HR 2454 has now passed the House, and was in the Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee chaired by West Virginia Democrat John Rockefeller IV. The committee of 25 includes Virginia's Senator Mark Warner, a Democrat.

Neither Virginia Senators Warner nor Jim Webb had issued a statement or comment regarding the bill at the time of this writing in early August.

If the Bill passes Committee, Senators will have until January 3, 2013 to pass it into Law.

The bill was originally proposed in 2009 "to create clean energy jobs, achieve energy independence, reduce global warming pollution and transition to a clean energy economy."

Blogs and news articles—many sponsored by the energy industry—quickly sprang up, expressing alarm that the enormous bill strayed from "creating jobs" and "independence" to requirements for expensive energy efficiency revisions and the possibility of increased taxes for homeowners and builders.

Some posted that they were more outraged by what they saw as government intervention into their private lives, and others provided arguments that it would have little effect on

Cap and Trade and the housing market >

Executive Summary:

The Cap and Trade Bill, a portion of which hopes to make homes more efficient, could have the effect of depressing the housing market even further, real estate people insist.

By Pam Hartle

The controversial "Cap and Trade Bill" stirred up a hornet's nest when it was rumored to require homeowners to "get a license" for their home, based on their energy saving

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our climate. The National Association of Realtors lobbied and amendments were piled into the bill.

The bill cites "incentives" for states that "reduce their emissions," by monitoring households and enticing homeowners and builders to outfit them with energy saving components. Those include energy efficient appliances, windows, insulation, storm doors and windows, among others.

Federal, state and local tax incentives were offered in 2010 and 2011 to redesign homes, rentals, and businesses to be more energy efficient.

Virginia's Governor Bob McDonnell announced an Energy Efficiency Rebate Program in March 2010 "to make existing homes and businesses more energy efficient." Virginia reported that it paid out "almost

7,700 rebates and dispersed \$10.4 million to Virginia homeowners and businesses," as of April 2011.

A few tax incentives still remain nationwide, but the majority expired in 2011.

Lisa Martin, a veteran Realtor with Prudential Real Estate in Roanoke says, "This will negatively affect the housing market for both buyers and sellers. Buyers will offer lower prices to provide a financial cushion in order to make the extensive required updates as regulations are tightened. And good luck even finding homes with Energy Efficient updates," she says.

Confusion surrounds the complicated bill, and supporters argue it merely offers "incentives" to comply.

"The required updates will net sellers less

Seydric Williams



- *Executive Director of K-5 Instruction for Roanoke City Schools*
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Dallas Powell



Landlords must be protected, as well, so the cost doesn't have to be passed along to tenants in an already bad economy.

—Dallas Powell

money for their next purchase," says Martin. "Others already strapped with high mortgages will be forced into foreclosure by their own government. Taxpayers will be forced to bear the cost of updates once Government insured homes enter the foreclosed inventory."

Dallas Powell, vice president of Real Estate Investors of Virginia, frequently buys and sells homes, and operates rental properties in Roanoke.

He says, "It is advisable that our lawmakers continue to offer tax rebate programs to assist property owners in making energy efficient products a reality. This way older homes can be economically retrofitted with energy efficient products. These tax rebates should extend to small business owners and landlords, as well as energy efficient products that will directly result in trickle down economics."

Critics express concern that although

the bill appears to merely offer incentives, the outcome of the new requirements for home inspections and appraisals stipulated in the bill, directly affects a buyer's ability to buy and borrow, and ultimately a seller's ability to sell.

"As a landlord, retrofitting multiple properties will require financing to do so," says Powell. "Financing that is difficult to come by with the current market conditions. Those that are able to obtain financing will be forced to substantially raise rents across the board to cover the costs of the loan and its interest. Those who cannot obtain financing will be in violation of the law and will not have the financial means for compliance."

"It is critical that there are amendments to what is currently proposed," says Powell. "Landlords must be protected, as well, so the cost doesn't have to be passed along to tenants in an already bad economy."



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Rod Belcher

Preparing for takeoff.

The helicopter lifeline >

Executive Summary:

Carilion Clinic's Life-Guard continues to respond with speed and efficiency, saving lives in the region.

By Rod Belcher

Those in the fields of medicine and emergency response often mention, the so-called “golden hour,” the concept that the time period—a few minutes to several hours—following a traumatic injury holds the highest likelihood that prompt medical treatment will give the injured the greatest chances of survival. It is a clock that every person who works daily to save lives is aware of and the clock ticks in drops of blood, heartbeats and shallow breaths.

Minutes can save lives, or lose them.

Shaving time off the interval between injury, response and treatment gives a critically injured patient a better chance to live and to recover. That philosophy is behind Carilion Clinic's Life-Guard Emergency Transportation program, which uses specially equipped helicopters crewed by top-end flight nurses,

paramedics and pilots to bring medical assistance to those severely injured in remote or difficult places to reach, or to get the critically injured to medical treatment when every second counts.

The Life-Guard Program began in 1981 at what was then Roanoke Memorial Hospital. Life-Guard 10, the first helicopter, was a Bell 206B Jet Ranger, which had the capacity to carry a pilot, flight paramedic and one patient. By 1984, a Bell 222A replaced the Jet Ranger. The new aircraft was approved by the Federal Aeronautics Administration to navigate and operate solely by instruments, in conditions where visibility was poor and had the capacity to carry two patients, two flight team members and two pilots.

Carilion entered the program in 1990 with Carilion Clinic Life-Guard 10. A new helicopter, a larger Bell 412, with extra cabin space, and redundant twin engines became the new incarnation of Life-Guard 10. In May 2005, Carilion saw the need for a second Life-Guard air medical base. Carilion Life-Guard 11, a Eurocopter EC 135 Lightweight Twin Engine Helicopter, began service in Southwest Virginia.

With two copters in the fleet, and a wider area of operation, Carilion saw a 10 to 20 percent increase in the use and demand for the Life-Guard helicopters. In response

to that demand, earlier this year, Carilion partnered with Med-Trans Corp. of Dallas, Texas to purchase a third EC 135, Life-Guard 12. Med-Trans is running the program, providing aviation support and pilots.

The two EC 135s are smaller than the Bell 412, long recognized as having a reputation for excellent service, safety and reliability among many pilots in the private, public and military sector.

"It was more cost-effective to go with the EC 135s," says Russ Rivers, one of four pilots charged with flying Life-Guard 12 and the Aviation manager for the Life-Guard 12 base in Lexington. "They are less expensive to maintain and maximize the reach of the service area we can cover."

Rivers has over 30 years' experience as a pilot, including being a Marine Corps aviator for more than 20 years. He says that the new EC 135s possess a variety of high-tech features that make them a good fit for demands of emergency transportation work.

"There are a number of technological advances in this helicopter," Rivers says. "There are redundant features for the hydraulics, the navigation system and the auto-pilot. We

have a GPS system that can be accurate up to three meters or less. This is one of the most pilot-friendly helicopters, I've ever flown."

While advances in technology make emergency transport more efficient, in the final analysis it is the human component that is the most important in the Life-Guard program. Rivers is one of 12 pilots and 30 other flight crew members who fly the helicopters, treat the injured and repair and maintain the vehicles on the ground.

Life-Guard 12 crew member and Certified Flight Nurse Dianna Coffey, has more than 26 years' experience with Life-Guard. She says the flight crews don't spend all their time in the air.

"We each have projects and administrative duties when we are not responding to a call," she says. "We spend a lot of time preparing for the next call and maintaining the equipment and vehicles."

That diligence pays off. While being interviewed, the crew of Lifeguard 12, which, this day, includes Coffey, Rivers and Paramedics Shane Watts and David Thomas, receive a radio call that they may be needed to respond to an emergency in



Cockpit of the new helicopter.



Crew gases up the new helicopter.

Bath County, over an hour away. In less than 10 minutes, the crew has fueled the EC 135, overseen a pre-flight inspection of the helicopter's systems and gathered the medical equipment they may need to save a life.

"To acquire and maintain this kind of technology is an expensive proposition," Rivers explains as he checks Life-Guard 12's instruments. "However, for the benefit it provides to the community, and to the patient, Carilion and MTC see that as a worthwhile investment."

It is impossible to measure the value of a life, of precious minutes that can save one, in dollars and cents. Public information director Eric Earnhart says, "For competitive reasons, we don't disclose the program's financials. However I can say that it is not a financial drain in the system. The program is an integral part of several important services we provide—including cardiac, stroke and neonatal care, in addition to trauma."

