

A woman is shown from the chest up, climbing a dark, craggy rock face. She is wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt, a yellow Petzl helmet, and a green climbing harness. Her arms are extended upwards, and she has a focused expression. The background is a dark, textured rock surface. The right side of the image is a solid red vertical band.

Valley Business

# FRONT

FOR THE UP AND COMING  
AND ALREADY ARRIVED

\$3 • ISSUE 54 • MARCH 2013

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*Working Through*  
**Hardships**

Betsy Parkins,  
ND&P



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Our March cover story reports on a number of people in our region who are fighting a daily battle to go to work and to produce excellent results, despite serious impediments. Fact is, Americans are good workers, careful and productive workers who put in far more hours than required—and sometimes more than is wise.

OnlineMBA has some startling statistics on our working habits:

- Even though 55 percent of us don't like our jobs, professionals work more than 50 hours a week.
- In 1970, we worked 35 hours a week and made (an adjusted) \$59,000 a year; in 2012 that was 46 hours and \$51,000.
- Six of the world's Top 10 economies prohibit more than 48 hours of work a week (the U.S. average is 46). Three of the Top 5 happiest countries in the world work 31 hours a week or less.
- 75 percent of Americans feel stress at work; 25 percent say it is the most stressful element of their lives. A million call in sick because of stress daily.
- Stress costs business \$200 billion a year, about what five million workers earn.
- After eight hours of work, productivity decreases by half.

Next time you're looking at spending more than reasonable amounts of time at work, think about what you're doing to yourself and to your business. Sometimes less is more.



**Tom Field**



**Dan Smith**

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2012-2013 RANKINGS

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# Hardships

Inspiring Stories at Work



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Art direction and cover photography  
of Betsy Parkins by Tom Field.

# Valley Business FRONT

MARCH

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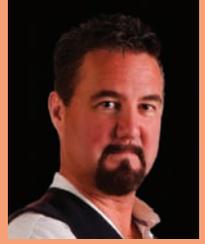
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Jane Dalier



Tom Field



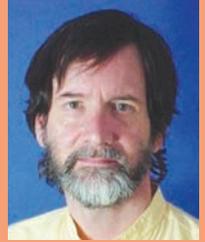
Michael Miller



Anne Piedmont



Nicholas Vaassen



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



Kathleen Harshberger



Becky Hepler



Liv Kiser



Pete Krull



Laura Purcell



Dan Smith



Samantha Steidle



Kathy Surace



We found a campground... set up a tent... got up in the morning... put on our suits and went out and found jobs

— Page 31

## 2013 Members

**Nancy Agee** Carilion (Wellness)  
**Laura Bradford** Claire V (Retail)  
**Nicholas C. Conte** Woods Rogers (Legal)  
**Warner Dalhouse** Retired (Seniors)  
**John Garland** Spectrum (Development)  
**James Glass** JG Co. (Development)  
**Nancy Gray** Hollins University (Education)  
**Ellis Gutshall** Valley Bank (Finance)  
**Nanci Hardwick** Aeroprobe (Tech/Industry)  
**George Kegley** Retired (Seniors)  
**John D. Long** Salem Museum (Culture)  
**Nancy May** LewisGale Regional Health System (Wellness)  
**Stuart Mease** Virginia Tech (Education)  
**Mary Miller** IDD (Tech/Industry)  
**Ed Walker** Regeneration Partners (Development)

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.



Dress  
one notch  
higher

— Page 22

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Editor's blog: [editrdan.blogspot.com](http://editrdan.blogspot.com)

# Hardships

## Inspiring Stories at Work

### Working through adversities >

**Executive Summary:**  
*When the world falls in, some people just keep going, looking on the up side, fighting hard in the face of overwhelming odds. Work often plays a key role in their recovery.*

By Dan Smith

Virginia Tech psychology professor Scott Geller has spent many of his 70 years studying people at work and recently he became interested in motivation. It was curious that he should take that avenue because at about the same time he turned his attention that way, he found he had prostate cancer.

It focused him even more and he wrote *Actively Caring for People*, a book to which 39 people contributed their thoughts on how it works.

Now, though, Scott is one of millions of people with serious life disruptions who are, quite literally, working through them. That means going to work and doing the best jobs they can in spite of major disease, divorce, widowhood, alcoholism and the entire range of calamities that can affect us.

FRONT decided to take a look at how some people in this region get up and keep going every morning in spite of circumstances that are often crushing to the spirit, the body and the mind. What we found was a level of courage and commitment that is often astonishing, but which the people telling their stories considered anything but heroic. It's just their lives.

Geller believes there are three important elements in overcoming big events (he calls them the Three Cs):

- Competence in worthwhile work;
- Having a choice. "It's about autonomy and being able to choose," he says.
- Community involvement. "It gives you a sense of connection."

He works every day, even though "I'm not making a dime beyond my retirement," but he's getting "intrinsic reinforcement" with the "natural consequences" of his daily routine.

# COVER STORY

He believes that a lot of that effort has to do with "what your legacy will be. What will they say at our funerals?"

Community is vital in the healing process, says Scott. "When I say 'community,' it is bigger and more important. The network makes the difference. Interdependency means connection with each other. It's systems thinking."

And it involves "a bigger picture," one that is about overcoming.

Here are our people and their stories:



Dan Smith

## Carol Willoughby, rheumatoid arthritis

Carol Willoughby, who's 63 now, was in her early 20s, a new mother and a young woman without a lot of focus. Then she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, a progressive, degenerative disease that ruins the joints and often leaves the victim with more physical problems than she can handle. For Carol, it has meant a succession of joint surgeries (the first knee replacement in this region in 1978 among them), pain, immobility ... and a life she loves.

She needed focus and the Arthritis Foundation provided it initially. She worked there 14 years and founded the first support group in the state. Finally, though, she "hit rock bottom. I had a hard time." Pain was intense and there was a hole lurking in her middle, wanting to be filled. "I got very angry," says Carol. "I had no faith, no religion. I said, 'If there's a god, there'd better be a good reason for this.'" She was

““”

I had no faith, no religion. I said, 'If there's a god, there'd better be a good reason for this.'

— Carol Willoughby

“”

School budget cuts left any kind of real instruction at a minimum. I was left on my own to organize class work and study without guidance because the instructors only came to my home to administer tests and exams.

— Liv Kiser

beginning to think her husband and two boys “would be better off without me. I was on the verge.” But then “everything changed.”

“A miracle changed me inside,” she says. “I needed a purpose in life” and in 1976 it hit her square in the face: service dogs. She had little education, less experience, didn’t drive, but there was a burning inside that led to the founding of Saint Francis Service Dogs, which she led for years, making it a national force. “Faith came to me in an instant and all I knew was I was changed. I didn’t know the strength that would be given me.”

She was a natural fundraiser, one who never took a salary. Carol has always been a beauty with a sparkling personality and she worked with those attributes and everything else given her to bring in more money than she dreamed possible. She learned public speaking and has been in constant demand for years. She is the face of Saint Francis, but still, “I’m sicker than people know. I don’t have energy or stamina. I don’t do anything these days that’s not for Saint Francis” because she reserves that energy.

Today, she says—without hesitation—that she feels fortunate to have this awful disease because it made her who she is.



Dan Smith

## Liv Kiser, diabetes

Liv Kiser has been living with Type 1 diabetes since she was nine months old. That’s nearly 18 years. She’s a Cave Spring High School senior who, in that short time, has come to be the face of Juvenile Diabetes for many and has started her own photography business, Photography by Liv. She’s also serving an internship at FRONT.

Type 1 diabetes is the most serious version, one that requires Liv to prick her fingers as much as 10 times a day to monitor her blood sugar. She says, “As diligent as my parents and I have been, no two days are the same ... If I go too high or too low [with the blood sugar reading] it is life threatening and ... [It is difficult] to convey the physical and emotional difficulties that I have faced because of diabetes.”

As a kindergartner Liv “developed a bone condition that, while a self-limiting disease, left the top of my femur misshapen. Because of increasing pain, in November 2011 I underwent the first of two major hip surgeries at Boston Children’s Hospital.” She finished her junior year with a home-bound tutor. “It was a year full of obstacles,” she says. “School budget cuts left any kind of real instruction at a minimum. I was left on my own to organize classwork and

study without guidance because the instructors only came to my home to administer tests and exams." She learned to speak up for what she wanted and, "at the end of that year, my GPA jumped significantly and I had learned to establish close relationships with my teachers."

It's a daily grind for the tiny girl with the big eyes, bigger smile and the oversized heart. "I am grateful for my obstacles because I tried to make them into positives," she says. "I represented Virginia in the 2009 Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Children's Congress and lobbied our representatives on Capitol Hill for more money to cure diabetes.

"I have been to the White House and shaken the hand of President Obama, and I have photographed cyclists in Death Valley as they rode in 106 degree heat to raise money to find a cure for diabetes. The reason that I am most grateful for my obstacles is that my faith has gotten stronger. This past Christmas morning I stood on the top of a mountain in Colorado and was able to snowboard down that run and I treasured every moment. I literally and figuratively conquered my mountain."

Liv plans to study communications at Emory and Henry College next year. You can see her photos at [livphoto.com](http://livphoto.com).

## Jan Keister, divorce

There she sat, homeless, with little money, pretty good credit, good friends and a goal. Jan Keister had just moved toward divorce without a plan, but one was taking shape. She and a friend found a "rundown duplex" in Old Southwest Roanoke that was the very definition of a fixer-upper, but it was affordable and they moved in and got to work.

That was nine years ago and now, at 56, Jan has turned her passion into a series of jobs and a calling. She loved her old neighborhood from the beginning and wanted to invest herself in making it better. She learned to write grants, learned to do the gritty work of upkeep, learned to manage an office, to plant trees, to administer programs.

She's a non-profit specialist now working for Hope Trees Camp Virginia Jaycee, Dare to Care Charities and Old Southwest Inc. She makes things work and she's helped rid Old Southwest of many of its biggest problems (guns, drugs, prostitution, disintegrating housing and the like) and helped it win national awards.

"It gave me focus," she says. "I could lie in bed and be depressed

““”

I could lie in bed and be depressed or I could get up and do something. I helped fix the neighborhood.

— Jan Keister



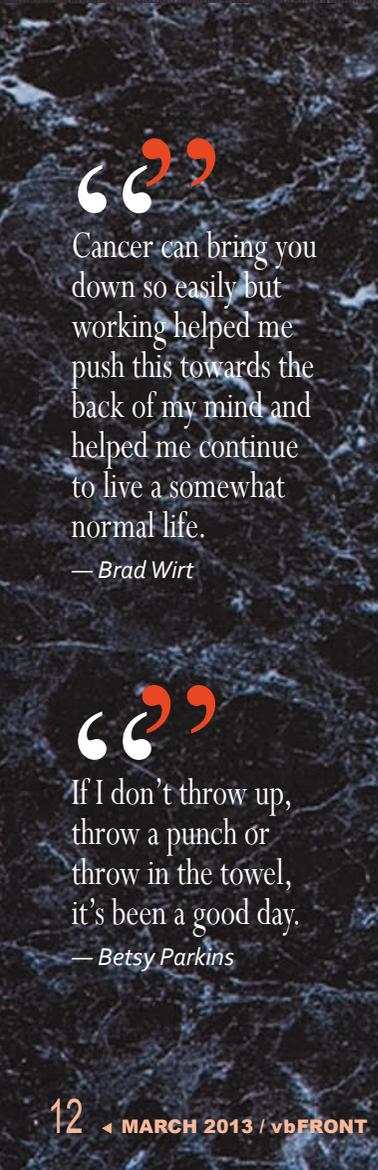
Dan Smith



or I could get up and do something. I helped fix the neighborhood.” Her self-esteem soared, she became a party animal of sorts. She started writing grants—teaching herself—which led to writing more grants. She became a recognized leader and a very different Jan Keister.



Dan Smith



Cancer can bring you down so easily but working helped me push this towards the back of my mind and helped me continue to live a somewhat normal life.

— Brad Wirt



If I don't throw up, throw a punch or throw in the towel, it's been a good day.

— Betsy Parkins

## Steven Myers, brain injury

Steven Myers is a 22-year-old Virginia Western Community College student majoring in civil engineering and architecture who was involved in an auto accident in August that killed his brother Aaron and left Steven with a traumatic brain injury. He nearly died and his prognosis was not good.

After three weeks in the hospital, he was transferred to a rehab center in Atlanta for intensive top-to-bottom rehabilitation. He was discharged from Pathways in November and, says his mother, Norma, “Steven has gone from leaving Roanoke ... in a wheelchair barely being able to sit up alone to walking without assistance upon leaving Shepherd Pathways.”

Steven is now looking at “a career in the human services field with a desire to transfer to Virginia Tech or study at Jefferson College of Health Sciences,” says his mom, who has taken leave from her job to take care of him. He is a patient at Carilion Roanoke Outpatient Rehab.

Steven is gutting out the rehab. Says Norma, “He refuses to let his current disability cancel out any opportunities that come his way. Steven is determined to continue his remarkable road of recovery working hard each day while at therapy and at home in order to take advantage of this window of opportunity of healing.” His sense of humor and a “refusal to give up even while grieving over the loss of his brother” have been important. “His embrace of life is his driving force to do whatever it takes to get well, return to school and work. It is coupled with the desire to make a difference in the lives of others.”

## Brad Wirt, cancer

Brad has been working as a branch manager at East Coast Metals in Roanoke throughout his fight with cancer, described as "Stage 3 follicular non-Hodgkin lymphoma." He's 39 and every day is a battle.

After a series of chemotherapy treatments, his disease went into remission after six months and "I am in a watch and wait mode," he says. "After each round of R-CHOP I took about five days off to recuperate. During the Rituxin rounds [of chemotherapy] I took two days off and with the Zevelin [treatments] I took a week off.

"My co-workers and corporate staff have been so helpful in all aspects in helping me keep focused on what I needed, which was rest and comfort. I couldn't have done this without the great help of all employees.

"Working through this issue has helped me keep focused and kept my spirits high. Cancer can bring you down so easily but working helped me push this towards the back of my mind and helped me continue to live a somewhat normal life."



