

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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AUGUST 2020

Manufacturing:
A Regional Report

Botetourt Manufacturing

Women in Manufacturing

Mack Trucks

Dwayne Yancey,
Playwright

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A portrait of Charlie Jewell, a man with short dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a red tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred office window with greenery outside.

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Charlie Jewell
Onward New River Valley



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

One of the industries deemed essential during the onset of the coronavirus pandemic was manufacturing. People need to keep making those widgets – not to mention ventilators, face shields, masks etc. As other business sectors strive to rebound from COVID-19 we thought that taking a look at local manufacturing was a safe bet. Both of us have worked in manufacturing, in various roles, from fabrication to assembly to machine operators to quality control to sales and marketing... in shops and working on the road. Making something tangible and pioneering new products—there’s a lot to be said about the good feeling we get from that. Manufacturing may be changing (it always does), but the business of making goods is indeed alive and well in this region.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

“”

Dream about the possibilities... and then work backwards to create it. — Page 27

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DEPARTMENTS

- 16 Botetourt Manufacturing**
by Aila Boyd
- 22 Mack Trucks**
by Gene Marrano
- 28 Women in Manufacturing**
by Lois James
- 58 Dwayne Yancey, Playwright**
by Dan Smith

PERSPECTIVES

- 20 Business Operations**
by Mike Leigh
- 21 Financial Figures**
by Michael Shelton
- 26 Mindful Business**
by Beth Bell
- 27 Small Business Tool Kit**
by Annette Patterson
- 30 A Little Insight**
by Bruce C. Bryan
- 31 Good Work**
- 34 Legal Business**
by Tom Ashton

REVIEWS & OPINIONS

- 36 On Tap from the Pub**
by Tom Field
- 37 There's Something Happening Here**
by Gene Marrano
- 38 Guest Commentary**
by Robin Weeks
- 40 Letters**
- 42 Reviews**

FRONTLINES

- 32 Spotlight FRONT'n About**
- 44 FRONT'n About**
- 50 Career FRONT**
- 54 FRONT Notes**

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COVER STORY PAGE 8

Not your father's manufacturing industry

by Jennifer Poff Cooper



“Will he sleep better tonight now that's been posted?” — Page 40

Cover photography of Charlie Jewell by Tom Field.

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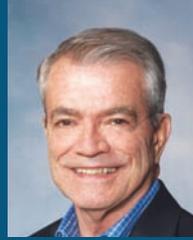
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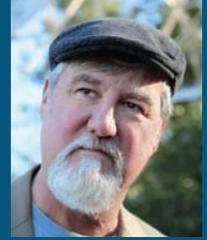
Tom Ashton



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Advisory Board

Valley Business FRONT has organized an Advisory Board comprised of a selective group of diverse business professionals who support our mission and have an interest in how our business journal best serves our local communities and region. As a sounding board throughout their term, board members have been given the task of helping FRONT understand the issues and develop coverage. You will note that the Board is comprised of experts in many different business / industry "fronts." This is intentional, as we are reporting on all the areas that affect our regional economy and are important to you. Although the members are encouraged to keep FRONT updated on their own industries and the key players, they aren't limited to their area of specialty, as all commercial enterprises ultimately collaborate to impact our quality of life here in this part of Virginia. An additional contribution by the Advisory Board involves direct input on the various FRONTLists we present throughout the year. In keeping with our policy of being "the voice of business in the valleys" we ask each reader to join us as an editorial partner by contacting us with your ideas. You know more than we know about your business—or you certainly should—and that inside knowledge shared with our readers will make us all better at what we do.

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Amy White
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College / education

“Some guys buy fancy sports cars or acquire mistresses... I started writing plays. — Page 58

“We need to stop thinking of manufacturing jobs as male-only jobs on a factory floor. — Page 28

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 52.

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All photos courtesy
Onward NRV

VT Team 5: Virginia Tech engineering students get hands on look at local production plant

Not your father's manufacturing industry

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Manufacturing in the region: reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated.

Manufacturing is still the “backbone of the economy,” said Matt Earnest, Director of the Center for High Performance Manufacturing at Virginia Tech. Nationally, it employs 12-15 million workers. In southwest Virginia, it is “good and growing.”

Of “strategic importance” to the local economy, according to John Phillips, President of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, who said it provides the base of employment for the region and pays a high percentage of taxes to support schools and other public needs.

Charlie Jewell, Executive Director of Onward New River Valley (NRV), said

that 140 manufacturers are located in the New River Valley. The sector employs 12,000 people, making it one of the top five employment industries. Between 2013 and 2018, he said, manufacturing grew its New River Valley employment by 6%.

Executive Director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, Beth Doughty, agreed that manufacturing is an important area that brings in new wealth. She said that 11.9% of all employment in the two valleys is in manufacturing, a significant number that shows the sector contributes more to our area than in many other regions. The number of manufacturing jobs (as of early July) was around 28,500 with

an average annual wage of \$55,000, substantially more than the overall average local wage of about \$43,000.

Doughty also cited the “multiplier effect,” which means that for every 100 manufacturing jobs there is a net creation of 158 jobs related to the base of manufacturing: in retail or services, for example.

Earnest said that southwest Virginia is fast being seen as transportation focused, with manufacturing of cars, trucks, and parts a big economic driver. Doughty agreed that there is specialization in transportation and also electronics, but also noted that the local manufacturing base is diverse.

Jewell named three sectors of advanced manufacturing locally: automotive and suppliers (driven by Volvo); motion control systems and electrical components (such as MOOG, Kollmorgen); and materials and chemicals (examples being Hollingsworth & Vose, Celanese).

Today’s high-tech manufacturing looks quite different from even 10 years ago, said Phillips. There is more automation; artificial intelligence integrates with robotics systems to do the manufacturing, leading to more robots on the assembly line doing jobs people used to do.

Doughty said that the trend toward automation and smart manufacturing technology does result in fewer



Matt Earnest, VT Center for High Performance Manufacturing

Korona Candles opened a Pulaski County plant in 2014, investing 18 million dollars in the facility





Beth Doughty, Roanoke Regional Partnership

physical jobs but also in a higher level of skills in the myriad of positions left, such as the person who manages the robotics machine or handles the mechanics. Programming, software, and artificial intelligence that support automation are critical needs.

People are indeed concerned about automation displacing jobs, Jewell said, who added that although fewer employees are needed, the skill set required and thus compensation awarded are higher.

"There is still a role for people," said Doughty. "There is a shifting of jobs into other areas of expertise to support automation. The bar on skills continues to rise."

As reported last month in Valley Business FRONT, training venues focus on the local community colleges, including New River Community College (NRCC) and Virginia Western Community College (VWCC). They have been central figures in workforce development, an area that continues to evolve to meet the advances in manufacturing, in order to maintain its strong position in the local economy. A skilled workforce also helps attract new business to the region.

Doughty cited the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) building VWCC constructed in direct response to these needs. Earnest said that community colleges are efficient vehicles to get workers into the workforce.

A primary focus of NRCC, said Jewell, is to support manufacturing. In fact, he said that Onward NRV takes prospects to tour NRCC when they visit the area. The college offers programs such as engineering, machine technology, and mechatronics that align with the needs of employers.

Hollingsworth & Vose in Floyd County manufactures advanced **filtration materials**, including for the N95 facemasks and hospital **air filtration systems**



One direction: onward



Katie Boswell, Onward New River Valley's marketing manager, stands with our FRONTcover model and executive director, Charlie Jewell. The organization (formerly New River Economic Development Alliance) is staffed by three members, served by 32 board members, and 115 business stakeholders with a mission to advance New River Valley via attracting and retaining jobs and investing in talent to constantly improve the region's economic vitality. Stats from OnwardNRV.org report 4,346 new jobs and \$350,000,000 of corporate investment since 2001.

"They [community colleges] are committed to growing the next generation of talent," said Phillips.

Earnest's center at Virginia Tech provides a way for students, who are doing their senior capstone projects, to interact with employers who sponsor them. On the job or internal training is important so that students can see in action what they have learned in school, said Earnest.

Development and retention of high-quality talent is one of the top challenges that manufacturers face. "Consistency in employment is key to successful business operation," Phillips said.

Earnest said that the average age of floor workers in manufacturing is 57, so a dearth of workers due to retirements is going to hit soon. According to Jewell, the industry is having trouble getting millennials interested in manufacturing as a career path.



Volvo Trucks North America has a production plant in the New River town of Dublin

"They assume it's standing on an assembly line doing the same motion over and over," he said, when in reality there is, for example, automation involving higher math.

Fortunately, the next generation of workers, ages 18-24, will have technological skills to fill the gap, said Earnest. In addition to being comfortable with technology, this new workforce needs to be flexible and team oriented. "The work and the workers have changed," he said.

Besides workforce, there are other challenges for manufacturing. Another difficulty the industry faces is fluctuation, said Phillips – tariff wars, the pandemic, and natural ups and downs of business.

Doughty said that manufacturing could see an impact from the current recession because of consumer spending decreases. She also noted that COVID-19 is causing

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Local manufacturing companies

Some key local manufacturing companies, according to John Phillips, President of Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council:

- Volvo, a 1.6-million-square-foot New River Valley assembly plant in Dublin which is the largest Volvo truck manufacturing facility in the world and produces all Volvo trucks sold in North America, as well as involving an enormous number of component suppliers locally
- Mack Trucks, part of the Volvo group, is opening a facility in Roanoke County to build a new line of medium-duty trucks (as of September; see related story elsewhere in issue)
- Federal-Mogul, a developer, manufacturer, and supplier of parts for automotive, commercial, aerospace, marine, rail and off-road vehicles
- BAE Systems, a prime government contractor which has a subdivision that runs the old Radford Army Ammunition Plant and is the U.S. military's primary propellant manufacturer
- Celanese, a factory in Giles County that makes cellulose acetate
- Wolverine, a provider of noise, vibration, and sealing solutions

factories to accommodate changes in process and to consider effects on employees, particularly in larger plants. If a manufacturing facility is forced to shut down a line because someone has tested positive for COVID-19, there are definite economic implications.

Earnest said that local manufacturing has been "fully impacted" by COVID-19, with some factories pivoting their processes to make PPE (personal protective equipment) and others affected by social distancing and the masking of employees.

The pandemic has created a "tale of two worlds," Jewell said. Some manufacturers have been able to sell their supplies to health care buyers, so they have stayed busy. Kollmorgen, for example, has used its capabilities to help produce ventilators. On the other hand, there has been "some softening" in the automotive sector due to the slower economy and fewer people buying cars. Said Jewell, "I hope we have hit the bottom in terms of job loss."

The global supply chain is the biggest trial that Earnest sees for the sector moving forward. No longer is a product totally made in one place; rather, supplies come from all

John Phillips,
Roanoke Blacksburg
Technology Council





InMotion Symposium: Virginia Tech Industrial and Systems Engineering Seniors Sarah Oertel and Nora Sleiman-Haidar work on their team's lean production cell design while onsite with their client InMotion

over. Any disruption to the supply chain, then, is highly impactful.

At summits held by Onward NRV, local manufacturers tell Jewell that I-81 is an asset and key reason why they located here, but they are concerned for the long term that, if not addressed, its congestion will affect logistics issues.

Also gleaned from their summits, Jewell said, is what people love about working in manufacturing in our area. One thing is the "unique culture." Most plants are smaller than those in urban areas, which fosters a sense of community.

In addition, because of proximity to Virginia Tech, one of the premier engineering schools in the country, local manufacturing can draw from its students to incorporate a research and development component into its work, which is "not a normal state of affairs elsewhere," Jewell said.

NanaSonic Inc is based in Pembroke, specializing in advanced materials



Employee count

Largest Manufacturers in the region by employee count. (2019 Virginia Employment Commission data; list from Roanoke Regional Partnership)

- Ply Gem Windows 1,000 and over
- West Rock 1,000 and over
- Altec Industries 1,000 and over
- Yokohama Tire 500 to 999
- Integrity Windows 250 to 499
- Dynax America 250 to 499
- Steel Dynamics 250 to 499
- Integer 250 to 499
- Trinity Packaging 250 to 499
- Coca-Cola Bottling Consolidated 250 to 499

A solid blue-collar work ethic is another positive. Jewell said one manufacturing leader associated that with the agricultural heritage of this area, with agriculture's need for ingenuity and problem solving.