As Life-Guard 12 rises from the pad, turns and thunders off, into the sky, the clock is ticking. With this helicopter and this crew, the odds just got better in the patient's favor. 



all photos: Rod Belcher



Gear awaits the crew in the new helicopter.

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Tech Scoop

One word: Plastics. >

Executive Summary:

A prophetic line from an iconic movie and we see evidence all around us.

By Michael Miller

Actually, the word is “polymers,” but it’s still relevant.

Anybody old enough to know who Simon and Garfunkel are will recognize that ridiculously famous scene from the 1967 movie “The Graduate.” No, not the “You’re trying to seduce me, Mrs. Robinson” scene, but the one where Ben Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) is wondering what he will do for the rest of his life after college graduation. The advice given to him by family friend Mr. McGuire was, “I just want to say one word to you. Just one word. Are you listening? Plastics ... There’s a great future in plastics.”

Well, sometimes the movies get it right. Here we are in a future that is dominated by polymeric materials, which is what we call plastics now. From our smartphone cases to the graduated bifocal lenses in our glasses, the world is more plastic now than ever before. Whole businesses have even grown up around making products from the recycled plastic that we throw away.

In June, Blacksburg became even more aware of the pervading influence of polymers as Virginia Tech was host to the 2012 World Polymer Conference.

This was quite a coup for the local organizing team at VT. Previous conferences had been held in such glamorous spots as Paris, Taipei, Rio and Glasgow, so scoring the local venue



Michael Miller

was quite an accomplishment for the whole region. No doubt the local hotels and restaurants were happy with the 1,400 registrants who spent the week of June 24-29 networking with their polymeric peers.

But aside from the obvious short term benefits to the local economy and regional reputation, this was, from a technology standpoint, a truly big deal. Polymers are now found in nearly every facet of life, from your water purifier to the coatings on the nanoparticles that deliver life-saving drugs inside your body. “Controlling blend film morphology by varying chemical structure of donor-acceptor alternative copolymers for photovoltaic applications,” as stated on one of the papers presented at the conference, sounds very academic, but in fact the concepts presented may well lead to window coatings that generate

electricity for your home during the daytime.

Building things from individual molecules is another fascinating glimpse into the future of polymer science. Topics such as "Supramolecular nanomedicines for targeted cancer therapy" hint at what our life will be like soon. Anti-cancer agents are increasingly being studied at the molecular level, meaning that we are figuring out how to slip "silver bullet" treatments against cancer cells through the very cell walls themselves, targeting only cancer cells, not normal cells. But constructing the bullets is difficult, especially when they are really just large molecules wrapped around a tiny cluster of nanoparticles. So, the study of "self-assembly" of the polymeric materials teaches us how to let the molecules build themselves, just like nature does. In fact, one might say that we are learning

how to mimic nature in this process.

Many extremely interesting topics were presented at the conference, and while most were probably over the heads of normal people (including even a techie geek like me), there was no mistaking the excitement present as these world-famous researchers described their little piece of the world of chemistry to their colleagues.

They even had their own home-grown entertainment, as the more musically inclined among the VT Chemistry faculty put together a band for after-hours entertainment. "Poly and the Mers" entertained at a local pub one night to demonstrate that scientists are not one-dimensional. I won't mention any of the names of the band members, but as musicians, I can tell you that these guys make great scientists. 



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Finding a home >

Executive Summary:

Wing Ng wasn't supposed to be here for more than a couple of years, but he found what he wanted and stayed.

By Michael Abraham

When Hong Kong native Wing Ng arrived in Blacksburg to teach Mechanical Engineering at Virginia Tech 28 years ago, he thought it would be a short-term stepping stone. He's still there, with no plans to leave.

The 56-year-old Ng's specialty is gas turbine engines, used primarily in aircraft and power generation applications. From his research work, he spun off a company 15 years ago called Technology in Blacksburg, now Techsburg, housed in The Threshold Center in the Christiansburg Industrial Park.

He finished high school in Hong Kong, then earned a mechanical engineering degree at Northeastern University in Boston, and a master's and Ph.D. at M.I.T. His first teaching job was at Virginia Tech in 1984.

Ng says that a big chunk of the gas turbine market these days is for power generation. Gas turbine engines are flexible in terms of the fuels they can use. People typically think of gas turbine engines powering jet aircraft, in which case they use jet fuel—essentially



Michael Abraham

Wing Ng: "The work ethic and the conditions under which an entrepreneur functions are better here, at least from my standpoint, than anywhere I've been."

kerosene. But they can burn natural gas or any of a number of fuels, mostly petroleum distillates.

"At the outset of the formation of the company, we got some government funding through the Small Business

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Michael Abraham

Wing Ng (center) with Gary Dudding (left) and Greg Whittaker of his team at Techsburg in Blacksburg

Innovative Research Program," says Ng. "We are essentially two companies in one. The first is engineering services, again primarily in the gas turbine area. We work for GE, Seimans, Rolls Royce, Honeywell, Northrop Grumman, United Technologies,

Caterpillar, and other multinational corporations.

"We do design engineering and testing of components, such as turbine blades. For example, if they have developed a new



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turbine compressor blade, we can test its performance, but in addition, we can lend our expertise in making it even better.

“We can do fluid dynamics modeling on computers, but we also have a wind tunnel where we can test actual parts. We provide timely and cost-effective services that are not easily duplicated by our competitors. We can do this because the second part of our company is a state-of-the-art CNC (computer numeric control) machine shop and manufacturing center. Having our own machine shop really helps us expedite our customer’s project.

“What sets us apart is two things. First is our strong engineering staff. Second is our level of automation that makes us efficient and productive. Our customers often get better parts, and get them faster, than what they’d envisioned in the first place.”

“I have been all over the world,” Ng says. “It would be difficult to duplicate what we have at Techsburg due to the infrastructure, the education, the work ethic, and the regulatory climate [in this region].”

Ng says his move here was initially temporary. “Southwest Virginia was supposed to be a transitional place, where my wife and I thought we’d stay for two years and move on. We love it here. I speak with a funny Chinese, Bostonian, Southwest Virginian accent, all combined together.

“Many of my employees are true Appalachian people, with deep roots in the area. The more I work with them, the more impressed I am. The work ethic and the conditions under which an entrepreneur functions are better here, at least from my standpoint, than anywhere I’ve been.” 



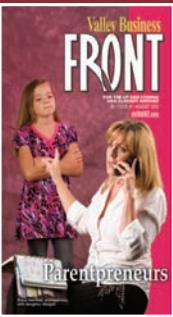
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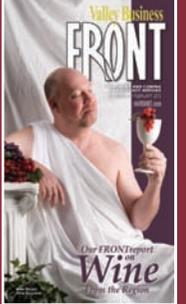


Coming Up..

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.



November 2012

The FRONT List

Yes, it's our annual best of business edition featuring the FRONTleaders in our region, in general and in specific industries. Get the FRONT List 2012 and read all about it.



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'A chance to get my name out there' >

Executive Summary:

Mobile displays at Valley View Mall give retail newbies a chance to get their feet wet.

By Randolph Walker

In January, Shenita Miller opened V. Lynns Premiere Accessories on a well-known Roanoke thoroughfare. Having a boutique was a dream she had shared with her mother, who did not live to see it come true.

"It started off OK, but as the months went by it started getting slower and slower," says the first-time business owner. "I will tell you, it's been hard."

Costume jewelry and handbags weren't moving fast enough. After talking with

the management at Valley View Mall, Shenita decided to move her business to a mobile display in the center aisle of the mall's ground floor. Why? "Foot traffic, number one," she says. "An opportunity to get my brand out here."

She opened on a Friday. The first weekend "was better than two weeks put together" at the storefront, she says.

Sunglasses, cell phone accessories, toy flying helicopters, dresses, "pain relief in a bottle," acupressure, gold purchasing, removal of extraneous eyebrow hairs—these are a few of the products and services available at the portable mini-stores the mall calls "retail merchandising units."

An RMU offers newbies a toehold in the retail world, or an opportunity for an established business to test or promote a product. The mall generally has space for up to 30 RMUs, although "we could make it happen if it's less or more," says Veronica J. Breck, assistant general manager at



Mobile displays in line.

Valley View (www.valleyviewmall.com).

Retailers rent RMUs under a license agreement. "A license agreement is an opportunity to come into the mall with flexible leasing. Specialty leasing is what it's called in the business," Breck says. The cost and length are negotiated; she declined to give specifics.

The next level up from an RMU is a kiosk—a stationary, enclosed space in a high-traffic location. Above that are "in-line stores" which fill the gaps between the anchors.

The holiday season is typically when you'll see the most vendors at RMUs, although it can depend on the product.

