

Valley Business

FRONT

THE SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEUR
CHAMPION IN VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE

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Franchises

Ronald McDonald,
Ronald McDonald House



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WELCOME to the FRONT

Do I really have to introduce you to our FRONTcover model this month?

There's a greater chance of readers not knowing for sure a U.S. president than this clown we have on the cover today. While history teachers all across the land might cry about that, just how bad is it that the world's most recognizable commercial icon is so... recognizable?

Ronald McDonald is the best representative I could think of for our FRONTcover story on franchises. Yellow gloved hands down. There are other great franchise characters and icons and American advertising symbols with color and flair and instant recognition—but none, absolutely none, more ubiquitous.

Living in a land where a clown selling hamburgers is elevated to such a high position seems troubling to some. Not me. It represents business success. Rags to riches. Pulling your yellow jumpsuit up to get to work. Putting your red shoes on one big foot at a time. A land of opportunity. Building a worldwide enterprise from such a simple idea, and capitalizing on a basic human consumption, with a little fun thrown in.

We didn't even include McDonalds as one of our featured franchisee interviews—but our clown is the king (sorry "other" burger joint) of franchises, even as it is attacked and finally slipping in sales at the moment. (Yet another lesson for constant striving to stay in FRONT.)

I'm especially happy to tell you our model is not just any clown. It's the Ronald McDonald at our very own Ronald McDonald House in Roanoke at the foot of the Roanoke Star and Mill Mountain. This charity, which provides temporary housing for families of hospitalized children, has served Southwest Virginia since 1984, with its "home away from home" mission. [www.rmhc-swva.org]

Just a tad more perspective on "that clown" on the cover.

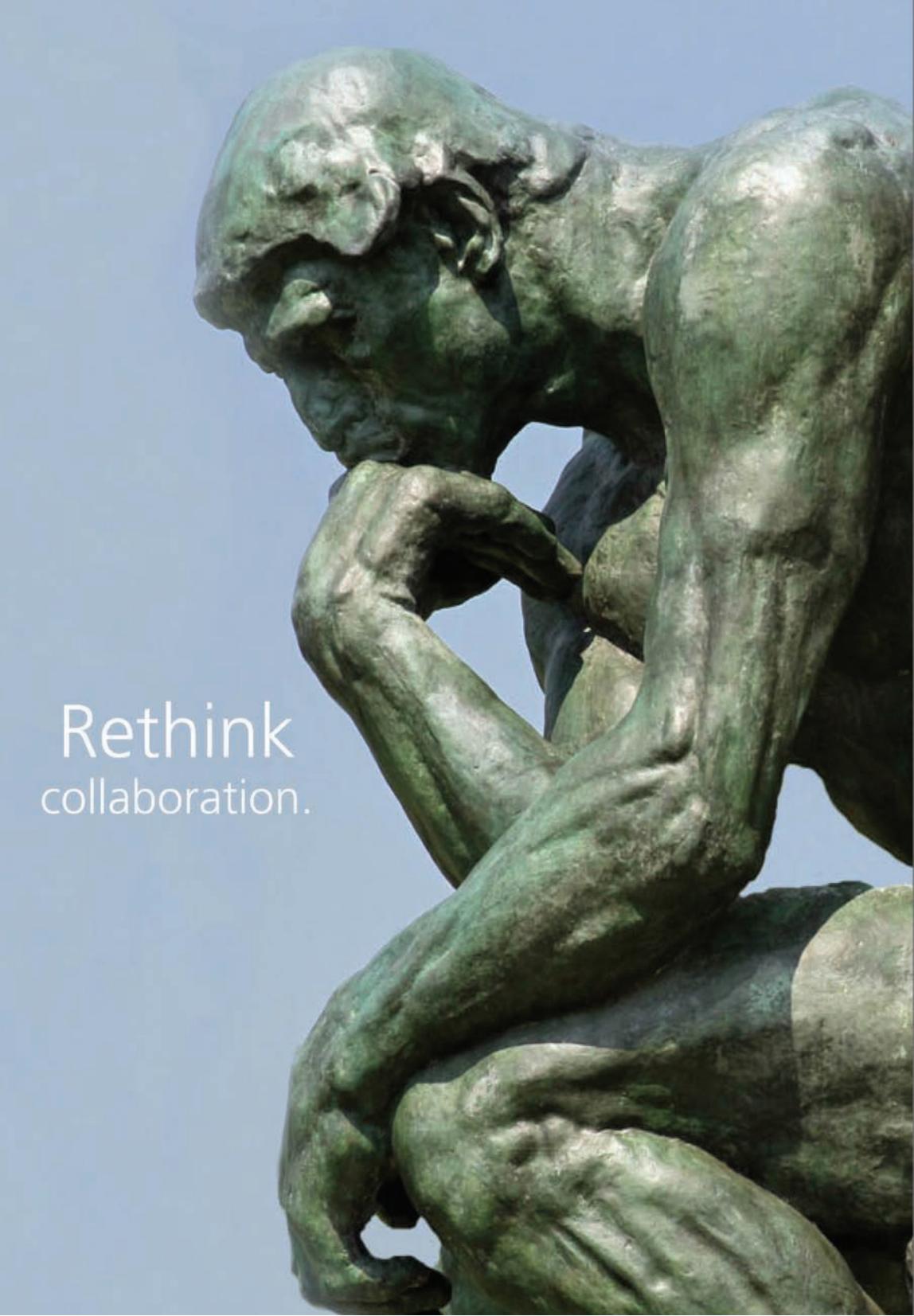

Tom Field

“
Ask them
what they
need and get
it for them

— Page 31

Inside the Ronald
McDonald House





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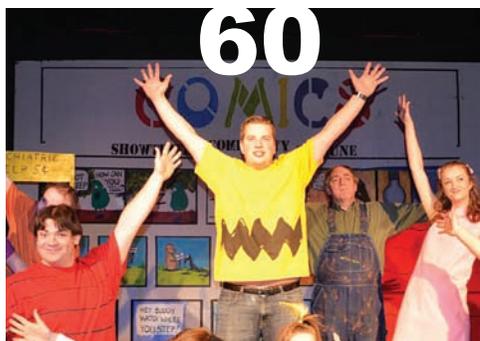
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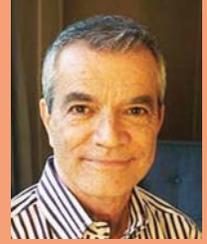
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JULY



Nicole Dobbs



Dan Dowdy



Kathleen Harshberger



Stevie Holcomb



Kathy Surace



Nicholas Vaassen

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.

This board has been given the task of helping FRONT understand the issues and develop coverage. "Members essentially have a red telephone at their hand," says publisher Tom Field. "They can inform us best on what is important, what is new, what impacts the greater community. Of course, our red phone reaches right back to them as well, for assignments and insight on our coverage. Although the members are encouraged to keep FRONT updated on their own industries and the key players, they aren't limited to their area of specialty, as all commercial enterprises ultimately collaborate to impact our quality of life here in this part of Virginia." An additional contribution by the Editorial Advisory Board involves direct input on the various FRONTLists we present throughout the year.

CONTRIBUTORS



Tom Field



Keith Finch



Micah Fraim



Mike Leigh



Ariel Lev



Dan Smith



Randolph Walker

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 30.

2015 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)
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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.

“ ”

No one would ever confuse chocolate with soap

— Page 40

“ ”

As the lawmakers and politicians grapple with the... gig economy. Those of us in favor of these options can do our part to be responsible, vocal users and operators

— Page 28

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The Franchise Owner / Operator

A PROVEN FORMULA FOR SOME BUSINESS OWNERS IN OUR REGION

Franchises >

Executive Summary:
A franchise offers a path to business ownership with at least some of the uncertainties removed.

By Randolph Walker

In terms of business, it was a thrill ride, although Rick Postle could not have known it at first.

Postle, 66, got on board the Wendy's rocket when founder Dave Thomas had just five locations, all in Ohio. Postle (pronounced "postal") was 23, just out of Ohio State with a business degree. He had seen an article about Thomas and called him to ask for a meeting.

"I said, 'Can I come in and talk to you?' And he said 'sure.' I said, 'I'd like to work for you.' He said, 'That's great, we don't have any college grads, it would be good to have a college grad in here.' I said, 'Can I be a marketing guy?' and he just chuckled, he said, 'I only got a few Wendy's, I do all the marketing, I'm not going to give you my job, but we're growing some more of these things and we need some people to run 'em.' So I said, 'I'm going to get in and join you.'"

Starting as an assistant store manager, Postle stayed with Wendy's for 18 years, gaining an invaluable education as the hamburger chain zoomed to 3,000-plus locations, both franchises and company stores. He left as President, USA Operations.

Postle went on to become president of Panera Bread, and later decided to shift to the franchise side. Under his family business, Blue Ridge Bread, based in Charlottesville, Postle owns 24 Panera locations, including two in Roanoke, one in Christiansburg and one in Blacksburg. "It was natural for me to stay in the restaurant business as a franchisee, and because of my relationship with Panera it was a very obvious choice."



Rick Postle

Owner Rick Postle with fresh bread at Panera, Tanglewood

As a Panera franchisee, Postle applies the lessons he learned at Wendy's: "TREAT ALL PEOPLE FAIRLY, WITH DIGNITY and RESPECT. GIVE YOUR PEOPLE A FINANCIAL INCENTIVE THAT ALLOWS THEM TO SHARE IN AND WORK FOR THE SUCCESS OF YOUR BUSINESS. TREAT YOUR FRANCHISEES AS PART OF THE FAMILY."

Postle had a clear path to success as a franchisee, based on his contacts and resume, but even for those with less experience, franchises offer an opportunity for successful business ownership. In this report, franchise owners in Western Virginia discuss why they chose to go the franchise route, how they picked an industry, and how they picked a particular franchise.

But first, some background courtesy of Virginia Tech's Mahmood Khan.

"A franchised business is a business in which the franchisee is working for himself or herself," says Khan, professor and director of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Center in Falls Church. "It is a right that is given by a franchisor to a franchisee to work on the concept that is developed by the franchisor."

Franchising dates to 1851 when Isaac Singer offered territorial rights to sell his sewing machines. Later, the automobile industry adopted the model, and then the food service industry, beginning with Howard Johnson in the 1930s.

According to the National Restaurant Association, franchising accounts for nearly 40 percent of total restaurant industry sales of more than \$660 billion in 2013, 30 percent of the more than 13 million restaurant industry jobs, and nearly 20 percent of all restaurant establishments.



**Rick Postle (Panera)
with Dave Thomas of
Wendy's (from 1981)**



Randolph Walker

**Ashley Spillman and
Lani Maddox work
the front counter at
Panera, Tanglewood**



Virginia Tech

Dr. Mahmood Khan

The proliferation of highways and women entering the workforce were both instrumental in the growth of restaurant franchises. Expanded services geared to busy, modern lifestyles—like easy in/out access, special parking for pickup orders, delivery, and apps for ordering—have contributed significantly to continued growth, Khan noted.

So, what does it take to get into a franchise? The cost for a “business-format’ franchises where you have to buy the entire concept is much higher than for ‘product-trade name’ franchises,” says Khan. “On an average it will be anywhere between \$500,000 to over a million. It all depends on the brand and concept.”