One of Onward NRV's goals is to establish the New River Valley as an international hub of manufacturing. There is already a trend of foreign-based manufacturers locating in the New River Valley, with 11 here so far.

As for the future of manufacturing, Jewell sees the "reshoring of production to the United States," bringing back jobs from overseas, with the vulnerability of the supply chain exposed as COVID-19 wreaked havoc elsewhere, often shutting down foreign parts manufacturers. In addition, more foreign-based companies will want to produce here because a "Made in the USA" label sells. Even in recession the U.S. still has one of the world's most solid economies.

Phillips also hopes that manufacturing is indeed moving back to the United States, "giving it a little bit of rebirth." This Industry 4.0, also known as the fourth industrial revolution, encompasses a combination of traditional manufacturing and industrial platforms and practices with the latest smart technology.

Earnest said it results in improved productivity, an important measure of success: "it is transforming the way we make things for the better." 

“ ”

For every 100 manufacturing jobs there is a net creation of 158 jobs related to the base...



Aila Boyd

Luca Forte (left), the chief operations officer for ELDOR, was given a tour of the STEM Lab at Virginia Western Community College in February of this year by the lab manager.

Pro-business attitude leads to manufacturing growth in Botetourt

By Aila Boyd

Botetourt County is celebrating its 250th anniversary this year. It's also celebrating a string of major manufacturing announcements that came over the course of the past five years.

"The board has set a powerful vision for our future, and we want our economy to be a regional force bringing in people from around the world to help our community thrive," says Billy Martin, chairman of the Botetourt County Board of Supervisors. "The past five years have seen great successes. Our goals are closer in sight than they have been ever before, and the stage is set for a very bright future in Botetourt."

Since 2016, almost 900 manufacturing jobs have been added in the county. Including new companies that have decided to locate there and expansions, \$201,044,450 in capital investments have been announced since 2016 (as of early July).

The upward trend in manufacturing started around the same time that both Gary Larrowe, the county administrator,



Courtesy of Roanoke Regional Partnership

Then-Gov. Terry McAuliffe spoke in March 2016 about ELDOR Corporation's decision to establish its first North American production plant in Botetourt County.

and Ken McFadyen, the director of economic development, arrived in Botetourt. The growth, McFadyen says, should be attributed to the county's "pro-business attitude."

Last year alone, there were three major manufacturing announcements in the county. In February of 2019, Pratt Industries, a producer of 100% recycled paper and cardboard products, announced the acquisition of a shell building at the Botetourt Center at Greenfield. The announcement included the

investment of \$25 million and the creation of 50 jobs.

In June of 2019, Metalsa Structural Products, a manufacturer of structural components for the truck and automotive industries, announced a 25-job and \$6.4 million expansion of its Botetourt facility. In August of 2019, Maag Gala, a manufacturer and global servicer of pelletizing systems and industrial equipment, celebrated its 50th year of operation in the county by announcing a \$45 million expansion.

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Courtesy of Roanoke Regional Partnership

Representatives from Altec and Botetourt County announced the aerial truck manufacturer's fifth expansion of its Botetourt Center at Greenfield site in 2017.

Other announcements since 2016 have included: electrical utility telecommunications product provider Altec Industries in 2017 (180 new jobs/\$30.2 million investment), Canadian steel structure fabricator Canatal Steel USA in 2016 (38 new jobs/\$1.5 million investment), alcoholic beverage producer Constellation Brands, which at the time operated its Botetourt beer making facility under the Ballast Point brand, in 2016 (178 new jobs/\$47.8 million investment), Italian automotive component manufacturer Eldor Corporation in 2016 (350 new jobs/\$75.2 million investment), and folding carton manufacturer Arkay Packaging Corp. in 2016 (50 new jobs/\$11 million investment).

One of the selling points the county uses when recruiting manufacturing businesses is its strategic location of within 500 miles of New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., Nashville, and Atlanta. Additionally, proximity to the greater Roanoke area has helped ensure companies that once they locate in Botetourt, they'll have access to the skilled workforce pool required for operation.

Current industrial parks in the county include the Botetourt Center at Greenfield,

EastPark Commerce Center, Jackson C. Smith Industrial Park, and Vista Corporate Park.

McFadyen says the groundwork that was laid in the late-1980s and early-1990s to establish some of the industrial parks and recruit manufacturers like Altec has been instrumental in the recent growth that the county has undergone.

The county is aided in its efforts to grow its manufacturing base by the Botetourt County Economic Development Authority, a seven-member body appointed by the board of supervisors, which develops sites. The Roanoke Regional Partnership markets the region and highlights the strength of the local workforce, and state officials direct companies that are looking to locate in Virginia to McFadyen's office. Currently, 13% of the county's workforce is employed in manufacturing. "The highest paying jobs in Botetourt are in the manufacturing sector," McFadyen explains.

"We have a team, from the board to front-line staff who work to maximize the conditions necessary for businesses to establish themselves and thrive. Even as we have adjusted in light of the pandemic, I am thrilled we are still seeing activity and



Aila Boyd

Representatives from Gala and Botetourt County participated in a groundbreaking ceremony in Eagle Rock in October of 2019 for the 20,000-square-foot expansion of the facility.

looking forward to what we can do in the coming years," Larrowe says.

As job growth took off in 2016, the need for additional affordable housing quickly came to the forefront. In an attempt to tackle the problem, the county put together a housing summit in early 2017 in which results from a housing study that was commissioned the previous year were unveiled, including the conclusion that an additional 1,000 rental units were needed in Botetourt County to satisfy the expanding workforce. Within a year,

500 new housing units were approved, including new single-family homes at the Daleville Town Center and the opening of The Reserve at Daleville.

Looking forward the county was awarded a \$650,000 Economic Development Access grant from the Virginia Department of Transportation to construct West Center Drive at the Botetourt Center at Greenfield last year, which will aid in the continued expansion of the site. Look for more announcements to come, in a county on the move. 



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Ode to manufacturing

Look around you. Stop reading for a second and scan your surroundings. If you are inside a building, then everything you see was produced by a manufacturer. Computers. Furniture. Buildings. Paper. Books. Food. Everything, including those masks and toilet paper that have been in short supply.

I have had the privilege of working for or with manufacturers for the past 20 years, including many in the Roanoke Valley. During the pandemic, most of them are considered “essential” businesses and need to keep their operations running. Since most manufacturing employees cannot work from home, leaders have been challenged to keep their workforce safe while maintaining operations.

Manufacturing makes up about 12 percent of our local industry. Combined with construction, transportation, and energy, it is about 25%. The industry is an important part of our local economy because unlike healthcare and retail, most of the revenue that manufacturers create comes from outside our area, creating an influx of money into the Roanoke Valley.

Manufacturers are also incredibly resilient. Despite supply chain interruptions, uncertain customer demand, and social distancing, they have managed to keep their operations running and bring their product to the market during COVID-19. And some, such as Hollingsworth & Vose in Floyd and Integrated Textile Solutions in Salem, are producing materials and making masks to keep us safe.

I am currently working with four manufacturing plant managers in a leadership development program. Together they employ over 1,000 people in clean and high-tech work environments, and as of this writing, have had no COVID-19 cases while producing medical and construction components, food packaging, and power generation equipment. They are providing rewarding careers for those who enjoy “building stuff” and using critical thinking and problem-solving skills in diverse professions such as maintenance, human resources, environmental regulations, health and safety, finance, and design engineering.

In this FRONT article dedicated to manufacturing, I’m dedicating this article to the hard-working men and women who are making our masks, building our test kits, assembling our ventilators, putting food on our tables, and producing all the goods we need in our day-to-day lives. You have been unsung heroes during this crisis, and I thank you for all you do. 

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
*A salute to the unsung
heroes who “make stuff.”*

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
OpXSolutionsllc.com

Making your home a better asset

There's been a big uptick in purchases at home improvement stores. Stocks are rising and revenues climbing at some of these retailers during a time most other businesses are struggling. It's no wonder. People are spending more time at home, looking for something to do, and fixating on home issues.

According to Baron's, "... home improvement spending rallied 16.4% year over year in May, with the adjusted figure coming in up 5.2% for the three months ending in April." Home Depot and Lowe's "comparable sales climbed 6.4% and 11.2%, respectively during this time." Yes, as we've been hunkering down, we've been tinkering with our living spaces.

Retirement planning with real estate

Typically, people think about 401ks and other traditional retirement savings vehicles when they calculate assets. As you plan your investment strategies and review your net worth, don't forget to include real estate.

What's also important to consider, though, when you decide to invest time and money into your home, is the return on investment. Of course, if your plan is to live there until you die and you're not concerned about leaving a legacy, improvements that simply make your life better are fine. But if you think you might sell some day, or want your home to be part of an inheritance, it pays to be pickier about what you do.

According to Bankrate, home improvements that get the best return on investment include:

- Garage door replacement
- Switching out stone veneer for portions of exterior siding
- Minor kitchen remodels
- Deck additions, and
- Siding replacement

What you get back on these investments depends on a lot of other factors. Things like house value, neighborhood, and your area housing market are things you can't control. Issues you can impact include how soon you sell after making improvements and the quality of workmanship on the project.

People are improving their net worth by enhancing their home conditions. As you dive into these projects, consider how what you do could make your house a bigger asset in your portfolio. Sure, more comfortable living is a good reason to choose a project, but why not do so with an eye toward what other people see as more valuable? 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
Your property impacts your net worth.

Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at michael@discover360 Financial.com



MAKING TRUCKS IN ROANOKE COUNTY

By Gene Marrano

By this Fall, the town of Dublin in the New River Valley won't be the only venue in the region where new trucks are being manufactured.

Announced with great fanfare during a “groundbreaking” ceremony in late January, with Governor Ralph Northam and other state officials in tow, the Roanoke Valley Operations plant at Roanoke County’s Valley Tech Park is slated to come on line next month after a delay from July due to COVID-19. The Mack MD Series of medium-duty trucks is a new line for the company and a \$13 million dollar investment to get the production line up and running inside an already existing building was announced in January.

Antonio Servidoni, the Vice President of Medium Duty operations, came over from the Volvo Trucks North America manufacturing facility in Dublin to oversee Roanoke Valley Operations (RVO). The parent company, Sweden-based Volvo, owns both product lines. Considering delays caused by the pandemic “at this point we’re doing extremely well,” he said in late June about the new targeted opening date for production at Valley Tech Park. “Our team continues to drive to [launch] production.” September 1 is the new targeted opening date for full-blown production. New trucks are already rolling off the production line.

The goal when assembling the production line for the brand-new medium duty truck was to “engineer simplicity. There’s a mix of very sophisticated [technology] like very autonomous things running and validation equipment, to secure foolproof quality” says Servidoni. On the other hand, where simplicity makes more sense in the production line that will happen as well, with cost

savings a factor. “I think its going to be a very nice facility – very unique I would say.”

Mack Trucks said it would hire around 250 employees (a process still underway in early July) who will then be trained for the assembly process at the RVO. Servidoni says a “completely different business model,” that includes training already underway and on the job preparation later will ensure “that everyone is fully ready to do the work.” So far Mack Trucks has been able to hire what he called a “promising,” caliber of worker.

Once the Roanoke County plant is up and running safety guidelines already in place for the coronavirus at other Mack/Volvo facilities will be evident here as well he adds. Adherence to federal/CDC and state Covid-19 safety precautions that will be in place September 1 will rule the day says Servidoni: “we have a complete [safety] design and that will be fully addressed.”

Early on during the worldwide pandemic there were a few supply chain issues but parts/truck component producers gradually adjusted to the new normal and right now “everything looks pretty solid, unless we have a surprise [pop up].” The RVO plant also built a few prototypes early on adds Servidoni, to help work out any bugs in the production line layout.