What do RMUs offer retailers? "Basically exposure, to be out in the common area of the mall. You can bring in products you wouldn't see in your typical stores," Breck says.

"It's a great way to get a business started."

Miller named her business V. Lynns in tribute to her mother, Vickie. "Before she passed away we talked about opening a boutique. A lot of my proceeds go to breast cancer awareness and breast cancer organizations."

The RMU puts Miller in front of "a wide variety of people, young and old. [It's] a chance to get my name out there." 

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Susan Lazear

Richard Reid: "After 40 years, I'm still excited about construction and new jobs."

Bees or buildings: It's about quality >

Executive Summary:

Richard Reid puts the emphasis where it belongs whether it's his vocation—Reid Custom Builders—or his avocation—beekeeping.

By Susan Lazear

Richard Reid's Reid Custom Builders in Blacksburg, has evolved a good bit since he first began it in 1986 and so has this 61-year-old Tidewater native.

Richard keeps a pretty busy schedule and insists that "after 40 years, I'm still excited about construction and new jobs." He's busy off the job site, too. He jokes that he spends two thirds of his time on construction and two thirds on his other interest: natural beekeeping, a topic about which he's knowledgeable and passionate. He keeps hives all over the area and has

been active in beekeeping since the early 1970s, about as long as he's been working construction.

His beekeeping avocation recently moved into the honey-making business. Beekeepers either grow new bees or make honey, and he's into the second phase, going all-natural. He does not treat or spray hives. He recently hosted Michael Bush, author of the bestseller *The Practical Beekeeper: Beekeeping Naturally*, when Bush spoke to the New River Valley Beekeepers Association in August.

He keeps about 100 hives all over Montgomery County with some in Giles County, located on friends' properties. Beekeeping requires a great deal of observation, but it's also an art: "You can't make bees do what they aren't programmed to do," he says. "You work with them."

He breeds his bees to be hardy (against disease, cold, and mites) and gentle. The queen determines the "personality" of each hive, so he will grow or find a new queen if

the hive becomes diseased or aggressive. Richard doesn't mind letting some bees die off from mites or cold, because his feeling is that the ones who survive will be stronger and hardier. He says that spraying/treating for disease and mites leads to a weaker population, even though fewer bees may die initially. Beekeepers who rely on the income may feel compelled to treat, he says, but he understands the drawbacks.

Newer hives or bees that are less acclimated to cold weather need to be fed through the winter (sugar, honey, or high fructose corn syrup are the choices available to beekeepers). Bees use honey as an energy source to keep warm throughout the winter, so if all the honey is taken, they can't survive the winter, and the feeding becomes necessary.

Richard only puts mature hives far away,

so he doesn't need to manage them. They are pretty much self-sustaining by that point. He will check on them once in a while, but they don't require a lot of upkeep.

Although he's not originally from the New River Valley, Richard has lived here longer than anywhere else. After transferring to Virginia Tech, in 1971, he decided to go into construction. In fact, there were a number of builders who all went into business around the same time: like-minded young guys who formed their core group, many of whom are still in the industry locally.

As his business grew through the 1980s, '90s, and 2000s, Richard had as many as 12 people working for him, and was coordinating jobs all over the area. Reid never envisioned building a large



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company and instead made the conscious decision to remain small and focus on quality. He relied on word-of-mouth recommendations from clients to keep busy.

The downturn hit hardest in 2008 and many of the new construction jobs, which had been plentiful just a couple of years before, dried up. Nowadays, Richard works with the subcontractors he knows and trusts on smaller remodeling jobs. He has always been happy to take smaller jobs, but would still consider building a new home, if asked.

Richard expresses concern for the people entering the field now. He says that the new rules and regulations driven by liability make owning a construction company a much more expensive proposition with more red tape. He's quick to point out that the rules aren't all bad and that they did get rid of much of the shoddy work that used to be a problem. Still, he insists,

for someone who is conscientious and quality-driven, regulations feel like an unnecessary burden and a hassle rather than a necessity.

Richard attributes much of his success to luck; he feels incredibly lucky to be surrounded by such great people, both workers and clients. Richard also stressed the importance of learning all aspects of the business from the ground up, and he advised taking it slowly. "After you start getting your own clients, a lot of it," he said, "is building people's trust and just doing what you say you're going to do. That pays dividends ... Relationships are what kept us going."

Richard hopes to harvest honey soon to sell at the Blacksburg Farmer's Market in the Happy Hollow Woods' booth. In both construction and beekeeping, Richard says he aims for quality: "People tell me our honey tastes great," he says. 



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Sarah Miller



Rebekah Manley

Joe Collins: “One of my proudest moments was seeing my daughters graduate and seeing them walk across the stage.”

A beloved everyman at VWCC >

Executive Summary:

Joe Collins has gone from architecture to building and grounds maintenance to design and marketing. At Virginia Western Community College, they just love him.

By Rebekah Manley

Adjunct professor and graphic designer Joe Collins never expected an article about him. In fact, his boss at Virginia Western Community College, not Joe, returned the reporter’s call. Joe forwarded the interview request and later explained, “I thought for sure you meant someone else. I’m shocked.”

Joe Collins, age 55, prefers to be in the background and his includes over 25 years

In Brief

- Names:** Joe Collins
- Ages:** 55
- Employer:** Virginia Western Community College
- Position:** Graphic designer, marketing
- Location:** VWCC / Fishburn Hall / F206
- Background:** More than 25 years in the field of architectural (A&E firms). Adjunct faculty eight years at Virginia Western; seven years as supervisor of building and grounds at VWCC. One year as graphic designer and marketing.

of architectural experience paired with graphic design projects. According to the VWCC President Robert Sandel, “Joe is never one to seek attention, but his work

has always stood out. It's his willingness to do whatever is needed to help the college and our students, along with the ease in which he collaborates with others, that has truly endeared him to everyone on campus."

A year ago, Joe joined Western's graphic design and marketing team. Seven years prior he was the supervisor of building and grounds and taught classes like "Basic Blue Print Reading and Sketching."

Initially he wanted to teach art or P.E., but he didn't finish college. Joe says he is "living the dream" after going to "the School of Hard Knocks." He still teaches two classes a semester and makes the campus' building and grounds his classroom.

Joe doesn't stick to the book or four walls. "I break the students up into teams, and they make their own construction firms and create." He constructs his curriculum

with his experience and bridges classes into the community by taking students to job sites and manufacturing firms. "Our clients are the students and the businesses because our students are employed by the businesses. Therefore, if we give the students the good background it will be paid off in their work," says Joe.

Regarding work "pay-off," Joe always encourages his students to walk at graduation and says, "I want to see you there. That's the final step of your journey." The other side of that stage is not the last place for many students to see Joe. He tells them, "Even if I'm not teaching your class, you can come to me. Let me know if you ever need help."

When showing one of his graphic design projects, Joe doesn't draw attention to his artful and aesthetic layouts. Instead, he points to a poster and explains, "We did this one for a Veteran's Day flag raising

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ceremony. We have a lot of veterans on campus who have come back to continue their education."

Another example from Joe's people-focused portfolio is the "Lunch Buddies." Joe heard about a need at church and sprung into action gathering Western's colleagues to visit Wasena Elementary School. Each week, about 10 employees go and have lunch with the students. "We talk about their day and listen," he says. "It's important not just to talk to them but listen about their day."

The "Lunch Buddies" believe starting young and encouraging education will fuel the students for middle school and beyond. "Whether they go to Virginia Western or some other college, their education is very important," says Joe. When the students wanted Joe and the others to go to their 5th grade graduation, Joe designed a card and a gift so that every graduate received a

"congratulations" from Virginia Western.

Church is another venue for Joe's educational encouragement. He is involved with the youth group at Cave Spring United Methodist; his sister-in-law is the youth director. Next year, as requested by the youth, Joe and his wife will lead the Senior High group. He will continue to ask, "What do you want to do? What do you want to be?" Undoubtedly, this grandfather of two asked his two daughters the same question. Both girls went to Virginia Western, and Joe says, "One of my proudest moments was seeing my daughters graduate and seeing them walk across the stage."

Pride for his kids, grandkids and others remain a theme in Joe's life. Take him up on his offer to show you Western's growing campus and he'll tell you himself, "I just like to see kids succeed and be successful." 

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Thank you again for an enjoyable, educational and rewarding weekend.

"I was really impressed with not only your knowledge and skills, but also your relaxed approach to teaching. You are obviously able to interact well with all types and ages. This is a gift and I am glad you are using it in the way that you are."