Ballpark figures from Khan: A McDonald’s franchise fee is \$45,000, start-up cost around \$750,000, and ongoing service fee / royalty is 4 percent of monthly sales. At KFC, the franchise fee is \$25,000, and the candidate must have a net worth of \$1.5 million with \$750,000 liquid. At Subway, the franchise fee is \$15,000, the start-up cost around \$15,000, and the ongoing service fee / royalty is 12.5 percent.

Bill Asbell: Exercise in decision making leads to Planet Fitness

Bill Asbell knows what it is like to be a cog in the wheels. He was a financial advisor in a large international bank when he started to consider alternatives.

Owner Bill Asbell at Planet Fitness, Roanoke



Randolph Walker



Birth of a franchise >

Our region has a perfect opportunity to witness exactly how a new national franchise is formed. Linda Balentine of Crowning Touch Senior Moving Services envisioned a franchise model when she first started her business back in 1996. After perfecting her business structure, growing, moving along with upgrades in technology (proprietary software is under development), and working her plans and markets, the franchise operation is ready to launch.

The business moves elderly people out of their home into the next place for their retirement living, and takes care of the years of accumulated private property, from furniture to automobiles, boats, artwork, knick-knacks, and anything of value in an auction environment (online or at a Crowning Touch facility).

The initial franchisee licenses will sell between \$50,000 and \$65,000 with a \$26,000 base cost. The business purchase price is also determined by size of the market service area.

Balentine's goal is to open five franchises in the first year; likely expanding in Virginia and southward.

—Tom Field

"I liked the idea of being my own boss, being able to make my own decisions, taking my own risks, failing or succeeding based on my own abilities, rather than being at the whims of large corporations who often change strategies and you get caught in the shuffle," says Asbell, who supervises his Planet Fitness locations from an office near Towers Mall. "I had a colleague at [the bank] who had decided earlier than I had that he wanted to go this route, and he had done lots and lots of research into first, franchising per se, then secondly, industries within franchising, and then thirdly, once he had decided on the health club industry, which company looked to him to be the best bet."

Franchises "are 80 percent likely to succeed, because there's that corporate support. It's a formula, they have economies of scale when it relates to purchasing, whether it's marketing or actual ingredients, things you must buy for the business, whatever it is you're selling. All of those things have been thought out for you, they've been tested, and it's been shown to work. You're buying a concept which is ready



Randolph Walker

Planet Fitness, Towers

made. In that sense it's easier. You can learn from other people's mistakes that are already fixed rather than having to learn through failure.

"We liked the health club business because it's not a cash-based business. The health club business is based on monthly dues [that are] collected electronically. The other aspect about the gym business—it's a service, it's not a product. You're not going to have waste, you're not going to have inventory. With a gym you're purchasing lots of equipment that has a big capital requirement at the beginning of the business. There's not as much labor required, there's not as much that can go wrong. You have to be friendly, you have to be helpful, but it's an easier thing."

Once he had decided on the health club industry, Planet Fitness was a natural fit. Asbell was member of the original Planet Fitness in his hometown, Dover, N.H.

"I knew the whole concept inside and out. I saw that it was more recession-proof than other gyms, in terms of what they were charging customers." Membership is \$10 per month.

The next question was where to locate. During college in Washington D.C., Asbell had taken a trip to Virginia Tech. "We drove down 81, we went past Roanoke, I just loved what I saw. I wanted a nice place to raise my children. It was, 'where do I want to live?'"

Asbell opened his first, and what he thought would be his only, Planet Fitness at Towers Mall in 2008. Now he owns Planet Fitness locations in Fredericksburg, Chesterfield County, Harrisonburg, and Lynchburg, with another coming in Roanoke.

Among the many lessons learned, "I did not realize how complex and challenging it was to get a gym open." For example, "a landlord often wants the tenant to use a



Randolph Walker

general contractor that he'll be using, so that the process can continue unabated and there don't have to be two contractors on site. Both parties could potentially save money because of economies of scale and the fact that the landlord's GC is already working on site." On the other hand, the tenant may be now working with a GC who's never built a Planet Fitness before, and may be less motivated to meet the tenant's timeline, resulting in delays.

Another unforeseen challenge was the sometimes apparently nit-picking character of building codes. "If the toilet paper dispensers are mounted at 19 inches instead of 18 inches, perhaps they'll fail the final inspection and if that's on a Friday, you can't get another inspection 'til the city inspector can get there some time the following week. So, if you've told the public you're going to open Monday morning at 5 a.m., you may now not be able to do that. That's a real world, personally experienced example and I have many, many more."

Rocky Starleigh: Mostly smooth sailing at Smoothie King

Grew up in the milk shake era? Not exactly sure what a smoothie is? Rocky Starleigh can explain.

"A smoothie is a nutritious fruit drink which can have protein additives or other nutritional additives," says Rocky, co-owner with his wife, Cindy Starleigh, of Smoothie King at Towers Mall. The basic ingredients are fruit, ice and water.

**Rocky Starleigh, co-owner
of Smoothie King at Towers**



Randolph Walker



Randolph Walker

Smoothie King, Towers

The Starleighs already had experience running a dry cleaning business when they started investigating franchises.

“We were looking for a proven business model,” he says. “It’s easier to get financing for a franchise, because they have a track record. There’s an established reputation with a franchise, whereas you’d have to build that reputation with a normal start-up.”

Mackenzie Kinney whips up a smoothie



Randolph Walker

The health-conscious Starleighs were looking for a nutrition-oriented franchise, and the name Smoothie King kept coming up.

Now the Starleighs are Smoothie King owner-operators. In the beginning Rocky was putting in 60 to 70 hours a week. Two and a half years later, he has eight employees, plus a couple more during the summer, and works 40 hours a week. Rocky manages the store, while Cindy handles financial and bookkeeping.

So far, he says, the financial results have exceeded expectations—they’re able to support a comfortable lifestyle and make reasonable payments on their debt. But, he says, someone choosing a franchise shouldn’t pick one strictly on financial criteria. “I would try to get into a franchise that is something you enjoy working in,” he says.

Happy with results so far, they are planning a second

location. That isn't to say there hasn't been a learning curve.

"As opposed to the previous business I owned, which was a dry cleaning business, there was a lot to learn. I was the only person working at my dry cleaning pick-up store, so I have learned to master management of labor percentage and hiring the right employees to save time and control costs. I also have learned how to keep track of inventory which is another way to keep costs down each month."

Joe Vagaggini: GNC offers opportunity for a healthy bottom line

Vagaggini owns ten GNC stores, including two in Roanoke and one in Christiansburg. He has a partner, Jim Dickinson, in one of the Roanoke stores and the Christiansburg store.

With 20 years of experience in large companies, Vagaggini had a solid understand of business before buying a franchise.

"I understood the importance of having in place solid systems, processes, and practices," he says. "It could take many man-hours and costs to develop and implement these with a new start-up company. In a retail environment,

Co-owner Joe Vagaggini at GNC





Randolph Walker

**Josh Rhodes, manager
of GNC Towers**

having in place an established and proven relationship with wholesale vendors is critical. A mature franchise system such as GNC has developed and refined all these over time.

"GNC has established and proven systems and processes for information and reports management, POS, inventory control, QA/QC, merchandising, financial management, marketing/advertising, real estate support, and loss prevention. Secondly, GNC has long-standing relationships with all major supplement vendors worldwide. Finally, and most importantly, GNC has their own facilities to research, develop, produce, warehouse, and directly distribute the GNC brand line which provides an exclusive edge.

"As a GNC franchisee, many of the most important aspects of the business are already in place, leaving me to focus directly on building sales and business expansion. GNC's corporate franchising support groups take care of almost every critical aspect of running a retail supplement business.

"I've had a lifelong personal interest in natural supplements, and GNC was the most established, proven, and recognized supplement retailer in the world. With their established franchise business model and global name recognition, I decided that being a GNC franchisee would provide me with the best opportunity to succeed as a small business owner."

Do your homework

While many questions are already answered for you, as a franchise owner your success or failure is still up to you. Before embarking on a life-changing decision, says Rocky Starleigh, "I would do a lot of homework, I would contact people in that industry, some operators of the franchise you're interested in, and just ask a lot of questions." 

From lodging to home décor to everything in between >

There are thousands of sources more than willing to suggest franchise opportunities for motivated buyers; and most are not objective, so it can be confusing to sort through the prospects that are truly performing. And today's hot property might be tomorrow's abandoned vehicle left sitting and rusting on the side of the road. In any locality we all remember the waves of shops that would come in to serve a trendy and popular idea, only to disappear after a few seasons.

Anyone in the market for a franchise must take all of these things into account: trends, current competitors, saturation, market demographics, available customer base, local acceptance. Any business venture is a risk; but for a lot of today's business owner/operators, selecting an established franchise along with the "formula" that came with it, proved to be a good decision to get them to profitability quicker than building it from scratch on their own.

Here is Entrepreneur magazine's current compilation of the Top 50 Franchises, nationally:

—Tom Field

RANK	FRANCHISE	STARTUP COSTS	RANK	FRANCHISE	STARTUP COSTS
1	Hampton Hotels	\$.4M - 14M	26	Vanguard Cleaning Systems	\$.11K - 36K
2	Anytime Fitness	\$.79K - 371K	27	Jiffy Lube Int'l. Inc.	\$.221K - 400K
3	Subway	\$.117K - 263K	28	Liberty Tax Service	\$.58K - 72K
4	Jack in the Box	\$.1M - 2M	29	Ace Hardware Corp.	\$.750K - 1M
5	Supercuts	\$.114K - 234K	30	Papa John's Int'l. Inc.	\$.130K - 844K
6	Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches	\$.331K - 520K	31	ServiceMaster Clean	\$.50K - 181K
7	Servpro	\$.142K - 191K	32	Papa Murphy's	\$.226K - 414K
8	Denny's Inc.	\$.1M - 3M	33	Matco Tools	\$.94K - 249K
9	Pizza Hut Inc.	\$.297K - 2M	34	Auntie Anne's - soft pretzels	\$.195K - 368K
10	7-Eleven Inc.	\$.37K - 2M	35	Midas Int'l. Corp.	\$.203K - 425K
11	Dunkin' Donuts	\$.216K - 2M	36	Sport Clips	\$.168K - 327K
12	Jan-Pro - commercial cleaning	\$.3K - 51K	37	Great Clips	\$.114K - 216K
13	Days Inn	\$.179K - 8M	38	The Maids	\$.99K - 126K
14	McDonald's	\$.1M - 2M	39	IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group)	\$.7M - 94M
15	Aaron's	\$.276K - 783K	40	Edible Arrangements Int'l. LLC	\$.157K - 277K
16	KFC Corp.	\$.1M - 3M	41	Miracle-Ear Inc.	\$.119K - 288K
17	Hardee's	\$.1M - 2M	42	Circle K - convenience stores	\$.211K - 2M
18	H&R Block	\$.32K - 149K	43	Baskin-Robbins	\$.103K - 389K
19	Taco Bell	\$.1M - 3M	44	Jazzercise Inc.	\$.4K - 76K
20	Kumon Math & Reading Centers	\$.64K - 134K	45	CleanNet USA - commercial cleaning	\$.10K - 98K
21	The UPS Store	\$.150K - 420K	46	Church's Chicken	\$.413K - 1M
22	Cruise Planners	\$.2K - 23K	47	Snap Fitness Inc.	\$.107K - 258K
23	GNC Franchising	\$.191K - 322K	48	Merry Maids	\$.60K - 88K
24	Sonic Drive-In Restaurants	\$.1M - 2M	49	Carl's Jr. Restaurants	\$.1M - 2M
25	Snap-on Tools	\$.160K - 316K	50	Budget Blinds Inc.	\$.89K - 187K

SOURCE: *Entrepreneur.com* / June 2015



Business Dress

By Kathy Surace

Executive Summary:
The navy blue blazer has been a staple for men's wardrobe since the beginning of the 19th Century; still working.