Early reaction to the new MD Series medium duty trucks has been positive and at a launch event in Phoenix “everyone was very excited. I think



the [Mack] dealerships are very excited about the new model coming in. The pandemic put a little bit of a hurdle [in the way] but so far we are very happy with what's going on right now. We want to show [the public] what we have been doing here." The medium-duty series truck (MD6) does not require a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) for non-hazardous loads. There's an MD6 (class 6 model) and a heavier MD7 model.

As for partnerships with Roanoke County, other local agencies and the Commonwealth of Virginia [which chipped in with \$700,000 from the Opportunity Fund] that helped land the manufacturing plant here Servidoni says that has been "extremely good. Everything that we needed [often started] with a phone call - and we got the full support for our needs here. Excellent so far." 280,000 square feet in the



new facility are dedicated to producing the MD Series. For competitive reasons Mack Trucks would not reveal how many they plan to roll off the assembly line in Roanoke County. The refrigerated, flatbed, dump and tank truck markets are among those being targeted. "We're taking orders for the new truck beginning today," said Mack Trucks president Martin Weissburg back in January.

No doubt there will be fanfare – and

maybe some relief - when the first production truck rolls off the line in September: "we're very excited with what's going on right now," says Servidoni. "We thought we would be hit much harder than we were during the pandemic. But we were able to stay in good shape to get things started in September. The whole team is going hard. I think people will enjoy working there. It's a very nice facility. It feels like home." 



FiftyCentLove Photographie

MINDFUL BUSINESS

By Beth Bell

Executive Summary:

This is a hard truth. Your business won't be back to "normal" this year. Maybe not even next. What are you going to do about it? How will you become essential?

Beth Bell is the executive director for the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce (as of mid-January) and helped found FemCity Roanoke, a business networking community for women. Contact her at bethboydbell@gmail.com.

Becoming essential

What's the most important thing for your business during this time? Joe D'Angelo at Oak Hall Cap and Gown kept his employees in four different sewing factories employed. They are normally working overtime, supplying caps and gowns to colleges, universities and high schools around the world. Graduations didn't happen. Now what? When the COVID-19 crisis peaked in March in New York City, D'Angelo immediately sought to help with the PPE shortage. Months later, they've supplied masks to John Hopkins, and are now working on see-through masks for those who communicate with the deaf. Oak Hall plans to support school reopenings this fall with washable masks. They became essential.

Many local companies jumped on the opportunity to supply masks- King Screen, Big Lick Screen Printing, MoJo Sportswear, Runabout Sports, Miss You flowers...the list goes on. Inspired to Enhance Beauty and Grooming Consultants, normally a salon, began providing a variety of masks and "Home Hair Care Kits" so clients could take care of their own color and care needs from home. Glazed Bisque-It provided take home pottery painting kits to families desperate for activities and entertainment for quarantined kids. The Taubman Museum of Art and Kids Square continued to fulfill their mission to provide STEAM activities to children as museums stayed closed.

Therapists moved their services virtually as the need for mental health services grew even stronger. Anderson Music Therapy, which normally provides music and art therapy sessions in person to neuro diverse individuals, went virtual. They began providing singing and songwriting groups for young girls to help them "express the challenges they faced with quarantine, increase social opportunities during isolation, and find joy in writing songs and making music." said Noel Anderson, founder. The mother of two young children also provided virtual crafting sessions, to help give working from home parents a break.

Restaurants and Entertainment businesses have been hit the hardest. What do you do when your business relies on both? Sabrina East, owner of Jump into Mystery, a company that offers live murder mystery games at local restaurants, wineries and breweries, shifted to virtual for families and nursing home residents. Parents raved about the virtual Easter scavenger hunt for children. She also created a free downloadable mystery game for nursing home residents to play, hoping to keep spirits up and minds sharp during isolation.

Many businesses pivoted quickly, hoping just to survive during the phased shutdown. Now we know we'll have to do something more sustainable to keep our businesses moving over the next year. How will you become essential? 

Regional innovation challenge

There is nothing more exciting than the introduction of a new product or innovation into the marketplace. But how can our region increase the rate of new innovations? Could we create a platform and support system that encourages the development of solutions, conquers fear with curiosity, and embraces the messy process of testing and pivoting?

How do we uncover and inspire those creative minds? Courage is important but curiosity is what spurs discovery. Encouraging curiosity requires that we accept that we actually can create new solutions, we can even create by looking at the past, looking at products around us, and how they can be improved upon.

There's nothing new under the sun because everything has already been invented ... right? No, it hasn't. What if the portal to discovery is just allowing ourselves the freedom to dream about the possibilities from our imaginations and then work backwards to create it? Once you've imagined it, surround yourself with others who understand the things you don't. You don't have to be an entrepreneur to develop new innovations. Many studies indicate that organizational culture is the key element in either inhibiting or enhancing innovation. Companies can benefit financially from providing support for employees interested in developing product or process innovations that improve quality or costs, and even business model management innovations.

Over the last six years, I've worked with more than 500 entrepreneurs and 200 mentors and industry experts who are eager to expand our business community. I've personally met incredibly talented individuals living in our community, inventors tinkering in their garage, and employees who see a better way to deliver the company's product or services. Some who have sat on their ideas for 1, 5, even 10 years all because they didn't know where to begin or whom to trust. Just look at the experimental thinking in labs at Virginia Western Community College, Dabney S Lancaster CC and Virginia Tech.

In the midst of COVID, lets take a break and try something new. The CHALLENGE: identify and mobilize one passionate and creative individual to seek out a problem that exists in their world and then develop innovative solutions. Help connect them with support and resources needed to prove their concept. Engage and rally higher education, business leaders, and industry experts to share their knowledge and resources. The process of innovation involves exploration and pivoting – if an individual or a company are willing to expand their parameters for success, we may just become the innovation capital of Virginia.

"Discovery is seeing what everyone else has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought." Albert Szent-Gyorgyi 



SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Annette Patterson

Executive Summary:
Invention is not for the timid. Find the freedom to dream about the possibilities.

Women Leaders in Manufacturing

By Lois James

What do you think of when you hear the word “manufacturing”?
When you hear the words “women in manufacturing”?

Or maybe when you hear the words “women in leadership in manufacturing”? If that makes you stop and think, good. I recently attended a conference in Southwest Virginia geared towards women in manufacturing, and there were well over 200 women in attendance. The speakers at this conference all echoed one important fact: get the word out to women at an early age to consider manufacturing as a career choice.

Sherrika Sanders was with Dow Chemical for 9 years, where she created a recruiting program to attract women to manufacturing at an early age. Sherrika was introduced to STEM and modern manufacturing at a high school science camp that “sealed the deal” for her career choice. She is an advocate for introducing middle and high school aged girls to opportunities in the manufacturing industry. We need to stop thinking of manufacturing jobs as male-only jobs on a factory floor. Career paths in manufacturing include engineering, information technology, human resources, management, journalism, and so many others. Peggy Gulick, Director Digital Transformation, Global Manufacturing at AGCO, sums it up well by explaining a passion for her chosen career in manufacturing, “If working with wearables, drones, 3D printing, robots and autonomous vehicles is not enough - in the end, I get to make things.”

Another push to attract women to the manufacturing industry is to highlight

successful role models young women can look up to. For example, Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors, leads a global business that has no gender pay gap according to the 2018 Global Report on Gender Equality. Marilyn Hewson, Chairman, President, & CEO of Lockheed Martin Corporation, has positioned the company as a leader in the aerospace, security, and technology industries.

Allison Grealis, the founder of the nonprofit trade association Women in Manufacturing, asserts, “It’s important to note that not only is manufacturing good for women, but women are also good for manufacturing.” She explains that there is a significant skills gap in the manufacturing industry, and we need to look to women to help fill that gap to stay viable. Women currently make up about 29% of the manufacturing workforce, so there are tremendous opportunities for women to be successful in this industry. Allison continues, “research tells us that when companies are more diverse, and when there are more women at the leadership table, those companies are more profitable.”

As work organizations diversify, the manufacturing sector holds the greatest opportunity for women to add value. So, the next time you hear the words “women in leadership in manufacturing,” I hope you think of incredibly talented women who are dedicated to their careers and industry and who bring knowledge, creativity and success to the manufacturing world. 

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A LITTLE INSIGHT

By Bruce C. Bryan

Executive Summary:
Many advertisers miss the mark with their messaging.

Bruce C. Bryan is the president of 5Points Creative, an award-winning advertising and marketing agency in Roanoke. Contact him at bruce@5PointsCreative.com

Pay attention²attract attention

My friend Bill from Toledo told me a story once and it's stayed with me for twenty years or more now. At the time, he was in commercial production for a television station and, as a Black man living in America, he had a very different perspective than I did. He recalled being a kid in the early 70's watching TV and seeing a person of color portrayed in a local television commercial. He raced to the kitchen and shouted excitedly to his mom, "There's a black man on TV!"

The occurrence was pretty rare back then, though in many cities (Toledo included) the African American population was a significant part of the market. Frankly until fairly recently it's remained uncommon. For a variety of reasons, most likely starting with the fact that most commercial production workers were white men, there was very little diversity on TV. For decades advertisers have been missing the mark with their messages in all sorts of outreach mediums.

Match Your Audience⁴More Success

Perhaps as a part of the many recent social justice movements or maybe because of the expanding base of talented producers – many of whom are women, Hispanic, or Black – commercials now look different. And they should. It's way past due and it's a refreshing change.

It's not uncommon to see the tapestry of peoples represented in advertising now. If you read magazines, watch enough TV, or glance at billboards while driving down the road, you'll notice same sex couples, bi-racial families, and all kinds of varieties of people pictured. It's almost as if companies have begun to figure it out.

It makes for better advertising because people want to see people who relate to them. Incorporating client testimonials, patients, actors, or models that represent your core audience creates a connection. Determine who you are doing business with or what part of the market you'd like to grow to serve and then be intentional in the images and talent you use. Whether it is a print ad, digital billboard, website, social media post, or your new TV commercial, it's important to have a set of talent who match society. It's a simple thing, but it's a very important part of representing your business. Plus, it will help you grow your business successfully.

Bill's story may be 20 years old, but the lesson is completely relevant in 2020 – and moving forward. 

Horses inspiring hope

Under the “Staff” tab on the Healing Strides of Virginia website (healingstridesofva.org) two options drop down: Horses, People. That’s not just cute—it’s telling. The message is clear: our horses are “therapists” and ready to serve in the highest capacity, just like our human staff.

Located on a 22-acre site just north of Boones Mill, Healing Strides of VA (HSVA) is a 28-year-old nonprofit organization that utilizes a herd of horses, professional staff, certified instructors, and trained volunteers to provide equine-assisted activities, therapeutic riding, psychotherapy, hippotherapy, and other mental health, educational and coaching programs.

HSVA staff has reported a significant uptick in requests for their services from people dealing with anxiety and depression during the pandemic. A horse “meets people where they are” says CEO Carol Young; and by capitalizing on what the website describes as “the incredible power of the horse” participant riders get relief in a most positive experience.

“We support the community with its needs; such as adding a fall day camp for children who need a safe place to be,” says Young. “Our mission is to provide wellness for people with personal challenges. I don’t know about you, but that’s pretty much everyone I know. Especially right now.”

To say there are a lot of smiles happening at the Healing Strides of VA ranch is no overstatement. You can lighten your load on the back of a horse.

At the end of July, the Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon-cutting at Healing Strides to note the recent upgrades. You can find out more about HSVA at the website, Facebook page, or calling 540-334-5825. And on August 12, a production by Buzz4good.com in collaboration with AAF Roanoke ad club, will air a special episode on the organization at 7pm on Blue Ridge PBS television. 

GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:
Called “my haven” by one participant, Healing Strides of Virginia uses horses to improve the mental state and overall well-being.



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Submitted photos



Transportation company provides COVID testing venue >

Lawrence Companies in Botetourt County transformed a front parking lot just off U.S. Route 11 into a free COVID-19 drive thru community test site in late June. The drive-through opportunity was organized by the Virginia Department of Health's Roanoke City and Alleghany Health Districts. Partners from New Horizons Healthcare and Council of Community Services helped staff the site. "When offered the chance to be a host, we

jumped at the opportunity to help bring this effort to our surrounding community," said Jim Harrison, Lawrence Companies CEO.