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Sarah Beth Jones

Kathy Blackwell: "It's a community coming together."

herself walking through the woods looking for the home of new clients. "I finally found this little two-room house with an elderly couple."

On the wall was her classmate's picture. She was the couple's daughter, and her shoes were muddy because she had to make the half-mile trek through woods each morning to reach the bus. "We make so many assumptions but we never know what people's lives are like."

Teenagers can be judgmental, but it's clear that Kathy has spent her life since then working to aid others, from her time as a social worker to her years as the vice president of Warm Hearth Retirement in Blacksburg. Though her time with Warm Hearth was both personally satisfying and successful—with Kathy heading up projects including the development of their Alzheimer's units and

training nationwide—she felt called to bring her work back to her home county and support those with the greatest need.

"I resigned, just like that," she says. "There were those who thought, and still think, that wasn't the smartest thing to do."

Not only did Kathy suddenly have no income; her budding idea of a thrift store that would raise money for those in need had no funding. Guided by her own personal belief system, she approached churches throughout the community for their support. "It is a testament to the faith community that I went to it with an idea but nothing to see. So many churches made a commitment to support the store for a year, some for \$100 a month, some for \$50 a month."

With those pledges, Kathy and a team of early volunteers were able to open the first

Angels alight in Floyd >

Executive Summary:

Kathy Blackwell got a good dose of community building when she founded Angels in the Attic.

By Sarah Beth Jones

Sometimes, something as simple as muddy shoes can strike one deep to her core. When Kathy Blackwell, founder of Angels in the Attic in Floyd, was a teen, the muddy shoes were worn by a high school classmate.

"I never said anything to her, but I wanted her to clean her shoes," says Kathy.

Years later as a social worker, Kathy found

iteration of Angels in the Attic in March of 2000. Less than two years later, though, the Angels found themselves homeless when a buyer appeared for the space they were leasing. They had 30 days to vacate and free storage for the displays. All of the merchandise went to Goodwill and rescue missions.

"This is the faith-based part," says the 60-year-old, mother of two. Four ministers and the core group of Angels' volunteers spent the next six months discussing how to revive the store before they were approached about a retail space for sale in the middle of downtown Floyd, on Locust Street.

It looked too small but turned out to be just 200 square feet shy of their hoped-for 5,000 square feet. It looked inconvenient, until they noticed the loading dock feeding directly into the back room. It looked financially impossible, but that wasn't taking into account the dedication and resourcefulness of Kathy and her team.

The \$72,000 sale price was paid in full in 14 months, \$13,000 coming in one night of fundraising featuring 20 area coaches and ministers in a womanless beauty pageant. More funds were raised when local winery Chateau Morrisette underwrote a video of the pageant and sold 150 copies.

Kathy's future plans include writing a memoir about her Angels journey and opening an up-cycling branch of the business, where donated goods would be repurposed and sold in a new boutique.

What they do >

Angels in the Attic mission is to help those who are helping others. Some of the ways they do this are:

- Giving \$5 vouchers for the store to social services organizations to distribute to their clients as they see fit.
- Making monthly donations to area medical charities, Fire and Rescue, Sheriff's department search services for children and Alzheimer's patients, food pantries and more.
- Creating specialized packages of clothes and comforts for women fleeing abusive situations and children taken from meth-producing parents.
- Sending funds to national and international disaster sites, including post-Hurricane Katrina and the 2011 tsunami.

She's insistent, though, that despite her ideas, none of this is about her.

"Angels in the Attic is not me," she says. "It's a community coming together." 

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Losing the middle class >

My View

By Dan Smith
Editor

BLOG: [fromtheeditr.blogspot.com]

Excutive Summary: *Making assumptions based on stereotypes is wrong any time, but it is especially wrong now.*

It was one of those moments when I probably should have taken time to listen to my own advice and not make snap judgments. The old guy in a room full of people I didn't know very well looked like an aging linebacker: broad, thick, slightly bow-legged with a crew cut on a square head, a thick neck, arms like buoys and ears that stood straight out. I only caught the part of his conversation that had this piece in it, "... the rich ... taxes ... hahaha ..."

Somebody had said earlier, "That's Pat. He's richer than you could possibly imagine."

So here I go: Pat's rich and doesn't want to pay taxes. He's probably against the administration's health care package. Likely wants the Bush tax cuts to stay in place. Probably supports any war effort that might come up. Likely listens to Limbaugh. And blah-blah.

Then I hear Pat say, "Yeh, my old man was union for about 40 years and that's part of the reason I'm where I am."

I turned around and looked at Pat's face. The man he was talking to had stepped to the side to freshen his drink and I stepped in, introducing myself. "Tell me about your father, Pat," I said. "I heard you mention that he was union. How do you—being a successful big business owner—feel about that?"

"I feel pretty damn good about it," said Pat. "He was in a union in Detroit in the '30s when it was hard to do." That was when Henry Ford's thugs were making life uncomfortable for union organizers and members, often with guns and clubs. "My dad was with General Motors, so he didn't have to face the violence the Ford workers saw, but it wasn't easy. He had worked in those plants before there were unions and he told me stories. It wasn't pretty, but the men had come in from the farms, didn't know much and didn't know how to fight it."

They didn't know that the government would back owners like Ford with troops the way they had in the '20s in the West Virginia mine fields. They didn't have laws to protect them from abuse at work. They didn't get vacations, eight-hour days, sick leave, paid healthcare, family leave, safe working conditions, a level of job security. None of that. They didn't dream of most of it until much later. Mostly what they wanted was not to be killed at work, to get paid enough to feed their families, to be treated with dignity.

Pat's dad was one of the quiet, hard-working, earnest family men who helped make unions respectable. They had been necessary for a long time, but resistance by company executives and a

continued on Page 52



A moving demonstration of service >

On Tap from the Pub

By Tom Field
Publisher

And here I was, all jacked up and ready to answer that greatest of questions in the minds of families all across America: "Who's yo daddy?" Ok, so the question is mostly a fabrication that rest in the meatheads of middle-aged fathers to make us feel a bit more necessary. But still—I was prepared for it.

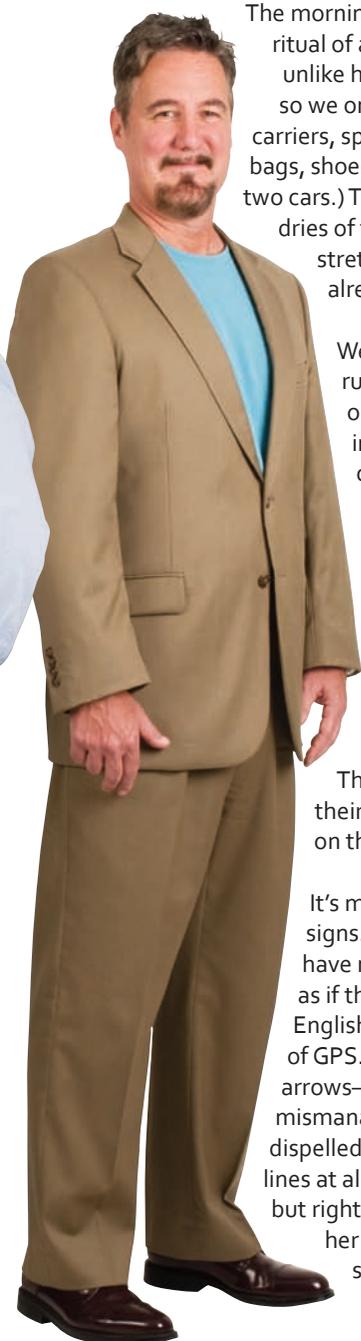
The morning began with the great packing of the great white SUV and that ritual of all rituals, the migration of my daughter off to college. Hayley, unlike her sister, apparently only needs 1/100 of her wordly possessions, so we only needed one vehicle. (Her older sister comes with rooftop carriers, spaghetti-wads of bungee cords, stacking storage units, boxes, bags, shoe-trees, spare tape guns, and this year... no kidding... a caravan of two cars.) Though I had put on my "moving clothes" along with various sundries of tools and hardware stuffed in my pockets, and did my warm-up stretches, when I walked into the garage to get started, the job was already done. Hayley travels light. Strike one against dad's help.

We take off for Harrisonburg and JMU, and of course my mind is running through all the navigational scenarios. "Now girls," I began on every tenth mile-marker, followed by my military tactics and instructions on just how we were going to beat the system of confusion that always surrounds college move-in day. My wife, ever the rule-follower, has her college admissions-supplied e-mail with the special directions on where we are supposed to go. She knows I am the expert on this, so I don't know why she brought it. The exit I know as far superior is coming up quickly, so I "casually" ask if anyone needs a restroom break before we get started in all the chaos. It's only an hour and a half trip, but it's an SUV filled with three females, I already knew the answer. Trick question. "Well, I'll pull off here then, so you girls can use the bathroom."