The re-invented navy blue blazer >

Not so many years ago young men preparing to enter the job market began building their business wardrobe with a navy blazer and gray flannel trousers. Although it never completely disappeared, the navy blazer fell from favor, perhaps due to its boxy "Dad" shape or merely because it seemed too traditional in the casual workplace.

No matter the reason, it appears to be back and better than ever, according to Clothier Doug Kidd at Tom James.

The new blue blazers come in a vivid range of blues rather than simply navy blue, offering men the chance to stand out in a crowd while still being appropriate. Additionally, the jacket is more fitted at the waist and is shorter in length than in previous decades. Although available double-breasted, today's blue blazer is most popular worn single-breasted with 2 buttons.

The improved navy blazer is distinctive in its details, too. Buttons, which once were traditionally gold, are now available in mother of pearl, silver, natural horn, and club or organization motifs. Buttonholes can be stitched in contrasting colors and sometimes vary in color for each buttonhole. Lapel accent stitching and pocket styles are available in quite a range and lend a unique touch to each blazer.

Also, the way that the new blue blazer is paired with trousers gives it a fresh, updated appearance. The new jacket colors coordinate nicely with yellow, light gray, white, green, tan, or red trousers. No longer limited to gray flannel to look appropriate, men are finding lots of freedom to experiment with the new blue blazer.

The history of the navy blazer is long and storied. It began with the crew of the British Naval frigate the HMS Blazer being outfitted in double-breasted navy blue blazers for the coronation of Queen Victoria in the early 1800's. Thereafter it became part of the official uniform of the British Royal Navy and a staple of the well-dressed man's wardrobe. Soon a single-breasted version evolved from the club jackets of English rowing clubs and American Ivy League teams, and later became popular in the country club setting in bold hues like green or magenta.

Despite all this tradition, the blazer needed some updating. Fortunately for us, designers have taken this traditional menswear staple and creatively adapted it to the wardrobe needs of today's men, adding some unexpected pizzazz to their image! 

For more on this topic email: Kathy@peacockimage.com

Protocol and precedence >

We live in an increasingly informal society, but no doubt about it, protocol and precedence are still an important part of our culture. Violations of protocol have led to insults, fisticuffs and even wars! And remember the recent hubbub when uninvited guests crashed a White House party? Let's take a look at some of the rules as set forth in *A Guide to Virginia Protocol and Traditions*, (2002).

"Webster's Dictionary defines "precedence" as "the right to superior honor on a ceremonial or formal occasion" or "the order of ceremonial or formal preference." Precedence is still determined by basic principles first set forth in the Eight Articles adopted by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. These principles resulted in the official precedence used today which is firmly set in Washington, D.C. and in all foreign capitals.

Unlike the federal government, there is no fixed order of precedence for state and local government officials. Generally, state precedence follows the same order as federal precedence. When several state officials of the same rank from different states are present, their ranking is determined by their state's admission to the Union.

With American precedence, there are several rules which always hold true and which may differ from what one would assume the order of precedence to be. First, no one outranks a governor in his own state except the President or Vice President of the United States. Secondly, no one outranks a mayor in his own city or town or the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors in his own county except the Governor of the state or the President or Vice President of the United States.

Remember that for purposes such as seating, the spouses of officials take on the rank of their spouses. They do not have their own rank unless they also hold an office. One exception to this is widows of former presidents who do have official standing. At a public dinner to which the President of the United States has been invited and sends his or her spouse as representative, that representative is accorded the same rank as the President. This could also be true of governors in their own state, but not other federal or state government officials."

I know it is impossible to address all situations in a column like this. An awareness of the rules gives us confidence and authority. Sometimes, however, we just have to take a deep breath and rely on common sense and good intentions! 



Etiquette & Protocol

By Kathleen Harvey Harshberger

Executive Summary:
Even in a nation abiding in the "all men are created equal" creed, we still recognize a protocol distinction with positions of honor.





Magnets USA headquarters in Vinton

A magnetic company culture >

Executive Summary:

Magnets USA in Vinton is 25 years old now, but its core values remain the same as they always have: product excellence, creativity, an ear for the customers' needs and being a good place to work.

By Dan Smith

From the first time Dale Turner took a box of magnets door to door along Williamson Road in 1990, selling them to merchants, until today—25 years later—the mission at Magnets USA has remained essentially the same:

“Listen to the customers and bring them what they want.”

Of course, that has meant anything but remaining static. The company has grown so steadily that it has moved five times, employs 60 people, has product lines that go far beyond the original magnetized promotions (to include high-end, engraved cutlery), has custom-built, state of the art machinery all over its production facility and includes all the departments a large company would normally have. Its two biggest products remain magnetized calendars and football schedules, which has been the case for years.

Its new home—since January—is the old Grumman fire truck facility on 3rd Street in Vinton, one that nearly doubles its facility off Hollins Road to 45,000 square feet. The



Magnets USA production area



Behind this door is a server



Randy Johnson and Laura Weeks at her Rescue Mission show

new facility employs the old paint bays for fire trucks as offices and production rooms. The computer server is behind a locked metal door (75,000 feet of network cable run through the building). Magnets USA has experienced 14 consecutive years of growth and this year, and both the company and one of its employees have generated a lot of good press of late.

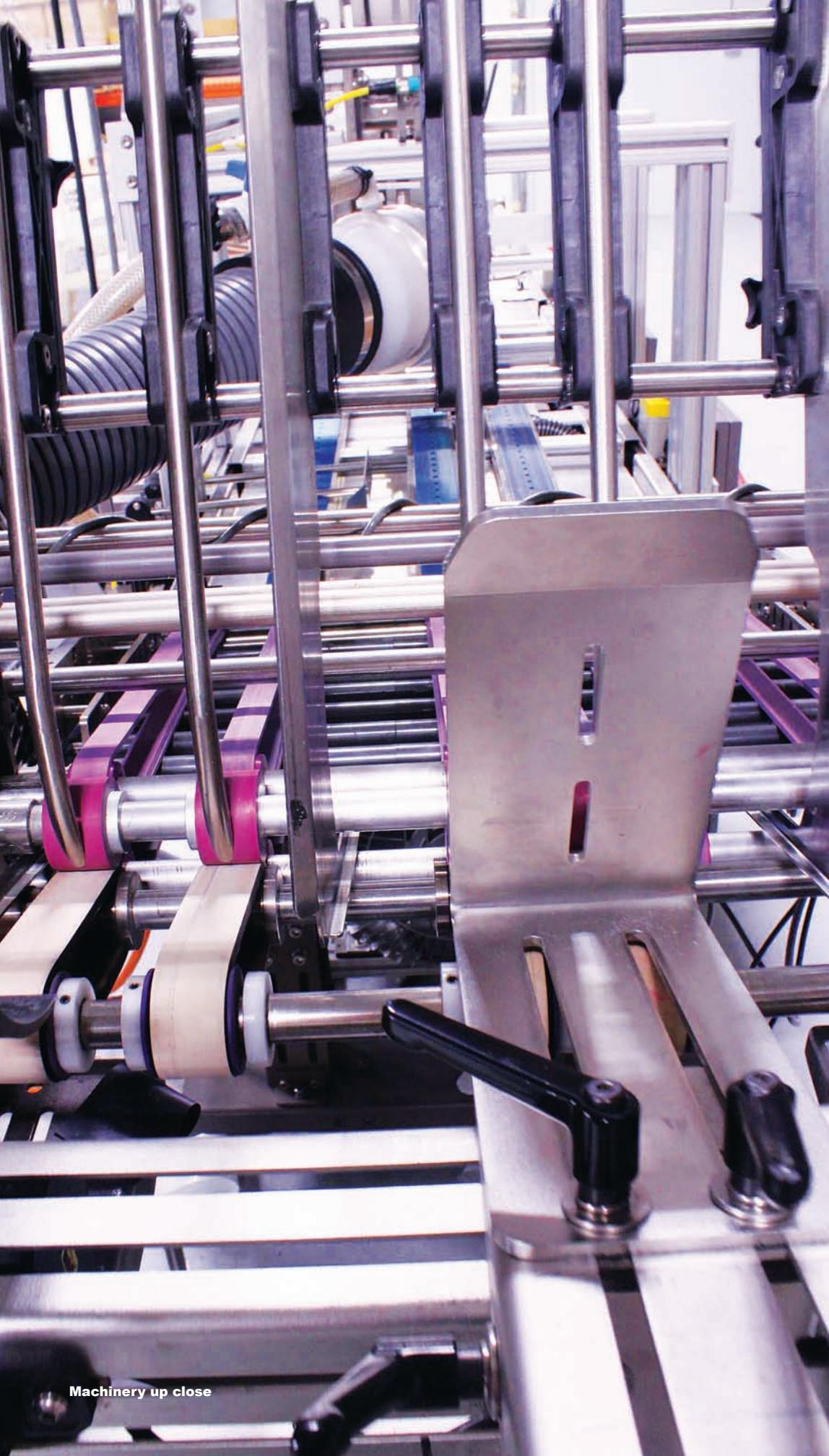
The company's move and anniversary—which were simultaneous—brought attention, but it was designer/writer Laura Weeks'

photographic show, "Project Hands," that probably said more about the company and its values than you knew before.

Laura is a 24-year-old James Madison University graduate who was hired at Magnets for her skills as a writer, photographer and marketing whiz. The show and sale of her work and the books it generated were to benefit the Rescue Mission in Roanoke, something Dale Turner applauds as "being in line with the values we all hold."



Graphics department in an old paint bay



Machinery up close



Donnie Martin with a printed sheet

This is a company that wears its culture on its sleeve. A simple walk through the plant, one where you notice small details, tells a lot about values, contentment, creativity, personal investment and level of quality. The walls are adorned with employee artwork (with slogans)—some of it quite striking—and work stations are occupied by people who readily greet each other and visitors. Product is piled high for shipping and much of it is eye-catching—which is the point of marketing materials.

Turner says he's not quite sure what his company is worth, "but it's worth more to us than it would be to somebody else," at least partly because you can't transfer culture. He lives in Tucson, Arizona ("I like warm weather"), but commutes to the Roanoke Valley about every two weeks and is directly involved with individuals and meetings every day. He regularly attends trade shows.

Donnie Martin, the chief operating officer, has been a co-owner for the past six years, and Randy Johnson is the marketing director. They form a strong coalition, says Martin, that regularly asks employees their opinions on product, production and just about anything else having to do with the running of Magnets USA.

The company is constantly adjusting as it discovers customers' needs and figures out how to meet them. When Laura Weeks announced she wanted to do the Rescue Mission project, she and Johnson put their heads together, looked at the equipment and figured out how to print her photographs on canvas, mount them and frame them. The result is little short of spectacular. She actually produced her first run of photo books (expensively) through ShutterFly, but Johnson and Martin intervened and suggested the company produce 75 of them in-house for sale to benefit the Rescue Mission, at considerably less cost. The technology and equipment were there; they just had to use it.