"Like many businesses in our region, we have been working hard to provide our staff a safe work environment and support the men and women who are on the frontlines of this pandemic. We're grateful for the opportunity to help VDH offer this testing to our drivers, their families, and friends, as well as the greater Botetourt County community," added Harrison, Lawrence Companies is focused on moving/storage, heavy equipment and other transportation-related services, with 5 branches elsewhere as well.





Ian Price photos

More kids will learn to swim after successful short-term fundraising campaign >

After raising well over the \$30,000 they targeted to help reopen public swimming pools in Roanoke next year, the organizers behind that drive donated another \$20,000 to the Kirk Family YMCA for swim lessons there. Some of that money (Carilion made a substantial contribution; there were almost 200 donors in all) was earmarked to transport local children to the Kirk Family Y for swim lessons; for 125 children in all, lasting about 3 months. Not to mention three-month free memberships for the families involved as

well. Joshua Yerkes is a senior director for the Y: "we're still working out the specifics," he said at the Big Check ceremony about COVID safety precautions, with the swim program set to start August 3. "We're just thankful to have organizations and individuals that are generous enough ... to really make this happen. This is huge."

Roanoke attorney **John Fishwick Jr.** (along with **Dr. Frank Cotter** from Vistar Eye Center) helped spearhead the short-term fund drive, with reopening Roanoke City's budget-strapped public pools as the prime motivator. "We wanted to make sure we stayed consistent with our mission," said Fishwick about the extra \$20,000 raised that went to the Kirk Family YMCA; "which is that pools are fun, fun for families. The Y was a logical place to make this additional contribution."





Know the new laws

On July 1, 2020, hundreds of changes to Virginia laws went into effect. A summary of all changes can be found online, including at <http://dls.virginia.gov/pubs/idc/idc20.pdf>. These changes cover everything from alcoholic beverage control to voting, and will, to varying degrees, affect the lives of every private citizen in Virginia. However, there are a number of notable legislative changes that will also affect area businesses, and I wanted to highlight some of those here.

Perhaps most immediately relevant to many businesses are the nearly annual increases made to state minimum wage requirements. The law requires a state minimum wage in excess of the federal minimum wage (currently \$7.25 per hour) as follows: \$9.50 per hour effective May 1, 2021; \$11.00 per hour effective January 1, 2022; \$12.00 per hour effective January 1, 2023; \$13.50 per hour effective January 1, 2025; and \$15.00 per hour effective January 1, 2026. For January 1, 2027, and thereafter, the annual minimum wage will be adjusted to reflect increases in the consumer price index.

There are a bevy of changes to the laws regarding discrimination in both housing and employment contexts, as well as in the health care and health insurance arenas. Generally, these changes either expand the definition of what constitutes discrimination or expand the protected classes to include new groups (i.e. sexual orientation/gender identity). This is of particular interest to businesses of all kinds in their human resource functions, and in particular to property management companies, health insurance companies and health care providers doing business in Virginia.

Also, there is a new payment reporting requirement for "gig economy" market facilitators to ease the imposition and collection of taxes on independent contractor income. There is already a federal reporting requirement, and this amendment adds a state reporting requirement

LEGAL BUSINESS

By Tom Ashton

Executive Summary:
Is your business ready for the changes now in effect as of last month?

Tom Ashton is a Roanoke attorney. Reach him at tom@ashtonlawoffice.com



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Further, the changes in the law include important changes to Virginia's unemployment compensation and worker's compensation programs. These changes are not sweeping in scope but may portend additional changes in the future. The new changes also include things such as alterations to state holidays, new regulations regarding the emerging field of "tele-dentistry," new general protections for certain tenants in eviction situations, and requirements for public works contractors and subcontractors.

For all businesses who may be subject to these regulations, it would be wise to consult with an experienced attorney soon, to better formulate a plan for compliance. As I think most could guess, there are very few of these legislative changes, if any, that are generally helpful to businesses – or add another burden at the very least. However, there are a lot of new legal requirements and a commensurate number of new civil and even criminal consequences for failing to meet those requirements. Being proactive may be the best way for owners and managers to protect themselves and their businesses. 



Perhaps most immediately relevant to many businesses are the nearly annual increases made to state minimum wage requirements.



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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
*Unwarranted, but
giving parental
advice anyway.*

Today's parental

I digress.

This isn't a parenting publication, I know. But it is consumed by families; so I'm going to take the leap from our standard subject matter.

Of course, if I were to address this to our business community (or even apply this to this very edition featuring manufacturing), I might say something like this:

Don't take your seven-year old child to the factory's assembly line to see if he can stick his or her hand in the machinery without getting hurt.

That's rather common sense, yes?

So why are so many of us acting like that kind of perspective doesn't apply to other areas in our daily life? It's as if too many of us would rather say, "well, the kid needs to see the real world... maybe improve his reaction time. He's gotta learn. I'm taking him down to the plant tomorrow morning."

OSHA—if not Social Services—would probably step in to prevent you from throwing your kid in that environment. But there are other hazards that aren't on the factory floor. Unfortunately, you're allowed to throw the kid in these places. It's your prerogative. But I implore you to reconsider.

Don't take your young child with you on your angry protests.

How dare I, right? Actually, I would argue to leave your kids at home on most any civic demonstrations or engagements that aren't civil or peaceful. But I absolutely see little merit in bringing young children on engagements that are filled with anger, volatility, clashes with police or military or fueled opposition forces, or the kind that are marked with threats and shouting and shoving and potential harm. Parents who willingly place their children in these environments, or even have them holding signs or wearing items with messages they wouldn't or couldn't form themselves are failing their chief responsibility: the protection of their own. A teachable moment, you say? That could be a devastating lesson.

Don't discourage your young child about school.

There is a good chance that a majority of parents are not satisfied with our school systems' response to the pandemic. One school says it's not changing at all... everything remains pretty much open. Another school says it's completely changing... everything is remote or online. And in between the two schools are all the other systems that are hybrid. Are you ready?... in class, remote, part time, full time, distanced, masking policies, partially occupied bus/classroom, classes/classmates separated, classmates kept together in small cells, lower grades in school more than higher grades, in-classroom meals, sports and extracurricular and club

continued on Page 40

Not Exactly “Zooming” ... and a good news manufacturing story

Just about every year I am asked to participate in the Overnight Sensations 24 hour page-to-stage experience at Mill Mountain Theatre, where in the space of one day a handful of ten minute long plays are conceived, written, rehearsed and staged before a live audience. As you might have guessed there was no live audience last month and Overnight Sensations was virtual on the Zoom platform. At curtain time all went pretty much like clockwork. Not as much fun and no free pizza in the green room, but an interesting experience.

What was also interesting: how much people of all ages (not just us older folks) are still learning how to use virtual platforms like Zoom for online meetings. Which button to push, where to find this feature, that feature etc. That went on all day as we rehearsed and went through the “tech” process. I’m sure Zoom veterans are saying “what’s the problem?” but if they really want the average Joe/Josephine of any age to become fluent in virtual technology in the era of COVID-19, then dumb it down. Put all the buttons needed to make changes or adjustments in one place and make it easier for dummies like me. In other words, further commercialize Zoom (or other virtual platforms I haven’t used, I suppose) to make it more welcoming and intuitive for the virtual rookie.

Local manufacturer grows: a good story as McAirmaid’s in Rocky Mount was recently looking for several dozen people to help produce non-woven airlaid (look it up) used in food packaging, retail, medical, filtration and other products. Pay started at \$12 per hour. McAirmaid’s president Mike Disotelle says the company was hiring before COVID-19 but with a growing demand for food packaging as more people eat at home, business is even better. “As the food channel changes away from eating in restaurants to cooking more at home our current demand is spiking. But we also have a long-term growth plan.” McAirmaid’s is a British Retail Consortium business with plants in the U.S. and in Europe.

Rena DeBerry, the communications specialist for McAirmaid’s says the company was already expanding before being deemed an essential business during the pandemic. “Safety is part of our culture. It was before COVID-19; its stressed even more now. People can come to work feeling safe.”

What’s interesting is that while the pandemic has caused misery and job loss for many, in some cases local manufacturers have stepped up to fill a void; like food packaging, facemasks, face shields, ventilators etc. Its been happening almost from the start of the pandemic and is indicative of the resiliency in the manufacturing sector. 📺



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

A way to go before everyone is comfortable meeting online.



GUEST COMMENTARY

By Robin Weeks

Executive Summary:

Working while being a Family Caregiver is a challenge that is also a growing problem; but you don't have to do it alone.

A tough balancing act

I have been a corporate trainer and coach for the past 20 years working with Fortune 500 companies developing team and leadership programs. Twelve years ago, I started my own business, My Pivotal Point so I could focus my work more locally on small to mid-size businesses. Just two years into starting my company, my father died, and a year later I had to move my mother to be closer to me here in Virginia. She was 89.

I had just officially become her caregiver. Although the year prior I had been going to check on her in Tennessee every month, I did not identify as her caregiver. It was what you did as the daughter. Like many adult children, I was thrust into this role totally unexpected, unprepared, not knowing a thing. Naively I thought she would do fine in her semi-independent assisted living apartment. Over the years we had some good times while she was physically able. However, as her health declined more of my time was spent caring for her needs, managing her health, making tough decisions.

Through delivering my Foundational Learning for Leaders® courses to groups of managers, I would walk into class and ask everyone to please turn off their cell phones. I then would let them know that I had to keep mine on. I never knew when a call would come that she had been sent to the ER or some other thing that would require my immediate attention.

Frequently, a manager would come up to me and tell me of their challenges becoming a Family Caregiver for an aging relative. The stresses, worries, lack of knowledge of available resources was very common. Also, we all felt so alone and isolated, as if we were the only one going through this challenging experience. And, juggling work with caregiving was extremely difficult, tiring and created a financial loss of some sort.

- Researchers at Harvard Business School found that 73% of employees in the U.S. are caring for a child, parent or friend.
- An AARP study says that even though 73 percent of millennial caregivers are employed, more than any other generation of caregivers, they also spend on average 21 hours a week caring for loved ones. About one-fifth of millennial caregivers devote 40 hours a week or more to such service.
- The study found that only 46 percent of millennial caregivers tell a supervisor about this commitment, compared with 60 percent of older family caregivers.
- The challenges of family caregivers in the workplace impeding their careers:
 - o 33% have unplanned absences
 - o 28% have late arrivals at work
 - o 17% have early departures from work
- The Hidden Costs to Employers:

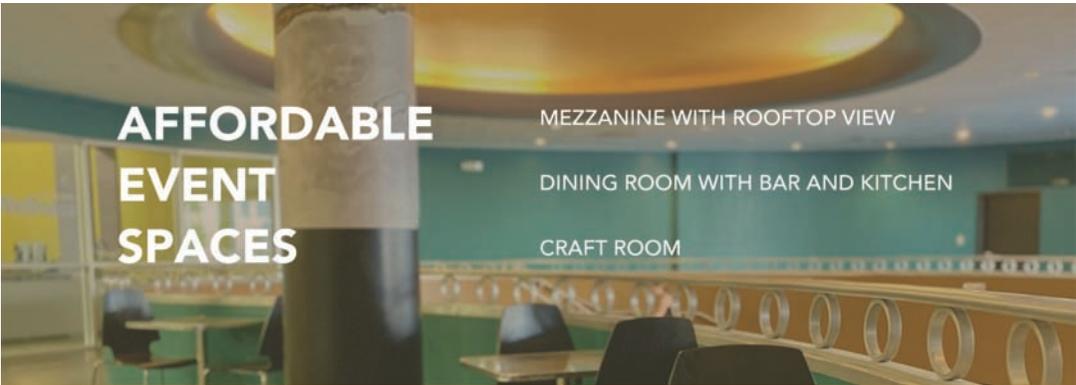
- o Turnover
- o Absenteeism
- o Presenteeism
- o Unexpected Events
- o Other workers picking up slack
- o AARP estimates that elder care costs to the employer to replace an employee is \$6.6billion
- o AARP estimates that the cost of workplace interruptions due to caregiver responsibilities is \$6.3billion

In 2019 I became certified as a Caregiving Consultant to provide support, resources and education. Family caregivers do not have to do this alone. I want employers to begin to see that this is a growing problem and Covid-19 has increased the stresses of being a family caregiver. Many have had to make the decision to bring a family member out of a care facility to their home, many who have a family member in a care facility are unable to visit them in person, a hospital visit means no family care advocate with them.