The girls don't even notice that I don't get back on interstate after their break. I'm sneaking in the back way to campus; and I'm LMAO on the inside.

It's most fortunate my laughter was not audible; thanks to the yellow signs. I could have approached the campus from Mars, and it wouldn't have made a difference. Someone had planted yellow signs everywhere, as if they expected the dumbest directionally-challenged first time non English-speaking alien riding in on a jackass from a land that never heard of GPS. You couldn't miss the signs. They were everywhere—and with arrows—making it impossible to misread, misinterpret, mishandle, or mismanage, even if you wanted to mistrust them. I think the signs even dispelled the traffic; because there was no backed up or even slowed down lines at all. The signs every ten yards took us not to an adjacent parking lot, but right up through sidewalks and the quad, directly to the very door of her dormitory. The yellow signs were only outnumbered by the student volunteers, who waved and greeted us at every crosswalk,

continued on Page 52



Smith / My View

from Page 50

corrupt Congress (when have we not had one of those?) made getting a toe-hold almost impossible for these men. Finally, though, with a great deal of effort, the solidarity movement overwhelmed management and got a few concessions, which led to a few more and, ultimately, by the late 1950s such power that corruption infiltrated and made the unions as corrupt as management had been.

Pat doesn't like that part, but—union man that he is—he recognizes it and understands how that very corruption has helped eliminate most of the union movement and much of the middle class,

the very class that makes us American.

"A lot of people have been able to make a good living for their families over the years because of people like my dad," said Pat. "I'm proud of that. I'm not proud of what happened to his legacy, of what unions—some unions—became and I'm not proud of the fact that we have so little good union influence today. I understand it is growing again and I hope it both grows and learns from its mistakes and its greed. Unions became what they were fighting and I believe there's a good bit of recognition of that fact. I sure hope so. If we lose the middle class, we lose the country. It's that simple." 

Field / On Tap

from Page 51

every corner, every checkpoint, every square inch... all wearing bright matching shirts so we couldn't possibly be confused. Strike two against dad's help.

The car parked, I could only act like I had something to do with the great spot; but now comes the real challenge: unpacking and transferring the goods, once we find her room among hundreds of rooms, floors, corridors and wings. The herd of bright shirts attack all sides of our vehicle, smiling and singing welcomes like a coven of Hare Krishnas at a 1960's airport terminal. Before I could turn around after shutting my door, they had stripped the goods out of the interior and carted it all off to her room. The great white SUV was ghosted out. It was empty, I had moved nothing, I had nothing to carry, and it was the first time I had heard the sound of lonely crickets chirping during the bright daylight like that.

"Hey, where's my pocketbook?" our other daughter asked. If it wasn't attached to your person, it's sitting in Hayley's new room. Strike three against dad's help.

James Madison University's got spirit; yes they do. JMU's got spirit, how 'bout you?

It really isn't the most manly thing to do in the world, but I had to cheer. A college move-in experience that is no more difficult than any ordinary day going to the store? In fact, it was easier, because no one unpacks my groceries for me here.

The university doesn't have to provide this service at all, much less to the extreme degree.

What little yellow signs have you planted at your business or place of work? What brightly colored shirts are you wearing? We all notice these details. And we notice them when they're missing. Even if we never say anything about it.

We all want to be in good company. And yes, we all want to be needed. Those three strikes against me? They don't even matter. Only one person can hug his daughter with a tightness that continues even as she slips off to a world of yellow signs and bright shirts 110 miles up the road.

"Who's yo' daddy?"
Such a silly, rhetorical question. 

Letters

Helps business

I'm writing today to express how grateful I am for Valley Business FRONT Magazine. Both the print version and the digital version you kindly send by email, have a wealth of resources inside. I learn, I connect, I refer and I treasure each issue.

More than anything else, I want you to know your publication has made my business more successful. It is a testament to the Roanoke and New River Valleys business and lifestyle communities that Valley Business FRONT shares their outstanding stories. Keep doing what you're doing.

Bonnie Cranmer
Travel Virginia Destinations
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Mom or pop CEO

Wow! Great articles on entrepreneurial parents [August 2012 edition]. It's nice to know we're not alone and to see other approaches.

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“ ”

Can you accept that your boss will never value his relationship with you?

— Page 21

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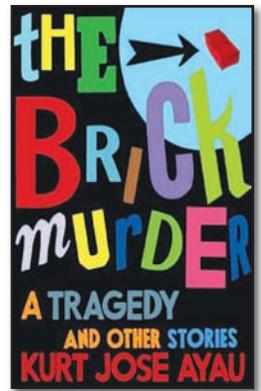
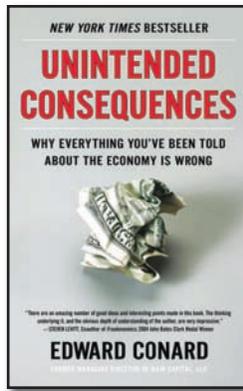
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The economy, stupid

Edward Conrad's *Unintended Consequences: Why Everything You've Been Told About The Economy Is Wrong* (Penguin Books) may be one of the most interesting and controversial books on the economy and how incentives, regulations, monetary policy and tax policy influence investments, international trade, capital flows and job creation to be written in a long time.

Conrad's business, rather than academic or political, background adds heft to his straightforward, unapologetic and matter-of-fact approach to complex issues. He is convincing in rationally explaining the economic importance of banks, the necessity of employing short-term deposits to fund long-term investments, and why regulators and governments need to be the backstop against cyclical short-term liquidity crises.

Conrad uses enough statistics and hard facts to support his analysis without losing the reader in data. For those interested in a practitioner's interpretation of economic history and who have always wondered if the academics, politicians, and policy wonks had it all wrong, this is a must read.

—John Williamson

A compelling collection

Kurt Jose Ayau, who teaches at VMI in Lexington, scores nicely with his first collection of short stories (he co-wrote *What the Shadow Told Me* under a pen name), an odd grouping of fascinating people studies called *The Brick Murder* (Livingston Press). This one's the winner of Tartt First Fiction Award and you don't have to go much

beyond a page to figure out why.

Kurt's characters are richly drawn, his narrative full of color and fire and his stories compelling—often in an absurd, but fascinating manner. Sometimes it's like watching a snake eat a rat: repelling and powerfully attracting simultaneously. He has but 11 stories in this short-ish collection, but you'll remember them all.

—Dan Smith

First of a series

Gifted: A Donovan Circus Novel (Amazon Digital, \$1.99, \$9.99 in print) by Roanoke author Liz Long was captivating from the beginning. The story doesn't ease you into this supernatural world. The author assumes you are an intelligent reader who can become part of it as the story progresses.

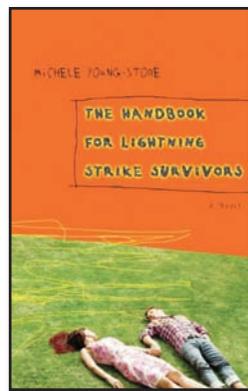
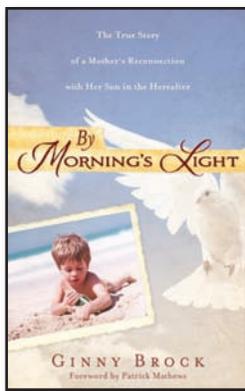
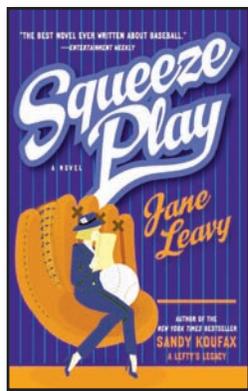
The dynamic protagonist, Lucy has to suppress her emotions in order to control her fire-starter powers. Her best friend, Delia, is free-spirit who helps the sometimes up-tight Lucy loosen up. As the story progresses, Lucy becomes stronger and learns more about her with support from her supernatural circus friends.

Ultimately we are left with questions about Lucy's abilities and her relationships with other circus members. The author leaves us wanting more, setting up the next Donovan Circus novel.

—Erica Dickson

Just for laughs

Jane Leavy's *Squeeze Play* (Harper Perennial, \$14.99 paperback) was first copyright in 1990,



but it remains such a great summer read that it's still going for \$9.99 in the Kindle edition. That's staying power. With good reason. I took this book to the pool with me for a few sessions and became something of a curiosity: the shirtless old guy reading a book who kept laughing out loud.