"We felt the project was in line with our values," says Dale Turner.

That process is pretty much the way the company operates in general: find a need, figure out how to meet it and get to work. "It is important to stay focused," says Martin. "We need to do what we do best. We try a lot of things and that's good because we create product that excels in promotion."

Martin says, "We used to say we need sample [products] that inspire. Now we



Peeling a magnetized sign

say we need people who inspire." Turnover rate is nearly non-existent, says Martin. Employee "retention was 100 percent last year," he says.

Laura Weeks was brought in as a full part of the team, despite her youth, something that has meant a lot to her as a professional. "I feel appreciated," she says.

Part of that appreciation, says Donnie Martin, is the "gamification" of work at Magnets. "Dale always said, 'Let's make a game of it,' when a difficult project came up," says Martin. "It's on-going."

Martin emphasizes that because of the company's size, "We can't always pay to keep the best talent, so we try to have benefits that attract people." In one recent month, he says, the company had two job-seekers (people who had good jobs already) who applied "because they said we had the reputation for caring about our employees. We're very family oriented." In fact, two married couples work at the company and the employees have 90 children among them.

The goal for the company? Says Turner: "To keep going. We have to adjust to a changing world, remain involved with our customer base. Nobody else does as well what we do." 

Magnets USA by the numbers >

238,000,000 padded calendars sold since 1992

35,000 football schedules sold since launch in 2000

20,000,000 magnetized products produced each year

240,000 calls handled, on average, by call center per year

75,000 feet of network cable running through the building

50,000 orders per year, on average

35,000 customers a year, on average

947 miles of calendars produced per year (29 miles high, if stacked)

60 employees

14 years of consecutive growth

5 times the company has moved

(Source: Magnets USA)

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Uber and the gig economy >

On November 6th, 2014 Uber came to Roanoke. Local millennials, smartphone users and bar-hoppers gleefully downloaded the “Uber” app, exclaiming that Roanoke was making one more step toward becoming a metropolitan hub.

Uber, which provides a safe ride with the touch of a button, has been popping up in midsize cities due to its success in large cities nationwide. There were headlines, initially, about the negative impact this new service would have on the locally-owned, car-for-hire small businesses in the Valley. As these stories came to pass, a new narrative emerged: Uber drivers are Roanoke locals, using the supplemental income to support their existing small businesses and projects.

Uber is one example of what Virginia State Senator Mark Warner and many other politicians call the “gig” or “sharing” economy. These new buzz-terms speak to jobs that exist due to emerging technologies, non-traditional forms of employment, and those who choose to engage with or make money off of them.

Sen. Warner cites multiple causes for this new economy, from the Great Recession, to legislation that makes it easier for independent contractors to have affordable healthcare, to the maturation of a generation who grew up using digital technologies. With a presidential election around the corner, Sen. Warner hopes to spark conversation about the implications of this new economy among candidates.

Locally, we are starting to notice the ripple effect in the entrepreneurial community. I have two friends who are part-time Uber drivers, but that doesn’t mean they work part-time. One owns a security and IT business and the other is a local pastor. Both enjoy the flexibility and the supplemental income, which helps them thrive in their full-time careers.

One of the most pressing issues in the entrepreneurial scene in Roanoke is making sure we have the infrastructure to retain innovative professionals, from college graduates to small business owners. Uber is one example of a technology that exists that not only provides a service to end-users, but gives operators the unique opportunity to cobble together a career that fits the a-typical lifestyle of an entrepreneur.

Many of these technologies are fraught with controversy, as are most innovative and disruptive ideas (take AirBnB, for example). As the lawmakers and politicians grapple with the larger-scope issues spawning from the gig economy, those of us in favor of these options can do our part to be responsible, vocal users and operators. 

Young Professionals

By Ariel Lev

Executive Summary:
Our workforce continues to evolve, with more opportunities for the truly independent “contractor” even as we struggle with entrenched systems.

Employee engagement >

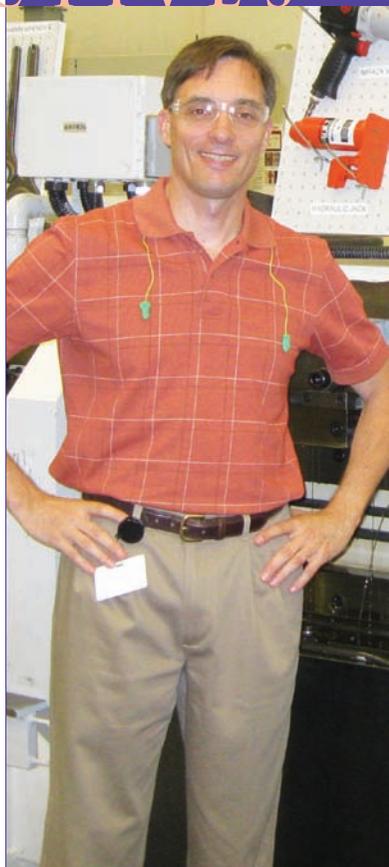
It seems as if every organization these days wants to improve employee engagement. Although employee engagement simply sounds like some warm and fuzzy buzzwords, they certainly are not. Since Gallup began reporting employee engagement in its *State of the American Workforce* report, businesses have become aware of the positive (or negative) impact it can have on performance. Gallup's report is compelling:

- Only 30% of the American workforce is "actively engaged" in their job, meaning they are motivated to do well and to help their company achieve its goals.
- The remaining are either "disengaged" (52%), or "actively disengaged" (18%).
- Gallup estimates that actively disengaged employees cost employers between \$450B and \$550B a year in lost productivity and are more likely to steal from their companies, miss workdays, and drive away customers.

If you want to improve employee engagement in your organization (and all of you should), remember the three E's: Empower, Enable, and Emotionally Attach.

Empower – Everyone wants to feel wanted, useful, and needed. When you empower employees with responsibility or give them an opportunity to provide you feedback and ideas, they will become more engaged. A great way to do this is to delegate. Delegation is a well-known benefit for leaders because it develops employees and improves personal productivity. But a third, lesser-known benefit of delegation is employee empowerment. Look for ways you can delegate something of real value to every employee.

Enable – Have you ever been frustrated by computer problems? Or upset by not having the right tool for the job? Or stressed out because of a task you need to accomplish without the skills to do it? Well so are your employees. If



Business Operations

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
If you are not paying attention to your employees, you're hurting your business.



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This is a compant that wears its culture on its sleeve — Page 25



They could have slowed down to move ahead — Page 44

you are not providing the training, tools, and resources your workforce needs, then you may be hurting your clients and disengaging your employees. Take care of your employees. Ask them what they need and get it for them.

Emotionally Attach – Any good salesman knows that customer buying decisions are emotional ones. So if you want your employees to “buy” your business, they must feel an emotional attachment to what you are “selling”. Does your workforce know your vision and mission? Do your employees understand how their work adds value to your customers? Have you helped them achieve their goals while they are helping you achieve yours? At every opportunity, share customer satisfaction stories with your workforce. Regularly communicate your business goals and vision. Spend time with your employees to learn and support their goals, and genuinely try to help them. They will become more emotionally attached and more engaged in their work.

So remember the three E’s to improve employee engagement, and watch your business excel! 



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Kristen Vest using the TellerVision at Floyd walkup.
The teller on the machine is Amanda Lindsey.

all photos: courtesy of Bank of Floyd

BANK OF FLOYD
the difference



Bank of Floyd's Salem Premier Event ribbon cutting with Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce.

TellerVision ATMs unveiled >

Executive Summary:

The choice in banking between a live clerk at the branch or an ATM machine is... well, no longer the only choice at Bank of Floyd.

By Nicole Dobbs

Bank of Floyd is celebrating a new era of ATM technology. "Two years ago, we took a leap of faith in expectation of this new ATM system, 'TellerVision' as we call it." Chief Administrative Officer Lynn Murray explains, referring to their recently unveiled and supercharged TellerVision ATM machines. In six of their seven branch locations they are introducing the evolution of ATM banking.

"From the day we signed the contract to purchase the machines, we have had a



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Marla Fonseca demonstrates the TellerVision to the Salem-Roanoke Chamber and customers.

dedicated staff of ten to twelve people working tirelessly toward this release," Murray states with pride as the project has come full circle, finally introduced to the public via TellerVision Premiers at their branch locations. The premier's purpose is not only debuting this new technology where everyone is invited to experience firsthand its specialized capacities, but to build familiarity with the new face of ATM advancement.

"With the swipe of your debit card you can activate a face-to-face conversation with a teller." While customers have the option to bank with a teller through these supercharged TellerVision ATMs, if the customer needs only to use the machine as an ATM it is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Through integrated systems, the TellerVision ATMs interface link to four TellerVision dedicated specialists working from their Floyd location. These four specialists are available during banking hours. TellerVision ATMs are at branch

locations in Floyd, Roanoke, Salem, Hillsville, Christiansburg and Radford. At TellerVision ATMs, customers can make deposits for cash or check, make withdrawals, cash checks with the change being deposited into the customer's bank account, make a loan payment and transfer money between Bank of Floyd accounts.

This investment will definitely revolutionize ATM banking. Through interactive TellerVision ATMs, Bank of Floyd is guaranteeing all their customers will be greeted by a smiling face and a personal banking experience. This use of technology encourages community and employs an unexpected medium to demonstrate that every Bank of Floyd customer is worth the time and investment.

At Bank of Floyd, customers are finding more than a machine when they interact with a TellerVision ATM. They are discovering a reason to look over and smile: a TellerVision specialist is a one debit card swipe away. 



When you don't own your name >

My friend the realtor was livid. "That name is MINE!" he said. "How can she DARE to use the same name!"

The realtor had called me, fuming, when he found out that another agent had opened a new real estate office calling herself "Real Estate of Southwest Virginia." My friend already had been doing business for a couple of years as "Real Estate of Southwestern Virginia."

"I want you to send her a cease-and-desist letter," he said. "It's obvious that this is trademark infringement."

"Actually, it probably would be pretty hard to win a case against her," I said. "The problem is that your name is too descriptive."

"Well of course, it's descriptive," he said. "I need to tell people what I do, and I need to tell people where I do it. I sell real estate in Southwestern Virginia, and so I call my business 'Real Estate of Southwestern Virginia.'"

"Unfortunately, that's exactly why a name like yours can be really difficult to protect," I said. "The purpose of trademark law is to help consumers tell the difference between businesses. But at the same time, all businesses are entitled to use common, everyday English words to describe what they do."

"Well, that's just what I'm doing," he said.

"Right, but it's sort of like a First Amendment thing," I said. "When you claim trademark rights in 'Real Estate of Southwestern Virginia,' you're saying that no other realtor should be able to use those words to describe his or her business. SOUTHWESTERN VIRGINIA just describes where you're located. People are entitled to describe where they're located. So trademark law generally won't allow you to stop other people in Southwest Virginia from saying that they're in Southwest Virginia."

"But my company name is 'Real Estate of Southwestern Virginia LLC,'" he said. "And I own the domain name, 'RealEstateofSouthWesternVirginia.com.'"

"It's great to have a company and to own a domain name," I said, "but neither of those give you any trademark rights. Only using a trademark in commerce gives you trademark rights. But even then, you've still got a problem because your name is purely descriptive. Can you imagine a realtor doing business without using the words REAL ESTATE?"

Shark Patrol

By Keith Finch

Executive Summary:

If your business name does nothing more than describe your business, then you may not be able to protect it. You won't own it, and you won't be able to stop other people from using it.