Dan Smith

## Betsy Parkins, cancer

In August of last year, 45-year-old social media whiz Betsy Parkins of Neathawk Dubuque & Packett in Roanoke was diagnosed with stage II breast cancer and "as it is for nearly everyone, the diagnosis came as a complete shock. Until that point, I'd never really been sick before." She's had three surgeries and four cycles of chemo since then. She'll do 25 sessions of radiation this spring. The hair is gone, but the smile remains.

"Having cancer is very much like having a second full-time job," she says. "Between appointments, treatment and recovery I spend as much time dealing with cancer as I do with my regular job. But I decided (quickly) that I had to make the time and effort in order to successfully beat cancer. There's no way I could cut corners. I had to accept that each step toward recovery and cure had to be done. I had to focus my energy each step of the way."

She's a newly-single mother and "I also had to figure out and manage a new household with an energetic six year old. My daughter has been an important part of my recovery,



Dan Smith



When I checked into Farley, they took my cell phone. Now they pay for it. That's the power of recovery.

— Pam Rickard



Dan Smith

so focusing on her as well has been another priority.”

Betsy believes “the best advice I received came within days of my diagnosis: I was allowed to feel sorry for myself, but only for a little while. Anything else just gets in the way of progress. I take that very seriously. Of course there are ups and downs but I try to take them in stride – they are all just part of the process.”

Her strategies: “The first is to systematically take each event one at a time, to focus on just the very next thing coming along. I don’t worry about or rethink what’s happened and I don’t worry about anything beyond the very next treatment or appointment. I can channel all my energy into getting through, but in a way that seems much simpler and easier to handle.

“From a broader perspective, I keep track of events by bunching them into the beginning, middle and end. Right now I’m at the end of the middle. I get a sense of accomplishment by checking off my mental list – I made it through the beginning (diagnosis) and I’m almost finished the middle (treatment). I do the same thing when I’m faced with a scary new diagnostic procedure or appointment.”

The second strategy is to “find humor in the situation and just laugh. ... You never know what’s going to run through your brain at the strangest moments.” She says “people give me hats, lots of hats.” She runs her hand over her bald head and smiles that toothy, airplane landing light smile.

Her job “has been a huge part of my recovery. I’ve tried to maintain as normal a schedule as possible. It’s important to me that I continue to work as hard for my clients as they expect me to. I never wanted my cancer to get in the way of providing clients – and the agency – great service. There were times when I was on my way home from surgery and answered e-mails – which got my iPad confiscated for a while.”

Without her colleagues, she says, “I couldn’t have managed. They’ve stepped in to help me with meetings or to get work routed through approvals. Our agency is very much team oriented and their support has kept me going.”

Finally, she says, “If I don’t throw up, throw a punch or throw in the towel, it’s been a good day.”

## **Pam Rickard, alcoholism**

Pam Rickard had it all going. High-end marketing professional, happy mother and wife, distance runner of national significance. Then in the middle of 2006, it crashed down around her, sending her to jail for three months and labeling her as an “alcoholic.”

Pam’s 50 now, still running, still marketing and the alcoholism

# COVER STORY

has become a blessing. She works for the Farley Center, where she recovered from alcoholism initially, and Runwell, the Linda Quirk Foundation.

She was, she says, “the poster child of the ‘functioning alcoholic,’ excelling in my career while dying on the inside.” She “didn’t lose my job due to my addiction, but I did voluntarily quit to work on my recovery full time after I completed residential treatment.”

She spent three years “not driving an inch [suspended license], working on my recovery, repairing damage done within my family and taking on freelance jobs to help make ends meet. I had to sharpen my skills of creativity and resourcefulness to navigate my life...asking for rides, car pooling, buying and riding a bike for transportation not exercise.”

The Farley Center made her its first alumni coordinator and she recently took a job with Runwell, where she had been a board member. “When I checked into Farley, they took my cell phone. Now they pay for it. That’s the power of recovery.”

Pam is a ball of energy and enthusiasm, a visible image of what an alcoholic can do (despite AA’s prohibition about going public). Her story was told in a book about the New York marathon and she is open and vocal about the endless possibilities for the healing drunk.

“The irony,” she says, “is that in [her final stage of drinking] I worked smarter.” She led the drive to get donations for the new Downtown YMCA in Roanoke and was recruited for other jobs because of her high level of success. She was never fired for her DUIs, either, the employer at the time preferring to provide her rides to work. “I ran some of my best races between binges,” she says. But, “I went down fast.”

In recovery, there’s still the work and the goals she sets daily—beginning with refusing to allow alcohol in her life.

## Justin Graves, paraplegic

Justin Graves is a 22-year-old Virginia Tech grad student, Homeland Security employee and paraplegic. He’s studying higher education administration when he’s not creating technology solutions in Washington during school breaks.

Justin has been in a wheelchair since he was three when he contracted “a viral infection in my spinal cord called Transverse Myelitis.” He says he is effective “because of the disability I have. I wouldn’t have it any other way. Of course there is no option, so I have to be optimistic.” And he fairly bubbles with enthusiasm when talking about his projects, his future, the possible. He has “no feeling from the waist down and can’t walk at all. I use my arms for 100 percent of my mobility, from rolling to crawling.”

“““

I believe that my lasting impact will be showing people that being in a wheelchair is no death sentence; losing any ability is no death sentence. You just have to learn to adapt and go about things differently.

— Justin Graves



“ ”

I think you just have to keep going. You can't exactly ask for a re-deal ... I definitely would have many years ago. It is what it is.

— Jessica Swanson

Justin is a social animal: "I have a personal goal of meeting one new person every day because I've realized that my outgoing personality helps people not define me by my disability. I don't remember walking at all, so it's not an emotional challenge to think back to walking and things like that. All my life I've known being in a wheelchair and regardless of my environment I accept that as normal. It keeps me from living a traditional, mobile lifestyle."

As he's aged, "I've realized that the people I am closest with over time are those who do not see my wheelchair. ... It's all in how I have accepted my disability and look at it as a vehicle to inspire others, not a vehicle that is strange and confining. I believe that my lasting impact will be showing people that being in a wheelchair is no death sentence; losing any ability is no death sentence. You just have to learn to adapt and go about things differently."

## Jessica Swanson, neuromuscular disease

Jessica Swanson has a rare neuromuscular disease that leaves her dependent on computer "assistive technology" to get around, communicate and live her life. She's 28 and works at the Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services in Roanoke, despite a condition that leaves her body virtually useless.

Her movements and her communication are accomplished by moving her head. A small silver dot in the middle of her forehead talks to the computer, which, in turn translates her thought into talk. She is smart, funny and outgoing. Her disease (which she doesn't care to name) "doesn't really have a treatment [because] it doesn't receive much research. You just treat various issues that come along. Breathing became more difficult as I got older. If I was outside in the summer for an extended period, I'd be exhausted for the rest of the day just because the heat and progression of the day would make me use more and more energy to breathe.

"When I was a junior in college, I got a trach and a vent so my body wouldn't have to work to breathe. The trach/vent has made me feel better overall, but it took away my ability to speak and it created an infection haven."

Schools have accommodated her physical needs (they're required to). She says Roanoke College and Virginia Tech "were fabulous. They believed in me and I couldn't have had a better experience. When I finished grad school and entered the job market, it was a different story. When employers found out



Dan Smith

that I'm in a wheelchair and I'm on a vent, I got the immediate brush off. I tried disclosing my disability up front and I'd never get a response. I tried avoiding disclosure until I got an interview and the interview would end as quickly as it started.

After four years of trying to find a stable position, the Department of Rehabilitation Services (now called DARS) got me a trial job with Disability Determination Services [part of the Social Security Administration]."

Sometimes it's a grind, but "I think you just have to keep going. You can't exactly ask for a re-deal ... I definitely would have many years ago. It is what it is. I just keep getting up, doing my job and hoping to win the lottery so I don't have to deal with insurance rules any longer. I want to be on my own and able to afford 24/7 support that I'd need."

## Clay Quesenberry, blood disorder (amputee)

The surgeries over 20 years became almost routine—averaging one a year, since 1993. Finally, though, Clay Quesenberry (54) lost his left leg below the knee to his hypercoagulative blood disorder called "factor 5." He was and remains the general manager of the Christiansburg Printing branch and is a sales rep, as well.

His is, he says, a "type of problem [that] affects you in any situation where mobility is required. The healing process was extensive due to a MRSA infection contracted in the hospital. After a few weeks I was keeping track of Wordsprint and my clients from my home computer. In three months I was driving to the office and working two or three hours. I had not received my prosthetic, so I used a walker and a wheel chair."

He has, he says, "tried my best to maintain a positive approach and not give up on myself, my family and my company. ... The owners of Wordsprint, Steve Lester and Bill Gilmer, were ready to support me from start. They paid my base salary through these difficult times. Coworkers were supportive and many took responsibility for tasks I wasn't able to physically perform." His family and friends were there consistently, as well.

"I have learned that the healing process begins within yourself. You need to come to terms that there are many things you need to approach differently but that you can accomplish most anything with determination and the support of those most special in your life."

The story continues to evolve "with many levels of emotions.

““”

I have learned that the healing process begins within yourself. You need to come to terms that there are many things you need to approach differently but that you can accomplish most anything with determination and the support of those most special in your life.

— Clay Quesenberry



Mike Miller



Due to all of the medical bills (even after insurance) and temporary loss of sales commissions, we are facing foreclosure on our home. It sure seems hopeless that we can save our property and I am hoping for a miracle on that matter. I suppose this is another story entirely. Life's struggles can be quite ominous and sometimes unforgiving."



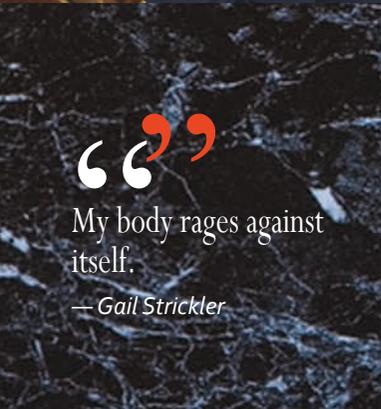
Dan Smith

## John Montgomery, heart attack

About 12 years ago, when John Montgomery was 45, he suffered a minor heart attack. Two years later he had open heart bypass surgery. Today, he's still running his sports magazine, Play by Play, in Roanoke, overseeing just about every aspect of the small business, including delivery, which includes a lot of lifting and carting.

He's philosophical about his recovery: "Although I'm sure my casual approach toward diet and an irregular exercise routine contributed to my heart difficulties, the primary catalyst was stress. Now that I work for myself, I can control my stress levels more effectively. I take a low-grade aspirin and cholesterol medicine daily, but other than that, my doctors have released me to do whatever I can handle. I am proud to be a regular blood donor for the past several years."

His job is not a cure-all, but it's a point of focus. "Of course, that's not to say running my own business is stress-free. Far from it. But it's gratifying to be in control of my work schedule. I have a strong religious faith and believe what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. I believe my heart difficulties have done that."



My body rages against itself.

— Gail Strickler



Dan Smith

## Gail Strickler, arthritis

Gail Strickler, who's 49 and works at the Rescue Mission in Roanoke, has been fighting chronic conditions for years now, but she's at work every chance she gets at "a blessed workplace where my problems become [her co-workers'] problems."

In the past five years, Gail has had two major neck surgeries, resulting from fusions, two shoulder surgeries, a narrowing of the spinal cord and chronic migraines. "My body rages against itself," she understates. The pain, she says, "can be maddening."

The challenges don't stop there, though. She was the primary caregiver to her mother during her last months and now she's caring for her father-in-law, who has dementia.

There are days when she simply can't work and she has negotiated a plan with the Mission to cover for her because when she does work, she works well and is a valuable part of the team. "I am my own department."

She is organized and that's vital to performing well, Gail says. Sometimes, though, "I just have to drive up to the Parkway and yell. I give myself permission to say, 'Enough is enough.'" And, she says, "I've learned to scale back and to say 'no.'" Mostly, though, she insists it is important, "to have a plan in place before asking for a change."

““”

I have a strong religious faith and believe what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. I believe my heart difficulties have done that.

— John Montgomery



Dan Smith

## Aimee Brenner, diabetes

Gutting out grad school is not all that uncommon. Gutting it out with Type 1 diabetes is a bit more unusual and quite a bit more difficult, especially when surgeries keep popping up. Aimee Brenner has been insulin dependent since she was 15, 25 years. By itself, "it's not that big a deal," she says, but when you combine it with high levels of stress: Boom! "The first 20 years of this, I was in the hospital twice. I was in the hospital three times while working on my PhD."

The illness was debilitating. She'd become severely dehydrated and "it would take a couple of weeks to get my energy back," but she'd have work due. "It always happened before a major writing assignment," she says. "I missed deadlines. It added a year to the program for me."

““”

I'm lucky in that work is something I'm passionate about.

— Aimee Brenner



But there was the grit: "I'm lucky in that work is something I'm passionate about." She got the doctorate and now she works at Averett University in Roanoke, teaching education. She occasionally works from home (she's a single mother) and it's all "a very fluid process."



Dan Smith

## Thomas Becher, divorce

The signs of his crumbling marriage were all over his business and Thomas Becher decided to simply lay it out for his employees at the tba agency, an advertising and public relations firm he owned in Roanoke. He cleared the air with his honesty and found solid support.

He'd never before owned a business and didn't realize the demands until they were there. Nights were late, a laptop a constant companion. In 2009, he separated. He "concentrated on being a strong leader" at work and taking care of his clients. "I was coping. There were people I could talk to and I got professional help. The best thing I did was to tell the team. They understood."

He was open with his clients, as well, telling them what they needed to know—minus the details—and promising they would not suffer for his personal challenges. "I wasn't looking for sympathy," he says, "but I was setting expectations."

He sold tba to Neathawk, Dubuque & Packett and became a vice president—without the responsibility of being an owner.

He has time with his boys now; he's remarried, but recalls "it was punishing." It no longer is. "I think I'm a better person," he says. "Stronger, with more balance and insight."

## Darlene Smithwick, widowed

Darlene Smithwick's husband Walter died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2009, the cause of which is in dispute and resulting in even more grief for the family. Darlene is a 54-year-old Roanoke County librarian who specializes in technology.

“ ”

I was coping. There were people I could talk to and I got professional help. The best thing I did was to tell the team. They understood.