There are lots of resources available to the "caree." There are lots of "Tips for Caregivers." Most do not have time to sift through all of the information.

This problem is not going away, it is only getting worse. Many participants in my leadership courses have told me that what they learn also helps them with their caregiver role. But they need more support. It starts with finding out who they are. The report "The Caring Company" shows that much of what is offered is not helpful as it fits into already established benefits. Family caregivers need something more. And, management needs to acknowledge that needing time off to care for an elderly parent is just as important as the time provided to care for a new baby.

My Mother died peacefully and quietly at the age of 94 in 2018. My role as her caregiver had a deep impact on me. I still love delivering leadership training, and it now has a new dimension. 



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Letters

The end of civility as we know it

Beyond the other hundreds of things I don't understand in our world, I'm now seeing more and more posts in social media where someone shouts a statement of their beliefs, then challenges you to agree with them, or not; "Or unfriend me." My read on this, judging from the people I've seen post this, is that it crosses boundaries. In other words, no one (political, racial, gender, etc.) group has a lock on the want to be heard, but not challenged.

I've an acquaintance that I've known since high school. We reconnected several years ago through social media. While a friendly "Friend," it was obvious that many beliefs espoused were not shared. No biggie- it is (was) a free country not long ago. Posts by this person were often encouraging others to be inclusive, love all, and more rights for more people and groups. It shocked me last week when this person posted a diatribe on masks and those who don't/won't wear them. I do know that she has a health challenge that makes this more meaningful to her. But I know many others like this also. The post ended with something like, "...And if you're one of the a**holes that won't wear a mask, UNFRIEND ME!"

Okay, Click.

My click had nothing to do with wearing a mask. It is the slamming of the door in my face. Not only is there no dialog, there is no remote invitation or intention to have one. I understand our need to have different opinions, even divergent views. I think that's what make us an interesting people. The second reason for my click was that the statement told me that her other bent—on inclusion,

love and supporting all people—was hypocrisy. Now I could only hear, "I want inclusion for all, will love all, and want more rights for more people, and groups—that is, as long as you totally agree with my world view."

I'm not brave enough to go down the path of the ones I've read that are so far right or left, or against the groups mentioned above. But just this week I saw one that blatantly shouted his beliefs, then ended with one more shot, "Oh, and..." Let me paraphrase his last statement in order to remove current biases; "BLAH, BLAH, BLAH, OH AND THERE ARE ONLY TWO VIEWS OF THE ROANOKE VALLEY!" Sorry for the all caps shouting, but one tries for accuracy.

There ARE more than two views of the valley. What I don't understand is why this person cares. Is his hold so tenuous on his beliefs that he must attack something so trite? That by SHOUTING it to the world, he's now fixed it? Were there people knocking on his door forcing him to look at things differently? Will he sleep better tonight now that's been posted? And what if, what if there are seven views of the valley. What changed in his life?

The end of civility as we knew it may have been a better lead. I remember when people could hold different views, when I could say, "I feel differently, but thanks for listening to my view." And they would say the same thing, shake my hand and clink our wine glasses as we talked about the stars out that night. And maybe in that silence we considered information that challenged us.

(And if you don't like that view, unfriend me that's okay too)

Grant Holmes
Laymantown

Send us your feedback in a letter with name and where you live – good or bad: news@vbfront.com

Field / On Tap

from Page 36

shuttering, revised hours of operation, teacher-substitute reassignments, homework and homestudy changes, displaced modules and trailers, new health and cleaning measures, sanitation stations, exposure and infection response policies, local-state-federal compliance, emergency-human resources-legal risk aversion strategies, etc., etc., etc.

I'm just asking we make an attempt not to convey all our frustrations to our children. Our school systems are addressing the challenge; and

whether we completely disagree with the decisions, agree with them, or vacillate between the ideas we know are good or bad; our kids are probably better off if we act like their world will be... ok.

Let children be children. Let them experience a world that is encouraging and full of wonder. They'll have ample time to raise their signs and fight the man later on. Or maybe, you've raised them where their natural response will be just to love one another.

Wouldn't that be a nice change? 



SNL's Bowen Yang



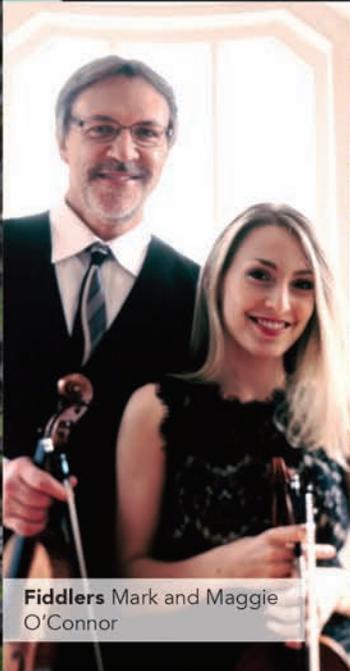
Pianist Gabriela Montero



Multi-instrumentalist and singer Leyla McCalla



Playwright and actress DeLanna Studi



Fiddlers Mark and Maggie O'Connor



Thomas Lauderdale and China Forbes of Pink Martini

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FRONTReviews >

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



Woody Allen.
Apropos
of
Nothing.
Autobiography.

Shhh... undocumented

When most young people are defining themselves, Excel knows he can't. *The Son of Good Fortune* (Ecco; 2020), Lysley Tenorio's second book (after *Monstress*), sympathetically illuminates the tenuous lives of undocumented immigrants, those who are "not really here."

Born on a Philippine Airlines flight to a mother fleeing abuse in Manila, they arrive in San Francisco with no documentation, and Excel identifies as "TNT"—Tagalog for "hiding and hiding." His mother, Maxima, a B-movie action star in the Philippines, works menial jobs and scams men online. Excel knows their lives could implode if he draws attention to himself, so he's "the quiet kid who keeps quieter.... What took effort and strategy became, as the years went on, instinct and habit."

At 19, Excel sees no future beyond working for the tyrannical owner of The Pie Who Loved Me pizza shop, who requires no Social Security number and pays him in cash. So when his girlfriend, Sab, invites him to move with her to the off-the-grid desert community of Hello City, he bids Maxima goodbye and leaves. Sab grew up bouncing among relatives, and with good humor and optimism they anticipate better days. Hello City brings new experiences, but after nine months, multiple crises send Excel back to Maxima. Consistently responsible and kind, he works to satisfy a debt and hopes to reunite with Sab, while mother and son establish a new bond. *The Son of Good Fortune* avoids sentimentality. Tenorio's characters are humorous and

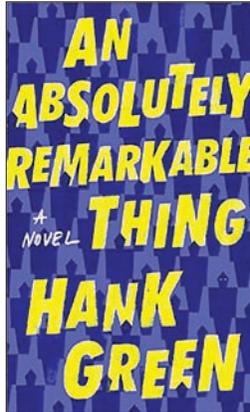
loving, in spite of the exclusion overshadowing their very existence.

—Cheryl McKeon

For Woody Fans

Chances are if you like Woody Allen movies and his New York sensibility – and sense of humor – you will like his autobiography, *Apropos of Nothing* (Arcade Publishing, 2020). It reads in many cases like a stream of consciousness as he jumps back and forth, from writing for variety shows in the 50's, to his marriage and relationships – professional and personal – with the likes of Louise Lasser (Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman), Diane Keaton, Mia Farrow etc. Allen never strived to make the commercial blockbuster and some of his many, many films either didn't make it to this part of Virginia or perhaps had one week at the Grandin. Movie buffs will enjoy Allen's behind the scenes look at filmmaking and he is brutally honest at times with his descriptions of those he has worked with over the past 50+ years.

What's a bit more uncomfortable are two longish sections where he reviews molestation charges brought against him by Mia Farrow against one of her two children that he had adopted as their father – despite the fact that he and Farrow lived separately and never married. Then there was 22-year-old Soon-Yi, Mia's daughter and not one of the children Allen adopted – who wound up in a highly public relationship with the filmmaker



30 years her senior. They've been married for over two decades now. The charges were never proven but many of Allen's associates stayed away when they went public. If you can stick to the story of his entering the business as a comedy writer and then as a filmmaker, *Apropos of Nothing* can be an amusing read.

—Gene Marrano

Lovely bar talk

In *Love* by Roddy Doyle (Viking; 2020) two guys hang out at the pub and talk about... relationships. Note to (most) girls (I know): it's not that deep. Note to (most) guys (I know): it's not that shallow.

—Tom Field

Robot post

Hank Green's *An Absolutely Remarkable Thing* (Trapeze; 2018) housed a good idea for a contemporary plot between its covers. The YA novel (I didn't see it marketed for youth) doesn't really work for younger or older audiences, unfortunately. Becoming an internet star by being the first to report on the mysterious appearance of robot statues makes a compelling story; but the shallow character development and dialogue was flat and unrewarding. I did stick with it—expecting a concluding twist I suppose; but I can only scratch my head

how so many people gave this story top reviews. If there ever was a misleading title...

—Tom Field

Giddy up delizioso

Napoli Cowboy "out near the lake" is an exceptional restaurant sitting in an unexpected converted roadside store in the Burnt Chimney area, Franklin County / Smith Mountain Lake. Family owned and operated, the bistro-like environment proffers surprising full flavored dishes that combine "Texan" and "Italian" cuisine for a most unique dining experience, even in the midst of the lake life casual atmosphere. You'll be hard pressed to assign yourself a "favorite" here... I order something different just about every time. And each presentation is always perfect... followed by memorable taste that lures you back... in my case, disregarding a near 45-minute drive. Who would have ever thought south central United States new country and Mediterranean peninsula old country culture could mix this well in the kitchen? It does. I promise. If you're disappointed after a visit to Napoli Cowboy, your taste buds need serious attention.

—Tom Field

The reviewers: **Cheryl McKeon** is a bookseller in Troy, NY; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT; **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT.



Earth Fare returns to Roanoke's Ivy Market >

The **Earth Fare** organic, no-additive and natural foods-only grocery store chain went bankrupt earlier this year - but a new investment group purchased the name and 8 locations. The Roanoke Earth Fare on Franklin Road was one of them. The Roanoke location reopened at the end of June. **David Issinghood** is Earth Fare's chief operating officer; he says those who shopped at Earth

Fare before will notice a greater emphasis being placed on the "boot list" – those additives and other ingredients that don't jibe with the now-smaller chain's all natural, organic theme: "it's been downplayed for probably the last 5-6 years, but we're going back to stressing what's not in our food."

Issinghood says the new store group owners have lowered prices across the board to make Earth Fare more competitive with other mainstream grocers. "We have everything, we're a full [service] supermarket." Before the much-larger chain went bankrupt, the Roanoke location that had opened in late 2017 "was one of the best stores in the company," notes Issinghood.



NRCC program grads >

Four **New River Community College** students recently finished their apprenticeship through **Apex Systems** with **American Electric Power (AEP)** Transmission Operations. **Eric Coalson**, **Winston Derham**, **Tyler Frazier** and **Robert Fread** are all recent graduates of NRCC and were part of a new 18-month dispatcher apprenticeship program that began in January 2019.

The program is designed for students who are enrolled in the second semester of NRCC's electrical engineering technology program. The selected students work and train with AEP Transmission Operations Control Center in Roanoke for 20 hours a week while completing an associate degree. The four NRCC students completed a training program developed by AEP while shadowing the dispatchers. Training opportunity offered by AEP included books, online modules, field visits, and specialized training sessions from third parties.