“No,” he said.

“See, the words REAL ESTATE are just descriptive of what every real estate agent does,” I said, “and so trademark law is not going to allow you to stop other realtors from using those words. Someone could set up shop next door to you calling himself ‘Southwest Virginia Real Estate,’ or ‘SWVA Realty,’ or anything similar, and you wouldn’t be able to stop him. For that you need a protectable mark.”

I went on to tell him about the five levels of trademark protectability:

1. “Fanciful” marks are the strongest. These are made-up words that didn’t even exist before someone created them to use as trademarks, words like XEROX or KODAK or SKYPE. Fanciful marks can be difficult to market, though, since there is no connection between the mark and the product—until you create one through your marketing.
2. “Arbitrary” marks also are strong. These are common words used to describe completely unrelated goods or services, like APPLE for cell phones or OLD CROW for whiskey. Of course, arbitrary marks too pose a marketing challenge.
3. “Suggestive” marks involve a connection between the mark and the product that requires an imaginative leap, like GREYHOUND for a bus service or PLAYSTATION for a video game console. Suggestive marks can be a good balance between strength and marketability.
4. “Descriptive” marks just describe your goods or services, like REAL ESTATE OF SOUTHWESTERN VIRGINIA. Geographic terms and surnames are usually descriptive. If you pick a descriptive mark, then it only will be protectable if it acquires “secondary meaning,” which essentially means that when the general public sees or hears the mark, they think of your business first. Examples of descriptive marks with secondary meaning include SPORTS ILLUSTRATED and FIJI WATER.
5. “Generic” terms can’t be protected as trademarks at all. Examples would include using the name BEER for a new brand of beer, or using the name APPLE as a brand for apples from your orchard. You would not be able to stop other people from using the words BEER or APPLE.

“Hey wait a minute, Apple Computer uses the name APPLE, and it’s a really valuable brand,” the realtor said. “I’ll bet they sue people for trademark infringement all the time.”



The purpose of trademark law is to help consumers tell the difference between businesses. But at the same time, all businesses are entitled to use common, everyday English words to describe what they do.



Identical trademarks for completely different products can coexist just fine, like DOVE for chocolate and DOVE for soap, or GERBER for knives and GERBER for baby food.

“Right, but APPLE used for cell phones is not the same trademark as APPLE used for the round, red fruit that comes from trees,” I said. “There are two parts to a trademark: one is the word or phrase itself, and the other is the good or service that it’s used on. So for example, identical trademarks for completely different products can coexist just fine. There’s DOVE for chocolate and DOVE for soap, and there’s GERBER for knives and GERBER for baby food. No one would ever confuse chocolate for soap, and no one would ever confuse knives for baby food. So there’s no trademark infringement.”

“Could I call myself APPLE REAL ESTATE?” he said.

“Maybe,” I said. “First you’d have to see whether someone else out there already is using APPLE for real estate. But it would be arbitrary, and so it certainly would be more protectable than REAL ESTATE OF SOUTHWESTERN VIRGINIA.”

In the end, the realtor picked a distinctive name and had us research it for him to make sure no one else was using it for real estate brokerage services, and then he had us file an application to register the name for real estate brokerage services with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Unfortunately he had to change all of his branding—something that he could have avoided if he had started off by picking a business name that it was actually possible for him to own in the first place.

Keith can be reached at keith@creekmorelaw.com

Note: *facts have been changed to preserve confidentiality. Oh, and this isn’t legal advice—you should consult a lawyer before actually selecting a trademark or business name, etc.*

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all photos: Dan Smith

The Advancement Foundation President, Annette Patterson.

Incubating in Vinton >

Executive Summary:

The Advancement Foundation, focused on community development - prepares low to moderate income citizens - and the privileged—for bigger roles in society, takes on building businesses from the birthing room with The HIVE.

By Dan Smith

Imagine for a moment that you've just been released from jail after serving two years for distributing drugs. Or that you're a recently divorced single mom or a guy who's been laid off from a long-held job.

The world is not beating its way to your door with jobs. You have a skill as a carpenter or a hairdresser or a writer, but opening a business is far beyond your level of knowledge or comfort. You want to change your life from its downward spiral, though, and you know something has to give.

Enter Annette Patterson and The Advancement Foundation. Annette is

an attractive, middle-aged curly-blond who is outgoing, comforting and interested. She has been working with the dispossessed for years and now she has this new thing in Vinton—this Business Incubation Center—and she's telling you that you have a chance. A real chance to make a living, to become a success, to get your life back. And you're believing her. And she's believing in you. Nobody's ever done that before.

Patterson has assembled a team of more than 75 business leaders who understand your desire to change your path, want to share their knowledge with you, make connections and bulldoze barriers.

Patterson, who has a background in social work and mental health, founded The Advancement Foundation (TAF) in 2007 with the intention of helping "impact the cycle of poverty for those who seek upward mobility by breaking down barriers and creating opportunities to build financial, skill, and health assets," she says. "Many of these efforts would be aimed at local women in need of life improvement." It was about creating entrepreneurs, among other things, by teaching skills and providing opportunities



Habibah Yasin, Annette Patterson and Debbie Davis spell HIVE (Home of Innovative and Visionary Entrepreneurs)

these clients had never imagined existed.

That worked and led to The Advancement Foundation becoming a true community organizer. The Charity Cottage thrift store in Vinton was founded to help finance projects, and volunteers from VISTA and AmeriCorps were brought in to help the overall program. Patterson formed a swim team for inner-city youth and adults and 2013 and found interest almost overwhelming. She is a champion swimmer and swim coach, so this was a natural progression.

But still more was needed and the idea for the incubator arose. Patterson and her sister, Debbie Davis (who became director of the incubator), hammered out a game plan and sold it to Vinton Town Council. Council furnished the ground floor of the Health

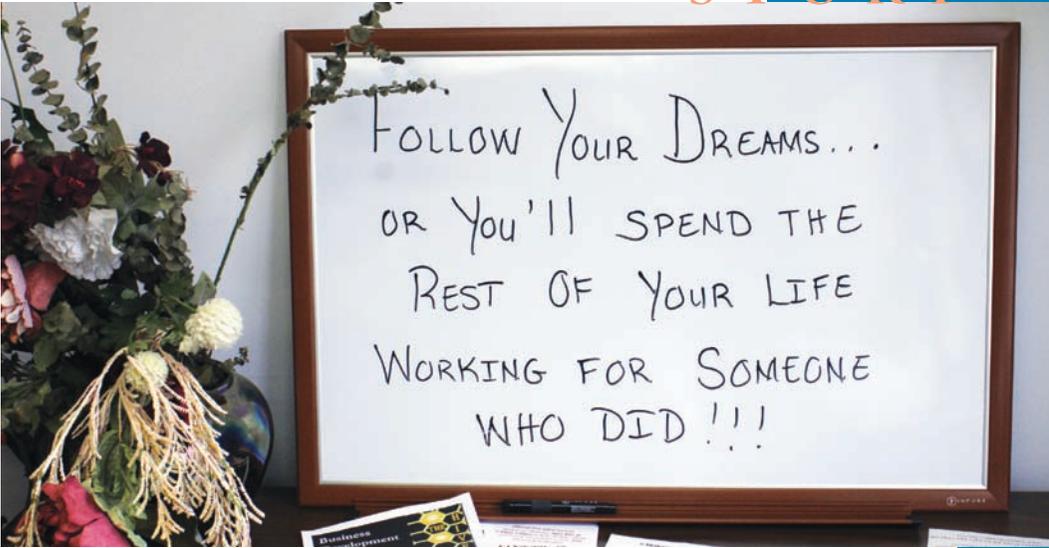
Department building—3,500 square feet—for the Business Incubation Center (Home of Innovative and Visionary Entrepreneurs: HIVE) for \$1 a year.

HIVE wants worker bees from all demographics, not just the poor, and wants to represent the full range of business people and entrepreneurs.

The space has been under reconstruction for several weeks and the HIVE was in the process of recruiting clients for its seven office spaces, co-working space, and business support services at press time. Spaces go for \$100 to \$600 a month, depending on the clients' needs. As with other incubators, this is not just space, it is real-world help, leadership and advice for the new entrepreneurs.



Debbie Davis shows off the under-construction conference room



Recently, the foundation sponsored a business plan competition—the Gauntlet—where entrepreneurs presented their plans for judging. They were given awards and opportunities. One of the winners was Habibah Yasan, a hairdresser who began with Advancement Foundation and has evolved into a teacher and mentor.

"We are trying to create a synergy with the entrepreneurs," says Patterson. "They will share ideas, support each other."

She is blunt in her assessment of what clients often face: "Low income people have been relegated to slavery," she says with an intense look. "They are owned by low-paying jobs that hold little opportunity for them to gain

real assets. We evaluate them 360 degrees—every angle—encompassing all their needs and help develop a plan of action."

The plan, says Debbie Davis, "is tailored to the individual. We take someone who is struggling or even homeless, evaluate their needs and dreams" and help prepare them to meet those goals.

Finding mentors, volunteers and contributors has been relatively easy, says Patterson, because Roanoke is an entrepreneur's city, one where help is available. The goal now is to find "entrepreneurs, felons, single moms, the homeless, those of moderate income—people who need our help." And there are plenty of those. 



A small office at the incubator.



On Tap from the Pub

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

You simply have to change speed if you intend to keep traveling on the road of commerce.

Our three-speed world >

Whether running in your shoes or running a business, there are really only three speeds. Slow down. Speed up. Stay the same.

For the most part, we have the choice on which way to go; but there are always consequences.

Some would argue that slowing down is never an option. There are times, however, when doing exactly that is the best course of action. I witnessed a small company get really big for its britches in a really short time frame. They were so successful they began grabbing for additional business channels (with their existing customers) that they really weren't prepared to manage. Being the sort of enterprise that invented itself all along in the first place, surely they could deliver in the new areas, right? After all, they were as familiar with the clients as anyone could be. The new areas were also related to the services they were providing. The can-do attitude actually backfired in this company's case; and today they are a shell of what they used to be. The principals and insiders will even admit they should have stuck to their core competencies. Had they simply remained in their pocket, gradually picking up new business and new clients instead of trying to up-sell, cross-sell, "value-add" or whatever you want to call it, they would more likely have experienced sustained growth.

In essence, they could have slowed down to move ahead.

Given that very example, some would argue that speeding up is too risky. But this one's a no-brainer. We all know there are times when a company better step up its game. Again, using our own market, can you imagine an established restaurant announcing that it won't accept credit cards? We actually have at least one prominent and long-standing restaurant in Roanoke that still refuses credit cards; and sure enough, business associates of mine all agree we simply avoid it as an option when taking clients to lunch, since that's what we prefer to use for business expenses and tracking. And who can imagine a media outlet in today's market claiming it doesn't really need a digital platform?

Some businesses could speed up a bit to catch up with the rest of the world.

Lastly, there is never a good time to remain at the exact same speed. Name one company over a few years old that never once accelerated or applied the brakes. None exists.

If you work for a company that just plods along, doing the exact same thing in the exact same manner day in and day out, I don't mind telling you this: you should be worried.

However you manage your speed, you can bet there is someone aiming a radar gun at you. And he's probably hiding behind a big ol' billboard that has you distracted. I've got his name if you want it:

Your next customer. 