—Thomas Becher



Dan Smith

It has been a difficult adjustment for her, but counseling through the Employee Assistance Program (which had been working with Walter) helped. "It was refreshing to be able to talk to someone who just let me say what I wanted and let me cry if I needed," says Darlene. "Friends don't like to see you cry. They want to make it better. For me, tears were part of the healing process." Later she took the class "Dealing with Loss" at a hospice. People from the class still get together to talk and play.

Darlene says, "Walter's kids, especially his daughter, and I became much closer after his death. ... Rachael was such a daddy's girl and his death hit her hard." Co-workers "would check on me and make sure I was doing okay. Even after all this time, they still do occasionally."

Darlene was strongly encouraged to return to work as soon as she could. "Staying busy [kept] my mind occupied and [helped] me get back into a routine," she says. "It was very helpful to have a job that I really enjoy and to be with people who care. Going home to an empty house at the end of the day was hard. If it wasn't for my dog, I probably would have stayed away from the house as much as possible. Other times, I couldn't pull myself together enough to go to work. Fortunately, I have a boss who understood."

"I've always felt like I'm a strong person emotionally and spiritually," she says. "I'm learning how to take care of things that I didn't have to when I was married. I still talk to Walter and I still miss him every day. I don't think that will ever end. But, it is much easier than it was three years ago." 

““”

I still talk to Walter and I still miss him every day. I don't think that will ever end. But, it is much easier than it was three years ago.

—Darlene Smithwick



## Should small business owners dress to impress? >

Running your own small business gives you the freedom to dress any way you please. Indeed, that's one reason often given for leaving the workforce and starting a small business: you don't have to follow someone else's rules.

Some employees and small business owners believe, also, that their work should be judged solely on its merits and their professional credibility shouldn't hinge on their appearance.

Ironically, though, a small business owner's appearance is even more important to the company image than when they were just one of many employees. The owner of a small business would be shortsighted to refuse to dress to impress clientele.

Consider the many small businesses entering the business landscape each month. We determine who gets our business and whether the PR they're putting out is credible by what we see and hear.

As owner of your small business, your personal appearance is akin to a billboard and your community interactions convey your company's brand. Professional dress is one of many ways to brand your company, publicly projecting your level of professionalism.

And just as a professional appearance can enhance opportunities for a business relationship, an unprofessional image can destroy business opportunities.

Whether you put effort into your attire or not, your appearance attracts or repels potential clients, depending on what they're seeking. We're drawn to people who are similar to ourselves and make us comfortable.

If your clientele is primarily in a field such as construction, entertainment, or IT, then dressing casually is appropriate and necessary. However, if your target client is in fields such as banking, law or accounting, you'll impress with dressier attire.

Research the company's dress code and dress one notch higher. This shows you respect and value the company's owners/directors enough to look your best for a meeting.

Small business owners wear many hats and are notoriously short on time. To save time, coordinate a few "uniforms" appropriate for meeting with the various types of clients you expect to serve. Take photos and store them in a binder according to proper attire for each situation. Having outfits coordinated and ready for future meetings frees you to focus on the business itself.

Image doesn't take the place of performance—it's essential to produce valuable goods and services—but your brand and image are a foot in the door. 

## Business Dress

By Kathy Surace

**Executive Summary:**  
*You have the choice to determine how you're perceived.*

## The right gift around the world >

Let's talk about gift-giving in the professional world, especially in the international arena. Americans don't usually give business gifts, but many cultures view the ritual as a way of strengthening relationships. Americans can be overwhelmed by the generosity of international clients, and embarrassed that they have nothing to offer in return.

Be aware that many U.S. federal and state agencies either forbid gift-giving or have a strict limit on the cost. Some American corporations wish to avoid any hint of bribery. In other cultures, however, presenting gifts and the accompanying etiquette does have a key place in business dealings. That being said, gift giving can be fraught with peril. If you give presents to your international clients, make sure you know the appropriateness and the implication of your gifts.

### Some tips:

- Always present a gift of high quality, and made in the U. S. (The latter is becoming increasingly difficult.)
- Make sure the present is light and portable. A bronze statue of one of our presidents is not a good idea here.
- Be sensitive about an appropriate time to present your gift.
- Avoid gifts with company logos, unless very discreetly displayed.

### Suggestions:

- Coffee table books about your region (just watch the weight).
- Something made regionally, like Jefferson cups from Virginia.
- Folding binoculars.
- Battery powered reading lights.
- Quality photo frames.
- Key rings or money clips from top jewelers.
- If your client has a degree from an American university, items from the alma mater will be received with delight.

### Gift taboos (and there are many more):

- Business gift giving is always reciprocated in China—not to reciprocate is bad manners.
- The time to present a gift in Japan is at the end of your visit.
- Don't give four of anything to a Japanese or Korean client. It's like our number 13.
- Don't give clocks to the Chinese—they're associated with funerals.
- Handkerchiefs, even beautiful lace or embroidered ones, are associated with tears in the Middle East.
- A Swiss Army knife would be welcome in some cultures, but not in others. It could signal the desire to cut off relationships.
- Flowers can contain land mines of unintended meanings, depending on the country.

So, do your homework and you will have another tool to maximize your potential in the international business world. 



## Etiquette & Protocol

**By Kathleen Harvey Harshberger**

### Executive Summary:

*Don't give the Chinese clocks or four of anything to a Korean. And for heaven's sake, don't give somebody from the Middle East a hanky.*



## License vs. franchise >

If your small business model has proven successful, you may be considering licensing or franchising. So, what would it mean to license or franchise your own business?

Licensing and franchising are legally distinct terms. It's important to know what they entail. Franchising is more legally demanding and includes the following three elements, according to Clark Worthy, an attorney at Roanoke law firm Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore:

- Use of a trademark. The franchisee operates a business identified with the franchisor's trademark, trade name, or some form of intellectual property.
- Operating control. The franchisor exerts significant control over the method of operation.
- Payment. The franchisor charges a fee, amounting to at least \$500.

If the agreement meets the description of a franchise, federal and state offices will consider it one. If you fit the franchise description but you are setup as a license, there could be significant legal ramifications. The cost for a law firm to set up a franchise, including the required Franchise Disclosure Document, is about \$30,000, says Worthy.

An alternative to franchising is the licensing agreement, which typically costs \$10,000-\$15,000. The licensee has the right to use the licensing company's business materials. The company retains ownership of its intellectual property and the licensee pays a yearly renewable fee.

In a licensing agreement, a company does not have control over what the licensee does with its materials, except with regard to infringement or unauthorized use. The licensee operates its own business plan and has more autonomy than a franchisee. If you are okay with little control, the licensing relationship can work for you.

Be certain to copyright and trademark your proprietary materials to prevent theft of intellectual property. This advice

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is especially important for companies that license. "If clients are at the point of considering either franchising or licensing, they likely have a successful business, idea or product. They will want to make sure it is protected." says Worthy.

After researching both methods, you may decide that neither of these is right for you.

Roanoke-based Crowning Touch recently explored the option of expanding its business through franchising. The business, which provides a variety of services including moving, consignment, and auctions, has operated for 17 years and is ready to grow, says Linda Balentine, founder and president.

Instead of borrowing money to grow her business, Balentine presented her case to a team of investors. They encouraged her to pursue a corporate expansion instead, which will allow her to keep the profits. Balentine is putting together a team of investors and looking to expand into Northern Virginia with her business. "I felt I had a unique idea, and I wanted to replicate it," says Balentine.

It takes a great deal of time and effort to expand your business. Make sure you understand your options and which is best for your business. 

## Small Business

By Samantha Steidle

### Executive Summary:

*If growth of your successful business is the goal, there are a couple of ways to go. One is probably right for you.*



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# Financial Matters

## Minimizing your taxes >

### Executive Summary:

*You have to pay them, but if you're careful, you won't have to pay so much.*

### By Pete Krull

There has been a lot written about taxes in the last year. From the presidential campaign to the “fiscal cliff” to the debt ceiling, politicians, pundits and ordinary citizens are keeping the subject alive and well.

The truth is that nobody really likes to pay taxes. If taxes had a Facebook page, it would have few followers. Many people realize the importance of paying taxes, however—from roads to schools to police and fire, taxes support those services that support us. Paying a fair amount based on your income is, well, fair.

All of that being said, there are several options and strategies that a law-abiding taxpayer can use to minimize tax liability. I'll share a few of my favorites with you here.

1. Participate in your company's retirement plan. In 2013, your 401(k), 403(b) or 457 contribution limit is \$17,500. It's \$23,000 if you're over 50. Most companies match a portion of your contribution, as well. That's free money for you. The amount you contribute is deducted from your taxable income and set aside for your retirement—what a great way to limit taxes and save.
2. Open an Individual Retirement Account (IRA.) The contribution limit

for 2013 is \$5,500 or \$6,500 if you're over 50. Now there are two types of IRA, a traditional and a Roth. The traditional is tax-deductible and will minimize your current tax liability while the Roth is not tax-deductible, but grows tax free. Your choice, but either way, you can't go wrong.

3. Alternative energy. We made the decision in 2012 to put solar panels on the roof of our house. While it was a major investment, we did get the advantage of a major federal tax incentive. Unfortunately Virginia does not have legislation in place for tax credits.
4. Efficiency upgrades. The Feds give a 30 percent tax credit, which goes a long way to making the system affordable. There are both Virginia and Federal tax incentives for making your home more efficient. Virginia will credit you 20 percent of the taxes paid on a number of Energy Star appliances and heating and air conditioning systems. Federally, tax credits are available for everything from windows and insulation to air conditioners and heat pumps. We installed a heat-pump hot water tank and will receive a \$300 tax credit. The water heater is 62 percent more efficient than a traditional one.

No matter what your motivation, there are any number of ways to minimize your tax obligation. Make sure to consult with your accountant or financial advisor before implementing any of these strategies as the laws do change often (the federal tax credit on windows, insulation, air conditioners, heat-pump hot water tanks was just extended as part of the “fiscal cliff bill” passed on January 1.) 

*Peter Krull is President and Founder of Krull & Company, an investment management firm specializing in socially and environmentally responsible investing. He can be reached at 877-235-3684 or [www.krullandcompany.com](http://www.krullandcompany.com).*



Liv Kiser

**Monica Monday:** "In private law firms across the board there has been difficulty retaining women. A lot of it is, the law is a demanding profession."

## A crack in the glass ceiling >

### Executive Summary:

*Only a few major law firms in Virginia have female managing partners. Gentry Locke is now one of them.*

### By Randolph Walker

When Monica Monday interviewed for a job at Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore, she had a gut feeling she was in the right place. Monica and the firm proved to be an excellent

match. In December, she became only the third managing partner Gentry Locke has had since the 1970s.

"Monica is a highly respected lawyer within our firm and by the bar and judiciary as a whole," says William R. Rakes, the firm's first managing partner, and who is still active.

Her immediate predecessor, Michael Pace, will continue his practice in business and real estate law, as well as his involvement in the Center for Teaching the Rule of Law at Roanoke College.

Nationally, only about 8 percent of the top 200 law firms have female managing partners, even though law schools have graduated 50

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percent women for the past 15 to 20 years. Only a few of the major law firms in Virginia have female managing partners.

"Some women leave to raise families," says Monica, 46. "In private law firms across the board there has been difficulty retaining women. A lot of it is, the law is a demanding profession."

Gentry Locke has accommodated working moms, as well as employees with health problems or those approaching retirement, with flexible work schedules. "I was a beneficiary of that," says Monica, who has a 9-year-old son. "The year I was eligible for equity partnership, I was pregnant. I asked the firm to make me an equity partner, but on a part-time basis [i.e., working part-time]. It was unusual for us. It had never been requested or explored. I credit the firm for being open to that idea. It sure made it a lot easier to be sitting where I am today."

From her office as managing partner—roughly equivalent to a CEO—she'll be handling day to day management as well as overseeing long-term planning.

Gentry Locke, which has about 50 lawyers, dates its history to the founding of a predecessor firm in 1923. One of Monica's first tasks is implementing an existing strategic plan aimed at maintaining the internal culture of Gentry Locke as "a fun and productive workplace."

"The economic changes that have occurred since 2008 have put pressure on firms. The

market for legal services has changed." Many firms had to lay off lawyers or cut salaries. "We were very fortunate in that we were largely able to avoid that."

That's partly because the Roanoke Valley has been less hard-hit than some other areas, she says.

Another priority is maintaining Gentry Locke's involvement in community organizations. Monica is on the board of the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville, where she lives.

She's also active in professional organizations, as a member of the Virginia Bar Association's Appellate Practice Section Council and chair of the Appellate Practice Committee of the Virginia State Bar Litigation Section.

After obtaining her law degree from William & Mary in 1991, Monica clerked for the chief judge of the Court of Appeals of Virginia. "The work of an appellate lawyer is a little different than the work of a trial lawyer," she says. "A trial lawyer builds a case. Once an appellate lawyer gets the case, the case is all over—the facts are in, the judge has ruled. The appellate lawyer is the forensic medical examiner of the case. We take an existing case record and figure out what happened and whether there was an error in the trial court.

"It's a lot of focused analytical work. I get to closely study a lot of legal issues, which I enjoy." 