Leavy is a latter-day Dan Jenkins (Semi-Tough) telling a long locker rom joke (literally and figuratively) and making baseball players (and one evangelical preacher type) look a bit less Renaissance and a bit more like a bunch of crude, stupid, selfish, unintentionally funny people. She will make you laugh at things you know shouldn't make you laugh and when people ask you what's so funny, you'll change the subject. The book IS funny. It is outrageous and delightful. It is old, but it is simply delightful, wonderful baseball escape when there is so much to worry about. I think I love Jane Leavy.

—Dan Smith

Re-appearance

Smith Mountain Lake author Ginny Brock presents a story about life after death in *By Morning's Light: The true story of a mother's reconnection with her son in the hereafter*, (Llewellyn Publishing, \$15.95) a warm, sad, happy exploration of how people can connect even after death. When Brock's son Drew died suddenly in November 2008 at 26, she was unprepared to lose her youngest child. No one is, but Brock opened her mind and heart to the possibility that he would try to connect with her.

Over the next year, Drew returns often, arriving in a rush of energy with a "Hey Mom." Brock isn't the only one who communicates with her son. His sister and brother do. Many of

his friends report "Drew sightings." Brock doesn't ask anyone to believe as she does. She wants people to understand her story but to read her story with an open mind.

—Betsy Ashton

ZAP!

Michele Young-Stone writes a lyrical tale of two children who don't know each other but whose lives are changed by lightning strikes in *The Handbook for Lightning Strike Survivors* (Crown, \$24). Becca is eight when she is struck by lightning. No one believes her, not even when her watches lose time and run backwards, not even when halos surround her head in photos. She is struck a second time at sixteen. Buckley's dysfunctional family offers no respite from a disaster-filled childhood. When his mother is struck by lightning when Buckley's thirteen, his world changes.

Becca and Buckley eventually meet after they are grown in New York. Becca, having her first gallery opening, captures the intensity of her lightning strike on canvas. Buckley walks into her exhibit and is captivated by the images. Their meeting opens wounds from the past, including reasons why they are both running from their families.

—Betsy Ashton

(**The reviewers:** John Williamson is CEO of RGC Resources in Roanoke. Erica Dickson is assistant director of communications at Old Dominion University. Betsy Ashton is a Smith Mountain Lake-based writer whose forthcoming first novel is *Mad Max: Unintended Consequences*. Dan Smith is FRONT editor.)



Steppin' In The Rain >

Despite threatening clouds and scattered showers, a record crowd attended the town of Blacksburg's annual **Steppin' Out** festival on August 4.



AAF D3 Agency Crawl >

The **American Advertising Federation (AAF)** annual district conference (three state consortium) was hosted by the Roanoke club at the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, August 10-12. The event included a downtown agency crawl with walking tours to **tba** and **Neathawk, Dubuque & Packett**. In a coincidental but unrelated development, on August 16, ND&P announced its acquisition of tba.

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



Women for Mitt >

A "Women for Mitt" rally was held at Congressman Bob Goodlatte's office on August 18. **Tonya Levis**, SWVA for Cuccinelli and **Chris Leavitt**, Goodlatte campaign manager, chat with Florida's first Attorney General **Pam Bondi**, who addressed the crowd.



Global Students Compete >

VT KnowledgeWorks held its third annual Global Partnership Week with the student entrepreneurship competition award presented on August 23 at Hotel Roanoke. The \$25,000 grand prize was awarded to **Annelies Tjebbes** and **Mayank Kalra** of team VersiCool (medical device), from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. The \$5,000 runner up prize was awarded to two teams from Vienna University of Technology: **Lucy Burne**, **Vanessa Elias**, **Megan Williams** and **Alice Batts** of team CARmunity (carpooling app); and **Josef Strezenec**, **Jennifer North**, **Michaela Naszada**, and **Philipp Zbornik** of team Vibeat (music headphones for hearing-impaired).



CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Abraham is the owner of The Threshold Center, a shell center in Christiansburg and co-owner (with wife Jane) of publisher Pocahontas Press. He has written several books, the latest of which is the novel Providence, VA. [bikemike@nrnunwired.net]

Rod Belcher (540-206-4866) is a busy Roanoke-based freelance writer, whose work appears in state and regional publications. He is also a science fiction writer of some note. Web site: [www.rsbelcher.net]

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@handshake2.0.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]

Kathleen Harvey Harshberger is a graduate of Radford University and the Protocol School of Washington. She conducts seminars in business etiquette, international business protocol, and dining skills. She has an international clientele in business, government, and higher education. She is a certified Protocol Officer. [harshbergr@aol.com]

Pamela Hartle is a former contributing editor, ecotravel photojournalist and columnist, and has returned to the Valley to continue her career as a freelance writer and photojournalist. Her photographs and non-fiction pieces have appeared on national television, webzines, and in print. [development.director@yahoo.com]

Sarah Beth Jones is a veteran newswoman who owns—with her husband Rob—Nary Ordinary Business Services (NO B.S.) in Floyd. She is a former columnist for the Greensboro Daily News and a native of North Carolina. [sbj@naryordinary.com]

Susan Lazear is a writer and teacher at Blacksburg High School. Earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from Virginia Tech and Radford. She and her husband have two children. [slazear@mail.mcps.org]

Rebekah Manley is a master of fine arts graduate of Hollins University in Children's Literature. She lives in Roanoke and is a Minister to Youth at St. John's Episcopal Church. She is the Roanoke Christian Singles Examiner for examiner.com. [rmanley@hollins.edu]

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]

Anne Piedmont is the president of Piedmont Research Associates, a marketing communications firm she has started after working for the Roanoke Regional Partnership as director of research for more than 18 years. She's also worked in public relations and journalism. She loves numbers and wants them to make sense for you. [annepied@yahoo.com]

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]

Kathy Surace is FRONT Business Dress columnist, an image consultant and owner of Peacock Image in Roanoke. She was a fashion consultant for a major clothing chain for a number of years. [kssurace@aol.com]

Nicholas Vaassen is a graphic designer with 12 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in the Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]

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]

Alison Weaver is a freelance writer based in Roanoke. She contributed to and was a staff writer at the Blue Ridge Business Journal throughout the 1990s before working as a copy editor at The Roanoke Times for eight years. Her recent freelance credits include Redbook magazine. Her story on niche publications won the FRONT Story of the Year for 2009. She was the 2010 FRONT Contributor of the Year and also wrote the 2010 FRONT Story of the Year. [alison.weaver03@gmail.com]



Sarah Beth Jones

August 2012 > Contributor of the Month

Part of Sarah Beth Jones' daily routine as co-owner (with her husband, Rob) of Nary Ordinary Business Services (N.O. B.S.) in Floyd is teaching clients to communicate, especially to write. That's a skill she has in spades. Sarah Beth is again FRONT's Contributor of the Month, this time for her story on Parentpreneurs on the cover of the August issue. This is a story she suggested, helped outline, rooted out the contacts for, wrote and in a few instances photographed. It was the whole package from a real pro. A real teaching pro. You can read Sarah's current and back issue articles at vbFRONT.com

“ “ “
We've always been careful
to be diversified

The languages we speak at home >

They come from all over the world to our part of Virginia, looking for an education, a job or a better life. As they settle in to the Roanoke and New River Valleys, they bring their own language and traditions, which are celebrated in festivals and events throughout the year. Roanoke's annual Local Colors Festival features more than 100 different nations.

Despite the increased ethnic diversity in the region, the vast majority of us (93.7 percent) speak English. That's well above the state average of 85.9 percent. Within the region, the New River Valley, with its large universities, is slightly more diverse linguistically than the Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area. In Montgomery County, home to Virginia Tech, almost 10 percent of the population over 5 years of age doesn't speak English at home.

The English-speaking percentages are much higher in the more rural areas and lower in the college towns and urban centers.

After English, the most common language spoken at home is Spanish. But even the small percentages represent thousands of people and present challenges to governments, schools, employers and healthcare providers that need to communicate with them. Foreign corporations that locate here also bring non-English speakers and their families who must fit into their new communities.

The ability to speak English "very well" by those who speak another language at home varies throughout the region. In the Blacksburg MSA, where many of the non-English speakers are likely connected to the universities, a majority reported that they speak English very well. In the Roanoke MSA, especially in the cities or Roanoke and Salem, those who speak Indo-European languages say they speak English very well. Those who speak Spanish or Asian languages at home tend to say that don't speak English very well. The ability to speak English "very well" rises in the suburban areas.