Reaching the millennial >

With Millennials surpassing Baby Boomers as the largest living generation this year, more businesses are concerned with how to connect with Millennials and retain them as customers.

Accounting firms are no different. They are more vulnerable to this shift than companies in other industries. As with any business-building endeavor there are two major concerns: client acquisition (getting them) and retention (keeping them).

Acquisition

Accountants on the whole are poor marketers. Sorry if that offends, but I stand by it. Most of us are more attuned to the technical and analytical aspects of our field, and do a sub-par job when it comes to proactively attracting clients. Aspects of this were highlighted very well in Natalia Autenrieth's article on transitioning from CPA to financial advisor. She notes: "to oversimplify for the sake of example, as long as you can fog up the mirror, have a CPA license and be available, someone will show up."

We as accountants have the luxury of generally being in-demand and many are likely still influenced by the fact that advertising by accountants has been banned in the past. But the "fog up the mirror" approach simply will not work with Millennials. They make consumer decisions differently than previous generations.

Shingles hanging outside a building, phone book directories, and even word of mouth referrals carry less weight with them and are not necessarily how a purchasing decision will be made. The majority of decisions are made at least partially on some digitally sourced information. Accounting firms at the very least need to focus on these basics:

Online testimonials and reviews: These are more easily accessible than word of mouth referrals and 88 percent of consumers trust them just as much.

Social presence and activity: Social networks provide the ability for consumers to find information on your company or share their experiences with friends. They often double as review hubs and are an important component of Search Engine Optimization.

A modern and professionally designed website: This is a requirement among younger consumers. This is your storefront and your face in the digital world. Having a landing page with your contact information may have sufficed five years ago, but a poorly-designed website in today's market makes you look like an amateur and will send Gen Y prospects running away from you as fast as their digital feet will let them.

Search Engine Optimization/Pay-Per-Click (SEO/PPC): A great-looking website is fantastic, but its utility is limited if



Guest Commentary

By Micah Fraim, CPA

Executive Summary:
As Millennials increasingly own more of the purchasing power, businesses must adapt; this advice for accountants holds true for most industries.



Blogging not only helps your search engine optimization, but it also showcases your knowledge to clients and prospects. All of the articles I write are emailed to clients, prospects and business contacts. It costs next to nothing aside from time and is an excellent way to build relationships with existing and prospective clients.

no one finds you on a Google search. Investing to rank higher on search engines provides one of the highest ROIs from advertising spend. It is relatively low-cost and is targeted to people who are interested in your services. For example, anyone searching for “CPA Roanoke” is already looking for an accountant in my area. Why shouldn’t they see my name pop up first? (By the way, they do-and that didn’t happen by accident.)

Blogging and email marketing: Blogging not only helps your SEO, but it also showcases your knowledge to clients and prospects. All of the articles I write are emailed to clients, prospects and business contacts. It costs next to nothing aside from time and is an excellent way to build relationships with existing and prospective clients.

An in-depth discussion about these business strategies is not possible within the confines of this article. But the key takeaway for accounting firms needs to be this: Millennials make decisions based on information that is fed to them digitally. Failure to be properly represented and active online are costing firms the business of this increasingly important demographic.

Retention

So let’s say you’ve invested the time and money on various aspects of digital marketing and have a bunch of Millennial/ GenY clients. Great, but it only stays great as long as you keep them. I pick up Millennial clients frequently, often because they have been dissatisfied with the relationship and interaction with their previous CPA.

Sometimes this is just because of personalities not meshing, but sometimes it comes down to the manner in which Millennials do business. Again, this has the slant towards the digital. None of the suggestions below are earth shattering. Still, they do provide a level of convenience and comfort that the tech savvy appreciate.

Email responsiveness: My attachment to my cell phone borders on illness and obsession. But I am a Millennial! With that compulsion I respond to most emails within two hours-even if just to say, “I’m on it. I’ll be back to you soon,” if I don’t have the answer immediately. The accountant down the street with a desktop computer who will respond to the urgent 5:30 PM email the next morning isn’t endearing himself to the anxious client. The person with email on his iPhone answering at 7 PM is. (Yes, I know you don’t want to do that. Who does? But the real question is “do you want to keep clients for years to come?” If so, we have to adapt.)

Electronic sending and receiving of documents: I have some clients I literally do not see all year. I have clients that I have never met in person-some of whom live thousands of miles away. All of the interaction is via phone, email and other

electronic means. They send their tax documents to me, I prepare the return, and I shoot them the finished copies and authorization forms all electronically. In previous years this may have been a security concern, but there are a number of low-cost encryption services that make this safe and convenient. You can even include a link in your email signature for clients to send you files through a secure server.

Shared folders: Same concept as the above, but some clients have documents to send to you monthly. For these you can install shared folders (with services like Dropbox or Google Drive.) These function the same as any other folders on your computer except both you and your client have access to the files therein.

Videoconferencing and remote meetings: Oftentimes clients will need assistance with their QuickBooks or other accounting software. Rather than having them haul everything to your office or you going to their location, it is possible to use a meeting software to fix the issue remotely. You can port into their computer and there is even a video chat function while you are doing it. It is time efficient for you, and younger clients love it.

Text messaging: This has been the subject of a number of comedy routines. Some younger generations have a near phobia of talking on the phone. If you have teenagers around, you know this. Younger clients often prefer the convenience and ease of texting for short discussion. The ability for them to shoot you a quick question without hesitation, not having to worry if they're bothering you or whether they're going to end up in a protracted phone conversation carries a lot of value to Millennials.

Electronic payments: I have had clients who do not know how to send a letter or write a check. All of them under 25. And they aren't uneducated or stupid. Gen Y just does things differently. This sounds funny, but for many people it is a rare occurrence. Driving to a post office to pick up stamps to mail you a check (when they can't even find their checkbook anyway) seems like a big imposition. You must make it easier for them by allowing the ability to pay online. It helps you get your money faster, gives them an easy record of the payment, and is convenient for them.

Perhaps you're saying, "But I like the way I do things now." The point, though, is that the biggest pool of future business- and lasting business- does not like the old way of doing things. And if you won't accommodate their style and their desired interaction, someone else will gladly do so and will prosper at your expense.

These and other small tweaks can build loyalty between you and your Millennial-aged clients. They are simple to implement and in many cases actually save you time, in addition to creating happy clients. You can't get much better than that. 



Oftentimes clients will need assistance with their QuickBooks or other accounting software. Rather than having them haul everything to your office or you going to their location, it is possible to use a meeting software to fix the issue remotely.

Books @ the FRONT >

Following are book recommendations from our contributors and business people in the Roanoke and New River Valleys who are inveterate readers. Readers are invited to submit short 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 news@vbFRONT.com



Road notes

I found this little surprising treat in a local coffee house. Hollins University grad Amelia Roberson's new self-published *Shadow Drive* (CreateSpace; 2015) is exactly the book to accompany a cup of coffee for a drop in work break; so first of all, kudos on the product placement. And like coffee, you can take it so many ways, though more bold blends than smooth. Not only are the poetic assembles the perfect accompaniment to visuals that will dance in your head, they are all the more grab-worthy when you realize most of the images are like crime scene arrangements up and down our very own Interstate 81. Good with just enough grit to grab traction.

—Tom Field

In the aftermath

Uncharted Territory: A Mad Max Mystery (Koehler; 2015), a novel by Betsy Ashton, is set during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina with action from New York City to Richmond, Virginia, to Mississippi.

Maxine Davis – Mad Max to her grandkids – had taken on second parenthood for said grandkids after the murder of her daughter. Trying to hold the family together with their dad, who was utterly committed to his work and only happy when he was running construction operations around the world, she came up with a simple plan. Whip, the dad, would commit to construction projects in the States. Max and the kids would join him and live in

top-of-the-line RVs. The kids would be home schooled, and life would be reasonably sane. Great plan!

Then came Hurricane Katrina devastating the Gulf States and Max's life. Whip took on a reconstruction project in Mississippi and the fun began. Max and the gang have to contend with a devastated countryside; limited resources; a local population that is shattered and suspicious of outsiders; a roaming gang of escaped convicts who enjoy theft, murder, and rape; a corrupt sheriff; a sex abuser priest; and raising a thirteen year-old girl and eleven year-old "holy-crap boy-child". Murder, mayhem, and conspiring abound. Read and find out why Maxine is "Mad Max".

—John M. Koelsch

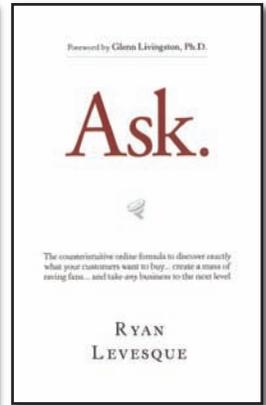
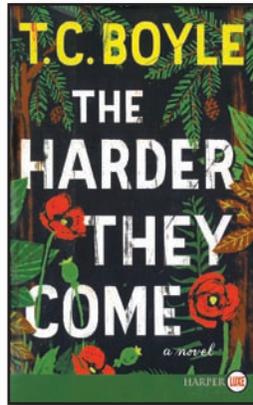
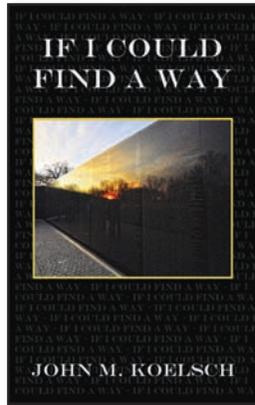
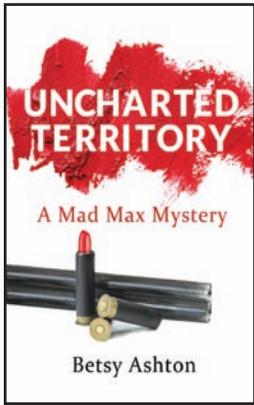
Soldier's lament

From the cover to the opening haiku to the last essay, the collection of poems and essays by John M. Koelsch in *If I Could Find A Way* (CreateSpace; 2015), takes the reader into the reality of a soldier in the Vietnam War.

"Blood Harvest," the opening haiku, sets the tone:

Seed strewn upon stone.
Lives wasted in senseless war.
We reap marble slabs.

Koelsch's collection is intensely personal. His experiences in wartime and his struggle



with post traumatic stress disorder inform his strongest poems. We learn why green can be frightening, because jungle hides the enemy and their tracer bullets were also green. Nightmares fill many poems. So do thoughts of suicide, the dead Koelsch couldn't rescue, the damaged living in pain.

This book is not for the faint of heart, but if you want to understand how one soldier still suffers from serving his country, I encourage you to add this to your collection.

If I could, I'd give it five tears instead of five stars.

—Betsy Ashton

Destructive mind profiled

T.C. Boyle's *The Harder They Come* (Harper; 2015) is a story of the wayward son. Wayward. There's really no redeeming value for this bad seed either; and you're only left to wonder what caused the antisocial demeanor. Drugs and mental disorder prevail, but both rather come along with the territory. Adam (and his alter ego Coulter) is isolated from everyone, with the exception of his girlfriend and occasional run-in with the parentals. And though none of them are perfect, they're hardly evil-inducing. The descriptive narrative is well done here. Anti-government rhetoric fuels the character development. The story—unfulfilling, but intentionally so.