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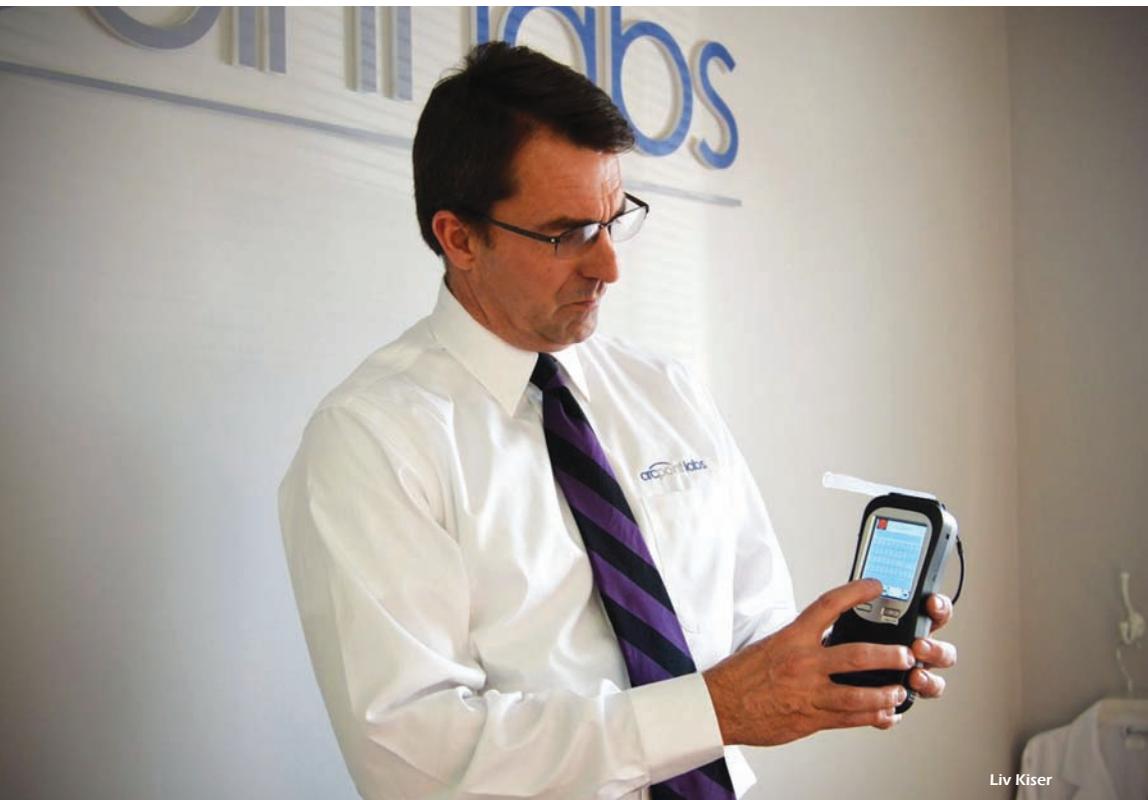


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Liv Kiser

**Jeff Howard: "We got up in the morning and put on our suits and went out and found jobs."**

## The franchise and the homefront >

### Executive Summary:

*A drug-testing franchise, ARCpoint Labs, met Jeff Howard's requirement for a business that would let him stay home at night.*

### By Randolph Walker

Jeff Howard was making six figures selling technology to auto dealers in Virginia and West Virginia, but success came at a price. "You're away from home a lot when you have a territory," he says.

Jeff had to drop off the board of Pathfinders for Greenways, which supports the Roanoke Valley's greenway program, because he couldn't make the meetings. He couldn't make choir practice. He was in and out of the lives of his children and fiancée.

He started thinking about opening his own business. "I wanted to go the franchise route versus a straight startup," he says. Based partly on his interest in health and wellness, Jeff decided to open a location of ARCpoint

Labs, which bills itself as the nation's largest drug testing franchise. ARC stands for Accurate, Reliable, Confidential.

Corporate offices are in Greenville, S.C., and Jeff's new Salem location is on East Main Street ([www.arcpointlabs.com/salem](http://www.arcpointlabs.com/salem)).

"It's primarily a business to business sales model," he says. "You can operate the business with a pretty small staff. I employ a client services manager and she basically runs the operation when I'm out trying to generate new business."

ARCpoint offers drug and alcohol testing for employers, government agencies, and individuals. Some samples can be tested on the spot; others are sent off. Jeff and his manager are certified to collect hair, urine, breath and saliva samples. He plans to eventually be certified for blood collection.

"In drug testing, there's mandated testing and non-mandated," Jeff says. "Truck drivers, pilots, railroad workers, they are required by law to be in a drug testing program. Non-mandated would be a company that wants to put a program in place because they see the benefit. You can drive profitability by reducing worker

turnover and absenteeism, and increasing productivity. In the state of Virginia if you have a drug-free workplace program in effect, you're eligible for up to a five percent discount on your workers' comp insurance. So there's a big economic driver to have a program in place."

Other services to business include background checks and workers' comp reports.

The Roanoke Valley's drug-testing waters are already being fished by several other companies. In hopes of building business, Jeff is shaking a lot of hands. He has joined both chambers (Roanoke Regional and Salem-Roanoke County) and the Society for Human Resource Management, and has attended meetings of the Salem Rotary and Roanoke StartUp MeetUp.

Jeff, who is 54, adds ARCpoint to a varied business resume that includes service as president/GM at Blue Ridge New Holland (a tractor and equipment dealership), and marketing manager at Novozymes Biologicals.

An Ohio native, Jeff graduated from Ohio State with a degree in business administration. But one of his first decisions wasn't based on business. He and his then-wife chose the Roanoke Valley because of its mountains and outdoor recreation opportunities and reasonable proximity to the beach. "It was really a quality of life decision," he says now. "We had our suits and our resumes. We found a campground and set up a tent. We got up in the morning and put on our suits and went out and found jobs."

A few years later, they put careers on hold to backpack around the world—26 countries on six continents. He's physically fit—he ran his first marathon a year ago. But he doesn't want to come across as a "drug-testing Nazi."

A positive test result, even if it results in a termination, can benefit the employee in the long run, he says. "If someone has a substance abuse problem, having a wake-up call may be what they need to find help." 



Liv Kiser

"Samples can be tested on the spot."

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## Tech Scoop

### Mixed signals on moving traffic? >

#### Executive Summary:

*Moving traffic at something faster than the speed of an ice floe is a huge challenge for science.*

#### By Michael Miller

My brother-in-law from New York City once told me that a “nanosecond” is defined as the amount of time from the instant the traffic light turns green until the guy behind you sounds his horn. I laughed until I was in the car with him in Manhattan, when I determined that a nanosecond was actually much longer than that interval.

The point of this anecdote is that we all wish something could be done about traffic signals. When I was a kid reading *Popular Mechanics*, I never worried about this because according to that publication we should have been traveling in flying cars by now, but that is a different issue. Even though science has let us down in the flying car area, we should still expect that traffic should move faster and more safely through intersections, given all the fancy new technology installed on our roadways. But apparently, such is not the case.

Recent studies conducted by the National Transportation Operations Coalition scored the operation of the 265,000 traffic signals in the US as a D-minus, citing unnecessary delays, increased fuel consumption and increased pollution as major results of poor signal operation. The primary reason for these problems is precisely the old detection and control technology that has never been replaced, even though better technology exists.

Hesham Rakha, director of the Center for Sustainable Mobility at the Virginia Tech



Michael Miller

Transportation Institute, spends a lot of time studying traffic flow, especially in intersections. In one of his research programs, Rakha is using GPS units in cars to provide data to traffic simulations that could help program traffic signal operation to alleviate congestion.

In one of his more fascinating research projects, Rakha uses the Smart Road to study drivers’ behavior as they approach intersections. Rakha has found that if the yellow light times are not set long enough, the driver approaching an intersection finds himself in a “dilemma zone.” In this zone, the driver is going too fast to stop, but doesn’t have enough time to make it through the intersection before the light turns red, so he can’t make a decision. This unpredictable behavior is what causes accidents. Only about one percent of drivers will cross the intersection on a red light, but more than 20 percent of traffic fatalities occur in intersections.

I am hopeful that this sort of research will eventually lead to more effective traffic flow, which in turn will significantly lower my blood pressure. But, for me at least, until they install better technology, yellow just means hit the accelerator.

And if any of my police friends are reading this, I’m just kidding. 



Randolph Walker

**Dan Motley of Norfolk Southern: "I'm tasked with knowing where the sites are, and the local contacts, and having relationships with those folks."**

## Just another customer service >

### **Executive Summary:**

*Norfolk Southern's corporate industrial developer Dan Motley helps keep the region's economy on track.*

### **By Randolph Walker**

When Mennel Milling Company was considering the relocation of its Jefferson Street flour mill to Roanoke County, Dan Motley had to come up with some answers.

Mennel needed to make sure the site could be adequately served by rail.

"We worked with them for several years when they were relocating from what is now the Biomed Center to Starkey

Road," says Motley, Norfolk Southern's industrial development manager for Western Virginia and West Virginia ([www.nscorp.com](http://www.nscorp.com)). "It was a vacant piece of ground. We did a lot of conceptual plans. We did that here for no charge to make sure it would work."

Work it did. Mennel's new \$32 million facility opened in 2007, making way for Carilion Clinic's expanding health care park as well as doubling Mennel's capacity in Roanoke.

While public/private organizations like the Roanoke Regional Partnership may be better known to the public, corporate economic developers like Motley still play a critical role.

Utilities also have development experts, and "engineering firms are big into this," he says.

So is Norfolk Southern. In 2012, its industrial development managers assisted in the

location of 64 new industries and the expansion of 30 existing industries along its rail lines. New plants and expansions represented an investment of \$2.1 billion by Norfolk Southern customers and are expected to create more than 6,100 jobs in the railroad's territory.

This is shaping up as another busy year for Motley, a native of Rocky Mount. He's 2013 chairman of both the Southern Economic Development Council and the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce, in addition to his railroad duties.

"I'm tasked with knowing where the sites are, and the local contacts, and having relationships with those folks," says Motley, who is based at Norfolk Southern's office building on Franklin Road in Roanoke. "In Virginia there's regional partnerships all over the state. In West Virginia, it's mainly the state or the counties we deal with.

"The thing I get asked a lot: 'Can you build track onto a site and what's it going to cost, how long's it going to take to build?'"

The question may come indirectly, through a consultant.

"Many times a company will want to be anonymous and they will hire a consultant to lead the search. They'll give a consultant a list of requirements—how many acres they need, how many employees and what skill set,

and what area they want to look at, and the consultant will start collecting data and building a list of acceptable sites."

At some point, incentives will enter the conversation. "That's part of the game nowadays. However, I've noticed states [including Virginia] starting to build clawbacks into their incentives, which means if the company locates but doesn't perform, they have to pay the money back."

Motley is sometimes the prospect's first contact, but usually not the only one. He stresses the collaborative nature of his job.

"I work with the Roanoke Regional Partnership in helping it be prepared for industry prospects, manufacturers typically. We work together to locate sites and do plans in advance to show how a railroad track can be built to a site. When prospects show up, we will go to the meetings as part of the team," which also includes utilities and municipalities.

"To be part of the business community is very important to us."

He's part of another team as well—the military. As a captain in the Navy Reserve, he serves as Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans for the First Naval Construction Division—getting things built for the Marines and other military branches. 

1983 ... 2013 ... tomorrow



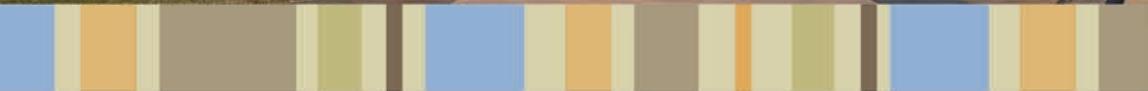
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all photos: Dan Smith

Teresa Martin tries on a mask.

## Dress-up for fun ... and profit >

### Executive Summary:

*Teresa Martin of Fantasy Creations in Roanoke has been dressing people in costumes for a lot of years and discovered early on that an avocation can become a vocation without a lot of trouble.*

By Dan Smith

There's an adage about leaving kids alone when they're playing because they could be learning a career. Teresa Martin is a walking, talking, selling example that there's more than a grain of truth in that.

The owner of Fantasy Creations in Roanoke started this gig when she was a little girl who enjoyed playing dress-up. She learned to make costumes as a kid and began loaning them to people. The requests started pouring in and after college at Marshall University (business major), things started falling into place



Wall o' masks.



Fantasy Creations, an outside view.

and a part-time avocation became an entrepreneur's first—and she hopes last—business.

She's been in business 30 years (a very youthful looking 56, she is), nine on Williamson Road in a big, old house that

fits the part well. She has as many as six employees during season. The house is filled to brimming with costumes of all varieties, some for rent (like the 12 Santas, which pretty much stay gone through Christmas), a lot for sale. They go out the door for corporate events, parades,



19th Century hats are the new sensation.



**Teresa Martin with Boba Fett.**

church plays and even some of the local theater groups rent them when their own stocks are low.

When she began the business "I made about 80 percent of the costumes. Now I only do repairs. Just don't have time to make them any more." The quality of the commercially made costumes is not as good as her hand-mades, she says, "and I want the best," but there's that time thing again.

Room after room is filled with costumes of characters from literature, the movies, television and just good imaginations. Colors are primary and there's lots of fuzz. There are fancy masks for the ball, Star Wars uniforms, witches and goblins, the whole Santa clan, princesses' dresses and tiaras, 19th Century Steampunk hats and cases full of accessories. The place is a gold mine for browsing.

Costumes rent for \$10 to \$75 and sell for up to \$800 (Boba Fett's duds go for that, but for \$1,100 elsewhere). "I just sold a Bumblebee Transformer for \$300," she says, smiling. "It sells for \$500 elsewhere." Teresa smiles a lot when she's talking about her people.

She mostly supplies locally, but she's fascinated by the national conferences like DragonCon in Atlanta where the serious gamers show up to examine what's new. "In the big cities, they spend a lot of money," she says. Not so much here, though, because the clubs are smaller.

She still loves the idea—if not so much the practice these days—of designing and making the costumes. "If you mess up, who ever knows it?" she says.

The shop is a happy place. "Everybody comes in here in a good mood," says Teresa. "They're playing dress-up."

She doesn't just sell this stuff. "I dress up and go out for fun," she says. "I'll do this until I drop over dead." 🍷



**Fuzzy critter section.**



**Costume central.**



Randolph Walker

Howard Packett with one of his campaign combs.

## Finally slowing down >

### Executive Summary:

*PR man and former politician Howard Packett takes a few moments to look back on life.*

### By Randolph Walker

As he walks from his car to his office on a hill off U.S. 220—he still goes to work every morning—Howard Packett can look across a broad stretch of South Roanoke.

He can also survey a life that's been filled with business success, public service, family, and probably a million jokes, many at his own expense.

"I've been lucky," he says from behind his desk at the Pheasant Ridge senior living community. "I've got everything I came into this world with except one tooth and my hair."

Howard is winding down a career that has covered journalism, politics and advertising.

He grew up in the rural Northern Neck—the peninsula between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. His father was a

Coca-Cola bottler. After serving in the Marine Corps, Howard earned a journalism degree from Washington & Lee.