—By Anne Piedmont,
Piedmont Research Associates

LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME

	English	Spanish	Indo-European	Asian	Other
Botetourt Co.	98.0%	0.6%	0.9%	0.4%	0.02%
Craig Co.	99.3%	0.2%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Franklin Co.	96.4%	2.5%	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%
Roanoke Co.	93.1%	2.3%	3.0%	1.5%	0.1%
Roanoke	92.3%	4.0%	1.7%	1.3%	0.7%
Salem	93.6%	3.1%	2.5%	0.6%	0.2%
Roanoke MSA	94.1%	2.7%	1.8%	1.0%	0.4%
Giles Co.	97.8%	1.3%	0.8%	0.06%	0.07%
Montgomery Co.	90.2%	1.6%	3.9%	3.5%	0.8%
Pulaski Co.	98.0%	1.1%	0.4%	0.5%	0.07%
Radford	93.8%	1.9%	1.6%	1.7%	1.0%
Blacksburg MSA	93.1%	1.5%	2.6%	2.3%	0.5%
Region	93.7%	2.3%	2.1%	1.5%	0.4%
Virginia	85.9%	6.4%	3.2%	3.4%	1.1%



Elizabeth McBride and her husband Ben Lawry

The curriculum's yours >

Executive Summary:

At Ben Lawry's Kayak Camps (now based in Roanoke), you pick what you want to learn and he teaches it to you.

By Randolph Walker

What's it like to be a student at one of Ben Lawry's Kayak Camps?

The eligibility requirement, "be able to hold breath while underwater," will give you some idea.

After starting Kayak Camp as a sole proprietorship in South Carolina in 2007, the hard-paddling Englishman moved to Roanoke in 2011, along with his wife, Elizabeth McBride.

They came for Elizabeth's new job as director of development for the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute. Ben can live anywhere, since Kayak Camp (www.KayakCamp.net) is a business, not a place. He travels 260 days a year. In 2012, he is offering camps in South Carolina, Hampton Roads, Long Island Sound, Michigan, and the Columbia River.

Ben offers two camps, the original Kayak Camp, plus Power Paddle Camp. Each lasts three or four days, at \$150 per day.

Kayak Camp matches eight students with two coaches. "We'll work on whatever they want to do—there's no script," he says. For example, students might request help with balance, stability of the boat, forward stroke, or turning stroke. If he sees that a student is weak in a foundational skill, he'll teach that too.

"Kayak Camp was developed to make self-sufficient paddlers who are very rounded in

padding and not just test passers," he says, referring to examinations given by the American Canoe Association and British Canoe Union.

With Paddle Power Camp, there are three groups of eight students. Each group of eight has one lead coach and one assistant coach who is usually local. Power Paddle camps have more specific agendas. A sea kayaking camp, for instance, might cover launching, landing, seamanship skills, navigating, reading currents, rescues, and dealing with surf or rocky coastlines.

The typical client is an empty nester age 50 to 65. These are not Huck Finns floating down Lazy River. "They want to get better," he says. "They're usually relatively focused. They want to learn the skills of kayaking and not look at the birds and the bees."

After three or four days, students are "pretty worn out. As much mentally challenged as anything else."

The lean and focused Ben Lawry didn't just drift into this line of work. He's been paddling since age 9. He became a raft guide, then worked in a store and as a manufacturer's rep. He has taught on five continents. He is a brand ambassador for Pyranha, a kayak manufacturer.

He met Elizabeth, 48, at an outdoor outfitter in North Carolina. Married since 2000, they are renting in Raleigh Court while trying to sell their home in South Carolina. She helps with booking and answering e-mails, plus cooking and house management when she's able to attend the camps.

Locally, Ben paddles on Smith Mountain Lake and the Roanoke, James, Gauley and New Rivers. Entrepreneurs, take note: Ben and Elizabeth think the Roanoke River is prime for recreational development.

"Imagine you're running on the greenway and you look off, and mom and dad and two kids are meandering down [the river]," says Elizabeth. "Maybe there's a business that offers a shuttle."

"A whitewater park would be massive here," says Ben.

In Brief

Names:	Ben Lawry
Ages:	45
Business:	Kayak Camp
Position:	Owner and lead instructor
Location:	Based in Roanoke
Background:	Native of Chester, England. Holds dual citizenship. Outdoor Education Management Diploma, Bicton College, UK. Holds Level 5 Instructor-Trainer-Educator certification in Sea Kayak and Whitewater from the American Canoe Association; Level 4 in Surf; and Level 4 in Swiftwater Rescue. Wife: Elizabeth McBride. No children.

But Ben may not have time to develop it himself. He teaches privately, presents at shows, helps design kayaks, works with stores and clubs, and competes in sprint, sea, slalom, rodeo, marathon, outrigger, surf ski and wildwater events. But don't call him an adrenaline junkie. "I equate adrenaline to an element of being out of control," he says.

All that's in addition to Kayak Camp. "I'm ready for it to slow down this summer already," he says. "I'm booked through June, July next year." 



Ben Lawry in action

Career FRONT

FINANCIAL FRONT



Wood

Banks

SunTrust Bank, Western Virginia has named **Rani Wood** business development officer for Western Virginia.

Investing

Brown Edwards in Roanoke has hired **Mark Woolwine** and **Scott Clarke**.

Merrill Lynch Wealth Management in Roanoke has given the title Financial Advisor to **Lisa Angle**, **Ellie Hammer** and **Michah Spruill**.

LEGAL FRONT



Byrum

Law Firms

Woods Rogers in Roanoke has promoted **John Byrum**, an environmental attorney, to principal partner.



Tenzer

David Tenzer, an attorney with Glenn Feldmann Darby & Goodlatte in Roanoke, has been reappointed by the Virginia Senate Committee on Rules, to the Virginia Israel Advisory Board.

WELLNESS FRONT

Emergency

L. Keith Dowler of the Virginia Department of Health in Roanoke has been named a certified emergency manager.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Roy d'Ardenne



Steuart

Steel

Roy D'Ardenne of D'Ardenne Associates in Roanoke has been

appointed to the U.S. delegation responsible for the global system of quality management standards. **Elizabeth Steuart** is the new assistant vice president.

DEVELOPMENT FRONT

Construction

Home Builders Association of Virginia, Region I, has elected **Chris Pfohl** of Rome Machinery vice president



Gerber

Architects/Engineers

Danielle De Young and **Andrew Hickling** of AECOM in Roanoke have earned professional engineer's licenses. **Jason Sawyers** has received his

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Have a career announcement?

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

certification as an engineer in training. SFCS in Roanoke has named **Julie Gerber** an interior designer.



Nielsen

Real Estate

Roanoke-based MKB Realtors' **Steve Hoover** has been appointed to a term

on the Virginia Board of Realtors.

Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer has named **John K. Nielsen** first vice president.

RETAIL/SERVICE FRONT

Brain Injury

The Roanoke Area

Brain Injury Connection has named **Juanita Thornton** president. **Heather Witt** is vice president; **Dan Gaskell** secretary; and **Linda Turner** treasurer.

Cleanup

Kevin Lancaster and **Christopher Martin** of ServPro in Salem have earned additional professional

designations.

Machinery

Blue Ridge Copier in Salem has hired **Chris Lovatt** as an account manager.

Resumes

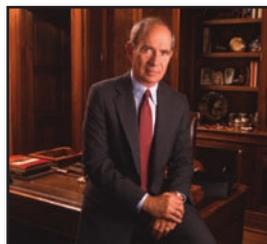
Susan Geary of 1st Rate Resumes in Roanoke has earned the professional



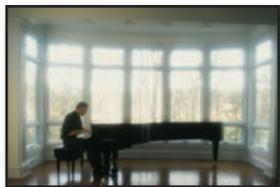
ADVANCE AUTO



MEDECO



BERTRAM FIRESTONE



BRUCE HORNSBY



ROANOKE TIMES



ROWE

gregvaughnphotography.com

Career FRONT

designation of Certified Master Resume Writer.

SENIOR FRONT

Homes

Virginia Lutheran Homes in Roanoke has named **Heather Neff** president and CEO.