Submitted



Love Dee Creations



Submitted



Latest Gauntlet sets records >

The 6th Annual **GAUNTLET Business Program and Competition** saw 170+ entrepreneurs participating, while shifting the program entirely online in response to COVID-19. On June 26, the Vinton-based Advancement Foundation hosted a first ever virtual Award Ceremony and Graduation, with awards packages valued at a record \$300,000-plus. The top winners and their prize packages (cash and in-kind services) included GermZAPP (\$26,000), Horse Mountain Farm (\$13,750), Cowden Technologies (\$12,750), Patina Creek Silver (\$19,750), Total You Health (\$15,595) and The Anchorage House (\$10,500).

Because you can never have enough coffee >

One of Roanoke's newest food trucks is not really a food truck – it's **Space Rabbit Coffee**, which set up initially in downtown Roanoke near the Market Square. "Thank goodness we are in the coffee business—we were up late getting everything finished up, and up early getting everything set up," said the excited owners as they prepped for opening day in late June.



VWCC awards grants from Innovation Program >

The **Virginia Western Educational Foundation** has awarded nearly \$24,000 to six Virginia Western faculty and staff members to support innovative initiatives designed to impact

student success and advance novel ideas. This year's awardees received between \$500-\$7,200 apiece to fund their initiatives. The Educational Foundation's Innovation Grant program has awarded 52 grants totaling more than \$250,000 in the past decade.



One grant will purchase more microscopes and slides for a STEM lab; another will enable outreach and collaboration between the College and Northwest Roanoke in an effort to attract more students from that area. Ed Hall is Chair of the Foundation's Scholarship and Grants Committee: "the goal of the Foundation is to attract really good faculty and improve education to the highest level possible, so our students are employable," said Hall. "We're focused on the long-term growth of the individual student as well as our community, and these grants provide a means for us to continue delivering on that."

Now THIS is dedication >

Jane Hurt was a social worker for 64 years and retired for the second time from **Family Service of Roanoke Valley** on June 30. Family Service of Roanoke Valley President and CEO, **Linda Hentschel**, read a proclamation naming it as "Mary Elizabeth (Jane) Bowles Hurt Day" from Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea Sr. That happened during a surprise retirement party. Hurt's career started in 1956 with the Virginia Social Service Bureau. She joined the Family Service of Roanoke Valley staff in 1971 and retired in April 2000 when she held the position of the Director of Older Adult Services.

After a trip to Asia she came back to FSRV as an Outpatient Counselor, working on a part-time basis ever since. 49 years of her 64 in social work were at Family Service. "I don't know if they'd call it or feel it was a noble profession, but I have gotten a lot of good vibes from people," Hurt said on retirement day, noting that she was "born for social work" (earning two degrees along the way). "I think people appreciate our role in the community."



Submitted



Submitted

Franklin County Connects >

Franklin County Administrator **Christopher Whitlow** was the keynote speaker during a recent **Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce "Franklin County Connects"** networking event in Rocky Mount. Whitlow provided updates on the County's strategic plan as well as information on economic development and workforce development. "Franklin County is poised for continued growth and is an excellent choice to locate a business, raise a family or come for a visit", said Whitlow. Franklin County Connects is a monthly forum; the event includes Chamber of Commerce, Town of Rocky Mount, and County updates.



New non-profit helping to save small businesses and jobs >

The nonprofit **Virginia 30 Day Fund**, launched in April, announced that as of July 1 it had already provided direct financial assistance to 500 small businesses, including forgivable small loans. "For as long as this pain continues, we are going to provide a shot in the arm to as many small businesses and help save as many jobs as possible," said **Pete Snyder**, who co-founded the Virginia 30 Day Fund with his wife, Burson. "While there is so much economic pain out there and so much more work to be done, hitting this milestone of funding 500 businesses means that more than 500 families get to keep their dream alive and more than 3,400 Virginians can stay on the payroll for another month." The zero-overhead nonprofit says it has stepped up efforts to raise and distribute funds to at-risk businesses. See va30dayfund.com for more on how to qualify for a loan.

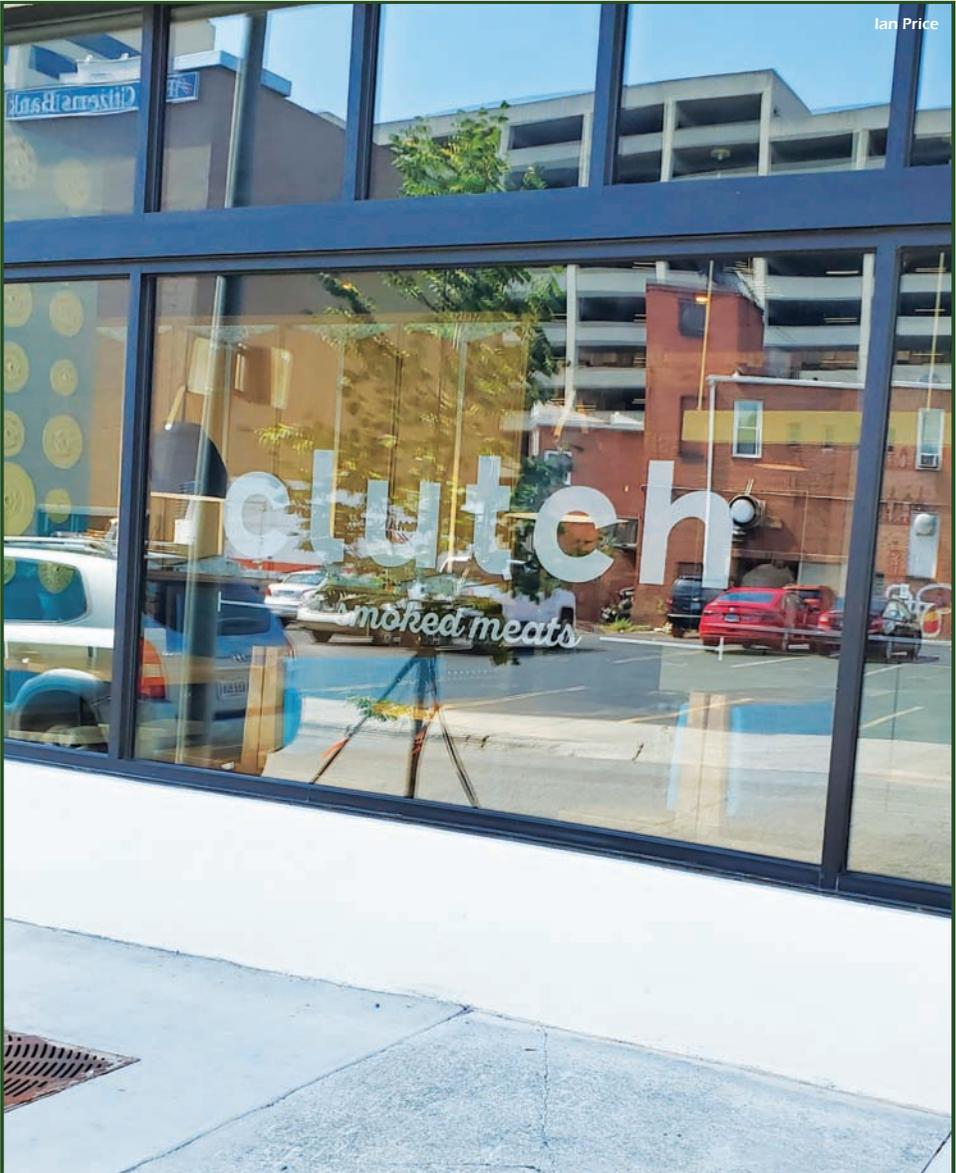


Update on young CBD entrepreneurs in Roanoke County >

A few months back we told you about two twenty-somethings, **Ryan Schirmer** and **Laura Warren** (now engaged), who had done their homework and opened a CBD products retail shop in southwest Roanoke County. The mid 20's duo opened **Your CBD Store** - then came the coronavirus. After shutting their doors for a while when the lockdown was most restrictive, they adapted. "A lot of it was money management," says Schirmer, "just figuring out how to pay for what we needed, not too much excess." Even the landlord cut them a break on the rent for a while says Schirmer. "I think it will make us stronger in the long run," says Schirmer, adding that they didn't take paychecks at one point.

"I definitely learned to be more creative," says Warren, as they did some promotion work from a booth at A Few Old Goats Brewing in the courtyard. That meant curbside and home delivery for starters. "As a business owner COVID forced all of us to think on our feet." That meant building a commerce-friendly website for online ordering and reaching out to loyal customers who had come to really on the healing aspects of CBD products from them. "This situation has really brought us closer together with our customers," says a grateful Warren, "they were there for us."

Ian Price



Another new eatery opens in Roanoke as Phase 3 launches as well >

Recently opened **Clutch Smoked Meats** is part of the Parry Restaurant Group of restaurants that includes Beamer's 25, West Salem Barbecue and Tuco's Taqueria in Roanoke. Now comes Clutch, a casual eatery being run by regional manager **Barry Caldwell**. As they opened about a month ago, he said Clutch is all about a handful of artisan sandwiches instead of an expansive menu. It's on Luck Avenue in downtown Roanoke, connected to the new "Owl Lofts" near the Texas Tavern parking lot. "Something quick and easy, sandwiches; we're not trying to reinvent the wheel," noted Caldwell. "We're doing ten sandwiches and we do them really, really good – instead of 30 that we do 'okay.'" Smoked pork butts and brisket are specialties.

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

DEVELOPMENT FRONT

The Branch Group has appointed its Chairman of the Board **Mr. Ron Oakley** as interim CEO effective July 1st. This comes after the resignation of CEO, Will Karbach. Oakley assumes the day to day responsibility for running the Branch Group. The presidents of the four operating companies as well as the CFO and CHRO will report directly to Oakley, who brings over 45 years of experience in the engineering and construction industry.

WELLNESS FRONT



Miller

Good Samaritan Hospice, the Roanoke and New River Valley's

only community-based, not-for-profit hospice, has appointed **Karen Brubaker Miller** as Chief Strategy Officer. "As we begin to broaden our services to the community, Karen is going to be invaluable in developing programs," explained Aaron Housh, Good Sam's CEO. "She brings a wealth of knowledge on advanced illness care and community partnerships." Miller is a native of Coastal Georgia. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Davidson College and a Master of Social Work degree from Florida State University. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and began her hospice career as a social worker in 1994.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Carla Finkelstein, a cancer researcher and an associate professor of biological sciences in Virginia Tech's College of



Finkelstein

Science, has joined the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC. Finkelstein, whose research focuses on the molecular basis of how circadian rhythms influence cancer initiation and progression, will move her research program and laboratory to the Virginia Tech research institute campus in Roanoke. Finkelstein is a founding member of the Virginia Tech Cancer Research Alliance (VTCRA) – a cohort of more than 25 research teams studying brain, breast, colon, lung, liver, and bone cancers in humans and animals

Melinda West has been appointed interim assistant vice president for finance and university



Murano

controller for the Virginia Tech Controller's Office. She brings more than 24 years of financial and accounting experience, and institutional knowledge to the position. West has served as university bursar since 2010. She now leads financial management and accounting operations, including accounts payable, payroll, internal accounting control, accounts receivable, financial reporting, fixed assets, and insurance programs. West replaces Ken Miller, who became vice president for finance in April. She will report directly to Miller.

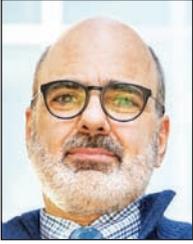
Anthony-Samuel LaMantia, a developmental

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neurobiologist and a professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, has been named the new director of the institute's Center for Neurobiology Research. LaMantia's new role includes guiding early career faculty and further integrating cellular and molecular neuroscience research enterprise at the FBRI.



Murano

The next president and CEO of Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center is **Brett Malone**, who

Have a career announcement?

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

earned three degrees from Tech and then founded a software firm at the CRC. Malone ('90, M.S. '91, Ph.D. '96) succeeds Joe Meredith, another Hokie alum, who retired in February after a 27-year run as president and CEO of the Corporate Research Center. The Virginia Tech Foundation appointed Malone after a national search.