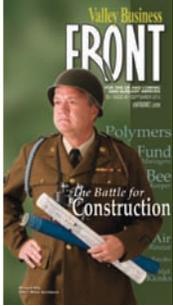
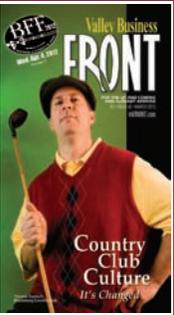
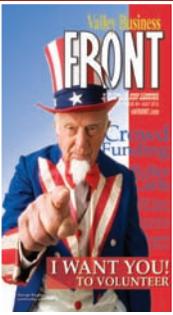
In 1959 he and his new bride, Jane, moved to Salem, where Howard managed The Roanoke Times bureau. A few years later they bought the house on Red Lane where they still live.

Sometime in the 1960s—he doesn't recall the exact date—he was invited by Cecil Edmonds and Cabell Brand to join the advertising agency Brand Edmonds, which later became the Edmonds Packett Group. In the '70s Howard became a partner and the agency moved to downtown Roanoke. The agency is now Neathawk, Dubuque & Packett.

In spite of his easygoing demeanor, Howard wasn't immune to stress.

One day he noticed he was losing hair in his eyebrows. Over the next six weeks his hair disappeared. An endocrinologist diagnosed a rare condition called alopecia and said it may have been stress-related.

Nowadays half the men you meet have shaved heads, but in the 1980s it wasn't so common. "People would shy away from me,



# Coming Up...

## April 2013

### Wind Energy

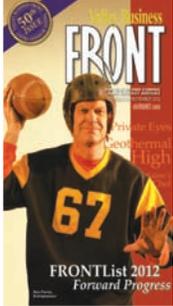
Breakthroughs at Virginia Tech, tax incentives for development, and domination of the industry by the Chinese are driving an urgency in this form of minimally-polluting energy. What's happening in this region? A lot. Read all about it in April.



## May 2013

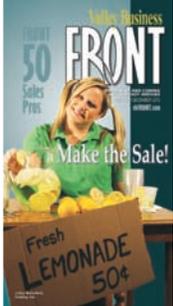
### Real Estate

In May, we'll see if real estate is on a distinct comeback trail. And to what extent it's being led by consumer need, a strengthening economy, and banks, builders, architects and others throughout the industry who are driving it.



### FRONTguide

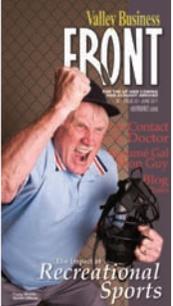
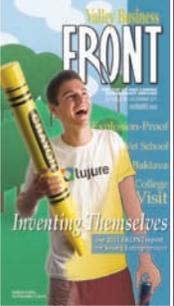
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think I had cancer," he recalls. "It really is traumatic in a way, [but] it didn't slow me down.

"The hardest thing is not having eyebrows, eyelashes and nose hair. People don't realize how you miss those." On the other hand, he says, he has no gray hair.

Using his head, as it were, Howard figured out how to turn his hairless scalp into an asset. He gave out promotional combs (he still has some) during a Salem City Council race, which he won, and during his House of Delegates race against Morgan Griffith, which he lost. "I may have to run again just to get rid of the combs," he deadpans.

He served on Salem City Council 24 years, including two as mayor. "I enjoyed council. Some people say they don't like politics. I loved it. I was involved in so many projects."

Many of those extended beyond the Salem city limits. "I was criticized for that. People said 'Take care of Salem first.'" However, "once I got into those regional projects they seemed to make more sense to me."

Howard helped start the Western Virginia Water Authority and help get funding for a new building for CHIP (Child Health Investment Partnership) of Roanoke Valley. He served on the boards of the Science Museum of Western Virginia, the Virginia Museum of Transportation, the United Way and the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission. "I think it was because

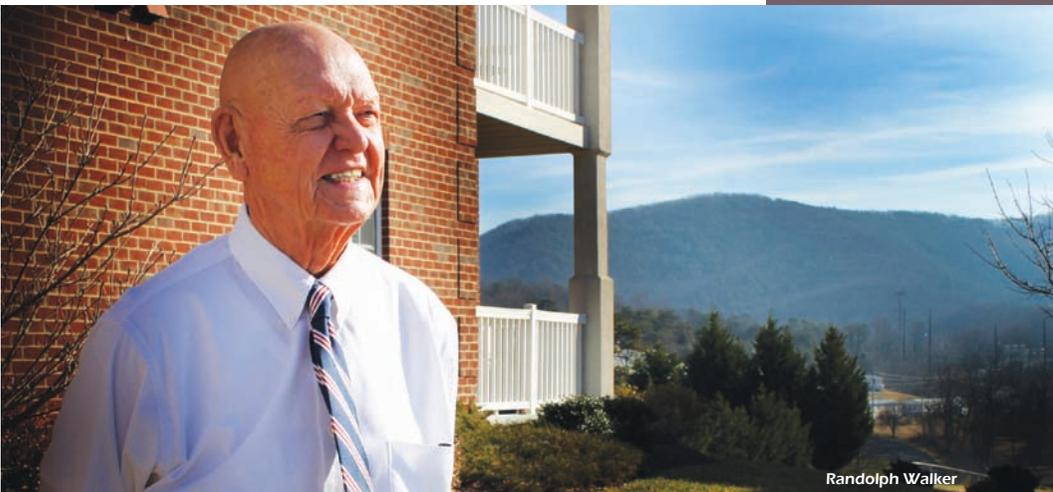
## In Brief

**Name:** Howard Packett  
**Age:** 80  
**Type of Business:** Public relations and marketing consultant  
**Location:** Roanoke County  
**Background:** Born in Westmoreland County. Served in the military during the Korean War. Experience includes newspaper reporting, copywriting, advertising sales and service, marketing and real estate sales. Lives in Salem. Wife, Jane; two sons, John and Mark; three grandchildren. "Thank God Mark lives in Salem 'cause I got my grandbaby to play with."

I was in the advertising business and everybody wants free PR," he says, with self-deprecation.

His other business ventures included Smith/Packett Med-Com, a senior housing and health care developer. He also keeps a real estate license.

Howard is retired from the ad agency and his involvement in Smith/Packett is limited to consulting on PR and marketing for South Peak, the company's multi-use project near Tanglewood Mall. He has turned down a few offers to work for other people. "I've had enough stress, I lost my hair," he says. 



Randolph Walker

**Howard Packett:** "When you're 80 years old you can't expect to do but so much but be alive."



Becky Hepler

**Environmental Health Specialist Kasey Agee reviews health regs with CEO Joel Hunter.**

## Smooth(ie) operation >

### **Executive Summary:**

*At Blacksburg High School, students get a solid course in business management ... by running a business.*

### **By Becky Hepler**

Imagine getting a paycheck as well as a grade for a class. That's why Krishan Puri, a senior at Blacksburg High School, signed up for the Dual Enrollment Business Management last spring. A senior who is headed for Virginia Tech next year, most likely in business, the class seemed a good fit. But also, "I saw my friends getting paid," he says.

The Business Management students get paid because they learn how to run a business by running a business. According

to teacher Toni Piccariello, for the last 11 years the Business Management class has had the real life practicum of creating and running a business as part of the class curriculum.

"We started out selling coffee and calling it True Brewin'," she says. Brewin', she notes, is an homage to the school's mascot, a bruin. However, health concerns sent the caffeine packing and a subsequent class decided on smoothies, thus Real Good Smoothies (RGS) was born.

While each class has the option to create a new business, all have opted to take advantage of the built-in marketing bonus of brand recognition and this makes the eighth year for RGS.

Competition gets fierce for the CEO position. Applying students must create a business plan, prepare a resume and be interviewed by representatives of the Society of Human Resource Management.

"This way it's not a popularity contest, but strictly [based upon] the best candidate," says Piccariello. Under the CEO is a president who supervises the vice presidents of the various departments, including finance, human resources, plant production, R&D and marketing. Everyone within the class has a specific job.

The business gets its seed capital from the profits of past year's effort, and the students sell stock in the business, usually to parents, teachers and students. It has been a successful venture and last year's 100 percent return on the investment had one teacher quipping that she wished RGS could manage her retirement fund.

This year's classes elected to do profit sharing instead of salaries. "It would have been more realistic if they had to worry about payrolls," Piccariello says. "At any rate, they love getting that check because it comes close to prom."

Since RGS is a food business, the students learn all of the health regulations that apply to their operations. Kasey Agee, Environmental Health Specialist with the Montgomery County Public Health



Becky Hepler

**Connor Davis and Wynne Darden mix up a new batch of smoothies.**

Department, used a class period to review best practices. "A smoothie operation is not as big or as complex as a restaurant, so this should be easier for them," he says.

Joel Hunter, CEO for the sixth period Business Management class and a senior who is hoping to go to the Naval Academy, came to the class for the leadership potential it offered and immediately

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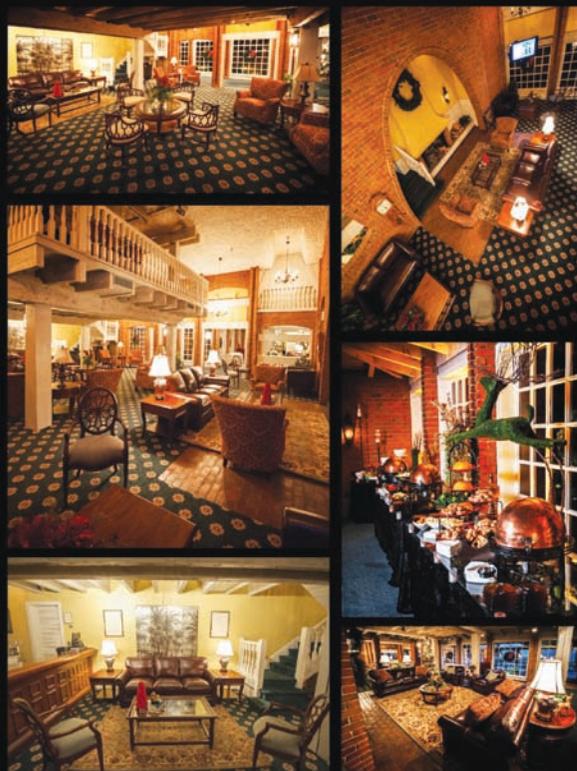
Becky Hepler

Lindsey Cusimano and Garland Smith serve up the smoothie.

began to understand some of the pressures. One of his first duties was to select the vice presidents. While some of his friends wanted the marketing position, he knew other candidates were more qualified. "The goal is to make as much money as possible, so you have to have the right people in place," he says.

Connor Davis, another senior is in the class because he likes math. As Hunter's president, he is in charge of overseeing the vice presidents and he also is learning interesting leadership truths. "Some days it's harder than others to keep everyone motivated and doing their job," he says. "But if you can get their respect, you can get the work done." 

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Dan Smith

Drew and Patti Lucas on their Harley.

## On the road again ... >

### Executive Summary:

*When Drew and Patti Lucas hit the road, they hit it hard and long and it's changed their lives.*

### By Dan Smith

There finally came a day when Drew and Patti Lucas couldn't put off the dream any more. So they got on the Harley and started making short trips, sort of practice runs. The big stuff would come a bit later. But it felt right from Day 1.

Patti had burned out in corporate controller executive positions and Drew's carpet cleaning business (Certified Carpet Cleaners) was more than 20 years old and pretty much running itself. They'd hit their mid-50s and were in financial position to live the dream. So they did.

The first iteration of the dream had begun with physical exertions, triathlons and

marathons and the like. "She was a cross-fit addict," says Drew, chuckling. But riding that big black bike, even after Drew had piled it up a couple of times and had to have one of his legs screwed back together, was looking better and better all the time.

"I was going to take a year off and make some trips with Drew," says Patti now. He'd been wandering out by himself and she wanted to go. She didn't drive a bike, but she was comfortable in the passenger seat. It's been three years now—four trips a year—and there's no end in sight.

They've traveled to 44 states and piled up "between 25,000 and 30,000 miles," says Drew. One of the east-west-and-back trips was 7,800 miles.

Drew's still running his carpet business in Roanoke and Patti has set up Blackbird Consulting and does some bookkeeping (she's a CPA). She had been an executive washroom keyholder at RBX and Optical Cable before retiring.

The lure of the road isn't just the road.



Drew watching for bears.



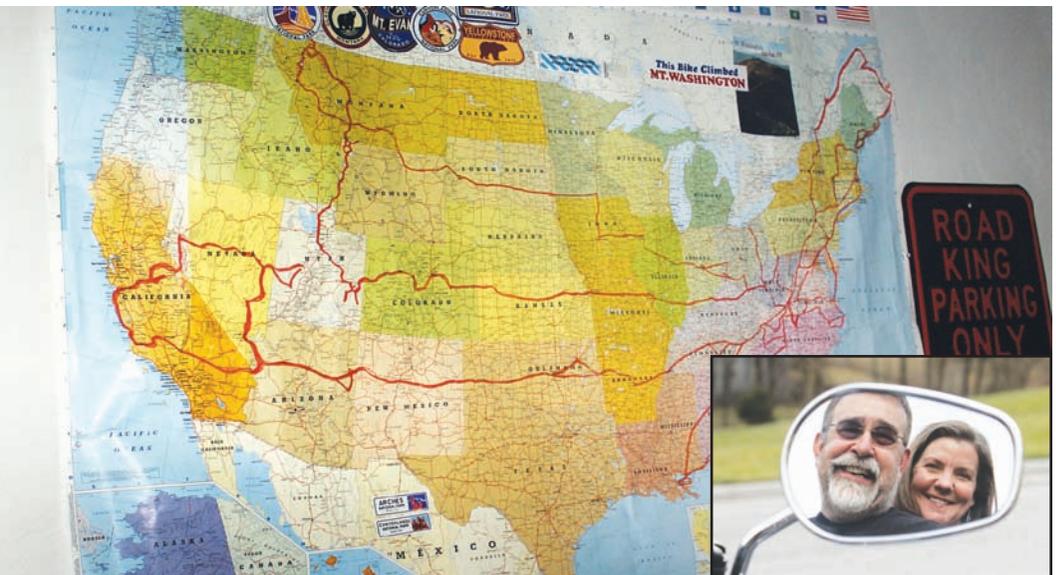
Drew and Patti at a western overlook.

Both Drew and Patti are outgoing, talkative people who've made friends along the way, visited hundreds of small diners and stores where they become part of the community for an hour or so and get mail from the people they meet. "Drew has invited no fewer than 30 people to come stay with us," says Patti, shaking her head.