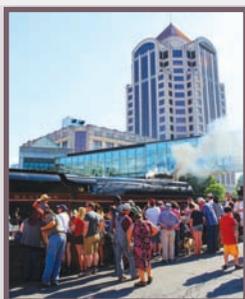
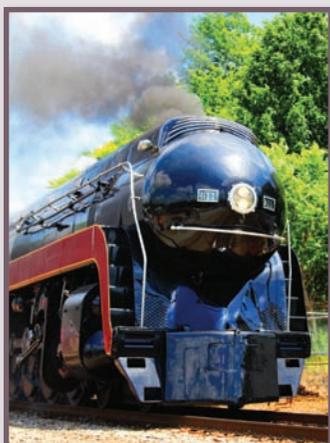
—Tom Field

How to ask

There are two ways to capitalize on *Ask.* (Dunham; 2015) by Ryan Levesque if you use email marketing for your business. One, hand it to your staff who manages your outbound email. Somebody will have to read the entire second section, which is very specific and very formulaic — and indeed it is an effective system. Or two, call up the author and have him come in as a paid consultant to set it all up. I suspect that may be the primary objective of this how-to book, because as descriptive as the task section is, it will be complicated for most small businesses, since two fundamental areas aren't fully identified: the important list segmentation (how to manage who gets what at what stage depending on the response from the previous communication); and the scheduling (when the successive messages deploy and the staggering). The practical application may be a little overbearing to develop at first, but the strategy is spot on. His lessons on "how to say it" are the best nuggets in the whole book. My takeaway: if you can't get your system to this level, don't stop the basic or elementary one you might have in place—frequent and regular communication is better than none.

—Tom Field

(The reviewers: Tom Field is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; John Koelsch is with the Roanoke Valley Writers Club and the author of *Mickey 6*; Betsy Ashton is president of the Virginia Writers Club and authors the *Mad Max* series.)



The time is 611 >

On May 30, when the refurbished Norfolk & Western Class J-611 steam locomotive rolled into Roanoke, it was as if the whole town—and everyone along roadside from Lynchburg (it's last stretch between Spencer, NC and Roanoke) responded. Built in Roanoke in 1950, and sitting idle for more than two decades, the engine was returned after a major fundraising and restoration project to a most enthusiast reception.



Here's your breakfast >

United Way of Montgomery, Radford and Floyd hosted a Drive-Thru Breakfast fundraiser at the Hampton Inn in Christiansburg, raising \$2,850 for health needs in the New River Valley; volunteer **George Jackson** (above) delivers a breakfast bag to a customer, filled with items donated by sponsoring businesses.



Post it notes >

Sara Elizabeth Timmons and **David Baldacci** answer questions after the showing of *Wish You Well* at Roanoke's Grandin Theatre, upon the premier screening June 2; the director and author praised the significant contributions from the regional community on the film, shot mostly on location at a family farm in Giles County.



Theatrical lineup >

Mill Mountain Theatre's first company of summer apprentices for the 2015 production of *Rootabega!* includes Abigail Grubb (Marymounty Manhattan College); Nicole Chaney (University of Virginia); Taylor Moore (Radford University); Brianna Carpenter (American Musical and Dramatic Academy); Patrick Lynch (Christopher Newport University); Murtaza Kapasi (Washington and Lee University); Valencia Lombardi Chisholm (Hollins University); Nicholas Lehotsky (Washington and Lee); and not pictured: Hannah Land (Virginia Commonwealth University).



Say cheese >

The first **Virginia Cheese Festival** was held June 13 in Blacksburg at the Moss Arts Center on the Virginia Tech campus; a sizeable turnout for the cheese tastings, wine and beer pairings, workshops, music and art.

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

Career FRONT

FINANCIAL FRONT

Scott Crawford has joined as professional development officer at ValleyStar Credit Union in Rocky Mount.

Angela Willard has joined as mortgage loan officer serving Franklin County, and **James Chidester** has joined as mortgage loan officer serving Lynchburg at MemberOne FCU.



Crouch

Betty Crouch has joined as senior manager in the tax practice of Dixon Hughes Goodman / Western Mid-Atlantic Practice - Roanoke office.

Rich Bryan has been

appointed president, **Sandy Jaeger** has been hired as associate client manager, and Chris Bishop has passed the Certified Financial Planner exam at Partners in Financial Planning in Salem.

Tara Lilly has been promoted to marketing manager, **Paul Economy** has been promoted to chief retail officer, and **Steve McClure** has been promoted to director of operations at MemberOne Federal Credit Union.

Rachel Cripps has been promoted to financial specialist; **Kimberly Lawrence** has been promoted to banking officer and Roanoke downtown assistant branch manager; **Carol Dearing** has been named downtown Roanoke branch floating retail specialist; **Desmond Cornette** has been named Salem branch retail specialist

at HomeTown Bank.

Alan Hurd III has been named president of Preferred Source for Insurance.

Brytonie Helton has been promoted to branch manager at Carter Bank & Trust in Salem.



Farrell

William Farrell, President of Berglund Management Group, has joined the HomeTown Bank board of directors.

LEGAL FRONT

Justice Cynthia D. Kinser, senior counsel for Gentry Locke, is the recipient of the Judicial



Kinser

Council of Virginia's 2014 Harry L. Carrico Outstanding Career Service Award.



Finnicum

Andrew Finnicum has joined as attorney, primarily in the personal injury, medical malpractice, and workers' compensation practice, at Gentry Locke.

WELLNESS FRONT

Alan Larson has been

Read the FRONT online

vbFRONT.com

Also get more stories and pictures at morefront.blogspot.com



Green

named the South Central Virginia market president and CEO of Danville Regional Medical Center.

Elizabeth "Libby" Green, R.N., has been named director of nursing for Richfield Recovery & Care Center and The Rehab Venter.

Jim Barker has been



Barker

promoted to vice president of finance at Corvesta, Inc.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

John Lugar of Virginia Varsity Transfer and Self Storage, has been named president of the 2015-16 Virginia Movers and Warehousemen's Association.

Marc Schillebeeckx



Schillebeeckx

has joined as executive vice president of sales, services and marketing

FROM THE Grapevine

The Source for Roanoke's Commercial Real Estate Buzz
By Richard Wellford & Bryan Musselwhite



The Demand for Apartments Continues.

Investors purchase income producing real estate to make money from cash flows, and that is exactly what a properly managed and maintained apartment building will bring. The manageable risk of multiple tenants is one of the things that makes multifamily properties a favorite vehicle for many investors.

Another advantage is that multifamily property typically offers a higher ratio of building to land value which means more of the capital investment can be depreciated. Additionally, the depreciation life of residential income property (27.5 years) is shorter than other commercial property types (39 years). Combined, these two factors can result in higher annual depreciation write-offs.

Industry projections show apartment demand and multifamily property values rising over the next 5-10 years. In Roanoke, apartment building values have held steady or increased even in the face of the increased supply. That's a result of increased tenant demand and the low cost of money.

So, let's review; cash flow, low risk, tax advantages and increasing values. Sounds like a good time to buy.



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Like us on Facebook at "Team Grapevine"

Career FRONT

at Virginia Transformer Corp.

Molly Doyle has joined as creative associate at B2C Enterprises.

DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Sawyers

Sarah Sawyers has been hired as dietician at Warm Hearth Village.

Todd Marcum of Access Advertising & PR was recognized with a Silver Medal award for lifetime achievement in advertising by AAF Roanoke.

EDUCATION FRONT

Rolf Mueller, associate professor of mechanical engineering in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech, has received an IBM Faculty Award to develop computing techniques modeled on the mammalian brain.



Kniola



Brown



Hollingsworth



Heaslip

senior consultant for communications and college relations at Jefferson College of Health Sciences.



Sparks

Rick Sparks has been named university registrar at Virginia Tech.



Kelderhouse

Nancy Kelderhouse has joined the staff of The Glebe as director of resident services.



Scherer

Hannah Scherer has been appointed assistant professor of agricultural, leadership, and community education and Extension specialist at Virginia Tech.

resources; **David Kniola**, assistant director for assessment and evaluation; **Anne Brown**, biochemistry graduate; and **Louis "Bobby" Hollingsworth**, chemical engineering and biochemistry undergrad have received the 2015 Illuminator Award at Virginia Tech.



Rafie

Carlin Rafie has been named assistant professor and Extension specialist at Virginia Tech.

RETAIL/SERVICE FRONT

Jeffrey Marks, general manager of WDBJ 7 television, has been inducted into the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame.

Shane Stoll, production manager at SERVPRO of Roanoke, Montgomery & Pulaski Counties, has attained designation as a Certified Ventilation System Inspector (CVI) from the National Air Duct Cleaners Association.



Gabrysch

Emily Gabrysch, web designer in human

Eugene Kotulka has been named superintendent of Alleghany County Public Schools.

Kevin Heaslip has been named research leader for resilience in National Capital Region at Virginia Tech.

Mark Lambert has been promoted to



Sontheimer

Harold Sontheimer has been appointed I.D. Wilson Chair in

the College of Science at Virginia Tech.



Sirgy

M. Joseph Sirgy has been named Virginia Tech Real Estate Professor by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors.



Dowd



Travis

Frances Dowd and Elli Travis have been named economic development specialists in Virginia Tech's Office of Economic Development.

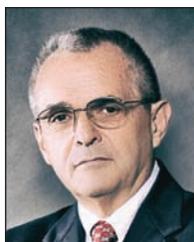
CULTURE FRONT

Isaac Rife has joined as director of member services for the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce.



Wade

Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia has named **Jim Wade**, former president of Advance Auto Parts, and **Bruce Farrell**, CEO of Berglund Management Group to the region's Business Hall of Fame.



Farrell

AAF Roanoke advertising club has announced its 2015-16 board and slate of officers: **Jamal Millner** (president); **Stephanie Brown** (vice president and public service); **Samantha Torre** (Ad 2 president); **Colleen Dresser** (treasurer); **Tom Field** (programs); **Patrick Carrell** (communications); **Leigh Anne Kelley** (diversity and education); **Jarett Henshaw** (membership); **Amy Pearman** (awards); **Matt Brown** (fundraising); **Chris West** (sponsorships).

Ferne Moschella has been awarded the 2015 Professional Leadership Award by the Christiansburg-



Moschella

Blacksburg Rotary Club.

Matt Brown received the AAF National Division 3 President of the Year award at the 2015 American Advertising Federation national conference.

MUNICIPAL FRONTS

W. Brent Robertson has been appointed county administrator for Franklin County.

Dan McKeague has been appointed district ranger for the Eastern Divide Ranger District, headquartered in Blacksburg.

Compiled by Tom Field

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Old Virginia Brick sits empty, awaiting its future

Brick sale

Old Virginia Brick in Salem has closed after 125 years of operation; Alton Prillaman, an attorney in Roanoke bought the property for \$1.78 million; auctions and property sales included the Salem headquarters and manufacturing facility, Madison Heights facility, and brick mining locations in Roanoke County and Elliston. The 9/11 monument on the property (constructed of beams from the Twin Towers) was donated to the City of Salem.

150 mark

Roanoke County received a leadership award by the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission for the County's various commemorations of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War.

150 exit

Construction is proceeding as scheduled

at the Interstate 81 Exit 150 interchange in Botetourt County despite a lawsuit from TravelCenters of America truck stop claiming improper shutdown by the State's use of eminent domain.