Kiwus

Christopher H. Kiwus has been named vice president for campus planning,

infrastructure, and facilities at Virginia Tech following a national search. Kiwus has served as Virginia Tech's associate vice president and chief facilities officer since 2014, and will lead the newly organized Campus Planning, Infrastructure, and Facilities Division, focusing on the maintenance and expansion of various Virginia Tech campuses.



Luxbacher

Kray Luxbacher has been appointed head

of Virginia Tech's Department of Mining and Minerals Engineering in the College of Engineering. Luxbacher is the C.T. Holland Professor of Mining and Minerals Engineering and has been a faculty member since 2008. The Virginia Tech three-time graduate (B.S., M.S., Ph.D.) formerly served as the Associate Director of the Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research. Since 2016 she has served as associate department head.

FINANCIAL FRONT

First Bank & Trust Company, an Abingdon-based diversified financial services firm has



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CONTRIBUTORS

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

Tim Bradshaw is the executive director for the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. A native of Roanoke who returned to the area in 2014, Tim has an Aviation BA degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Master's in Public Administration from Western Kentucky University. He lives in Troutville on a small farm with his wife Janee. His daughter Jessica and son-in-law Matt reside in Roanoke. Tim is an avid outdoorsman.

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Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjp91@gmail.com]

Mike Dame is the vice president of marketing and communications at Carilion Clinic. A graduate of the

University of Florida, he spent nearly a decade as a sportswriter for the Orlando Sentinel before transitioning to a career in digital communications that landed him at Virginia Tech in 2005; he joined Carilion in 2008. Mike lives in Roanoke with his wife Valeria and enjoys golf, guitar, spending time with friends and cheering on his beloved Florida Gators.

Dan Dowdy is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading services (proofingprof.com). His background includes service in the U.S. Air Force and an extensive career in education, including teaching college-level writing competency and business courses, and working for a Fortune 100 company. [ddowdy@vbFRONT.com]

Tom Field is a creative director, marketing executive and owner of Berryfield, Inc. in Salem, and owner of Valley Business FRONT magazine. He has written and produced programs and materials for local and international organizations for 40 years. [tfield@berryfield.com]

Katie Gehrt is the director of marketing and communications for the Moss Arts Center and the Center for Creativity, Arts, and Technology at Virginia Tech. She holds degrees from Virginia Tech and West Virginia University. She's an avid equestrian who loves to travel and lives in Blacksburg with her husband and potcake dog.

Lois James has 28+ years business and management experience in the financial, customer service, and healthcare industries. Most recently before joining OpX Solutions James spent 14 years in the senior healthcare industry locally, holding various leadership and management positions.

Mike Leigh is president of OpX Solutions, LLC, a performance improvement company that helps organizations pursue operational excellence. A retired naval commander and former GE manufacturing manager, he has extensive experience in leadership development and process improvement. [Mike@OpXSolutionsLLC.com]

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anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. [gmarrano@cox.net]

Frank Martin is a senior associate broker and the top sales agent for Hall Associates, Inc., the oldest commercial real estate brokerage west of Richmond. He specializes in Sales and Leasing for office and industrial properties in southwest Virginia.

Mary Ann L. Miller is vice president of business banking and community relations at Bank of Botetourt. A graduate of Bridgewater College, she has been in the banking industry for more than fifteen years and currently serves on the board and executive committee as past-president with the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce, a board member with the Daleville Institute, and is vice chair of the board of with the Botetourt Family YMCA. A native of Botetourt County, she resides in Daleville with her husband, Matthew and their son Ira.

Annette Patterson, President of the Advancement Foundation in Vinton, is a results-driven leader that has built a massive network of support services, resources, and collaborations to benefit main street, early high growth ventures and freelancers. [annette.taf@gmail.com]

Paul Phillips has served as the chief executive officer of Freedom First Credit Union for the last twenty years. Freedom First was chartered in 1956 as a federally-insured member-owned financial cooperative and currently serves residents and businesses through its ten locations in the Roanoke and New River valleys. Prior to moving to Roanoke in 1998 Paul and his wife Missy lived in Cheyenne, Wyoming with their three children. A resident of Fincastle, Paul enjoys numerous outdoor activities, travelling and spending time with his two granddaughters.

Brian Powell is the owner and operator of Wine Gourmet in Roanoke Virginia. Brian moved to Roanoke when he purchased Wine Gourmet in 2011. Brian attended Virginia Tech and is an avid Hokie Fan! A member

of the Guild of Sommoliers, Brian resides in Roanoke and enjoys time with family and friends.

Michael Shelton is a Registered Financial Consultant that specializes in working with Accredited Investors, largely being business owners and real estate investors. He has worked with thousands of clients in Southwest Virginia and beyond to create smart, cost-effective, and rewarding financial solutions. Michael's services bring together the powerful combination of tax reducing plans through the business and investment planning with your personal net worth. His unique strategy to provide a holistic approach towards asset management always delivers a simple, easy and enjoyable experience. [michael@discover360Financial.com]

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Amy White is the Dean of STEM (School of Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) at Virginia Western Community College. She has a Bachelor's degree in biology from James Madison University, a Master's degree in microbiology and immunology from Virginia Commonwealth University, hails from Botetourt County, and has worked at WVCC since 2003.

Robin Weeks provides leadership development training and coaching through her business, My Pivotal Point. She works with both new managers and executives, and is a certified Big Five for the Workplace consultant and coach and certified through the Roanoke Center for Conflict Resolution. She's also a Certified Caregiving Consultant providing support, education and coaching to companies and individual family caregivers. [robind35@hotmail.com]



Puckett

announced that **Andy Puckett** has been promoted to Senior Vice President and Manager of the Mortgage Division. Puckett has 15 years of banking experience. The 2003 graduate of Emory & Henry

College has been with First Bank & Trust since 2019.

Ken Sigmon has joined Bank of the James as a Senior Vice President and Special Assets Manager and will be headquartered at the bank's Electric Road, Roanoke location. A Virginia Tech graduate, Sigmon has 40 years of banking experience and was associated with SunTrust Bank

prior to joining Bank of the James.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

Pamela Kestner has been appointed Chief Deputy at the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). She previously served as Deputy Director of Housing at DHCD and prior to that as Deputy Secretary of Health and Human

Resources in the McAuliffe Administration. She has a bachelor's degree in Sociology from Emory & Henry College and a master's degree in Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University. The former Roanoker was executive director for the Council of Community Services before joining the state government.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

“ ”
No pizza in the green room, but an interesting experience. — Page 37



DR PEPPER PARK 2020 SEASON LINEUP

- 08/14 AC/DC Tribute: Shoot to Thrill
- 08/21 Queen Tribute: Absolute Queen
- 08/27 Aaron Lewis
- 08/29 Roanoke Wing Fest 2020
- 09/11 Fleetwood Mac Tribute: Tusk
- 09/04 Colt Ford
- 09/10 Blackberry Smoke
- 10/09 Kid Rock Tribute: Cowboy
- 10/23 KISS Tribute: KISS America

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Bank of Botetourt



Center in the Square deep cleans, then reopens

In preparation of reopening on July 1 at the beginning of Phase 3, **Center in the Square** accepted a donation from Green Home Solutions for a hospital grade building disinfection with an estimated value at \$10,000. Green Home Solutions is a locally owned air quality company (the Pennsylvania-based firm has franchises in Roanoke and Blacksburg), specializing in decontamination and mold remediation. Center in the Square stressed it would be adhering to all physical distancing guidelines, face covering requirements of staff and patrons, occupancy restrictions, routine cleaning of high contact areas, hand sanitizer stations, new signage, staff training and staff health monitoring and more. "We are excited about welcoming our guests back into Center in the Square," said President Jim Sears just before the reopening. "We have truly missed them. It has been lonely not having an atrium, rooftop, and museums full of families learning and creating memories. It seems that even our aquatic life in the six aquariums miss seeing children and families."

GO Virginia seed money approved

The **GO Virginia Board** announced approval of three new Region 2 projects (parts of central and southwestern Virginia) aimed at growing the regional economy. The GO Virginia Board

approved a total of \$700,000 in state funds, leveraging \$478,298 in non-state sources to assist with the economic diversification in the region. That money is earmarked for the Roanoke Regional Partnership (COVID-19 recovery efforts), workforce training associated with the coronavirus (Virginia Tech Office of the Vice President for Health Sciences and Technology) and for the New River Valley Business Continuity Team (New River Health District), which is assisting local business owners with the resources needed to operate in the COVID environment.

Spotless record – again

Friendship, the senior living and rehabilitation company, announced that its Adult Day Care services, offered at the Hershberger Road campus, confirmed its two-year license from the Virginia Department of Social Services after achieving another zero-deficiency survey. This is the second year in a row the center has earned a deficiency-free review. "This achievement is especially hard to earn now due to the pandemic," said Stephanie Landes, Director of Marketing.

ROA working its way back from depths of COVID-19 travel restrictions

It doesn't get much worse that this – traffic at Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport was down 97 percent in April from the same month in 2019. Business travel has been almost non-existent since the

coronavirus pandemic hit Virginia and in late June what air travel traffic had returned was largely leisure. Business traffic is what needs to come back strong. So says Brad Boettcher, the director of marketing and air service development for the airport. Still, June's traffic – down about 70 percent from a year ago – was better than the national average.

"We're cautiously optimistic," said Boettcher, who was about to launch a new Fly Local campaign "with a lot of major stakeholders throwing their support behind it," in March when the coronavirus arrived. Flights should be added back to the ROA schedule over the next few months as things return to whatever the new normal might be. "Now more than ever we need the community support to be able to use [the airport], so that we can get our air service rebuilt," says Boettcher; "[that] will definitely help the economy locally by getting business [travel] in and out the region."

Tough economic times extends to academia

The financial impact of COVID-19 led Roanoke College to announce cost-cutting measures to employees today. Beginning in July the College said it would reduce spending by approximately \$6 million dollars. The budget cuts announced in late June include suspension of contribution to employee retirement plans and a reduction of salaries, operating expenses and workforce. Many positions that are open

and 14 currently filled staff positions will be permanently eliminated. "The current devastating health and economic crisis requires us to take these actions," said President Michael Maxey. "We are making the sacrifices necessary now to ensure our long-term viability and ability to provide a high-quality experience to every one of our students," Maxey said. "These are difficult decisions to make."

LewisGale-HCA launches hotline

The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty for many who have lost their jobs due to the economic impacts of the virus. The loss of health insurance coverage is a major concern for those recently unemployed. **LewisGale Regional Health System** is now working with **HCA Virginia** to assist those who find themselves without health insurance coverage, by establishing a phone hotline for those who have lost health insurance coverage, helping them to secure temporary coverage while unemployed. The Hotline at (833) 867-8771 is available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"Part of our mission is to ensure the health of the communities we serve through our hospitals and healthcare providers," said LewisGale Market President Lance Jones in announcing the hotline. "An important part of that is to be there in times of need and to ensure lack of insurance coverage and fears about the COVID-19 virus do not preclude people from

receiving the healthcare they need. This hotline is a tool for us to tend to the overall wellbeing of our patients and their families, and to remove barriers to seeking lifesaving care in a safe hospital environment.” Hotline advisors can discuss eligibility and advocacy services appropriate for a variety of scenarios.

A boost for students looking at motor sports careers

Officials with the Bobby Scruggs Charitable Foundation have announced the winners of its scholarships for 2020. The \$1,000 scholarships memorialize long-time NASCAR official and Roanoke resident James R. (Bobby) Scruggs, awarded to young men and women pursuing careers in motorsports and related industries- as well as to interns working for Motor Racing Outreach and Wake Forest University Research Center. Scruggs lost his 13-year battle with cancer in 2005.

BSC Foundation scholarship winners for

2020 are: **Jenna L. Bostic** – Craig County High School, attending Virginia Western Community College and Liberty University, studying aviation; **Elijah R. Boyd** – Franklin County High School, attending UVA Wise, studying computer science; **Lauren F. Craddock** – Craig County High School, attending Radford University, studying math and engineering; **Wesley R. P. Miller** – Magna Vista High School, Henry County, attending Universal Technical Institute, studying motorsports; **Victoria D. Pritchett** – Magna Vista High School, Henry County, attending Virginia Tech, studying engineering; and **Cami Parsons** – MRO intern for 2019, Cami is a rising junior at the University of North Carolina. She is the daughter of former NASCAR driver Phil Parsons.