This whole thing started, says Patti, "when I came home from work one day and said, 'You remember I said I wanted to retire

at 58? I can't wait.' I gave a seven-month notice so [her employer] could find a replacement and we took a 10-day trip to the Grand Canyon. I'd never had two weeks in a row off before." She liked it.

Drew had been planning some long trips alone, but had two wrecks in six months and Patti thought, "What an idiot to get back on [the bike]." But then she looked at his plans: Asheville, Pittsburgh, New Orleans ... She was hooked.



Here's where they've been.

For the first big one—to California—she flew out and he drove. She rode back. She discovered in the process that “Drew’s a map geek. Loves maps.” And he’s an inveterate planner. He figures out interesting twists for trips and “we were gone five weeks without having a fight,” says Patti. “We’ve always travelled well together.” Part of that has to do with the fact that “as a passenger, I don’t have to do anything,” says Patti. They had head sets, but don’t wear them any more because they don’t talk while riding. She discovered that on long trips, it’s not your butt that hurts, but “your knees. I have to stretch occasionally.”

Drew has worried little about his company. “Most of the guys have been with me a long time,” he says, “and when we go on a trip, I tell them not to call me unless it’s an emergency. I don’t want anybody calling, saying, ‘What do I do?’ Just do it.” He handles finances from the road with a laptop or iPad. “I don’t

want to be driving this bike and worrying about something at the office. If I can’t make a difference, I don’t want to know about [office problems].”

“I can’t believe this is our life,” says Patti. “I love it. I can’t imagine anyone who wouldn’t like our life.” Even with the adventures: the biker gang near run-in, the brushes with grizzlies and bison, the wicked rainstorms ...

“It makes me appreciate how much we like being with each other,” says Drew. “We talk.” Then he says, “We have the luxury of not having to do things that don’t make sense to us.”

At the time of the interview was a trip to Costa Rica, riding on what Drew calls “Tea Party roads, the roads the Tea Party would maintain ... or not.” That’ll be 30 days nonstop. Which is pretty much how life goes for the Lucases. 

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# The essence of courage >

## My View

By **Dan Smith**  
Editor

BLOG: [ [fromtheeditr.blogspot.com](http://fromtheeditr.blogspot.com) ]

**Excutive Summary:** *Sometimes being a journalist leads to a high level of gratitude.*

I've been sitting behind a typewriter or keyboard for 18 months short of 50 years now and rarely in that half a century have I had a story affect me as deeply as our cover story this month. I have a tendency to be cynical about the state of the human condition—and if you look at Washington and Richmond, how can you not be? But this story restores faith in ways I could not have imagined.

It is a long story—5,100 words give or take—but it doesn't read long because it is of struggle and triumph. The 15 people profiled are not extraordinary and that makes the piece even more telling of who we are: proud people with a great work ethic, courageous Americans who don't give up in the face of overwhelming odds.

I was touched by their stories: Jessica whose method of communication is a dot in the middle of her head, tied to a computer; Liv, the gutty and enthusiastic teenager whose diabetes could kill her; Thomas, whose divorce became the office's divorce; Pam, the bounding alcoholic whose exuberance puts a new face on a terrible disease; Clay, who has learned to walk with a prosthetic and adjust his life; Carol, whose pain and lack of mobility proved an inspiration to her and not a ball and chain. All of their stories are powerful, ordinary and moving.

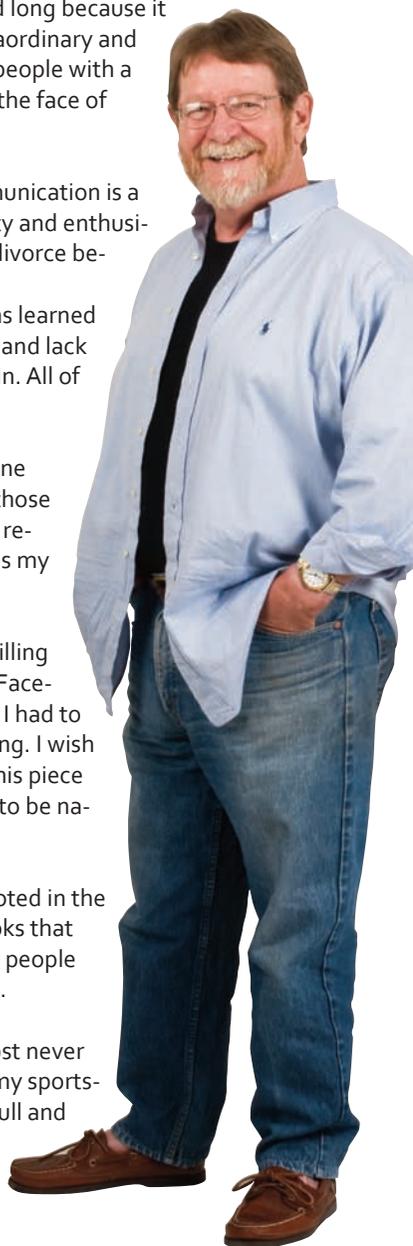
This story came about because I was feeling sorry for myself one evening. In recent years, I have faced some of the mountains those in our story face daily: alcoholism, diabetes, divorce and most recently joint replacement. We won't even go into old age, but as my friend Betsy Gehman insists, "It ain't for sissies."

I thought it would be difficult to impossible to find 15 of you willing to tell your stories publicly, but it wasn't. I put out a notice on Facebook, looking for people to interview and got a flood of them. I had to narrow the list and it was difficult, but the stories are compelling. I wish we had the room to tell them all and I'm being urged to turn this piece into a book (which is not likely to happen, since it would need to be national in scope and I'm already working on two books).

Scott Geller, the Virginia Tech psychology professor who is quoted in the story (he has prostate cancer), has already written several books that touch on the topic and he's living it daily. He says contact with people like the ones I've met inspire him and I can see what he means.

Mine is a profession I've always felt grateful to practice. I almost never find a story to be of little or no interest—as I often did during my sports-writing days many years ago (sports figures are all too often dull and of limited scope). Some stories stick with you for a lifetime: the airplane crash that killed 97 when I was just a kid; the

continued on Page 52



## No More Experts >

By Tom Field  
Publisher

## On Tap from the Pub

Doctors, scientists, engineers: you're ok. For now.

We still need your expertise. Your skill is required for our surgeries, our miracle formulas, and our power plants. But for everything else, we can figure it out ourselves, thank you very much.

Need to replace a fuel pump on your car? Type your make, model, and problem in YouTube, and you'll get a step-by-step video on how to fix it. No mechanic needed.

Need a great TV commercial for the Superbowl? Ask your customers (or anyone) to send one in. No ad agency needed.

Need some good content for your newspaper? Enroll some citizen journalists, and you won't even have to pay for it. No professional writer needed.

Need a will, a corporation filing, a divorce? A quick visit to [legalzoom.com](http://legalzoom.com) ought to do it. No lawyer needed.

And don't even get me started with photographers, website developers, social media consultants, home repair services, contractors, financial advisors, stockbrokers, technicians, real estate agents, chefs, counselors, teachers, preachers, producers, artists, actors, musicians. You're crazy if you're spending a lot of money with these professionals.

Who needs a so-called expert?

Have you seen what is being created and produced by average Joes who are often more passionate and talented than their licensed or certified or trained counterparts?

There's the rub.

Indeed, the examples of truly great work from non-professionals are out there. We often forget though, that we see these demonstrations because they *are* phenomenal and extraordinary. We forget that, in many cases, superior performance is the exception, not the standard. In some professions, the ratio might be 1:100. One really excellent product comparable to the professionals out of one hundred efforts. If it doesn't matter that much, you probably don't need a pro. Is Fido not going to sleep in his doghouse because the corner isn't true and the trimwork isn't flush?

Professional or amateur, it's not always easy to find the true expert.

But don't let our incredible expanding knowledge-based society fool us into thinking we *never* need one. Our grandparents were right: You get what you pay for. For the most part. 



## Smith / My View

from Page 50

story on the home life—mostly bad—of a group of obsessive softball players; the interview with Carl Sandburg when I was 18 and just starting (it didn't go well); sitting in a major country singer's bus and watching him snort coke during our interview; the "Remember the Titans" football game in Roanoke; and quite a few others, some award winners, most not.

The stories that stick, and the ones that don't make mine a profession that I consider special. I go to work every day not knowing who I will meet. Some days I run into people like those on the cover of this month's issue. And I feel blessed. 

“Don't give four of anything to a Japanese or Korean client. It's like our number 13

— Page 23

### Seydric Williams



- *Executive Director of K-5 Instruction for Roanoke City Schools*
- *Graduate of UNC Charlotte & NC State*
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## Letters

### Planes & Trains

I have visited or worked in all 50 states and seven countries. During the 70's and 80's, I was based in Roanoke. I flew 36 flights in 21 days, three weeks after 9/11 from the ABC airport. I also completed my MBA thesis on Airline Deregulation in 1977. I interviewed the presidents of several airlines including Frank Borman and Leslie Barnes. I have flown into most significant airports in the U.S. and on all the major airlines and aircraft. My consulting projects include an FAA Aircraft Parts Reseller (this is another story and if I were to go into that, you would never want to fly on a small aircraft). So I know airports and airlines.

In reading your article, I surmised that you were mostly interviewing cheerleaders. Did you expect them to be analytical? They are promoters and mostly for their own jobs.

Roanoke missed the boat, uh plane, when in the late 80's they did not pursue a regional airport with Lynchburg in a location near Bedford that did not have weather problems. Neither airport will attract a significant carrier in their current locations because of runway lengths and weather. But by 2018 they may be able to attract a slow train. The planned high speed rail from Bangor,

ME to New Orleans will have a stop in Greensboro and Greenville. Where are intelligent businesses going to locate? Do the math.

Currently funds could be spent more productively if the proposed I-73 corridor were to contain a high speed monorail in the middle that would link both to the GSO airport and the Amtrak high speed rail. It is not too late for this to be pursued with intelligent leadership.

Chris Morrill and Bob Clements of the City of Roanoke are very intelligent people who sponsored the Roanoke Innovation Leadership College last year. This type of event and training should be sponsored by all the cities in this region. Perhaps we then could discover the duplication and costs of so many governments in a small area. Perhaps they could align to build a real airport.

**Basil Akers**  
Albuquerque, NM

### Correction

Cathy McDowell is vice president of orthopedic/spine services for LewisGale Health System. Her place of employment was incorrectly attributed in one quotation in the February print edition in an article on joint replacement.

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

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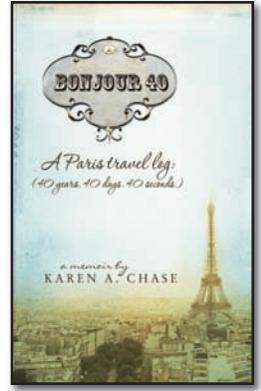
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## Books @ the FRONT >

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



### *40 for Paris*

"Every woman should travel alone and really take the time to explore a new place and herself at the same time." That pretty well set Karen Chase, a former Roanoke designer, off on her quest to discover Paris in 40 days, following her 40th birthday last year. The result is the delightful *Bonjour 40: A Paris Travel log: 40 Years, 40 Days, 40 Seconds* (self-published and available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)).

Karen is one of these multi-talented people who drive the rest of us crazy with her creativity. She wrote the book initially as a blog, photographed it (with the eye of a pro) and designed it. The book is a large-format, paperback delight and is a great bathroom read—short pieces of nice prose (often very funny), introspection, travel tips, life in general and plenty of pictures.

This represents one of the new major changes in publishing: blog to book; book to e-book; self-publish; successful. *Bonjour 40* is selling well, making its point that you don't have to do this the way it's always been done. Good for Karen and good for a lot of other writers. Strongly recommended. Sweet book.

—Dan Smith

### *Going deep*

Murder Hole, one of the most interesting geological features of the Roanoke Valley, is the subject of a new book by Marian McConnell, *Murder Hole: Catawba Murder*

*Hole Cave* (National Speleological Society). She and her husband, Dan, are the owners and caretakers of the cave, located in Botetourt County near Catawba. (Disclosure: Marian and I are musical collaborators.)

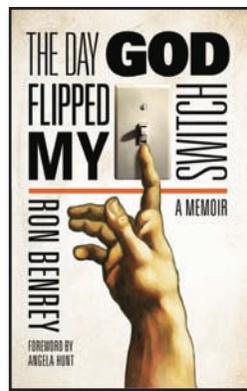
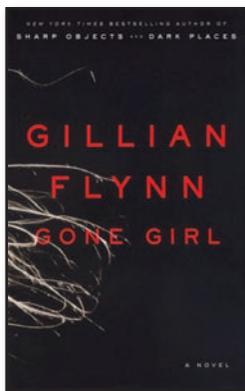
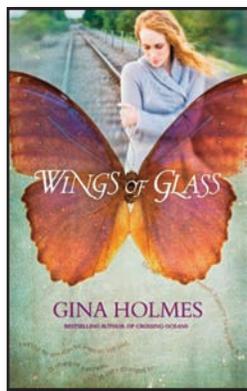
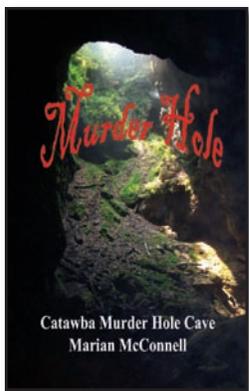
The "daylight" part of Murder Hole is a 108-foot deep cavern. At the bottom, an opening leads to subterranean chambers. She has assembled a scrapbook of legends, news articles, and first person accounts, and illustrated it with over 160 photographs, drawings, and maps.

There are several accounts of a student from the Virginia Tech caving club who fell to his death in 1958, and a section on other caves in Western Virginia. Anyone with an interest in caves will enjoy poring through *Murder Hole: Catawba Murder Hole Cave*. Paperbacks are \$24, hardbacks \$35. To order, contact Marian at [marian.mcconnell@gmail.com](mailto:marian.mcconnell@gmail.com).