Closing the gap

The long-awaited movie based on Adriana Trigiani's **Big Stone Gap** is finally releasing nationwide in theaters in October, according to an announcement by the author and Picturehouse; the film premiered at the Virginia Film Festival in Charlottesville last year, is set in the town of Big Stone Gap in the late 1970s, shot on location there, and stars Ashley Judd, Whoopi Goldberg, Jenna Elfman, Pattick Wilson, Benjamin Hickey, Jane Krakowski, and Anthony LaPaglia.

Barter for an Emmy

Blue Ridge PBS has received a 2014 Emmy® Award nomination from the National Capital Chesapeake Bay Chapter

of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for the Documentary - Cultural category with "Barter Theatre: Trading Ham for Hamlet."

Library travels

The Roanoke County Public Library / South County branch has been approved as a **Passport Acceptance Facility** by the U.S. Department of State.

Say ahhh no more

Allergease, a throat lozenges distributor and recipient of about \$700,000 of a \$1.125 million grant from the Virginia Tobacco Commission, has closed its office in Danville.

LU F-U-L-L

At the first of June **Liberty University** reported it is shutting off its on-campus enrollments for the fall semester because it has reached capacity; receiving a record 33,914 applications. The campus

has been expanding and is constructing more residence halls; freshmen are required to live on campus.

Rock on

Eternal Summers, an indie trio band in Roanoke, with a new album "Gold and Stone", has been listed in the top ten new artists you need to know about by Rolling Stone magazine.

Snackin' up

Monogram Foods in Henry County is expanding again; the meat jerky and cheese snack producer is investing \$7.2 million in warehouse and logistics as well as 100 new jobs.

Google on NoVa roads

Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) at Virginia Tech, which has been active in the research and development field of self-driving cars, will be even more aggressive with the announcement

of live testing on public roads in Virginia on Interstates 95, 495, 66, and U.S. 29 and 50.

Feed the chickens

Novozymes is marketing a probiotic for poultry, adding beneficial bacteria to feed that will improve animal growth and gut health and reduce the need for antibiotics in chicken production. The product will be manufactured in the Salem / West Roanoke County facility, a response to more countries and companies (Tyson, Perdue, McDonalds, Walmart, Chick Fil A) banning or phasing out the use of non-medicinal human antibiotics in chicken, according to a company statement.

Pinball wizards

Roanoke Pinball Museum has opened at downtown's Center in the Square, second

floor; a collection of 46 machines from 1948 to today.

See more

PogoTech of Roanoke is the new name of Photo-Eyewear, the electronic wearable device inventor and manufacturer, now including three new divisions: *On-Track* attachment components, *Look & Shoot* camera attachment, and *Pogo-Power* wireless power system.

New operator

The Park, a dance club on Salem Avenue in downtown Roanoke has been donated to the Roanoke Pride organization.

Cancer center

Blue Ridge Cancer Care, with Drs. William Fintel and Padmaja Mallidi, has

Have an announcement about your business?

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

opened a new office in Lexington at 108 Houston Street, Suite B.

More with 4G

Citizens of Floyd is offering additional options for its expanded 4G LTE cellular service in its network, including sign-up promotions and the benefit for customers to keep their same telephone numbers when bringing over their own compatible devices.

Doc name swap

The practice of Drs. Newman, Blackstock & Associates Optometrists,

PC has changed its name to **Johnson Curran Optometry Centers**.

From here to hell to AC

Roanoke chef **Meghan Gill** won the top and final competition of the Gordon Ramsay "Hell's Kitchen" television show, which finally aired the episode on June 9; she now leaves Stefano's on the Market to accept the head chef position at Caesars Atlantic City.

IP guidelines

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors has approved revisions to the university's intellectual



Grand Opening of the Roanoke Pinball Museum at Center in the Square

FRONT Notes

propriety policy, including unclaimed ownership of intellectual property created by students, and clarification to inventions and IP rights by faculty if the university does not pursue the idea.

Happy's not smiling

After two years of building code issues with the City of Roanoke, the building structure at **Happy's Flea Market** on Williamson Road was declared unsafe and shut down indefinitely on June 9; the outdoor market is expected to continue operations, inside vendors have been ordered to exit, and the future of the facility is unknown, pending repairs to roofing, electrical, and fire exits.

Treadlife

Yokohama tire manufacturing plant in Salem is investing \$15 million over the next three years in facility improvements and new equipment; the City of Salem will rebate a portion of the company's

tax payments if terms are met and at least 800 employees are retained.

Park-n- pay up

Parking at a meter in downtown **Blacksburg** has been raised to one dollar per hour, and they will begin accepting credit cards by the fall.

New ops center

HomeTown Bank Operations Center, containing the functional units of deposit and loan groups, credit administration, and risk management, has opened in southwest Roanoke County, currently occupied by 24 employees.

High school dot com

Virginia Department of Education is accepting 100 trial students this fall to test a program that will allow students to earn a high school diploma online, without going to classrooms. Enrolled students can still

participate in the local school's extracurricular activities such as sports and band.

Water works

Jewell Engineering Consultants, a water resources engineering firm headquartered in Kernersville, NC, has opened an office in downtown Roanoke.

Farmer at the door

Edibly Fresh, a Roanoke area delivery service for locally grown foods has opened and may be accessed at www.ediblyfresh.com.

New flea market

Traders Outlet, a flea market, has opened at the former 84 Lumber facility on Main Street in West Salem.

Advertising powerhouse

AAF Roanoke, the local and regional advertising association, won the

"Club of the Year" at district and national level, picking up the award at the 2015 AAF Admerica National Conference in Las Vegas in mid-June.

Four! sale

The Water's Edge country club at Smith Mountain Lake has been put up for sale, including the golf course and club; 712 acres.

HSN o-u-t

Home Shopping Network fulfillment center in east Roanoke County has announces that it is closing, affecting about 350 jobs, as it moves operations there to its facility in Piney Flats, TN.

Got milk money

Southway Farm, a 350-acre dairy farm site in Franklin County between Rocky Mount and Boones Mill, is being considered as a potential business park development by the County, pending review and sale options

Read the FRONT online

vbFRONT.com

Also get more stories and pictures at morefront.blogspot.com



Screen shot from "Rooted in Appalachia" Telly Award by Mikula-Harris

of the \$7 million valued property.

New online grad degree

Radford University will begin offering an online MBA program this Fall 2015; accounting and innovation will comprise the first two classes.

Video wins

Mikula-Harris advertising agency of Roanoke won a national bronze Telly Award (recognizing local, regional, and cable TV commercials and programs) for two video projects: "Humpback Bridge & Water Recreation" for Allegheny Highlands Chamber of Commerce; and

"Rooted in Appalachia" for Appalachian Sustainable Development and Abingdon Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Investment firm on list

Partners in Financial Planning in Salem has been listed as a Top 300 Registered Investment Advisor firm in the nation by Financial Times.

Plan to win

Virginia Velocity, a business plan competition directed to ventures in the bioscience and energy sectors, and awarding \$850,000, has been launched by the Governor and the Office of Secretary of

Commerce & Trade. The state also announced a Talent Solutions Grant Competition in partnership with the Virginia Employment Commission for employment development.

Eagle has landed, twice

Blue Eagle Credit Union has opened two new offices; North Market Shopping Center at Peters Creek Road and Williamson Road in Roanoke, and Cornerstone development on Greenway Drive in Lynchburg.

Killing germs in SW

Qore Systems, a manufacturer of hand sanitizer, is moving from

Arizona to the Highlands Business Park in Glade Spring (owned by Smyth County and Washington County).

First air strike

Virginia Tech and its Mid-Atlantic Aviation Partnership consortium may be designated as the first entity to deliver a package in the U.S. by drone, thanks to its ability to get necessary approvals from the Federal Aviation Administration; the first real time exercise planned for mid-July, a 22-mile medicine delivery to a patient in the mountains of Southwest Virginia.

Compiled by Tom Field

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



Showtimers in Roanoke County

Oldest theatre group better than ever >

Executive Summary:

Showtimers in Roanoke County is not only the very essence of community theatre, it's a major production worth visiting and supporting.

By Stevie Holcomb

In 1951, Tennessee Williams' play *The Rose Tattoo* opened on Broadway, Frank Sinatra records *I'm a Fool to Want You*, and a small group of actors in the Roanoke Valley got together to form Showtimers, Roanoke's oldest theatre group is still going strong and performing today, after 65 years.

The first show, the classic *Arsenic and Old Lace*, has had its chance to be performed three times on the Showtimers stage over those 65 years. In 1951, the season was only over the summer, the company performing four shows using the stage at Roanoke College. Ten years later, the company moved to its own space, the former Oak Grove Church of the Brethren on McVitty Road near Allstate — where it continues to delight Roanoke audiences today. With a season

of six shows (each season a mix of musicals, comedies and dramas), the theatre has produced new works along with Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning plays to happy, sold-out crowds.

The theatre's alumni is also something to boast about. Recently, a young man named Josh Grisetti has been singing and dancing his way into the hearts of theatre-goers on Broadway, alongside Tyne Daly, in *It Shoulda Been You*, directed by David Hyde-Pierce. If the name Adrian Cronauer rings a bell, you probably are a fan of the movie *Good Morning, Vietnam*, based on Adrian's experiences in Vietnam. Oh, yes, Adrian is a Showtimer too. There are other names and faces you've seen on TV and movies, Broadway and commercials — Skyler Vallo, Kent Sublette, Evans Evans, Ed Sala, and MacKenzie Mauzy, just to name a few.

The shows that have been produced at Showtimers vary from classic to modern, from well-known to not-so known. Recent productions include *Steel Magnolias*, *Oliver!*, *A Christmas Story*, *On Golden Pond*, *Nunsense*, *Dracula*, *A Lion in Winter*, *Wait Until Dark*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *A Lesson Before Dying*. Most shows are suitable for the entire family, but they are not afraid to rock the boat sometimes, producing plays such as *The Rocky Horror Show*, *The Best*

Little Whorehouse in Texas, and *The Heidi Chronicles*. The 2015 season continues with *Cabaret* in late July/early August, *12 Angry Men* in September, and *Bloody Murder* (a comedic farce written by the group's own Ed Sala) in November. The 2016 season will be announced in September.

The amazing thing: everyone is a volunteer. No one gets paid and everyone has a job or school to attend during most of the day. Rehearsals are usually 7-9 in the evenings, with set construction and painting happening usually over the weekends. Everyone pitches in and works together to bring a production to life, and it takes six weeks or so to produce ten (straight plays) or twelve (musicals) productions. The amount of time, effort, sweat, dirt and heart that goes on to produce a show is mind-boggling to anyone who has never done it themselves. It's hard to explain to some people, but the satisfaction of standing behind that curtain on Opening Night waiting for it to go up to a crowd of happy theatre-goers is beyond compare.

You may have driven by the theatre without blinking. The back of the building faces 419 at the stoplight near Keagy Village and Allstate; but if you have never ventured through its doors and into the world of live theatre, you will find a place



To Gillian on her 37th Birthday

full of mystery and magic. Live theatre is unequalled in its experience. You are there, in the same room with live actors telling a story just for that audience, at that time. No movie can compare. 

Showtimers is located at 2067 McVitty Road in Roanoke. Turn onto Keagy Rd. the opposite direction from Keagy Village and you will see it on your left, up a little hill. The theatre seats 138 patrons, and ticket prices are more than reasonable. The box office is 774-2660, website www.showtimers.org, Facebook page www.facebook.com/Showtimerstheatre.



You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown

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