Technology helps to shoulder the load during surgery

Jeremy C. Smalley, MD, with LewisGale Physicians Virginia

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Send announcements to news@vbFRONT.com
 A contact / source must be provided.
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Orthopedics in Salem is the first provider in southwest Virginia to use a new technology offering guided personalized surgery for shoulder replacements. LewisGale Medical Center is also the first Virginia hospital west of Charlottesville to offer this surgery option. A preoperative planning software tool allows surgeons to understand their patient’s anatomy prior to surgery and personalize the surgical plan using simulated bone and implants.

During shoulder replacement surgery, a camera and tracker technology work together to monitor the position and mechanical alignment of the surgical instruments and joint replacement. “The shoulder navigation system allows me to

optimize implant position and preserve as much bone as possible in each individual patient,” says Smalley.

FloydFest 2021 already announcing headliners

Across-the-Way Productions, Inc. had to ultimately cancel **FloydFest 2020 Vision Quest** due to safety concerns over the coronavirus, but they are already inviting patrons to embark on an “Odyssey” at FloydFest 21, July 21 to 25, 2021. Already announced: the GRAMMY-nominated, North Carolina Music Hall of Fame-inducted folk-rock group, The Avett Brothers, who will headline the five-day, nine-stage, 100-act, award-winning festival, with more artist additions



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and surprises to be released in the coming months. "As we navigate these incredible times, it's amazing to think that we are all experiencing a 'Vision Quest' in some form or fashion," said Kris Hodges, founder and chief creative officer. "We welcome The Avett Brothers, as they align so wonderfully with our commitment to you, the fan," said Hodges shortly before he embarked on a cross-country motorcycle adventure with his son.

Grandin Theatre gets creative with movie offerings

With COVID-19 cases still present in the Roanoke Valley (and on the uptick last month), the **Grandin Theatre** Foundation opted for a safety-first model, with reduced public engagement when it comes to showing films, at least through August. The Big Screen Classics Series launched in July with former summer blockbusters like *Jaws* and *E.T.* Each film is being shown in the Main Theatre - once a week, on Friday night - and 80-90 tickets per show will be sold, roughly 25% of the room's capacity.

Patrons have a checkerboard, socially distanced theatre of seats to choose from, Masks are required in all common areas (like concessions) but may be removed once patrons are in their seats. The Grandin is also encouraging people to book private rental experiences for the remainder of the summer. Rental prices are based on group size and patrons can also support the Grandin by purchasing concessions and beverages from the bar with the Theatre's in-house ABC license. "The unique private rental component is a win-win for the public and the Theatre. It allows our patrons and supporters to have an incredible experience ... support the Theatre and do it in a private all-to-yourself setting," said Grandin Theatre Foundation Executive Director Ian Fortier.

Roanoke County small business program

Roanoke City had its **Star City Strong Task Force**, which made its recommendations last month to City Council on how up to 7 million

dollars could be spent to help bolster small businesses there. Roanoke County jumped in with a \$1 million Small Business Recovery Grant program in July. The money comes from the federal CARES Act. Depending on how many employees were on the payroll, grants of \$2500 to \$10,000 were available for eligible companies that had been in business for at least a year as of March 1. "Every little bit helps," says Roanoke County economic development director Jill Loope, "and many of them are needing rent assistance, they need to provide deep cleaning services [or to] pay for PPE expenses. Many of them are just trying to survive right now." The smallish grants won't make a business whole said Loope, "but we are hoping this will help somewhat. We want to help them stay in business."

Innovation Mill, Gauntlet alum snares grant

Cowden Technologies, LLC of Blacksburg has been awarded a \$75,000 grant from the Commonwealth Research Commercialization Fund (CRFC) administered

by Virginia's Center for Innovation Technology. Mickey Cowden, owner of Cowden Technologies, LLC is an alumnus of the GAUNTLET and Innovation Mill programs administered by The Advancement Foundation in Vinton. Innovation Mill supports early stage businesses in high-growth industries. Cowden Technologies will use the grant award to build a prototype and program software for smart drone docking stations.

"Working with the Innovation Mill has been invaluable," said Mickey Cowden. It's the first grant for an Innovation Mill tenant says lead industry expert Debbie Custer. "We think it's remarkable considering we are [just] getting ready to start our second year". Cowden's autonomous drones are designed with small farmers in mind says Custer: "test the quality of the air, [for] pesticides, the level of moisture ... then come back to its resting station and transmit that data."

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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Dan Smith

Dwayne Yancey

First person Q and A with Dwayne Yancey

By Dan Smith

Dwayne Yancey on his other “career” and the state of local live theater in the time of COVID-19

When and why did you become interested in writing for the theater? How did you initially go about it? What is the continued appeal?

I was one of the geeks who was involved in theatre in high school. I’m sure I was no good as an actor, but it was fun. At JMU, I took a playwriting class as an elective. It was co-taught by Roger Hall and Ralph Cohen [who] later went on to co-found the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton. I also hung out with some theatre people, one of whom is now my wife - Trina is now executive artistic director at Attic Productions so she’s the real theater person in the family. I didn’t really

think about writing plays until 1998. At the time, my daughter was nine. I took her to see a youth show at Attic and thought to myself ‘I could do that.’ So, I did. I called up the memory banks from that one class at JMU and started writing plays.

I tell people it was my mid-life crisis—some guys buy fancy sports cars or acquire mistresses. I started writing plays. I was blessed – or cursed – with some early success. I naively started sending scripts and queries off to places. One of those one-acts got produced and then published - HAMLET ON SPRING BREAK, a one-act. So, at that point I was hooked. I like the idea

of creating a world and making it come to life. To me, there are few things more powerful than good live theatre.

How much time do you spend writing plays?

Until the virus came along, I mostly just wrote on weekends—that’s basically what I do on Saturdays and Sundays. Not sure how many hours - but I could easily put in 8 hours each Saturday and Sunday writing. I say “until the virus came along” because now I’m mostly working from home—that’s far more efficient than working in the office, and I don’t have a commute time, so now I have more time and so now I sometimes write at night during the week as well.

Does writing for the theater ever interfere with your journalism and if not, how do you keep them separate? Do plays ever result from your journalism?

I try to keep a bright line between the two. Journalism interferes only in the sense that work has to come first so sometimes I don’t have as much time for playwriting as I wish. The only play that’s resulted from my journalism work is a full-length that’s never been done. LILA’S LONG THREAD was inspired by the attempt closure of Sweet Briar College. I’ve never really written a “newspaper play.” Maybe someday.

"IN BRIEF"

NAME: Dwayne Yancey

HOMETOWN: McGaheysville, Virginia (Rockingham County).
Now lives near Fincastle.

EDUCATION: James Madison University -- political science major.

WORK HISTORY (very briefly):

Worked for a now-defunct magazine in Richmond from 1980-1982. Has been with The Roanoke Times since 1982, first as a reporter, later as an editor. The editorial page editor since 2014.

Does your theater work pay? How much, for example, do you make if a theater group puts on a full production?

In a good year, I’ll make about \$1,000 from plays—most of those royalties through publishers. I’ve had about a dozen plays published. I let non-profits perform my unpublished work royalty-free. Other playwrights go ballistic when I say that, but I take that view that if nobody else is getting paid—and in community theatre nobody gets paid—why should I? I’m just happy to see my work done. It’s not like I’m trying to make a living at this. If Broadway came calling, sure, I’d want to get paid. But most community theatres hang by a thread - I don’t feel

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Chad Runyon photography

Dwayne Yancey and Katrina Yancey

right squeezing money out of them. It wouldn't be much anyway. It's almost impossible for anyone to make a living at playwriting unless you're Lin Manuel-Miranda and have a hit on Broadway.

How good is theater in Roanoke—in general—and where is it lacking.

Roanoke has a lively theatre scene—far livelier than a lot of communities this size. I'm not sure we appreciate that, but I'm often reminded of it when I deal with out-of-town theatres that are struggling. Personally, I wish there were more adventurous shows, but theatres have to cater to the market and the market here prefers the old standards. I do think that is changing—for the better. About two years ago Mill Mountain Theatre did *SPRING AWAKENING*, which is very adventurous. It was packed. Even better, the night I went most of the audience appeared under the age of 40. At a lot of shows, I'm one of the youngest people there—that definitely wasn't the case for that show. Same for when Showtimers did *RENT* and *HEATHERS*, which are adventurous shows for this market. I think there's now a younger audience out there that's ready and eager for

more adventurous work - it just has to be tapped.

The thing that virtually every theatre around here lacks is marketing. Companies put together really good shows and they have great directors, actors, costume designers, set designers, lighting designers, all that. What always comes last, and often gets left out, is marketing. I think there's a younger market out there, but it's unaware of what's going on. Lynchburg has a very lively theatre scene, too, that often is more adventurous than what we see in Roanoke. That really runs counter to people's impressions, but Lynchburg is a far more complicated, and interesting, place than people give it credit for. Renaissance Theatre there is a real gem.

Are you seeing local impact on theater in the Roanoke Valley because of COVID19?

The virus will be bad news for arts groups all over. A theatre that has a mortgage to pay will be in a different place than one that doesn't. A theatre with staff to pay will be in a different place than one that is all-volunteer. The problem will come on the recovery side:

Chad Runyon photography



Todd Ristau (L) and Dwayne Yancey

the buzz among playwrights is that the pandemic will be terrible for us. Theatres have always favored old standards over new works - now it will likely be even more so, because theatres will want shows guaranteed to draw a crowd so they can recoup some of the money they haven't been making. I bet you'll see a lot of Shakespeare -- name brand, and no royalty costs. I've also read speculation that there will be a lot more interest in small-cast shows -- that will hold down costs for professional theatres and allow for social distancing for theatres at all levels. (So, yes, I'm about to start work on a small-cast show with that in mind).

I saw a piece in *Middle Class Artist* that had diagrams of what a concert hall would like with a socially-distanced audience. Their estimate was you could only use one-quarter of the seats, so their calculation was if you only had one-quarter the audience, but the same set of expenses, then tickets would have to be four times higher. That prices out a lot of people. Ultimately the question is when consumers feel safe enough to resume normal activities. The one saving grace is that the theatre world, like everyone else, has discovered Zoom and is trying to figure out how to use it.

Michigan State University produced one of my one-acts over Zoom.

Where have your plays been staged?

I've had scripts produced in London, New York, Toronto, Chicago, Los Angeles and Melbourne, among other places. I've had staged readings of four full-length [plays] in New York (most recently in November) but getting a full-length production in New York is very hard and I suspect is about to become even harder. I've had work produced on every continent except South America and Antarctica. One of my short plays was produced in May in Israel (*Q DOWNSIZED*) - and live-streamed on Facebook. This was the 16th country in which I've had my work performed.

CODA: "He never stops writing, he never stops submitting, and he never stops getting his work up and in front of audiences. He is passionate, dedicated, disciplined, and damned talented," says Todd Ristau, Director of the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University, who has nominated Yancey for a Perry F. Kendig Award, Individual Artist award in the past. (Hollins University and Roanoke College hand out the Kendig Awards annually.) 

ADVERTISER INDEX

Ameriprise Financial / Christine Smith	29	Richfield Living	57
Anytime Fitness.....	56	Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport	17
Bank of Botetourt.....	50-51	Salem Health & Rehabilitation Center.....	35
Berryfield	29	Sponsor Hounds / Dr Pepper Park.....	53
Brown Hound Tree Service.....	29	VCOM	3
Carilion Clinic.....	BC	Virginia Business Systems	63
Citizens	55	Virginia Western Community College	5
Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia	31	Virginia Tech CRC / COgro.....	34
Davis H. Elliot Company	29	Virginia Tech Moss Arts Center	41
Entre Computer Center	59	Wine Gourmet	19
Freedom First Credit Union	2		
Garland Properties / Crafteria.....	39		
Proofing Prof	29		

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