—Randolph Walker

### *Latest from Gina*

Chosen as an OKRA pick from the Southern Indie Booksellers Alliance, Roanoker Gina Holmes' latest novel, *Wings of Glass* (Tyndale House), is an uplifting story of friendship and redemption. This novel tells the story of 18-year-old Penny, who is swept off her feet by a farmhand with a confident swagger. Though Trent offers an escape from her small town, she realizes too late that her new husband is no Prince Charming.



When Trent is injured and his paycheck stops, Penny is finally allowed to take a job cleaning houses. Here she meets two women from very different worlds who teach her to laugh again, and lend her their backbones just long enough for her to find her own.

Wings of Glass is a beautiful testament to the power of friendship and one that is sure to change the lives of those who read it.

—Ane Mulligan

## Making sense of it

Gillian Flynn, author of the best selling *Gone Girl* (Crown Publishing), is an accomplished writer and tells such a compelling and taut tale, I spent hours with characters I didn't even really like, just to see how the story ended.

Nick and Amy are a golden couple living the interesting writer's life in New York City but when economic disaster strikes, they go back to Nick's midwest home near the Mississippi River and try to make a life there.

On their fifth wedding anniversary, Amy goes missing. Is it a random kidnapping, a strange stalking gone awry, a bored husband itching to get out of a marriage gone stale? Flynn's bouncing between two viewpoints keeps you guessing till the end and while the ending at first seems unsatisfying, you keep thinking about the story until it finally makes sense.

—Becky Hepler

## Enlightening enlightenment

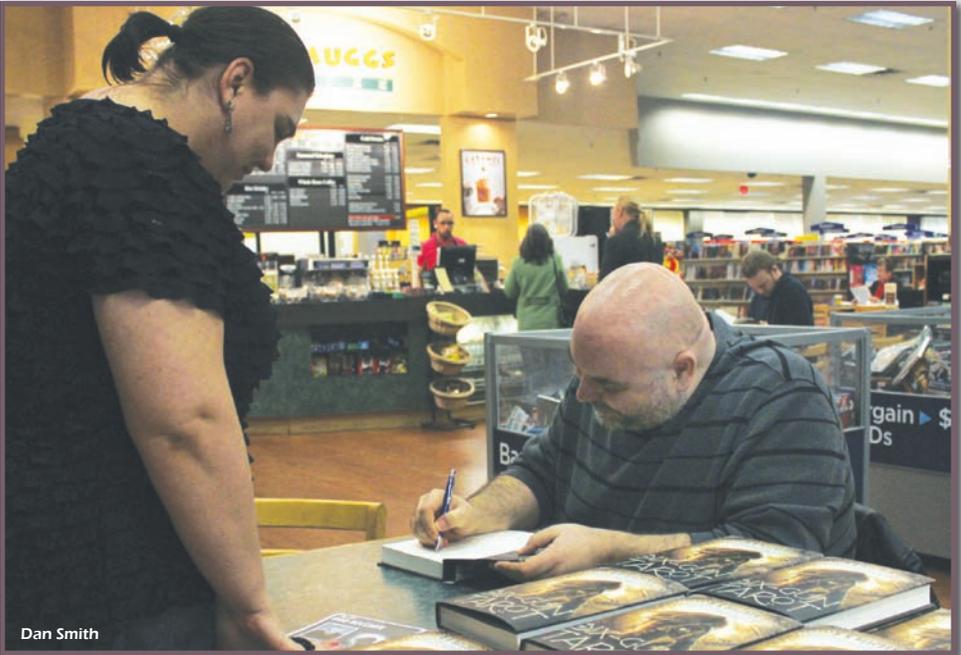
Put Christians and memoirs together and you often get TMI (sex and drugs) or sugar coating. Ron Benrey's account of his conversion to Christianity in *The Day God Flipped My Switch: A Memoir* (Greenbrier Book Company), which happened well into middle age (a "late bloomer"), is an exception.

Benrey is a thoughtful man, has written many books, and resides on the culturally savvy side of things. He's also street smart and his book is riddled with self-deprecating, dry humor.

His conversion experience itself is pretty remarkable—statistics indicate that unless you convert by age 25 your future chances are pretty slim. But the numerous factors that contributed to his turnaround are what fascinate, and often it's the most unexpected occurrences that influenced the most. The simple yet revealing glimpses into contemporary Christian culture are an added bonus—which pew to sit in during a church service, how much money to give, and more. Very funny. Enlightening too.

—River Laker

**(The reviewers:** Randolph Walker is a Roanoke-based freelance writer. Ane Mulligan is a book reviewer and script-writer. Becky Hepler is a librarian and a freelance writer who lives in Newport. River Laker owns a marketing company in Roanoke. Dan Smith is editor of FRONT.)



Dan Smith

## Book Signing >

**Rod Belcher**, an occasional contributor to *FRONT*, signs his first novel, *Six-Gun Tarot*, for fan Stephanie Kepros at Books-a-Million in late January. Rod's book is science fiction, which he has been writing in shorter form for years. This was the first book he signed.

## BizTek Showcase >

The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce hosted its 2013 **Business & Technology Showcase** Feb. 11 at the Salem Civic Center. Two rooms of exhibitors networking included **Leslie Coty** (in purple) of Coty Connections, along with **Mary Catherine Aesy** of Roanoke Business Lounge.



Tom Field



Liv Kiser

## Writers' Chapter 6 >

The **Roanoke Regional Writers Conference** held its sixth annual event at Hollins University Feb. 1-2. Director **Dan Smith** (editor of *FRONT*, which is a sponsor) awarded scholarship checks to Hollins University Horizon students **Allison Bernardo** (left) and **Carla Story**.



## Stairwellness >

Carilion CEO **Nancy Agee** (brown suit) and wellness consultant **Michele Hamilton** prepare to cut the ribbon for their Stairwellness campaign at Roanoke Memorial Hospital Feb. 4. The campaign was Hamilton's idea and involves taking the stairs instead of the elevator for the hospital's 14 floors. The stairwells have been repainted and brightened for the initiative.



## Fantasy Invasion >

Billed as "an educational sci-fi, fantasy, and horror convention" the annual **SheVaCon** (originating from Staunton, VA as the "Shenandoah Valley Convention") took place on Feb. 8-10 at Hotel Roanoke. The weekend celebration of the genre of costuming, fantasy writing, art and artifacts included numerous character sightings such as the troopers above in one of the hotel lobbies.

*Valley Business FRONT is FRONT'n About at many events each month. Check the blog links at [www.vbFRONT.com](http://www.vbFRONT.com) for more coverage.*

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Jane Dalier** is an Account Executive for FRONT, with extensive experience in publication sales and small business ownership. [janedalier@gmail.com]

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**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]

**Becky Hepler** lives and works as a high school librarian in Newport. She has been writing for more than 20 years. [rbmteagu@pemtel.net]

**Liv Kiser** is a senior at Cave Spring High School, who will attend Emory & Henry College in the fall to major in mass media. She is serving as a photographic intern for FRONT. Liv has her own photo business, Photography by Liv (www.livtophoto.com). [livtophoto@gmail.com]

**Pete Krull** is a FRONT financial columnist, and president of Krull & Company, a financial services firm with many clients in the Roanoke Valley. He is a registered principal with and securities are offered through LPL Financial, Member FINRA/SIPC. He was on a national championship volleyball team in college. [pkrull@krullandcompany.com]

**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]

**Laura Purcell** is a mother, wife, rat-terrier wrangler and writer living in Blacksburg. Her website is purcellink.squarespace.com. [lmspurcell@gmail.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]

**Samantha Steidle** is owner of the Business Lounge in Roanoke. She has an MBA from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and has worked in TV advertising, marketing, education and small business counseling. [samanthasteidle@gmail.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]

**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]

“”  
The hardest thing is not having eyebrows, eyelashes and nose hair

— Page 43

“”  
Only about 8 percent of the top 200 law firms have female managing partners

— Page 28

## Signs of growth in the region >

Population in the Roanoke and New River Valleys is growing, countering a long trend to the contrary. The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia released its July 1, 2012 estimated growth numbers for Virginia's cities and counties in January. The numbers show the pace of growth in the region more than doubled from 2011 to 2012 (up 0.7 percent) over the estimated growth from the 2010 US Census to July 1, 2011 (0.3 percent).

Population growth, or the lack of it, has been a concern of local business and civic leaders. The population increase is a good thing. It makes the region more attractive to retailers, relocating businesses, developers and cultural opportunities. It is an indication of vibrancy in the community.

How many people live here? The 2012 population estimate for the Roanoke and Blacksburg Metropolitan Statistical Areas is 476,756, with 164,425 living in the New River Valley and 312,331 in the Roanoke Valley. Over all, it is an increase of 1.1 percent from the 2010 Census.

The cities of Radford and Salem, each with a 1.8 percent increase from 2010, grew the fastest. Only Pulaski County (down 0.8 percent) saw a decrease in population over the same period. Population growth in the Roanoke MSA, up 1.2 percent, was slightly higher than in the Blacksburg MSA, up 0.9 percent.

Roanoke City's population grew by a healthy 1.6 percent after a decade of slow increases—and some declines. In fact, the city's population grew by just 2.2 percent over the 10 years between 2000 and 2010, one of the slowest growths in the region during that period. One of the differences since 2000: the boom in downtown housing has brought many of residents into the city.

All three cities have seen growth. As the economy improves, could we be seeing the fruits of the regional efforts to attract residents through the promotion of amenities? Are younger people and professionals seeking the convenience and liveliness of city life? It will be interesting to watch this trend over time to see if growth leads to more growth—and more opportunities for all of us.

—By Anne Piedmont,  
Piedmont Research Associates

### Population Growth in the Region

	2010 Census	2012 Estimate	% Difference
Botetourt County	33,148	33,293	+0.4%
Craig County	5,190	5,258	+1.3%
Franklin County	56,159	56,616	+0.8%
Roanoke County	92,376	93,256	+0.9%
Roanoke City	97,032	98,641	+1.6%
Salem City	24,802	25,267	+1.8%
<b>Roanoke MSA</b>	<b>308,707</b>	<b>312,331</b>	<b>+1.2%</b>
Giles County	17,286	17,486	+1.1%
Montgomery County	94,392	95,626	+1.3%
Pulaski County	34,872	34,599	-0.8%
Radford City	16,408	16,714	+1.8%
<b>Blacksburg MSA</b>	<b>162,958</b>	<b>164,425</b>	<b>+0.9%</b>
<b>Combined Region</b>	<b>471,665</b>	<b>476,756</b>	<b>+1.1%</b>



Submitted Photo

**Thomas Via and his daughter, Nancy, the third generation of the family to work at the firm.**

## The assurance of insurance >

### **Executive Summary:**

*Thomas Via of Brown Insurance Blacksburg is the new head of the Independent Insurance Agents of Virginia and he has a plan.*

### **By Laura Purcell**

Meeting new people every day is what keeps the insurance business exciting for Tommy Via,

president of Brown Insurance in Blacksburg.

"It's mind boggling the different ideas people have," says Via who has worked at Brown for 34 years. "Take some of the individuals I work with at the [Corporate Research Center]. They've grabbed hold of those ideas and are doing research and development or are putting them into production. I enjoy working with people from all walks of life."

This year, Via was appointed chairman of the Independent Insurance Agents of Virginia. The organization has 450 member agencies throughout the Commonwealth and is part of the national Independent Insurance Agents

# EXECUTIVE PROFILE

and Brokers Association. Via became involved in the organization in 1979, when he graduated from Virginia Tech and started as an insurance agent at Brown Insurance in Blacksburg.

Membership in the Independent Insurance Agents of Virginia has been important to Via throughout his career—he took his licensing courses through the organization and served on the young agents committee, which allowed him to meet other insurance agents just starting their careers in the commonwealth.

"We've really grown up together," Via says. "When we need help, we rely on each other. [This organization has] benefitted me in great ways, and you certainly get more out of it than you put into it."

In his one-year appointment as chairman, Via has several goals. He hopes to increase participation in the organization's political PACs, to expand the organization's non-profit arm that provides educational opportunities, and raise awareness among young people and new college graduates about career opportunities in the insurance industry.

Via also wants to reach out to member agencies and hold regional meetings. "Years ago, we had a chairman visit every member during his term. I can't do that, but the face-to-face meetings are beneficial to us. It will allow us to learn what's keeping our agents awake at night."

So what is keeping agents awake at night?

"The speed of doing business," Via says. When he began his career, insurance applications

were mailed in. Today, everything is done in a flash and clients expect answers quickly. The Independent Insurance Agents of Virginia hopes to help teach members how to meet their clients' needs efficiently.

Independent agents are also concerned about merger activity of insurance agencies. "Smaller agencies are struggling to get by and getting gobbled up by larger agencies," Via said. "We want to help agencies who wish to remain independent."

"A lot of people take insurance as a commodity, that one policy is the same as another. But there are huge differences, because every person's needs are unique. Our job is to make sure that our clients have the proper coverage and that their claims are covered in a fair manner," Via said.

"So many television ads for insurance these days proclaim 'We can save you money!' and that may be the case," Via said. "An acquaintance of mine has a son whose car was stolen, and the son was having issues with his insurance carrier. He wanted to know what to do. However, he had purchased his insurance direct from the carrier, and the best advice I could give him was to contact the state's Bureau of Insurance.

"An insurance agent is going to sit down and look at liabilities of different items, and you may or may not get that advice over the telephone. You know that you're going to be taken care of when that claim occurs. Sometimes it is more emotional than dollars and cents." 



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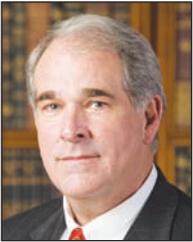
# Career FRONT

## FINANCIAL FRONT

### Banks

**Mildred Brown** has been selected to the board of Blacksburg's National Bank. **Dwane Pack** is the new VP of trust.

SunTrust Bank in Roanoke has named **Jake Hedrick** a financial advisor in the SunTrust Investment Services Private Wealth Management Division. **Tiphonie Witt** is a new assistant VP.



Hayter

**William H. Hayter**, president and CEO of First Bank & Trust Company, has been named chairman of the board of the Virginia Agribusiness Council. First Bank & Trust Company in Roanoke



Taylor

has named **George Taylor** senior VP and wealth management officer.

The Bank of Fincastle's new officers include **John Kilby** as chairman and CEO; **Ray Sprinkle**, president; **Michael Jasper**, COO; and **Cameron Miles**, assistant VP in accounting.