OTHER FRONTS



Womack



Register

Non-Profits

Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia has announced its officers and new board members for the 2012-2013 fiscal year. Officers are: co-chairman **Coy Renick**, The Renick Group; co-chairman **Bill Stone**, BB&T; chairman elect **Tony Morrison**, R.R. Donnelley; immediate past chairman **Scott Miller**, Birchwood Development; secretary **Theresa Womack**,



Starkey



Smith



Dalton



Curro

MemberOne Credit Union; treasurer **John Register**, Valley Bank; major fund drive co-chairs **Alisha Starkey**, Cox and **Charles Robbins**, BB&T. The following were named to the board of directors: **Philip P. Noftsinger**, CBIZ Payroll; **Jerry M. Quinn**, Shenandoah Life Insurance Company; **Troy J. Smith**, Avis Construction Co.; **Neil Dalton**, Yokohama Tire; and **Terri Curro**,

HomeTown Bank



Hazelwood



Parries



Testa

Media

WDBJ7 television in Roanoke has added the following in sales: **Amber Hazelwood**, **Chad Parries** and **Eric Testa**.

Organizations

The Blue Ridge Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure has named **Pamela Adams** coordinator.

The Western Virginia Land Trust has named **Rupert Cutler**, **Broaddus Fitzpatrick**, **Sam Long**, **David Maxson** and **Linda Pharis** to its board of trustees.

Roanoke Valley SPCA has named **Todd Foutz**



Foutz



Vaught

of Neathawk, Dubuque & Packett and **Tammy Vaught** of Leonard Copy Systems to its board of directors.



Beers



Cundiff

Blue Ridge Literacy has elected the following officers of its board of directors: **Molly Bell**, Roanoke Times, president; **Gina French**, Virginia Tech Pampli., VP; **Tommy Denton**, retired, VP; **Ruth Dickerson**, Cole & Associates, treasurer; and **Jean Holzinger**, Hollins University,



Feldmann

secretary. New board members are: **Paul Beers**, Glenn, Feldmann, Darby, and Goodlatte; **Margie Cundiff**, Lanford Brothers; **Greg Feldmann**, Skyline Capital Strategies; and **Matt Huff**, with Poe & Cronk.

Botetourt County

Chamber of Commerce has announced the following officers for 2012-2013: **Travis Jones**, president; **Scott Winter**, first VP; **Pete Pearl**, second VP; **David Knicely**, past president; **Dan Naff**, executive director; and the following directors: **Anita Arnold**; **Lee Arritt**; **Dan Babish**; **Chris Copenhaver**; **Linda Doolittle**; **Cassandra Dove**; **Sam Foster**; **Stephanie Frost**; **Larry Harris**; **Mary Ann Layman**; **Pete Peters**; **Scott Stevens**; **Angie Stroop**; **Dan Taylor**.

“Landlords must be protected as well, so the cost doesn't have to be passed along to the tenants”

— Page 28

it's here

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FRONT Notes



Jed Hammer, Mike Cagle and Todd Morgan of MB Contractors.

Hospital for sale

The Giles County Industrial Development Authority has announced it has a contract to sell the former **Giles Memorial Hospital** to a team of investors led by Brian Wishneff of Brian Wishneff and Associates, a Roanoke based developer and development consultant. No price was released. The facility was initially acquired by the authority as part of an exchange for the real estate and infrastructure for the new Giles Carilion Community Hospital development.

A portion of the facility was recently leased and renovated by Fresenius Medical for a dialysis clinic. The facility will also be used as office space and set development by the production company of the "Wish You Well" movie to be filmed in Giles County this fall.

Record income

Valley Financial Corp. (Valley Bank) in Roanoke has posted net income of \$1.9 million for the quarter that ended June 30, compared with \$1.2 million for the same

quarter a year ago. That's a record.

MB transition complete

The transition of 100-year-old **MB Contractors** in Roanoke is complete. The transition began six years ago as President Todd Morgan and Executive Vice President Mike Cagle acquired the remaining shares from CEO Jed Hammer on July 17.

Employees, clients, and business partners will see no change in day-to-day operations and dealings. "When Morgan and Cagle

bought into the company in 2006," says Hammer, "I began to slowly remove myself from daily operations as they took on more and more responsibility and have effectively been running the company for the past few years with me acting in more of a consulting role."

An avid outdoorsman, Hammer plans to spend more time hunting and also with his family that includes a granddaughter and two new grandchildren who are expected before the end of the year.

We Never Forget It's More Than a Box.

where
creativity
unfolds



cccbox.com

From the first time we attacked a refrigerator box with markers, scissors and tape, we knew it could be anything we wanted... an airplane, castle, spaceship, playhouse, or submarine. Today we have the manufacturing capability to make nearly anything you can dream of out of corrugated board; and people with the imagination and experience to create the perfect box, product package or point-of-purchase display.



Roanoke, VA • Winchester, VA • Piney Flats, TN • Holly Springs, NC

Company sold

Ram Tool and Supply of Birmingham, Ala., has bought **Marco Supply Company** of Roanoke for an undisclosed amount. Marco is more than 40 years old and has locations in six states. Those locations will remain Marco Supply under the deal.

Friendship, one of the largest in the region, wants to build near Va. 419 and Starkey Rd., relocating about a third of the 373 beds it has on Hershberger Rd. MFA has not yet said where its facility would go.

"The proposed Roanoke area center is in response to culture changes in our industry," MFA said in a statement responding to questions from The Roanoke Times. "Our customers are seeking more rehabilitative services, therapeutic activities, and building amenities provided in a 'neighborhood' model

design."

Metatronics grant

Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke has a new grant of nearly \$200,000 from the National Science Foundation that will help it establish a program

in mechatronics, a combination of disciplines that includes mechanical engineering, systems design and software engineering.

Contract to outside firm

Yet another huge construction contract

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 eldercare facilities

Friendship Retirement Community and Medical Facilities of America plan to construct new facilities in the Roanoke area and have filed the paperwork to get started.

So much more.

vbFRONT.com

- > ND&P Acquires tba to Form Big Agency
- > Foot Levelers New Marathon Sponsor
- > New Partnership for Save-a-Ton
- > The Roanoke Regional Chamber Responds
- > MB Contractors Leadership Transition Complete
- > Huge Roanoke Contract Goes to Another Outside Firm
- > New Regional Investment Firm Announced
- > Roanoke All-American City for 6th Time

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.

- > 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
- > 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

and much more (of course; hence, the name)

FRONT Notes



Sherry Gearheart (left) of the Women and Children's Center and Carly Oliver, Foundation Associate Director with the check.

for work in Roanoke has gone to an outside firm, this time one in Pennsylvania with an office near Richmond. A \$20.4 million contract to improve the I581-U.S. 220 link at Elm Avenue in downtown Roanoke has been won by **American Infrastructure-Va. Inc.** in Glen Allen. It was a no-bid contract.

The work is to improve the flow of traffic in one of Roanoke's more congested areas. American Infrastructure is based in Worcester, Pa. The project is expected to begin in the middle of next year and finished in 2015. A lane will be added to the off-ramps and the left turn lanes will be extended in each direction. Elm Ave.'s

bridge will also be widened.

Mission grant

Foundation for Roanoke Valley has awarded \$35,000 to The Rescue Mission from the Foundation's Earl D. and Carrie Leigh Doran Fund, established through the

estate of local barber Earl Doran. The fund has a number of purposes, including supporting agencies which provide shelter, care and assistance to battered women.

"Many people do not realize the number of abused women sheltered at the Rescue Mission," says Kim Gembala, of the Rescue Mission. "In a recent survey of our family shelter, 76 percent reported being a victim of sexual, physical, and verbal abuse from a spouse or partner."

Station to re-open

Jones Broadcasting has leased approximately 22,136 square feet at the Crossroads Theater Building on Airport Rd. in Roanoke. The building is a former movie theater.

Jones Broadcasting purchased WDRL Television and is renovating the above property for their new offices. WDRL closed in recent years.

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Layoffs

MasterBrand Cabinets of Martinsville closed in August, losing 335 jobs in an area that can't afford the loss of even one. MasterBrand opened less than a year ago with considerable promise and \$1.5 million from the Governor's Opportunity Fund. The area's unemployment rate is more than 14 percent, one of the highest in Virginia.

New client

Access Advertising &

Public Relations in Roanoke has added Inorganic Ventures to its list of clients.

Factory closes

The Dublin location of **Dove Vinyl Windows** has closed, putting 52 people out of work. The weak economy was given as the reason for closing by the Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based company.

*Compiled by Dan Smith
and Tom Field*



It is impossible to measure the value of a life, of precious minutes that can save one, in dollars and cents

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Additional FRONT Notes posted online at moreFRONT.blogspot.com.

Read extended versions of items listed above, plus photos and many more current listings each day on the moreFRONT blog, also available by link at vbFRONT.com.



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Virginia Women's Conference
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“ ”
The Roanoke River is prime
for recreational development

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“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.

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Defining a best place to work.
September 20. See page 43.

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