### Investing

Dixon, Hubard, Feinour & Brown in Roanoke has named **James Hall Jr.** vice president.

Shenandoah Life Insurance Co. has named the following second vice presidents: **Bill Board**, information systems; **David Killian**, corporate actuary; **Pam Ferguson**,



Board



Killian



Ferguson



Hilbish



Chrisley

legal services; **Steve Hilbish**, investments and **Marci Chrisley** tax and treasury services.

## LEGAL FRONT



Bagby

### Law Firms

**Thomas R. Bagby**, president of Woods Rogers in Roanoke, has been installed as 2013 president of The Virginia Bar Association, the state's oldest and largest voluntary organization serving the legal

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profession. Bagby is the sixth Woods Rogers attorney since 1928 to lead the VBA.



Osborne

**J. Lee E. Osborne**, an attorney with Woods Rogers in Roanoke has been named a Fellow of the Virginia Law Foundation.

Sands Anderson in Roanoke has advanced

## Have a career announcement?

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

**Stephen Durbin** to counsel.

### WELLNESS FRONT

#### Dentistry

**Dr. Hui Yang** has joined the Family Dental Clinic of the New River Valley in Christiansburg as a dentist.



Koumaras

The National Health Care Anti-Fraud Association (NHCAA) named **Dr. George M.**

**Koumaras**, dental director for Delta Dental of Virginia in Roanoke, as the 2012 Medical Director of the Year for his accomplishments in reducing insurance fraud.

#### Education

**Dr. Megan Cornwell Thomas** has been named associate

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# Career FRONT



Thomas



King



Magalhaes

chainwoman for Internal Medicine and course director for clinical medicine at the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine in Blacksburg. **Whitney King** is the new admissions coordinator. **Dr.**



Mills

**Edward P. Magalhaes** is the new director of academic and counseling services; and the humanistic specialist in the Simulation Center. **Julie Mills** is the new director of admissions for the Virginia campus in Blacksburg. **Amy Howell** has joined the admissions staff. **Dr. Peter Recupero** has become chairman for internal medicine.

## DEVELOPMENT FRONT

### Real Estate

**Frank Kregloe** and **Darin Greear**, of the Blacksburg office of Long & Foster Realtors, have been appointed by the New River Valley Association of

Realtors to serve on its Board of Directors.

**Coy Asbury** is a new broker at Lichtenstein Rowan Realtors in Roanoke.

The New River Valley Board of Realtors has named **Frank Kregloe** and **Darin Greear** of Long & Foster Realtors to its board of directors.



Lane

**David Lane** of Long & Foster in Christiansburg has graduated with a GRI designation from the Virginia Association of Realtors' Realtor Institute.

## RETAIL/SERVICE FRONT

### Automotive

Advance Auto Parts in Roanoke, a retailer of

automotive aftermarket auto parts, has named **Joshua Moore** vice president for finance and investor relations and **Navdeep Gupta** to VP for finance and treasury.

### Clothing

**Jeffrey Goldstein** has been named president of Sam's On the Market Inc. in Roanoke.

### Furniture

Stedman House in Roanoke has named **Emily Mangus** an interior decorator.

## SENIOR FRONT

### Services

Generation Solutions in Roanoke has named **Jacque King** executive director.

## EDUCATION FRONT

### Colleges/Universities

**Robert Sumichrast**

# “Power To The People”

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

**Rife + Wood ARCHITECTS**  
Roanoke, Virginia 540.344.6015



is the new dean of the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech.

The following are new with Jefferson College of Health Sciences in Roanoke: **Jennifer Becker**, clinical education, library; **Stephanie DeLuca**, occupational therapy; **Carol Farley**, administrative assistant; **Ken Heck**, exercise science; **Melanie Johnson**, **Stephen Lovern**, **Faye Lyons**, **Renee Poff**, all nursing; **Susan Polich**, rehabilitation and wellness; **Jim Stevens**, occupational therapy; **Randall Thornton**, financial aid; and **Douglas Wright**, respiratory therapy.

#### PR/Advertising

**Heidi Ketler** of NEWSource & Associates in Roanoke has been named president of the Blue Ridge Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. Other officers include: president elect, Melinda



Ketler

Mayo of the City of Roanoke; immediate past president and assembly delegate **Nancy Simmons** of National College; treasurer **Chuck Lionberger** of Roanoke City Schools; and secretary **Betsy Parkins** of Neathawk Dubuque and Packett in Roanoke. Directors at large are **Douglas Cannon** of Virginia Tech; **Jennifer Ward** of Blue Ridge Filly Productions in Roanoke; **Alison Hammond** of Commonwealth Catholic Charities in Roanoke; and **Beth Klinefelter** of Roanoke's Access Advertising.

Access Advertising & Public Relations in Roanoke has named



Spencer

**Rachel Spencer** a senior associate.



Oberg

#### Testing

Roanoke-based Interactive Achievement, a developer assessment software for school districts, has named **John Oberg** director of sales to lead the

company's efforts to expand nationally.

#### OTHER FRONTS

#### Chambers

**Brian Clingenpeel** of the Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department has won the 2012 Governor's Award for Outstanding Contributions to EMS for Children.

**Chris Chittum** has been named director of planning, building and development and **Wayne Bowers** is the new director of economic development.

#### TV/Radio

**Michael Stater** is the new director of Advancement at Blue Ridge PBS in Roanoke.



I dress up and go out for fun — Page 40

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right here in  
Catawba, Virginia

“ An amazing course!  
The leadership parallels are clear.  
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the challenges of Mother Nature as well as the office!  
Reggie is a masterful teacher. I would do this again in a heartbeat  
and whole-heartedly recommend it! ”



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# FRONT Notes



South Peak hotel drawing

## Hotel for South Peak

**South Peak** has released plans for a 117-room Hilton Garden Inn hotel that will soon be under construction. The approximately \$15-million hotel, will also include roughly 2,000 square feet of conference/meeting space with an additional 1,000 square feet of break out space and a fifth floor conference room with mountain views. In addition, there will be a full-service restaurant and lounge and fireplaces in 40 guest rooms. The hotel is expected to be open by spring of 2014.

The Hilton Garden Inn will be located at an elevation below The Peaks residences, giving guests a beautiful view of the mountains and downtown Roanoke. Additional amenities include a fitness center, a heated indoor pool with whirlpool, family suites and a 24-hour business center. Guest rooms and suites will be available

in a variety of floor plans.

## Re-opening of GTB

The new owner of Roanoke's **General Truck Body**, which burned in July, plans to re-open the shop at a new location in Roanoke. MRT Manufacturing of Forest will operate General Truck Body and former owner Tony Williams will be a sales manager.

## Cycle Systems sold

Longtime Roanoke Valley business **Cycle Systems** has been sold to Gerdau, a steel producer. Cycle Systems was founded in Roanoke in 1916 by Jacob Brenner, an immigrant, and has been in the family all these years. Former chairman Bruce Brenner died in December of last year and the current top executives are Jay and Neal Brenner. Cycle Systems is a private business and the sale

price was not revealed.

Cycle Systems has had some challenges of late, laying off 45 employees last spring. That left an estimated 195. Gerdau has steel mills in Petersburg, as well as in Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky and other locations in the U.S. and Canada.

## New IMAX theater

Blacksburg will get the region's first IMAX theater in the near future. It will be opened in the First & Main Shopping center and will have 12 screens. The theater will be called the **CineBowl & Grille** and it will feature an arcade, bowling alley, restaurant and a bar.

## Named a member

**Southwest Virginia Moving & Storage** of Christiansburg was recently inducted as a Core Member of the International Association

of Movers (IAM). IAM is a global association of over 2,000 members in 170 countries and territories with a goal of providing the global shipping community with a high standard of service.

## New cultural center

Rockbridge County businessman Bobby Berkstresser has announced that he and a group of Shenandoah Valley investment partners are finalizing plans for a major new \$11 million regional artisan and cultural center—**AWASAW Artisan Center**—expected to open in summer 2014. The Center will be located on eight acres at the Raphine interchange just off Interstate 81/64 exit 205 in northern Rockbridge County.

AWASAW Artisan Center, designed along the lines of the popular Heartwood and Tamarack artisan centers, will provide travelers a cultural and culinary experience,

supporting and promoting local cottage industries such as farmers, winemakers, artists, and other craftspeople.

The facility will include: an artisan demonstration area showcasing hand-crafts such as weaving and fiber arts; a Virginia arts and crafts retail center; the new Virginia National Guard Museum; a high-tech tourist information center serving all of Virginia and particularly the Shenandoah Valley. It will feature a "Taste of Virginia" culinary experience and Virginia-made food and wine shop; a frozen dessert parlor and food court featuring seasonal foods prepared in the Southern tradition; an "Experience Virginia" plasma-screen theater;

and a family-friendly experiential science exhibit. The center will also offer space to host public and private events.

### Broadband progress

#### The Roanoke Valley Fiber/Broadband Task Force

comprised of business leaders and local governments has developed recommendations in the nine months following the release of a study showing the Roanoke Region is lagging behind other surrounding communities when it comes to affordable broadband access. The task force is recommending the creation of a regional Broadband Authority to implement a number

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 A contact / source must be provided. Inclusions are not guaranteed and all submissions are subject to editing.

of objectives to expand the infrastructure of broadband throughout the region while making it easier for existing broadband providers to deploy their technology.

The proposed authority would be created by interested localities in the Roanoke Valley under the Virginia's Wireless Service Authority Act.

The task force's compre-

hensive recommendations are to:

- Identify and reach out to large companies, institutions and broadband users to broaden stakeholder support.
- Develop a master plan for construction and operation of a high-speed, redundant regional network ring. The network should



Former House of Delegates representative William Fralin talks about the broadband recommendations at press conference.



**Pamplin Dean Richard Sorensen (right) with Gov. Bob McDonnell**

of Moneta, Sellavision Media LLC, of Moneta and the Carlin Agency Public Relations, of Roanoke.

Firefli Media will handle South Peak's website development and management, while C-Media will be responsible for the creation and placement of all South Peak advertising. Sellavision Media will manage video production and The Carlin Agency will provide leadership on public relations and social media with the assistance of the Social Buzz Lab. South Peak will be marketed through advertising, the news media and a strong social media campaign.

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*Sorensen honored*

**Pamplin College of Business Dean Richard Sorensen** was formally honored in the Virginia State Capitol recently with a joint resolution of commendation by the Virginia General Assembly.

When he retires in July, Sorensen will have served as a business dean for 40 years—31 years at the Pamplin College and nine at Appalachian State University. Del. Joseph Yost spoke of Sorensen's accomplishments at Virginia Tech and the many contributions he has made to business education in the state and the nation and abroad. A framed copy of the resolution will be presented to Sorensen, and another will be sent to the Pamplin College for permanent display. "I am deeply

reach schools, industrial parks, large employers and other economic centers.

- Develop cooperative agreements for localities with technical specifications and commercial terms for operating the network and for exchanging data across municipal boundaries.
- Develop and implement "dig once" requirements for construction projects, including the placement of open-access conduit for optical fiber cable.
- Explore the creation of policies and/or

agreements with Carilion Clinic and Virginia Tech for open access to high-speed Internet in their adjacent communities.

- Work with the New River Valley and other adjacent communities that are supporting existing broadband and fiber deployments.
- Communicate broadband-related activities and technology to the public.

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*New Salem lab*

**ARCpoint Labs**, a third party provider in the

drug and alcohol testing industry, has opened an independently-owned location at 1627 E. Main Street in Salem. It is owned and operated by Jeff Howard. ARCpoint Labs is a national franchise specializing in the drug, alcohol, DNA and steroid testing, background screening, and corporate wellness.

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*Media 'team'*

**South Peak** community has announced the formation of a media team that combines the expertise of four local media companies: Firefli Media of Roanoke, C-Media Company LLC,

honored. It has been a privilege to serve Virginia Tech and the commonwealth all these years," Sorensen said.

#### Landmark paper sold

#### Landmark Media

**Enterprises'** Greensboro News & Record has been sold to Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc. Landmark owns The Roanoke Times, which was for sale a while back, but withdrawn from the market after there were no takers. Published reports say there was

no interest expressed in the Roanoke paper in this deal, either. The News & Record has daily circulation of 58,000 and Sunday circulation of 86,000, which makes it slightly smaller than the Roanoke paper, which has seen circulation figures fall precipitously in recent years. Berkshire bought 63 Media General newspapers a year ago for \$142 million.

#### Stores to close

Charlotte-based **Food Lion** announced it would

close eight grocery stores in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, including stores in Moneta and Forest. The stores were to have closed in mid-February.

#### Another restaurant closes

The spate of restaurant closings in the Roanoke Valley continues. The latest is **Baja Bistro** in Roanoke County, blaming a lack of confidence among consumers. It was located in the Shops at West Village. The restaurant's owner says

he is looking for a less expensive location to re-open.

#### Valley Bank profit

For the third straight year, **Valley Bank** has reported a significant profit. Earnings were \$6.5 million, increasing 14 percent over 2011. That's an increase of \$5.7 million.

Compiled by Dan Smith

**Additional FRONT Notes posted online at [moreFRONT.blogspot.com](http://moreFRONT.blogspot.com).**  
Read extended versions of items listed above, plus photos and many more current listings each day on the [moreFRONT](http://moreFRONT.blogspot.com) blog, also available by link at [vbFRONT.com](http://vbFRONT.com).

# So much more.

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- > A Broadband Step Forward for Roanoke Valley
- > Carilion Rolls Out (Stair) Wellness Campaign
- > New Dentists Office Features Green Technology
- > Girl Scouts Head New CEO of RVSPCA
- > David Bandy New President at Spectrum
- > Taubman Selects Art Museum Professional as ED
- > Breakell Inc., 'Green' Roanoke Builder, Closes
- > Betsy Parkins: PRSA's Illuminator
- > Seven Montgomery Winners Among Gap 50

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- > Preservation Foundation Issues 2012 Awards
- > Startup Virginia Starts Up Tonight in Roanoke
- > Tech Approves Unique Real Estate Program
- > EventZone, Roanoke End Long Affiliation
- > Localities to the Rescue of SPCA in Roanoke Area
- > Roanoke Hires Economic Development Director
- > FedEx Breaks Ground for Roanoke Facility
- > Novozymes, Syngenta Reach Distribution Agreement

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

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