

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 142

JULY 2020

Virginia Registered
Apprenticeship Program

NRCC's FastForward

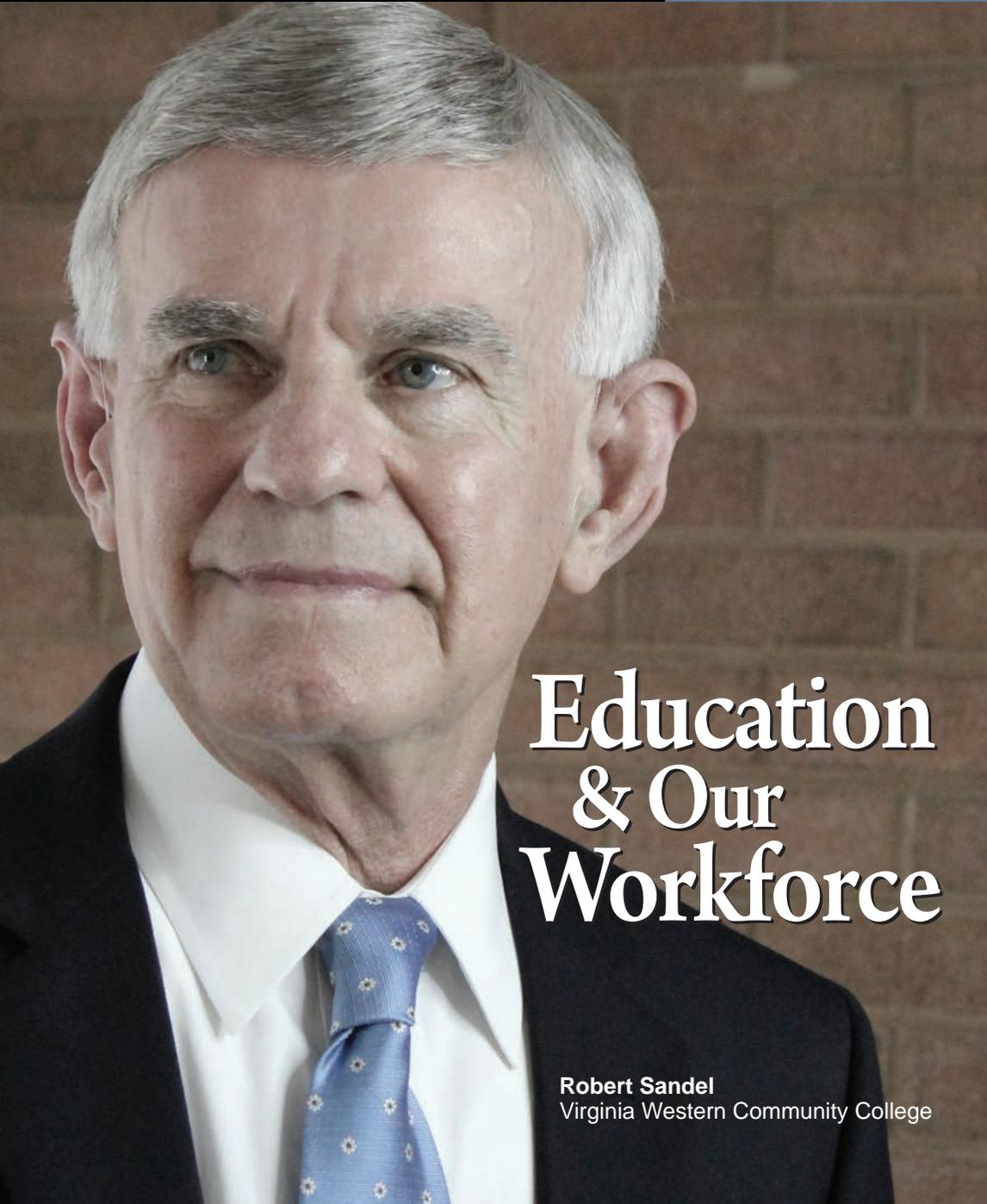
Greenfield Education
and Training Center

VWCC's STEM

Bank of Botetourt's
Mary Ann Miller

New River Valley's
Road to Recovery

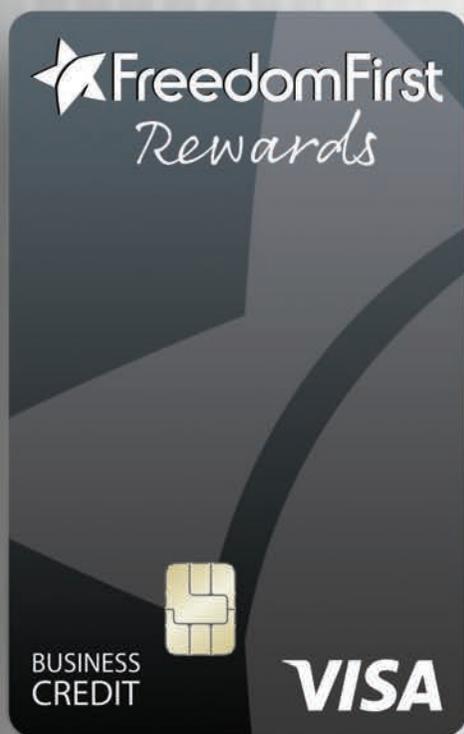
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Robert Sandel
Virginia Western Community College

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Education is a very broad topic, encompassing from preschool age up to post-graduate learning; so in this issue we decided to focus on training at the community college level – where a two year degree or even a shorter term certificate program can lead someone to a good paying job. We also look at a high school apprenticeship program that’s paying dividends. (Hopefully, these programs are all intact or fully opened up again at some point this fall.) Even before the high unemployment numbers associated with COVID-19, thousands of jobs went unfilled just in Virginia because there was not enough skilled labor. With the food service industry especially hard hit early on by the pandemic business restrictions, the better credentials someone has in what is considered an “essential” industry may just be a lifesaver.

Tom Field
Publisher

Gene Marrano
Editor

“”
The trades are in demand...
the money is going up.

— Page 18



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“We're lucky to live here. — Page 39

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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.

2020 CONTRIBUTORS



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Cory Crouser



Dan Dowdy



Nanette Levin



Gene Marrano



Michael Shelton



Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

“” Attendance has been near pre-COVID-19 levels since the first virtual meeting in April.

— Page 36



Tim Bradshaw
Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport / transportation



Lisa Clause
Richfield Living / senior development



Mike Dame
Carilion Clinic / healthcare

“” It was more than just a class

— Page 14



Katie Gehrt
Moss Arts Center at Virginia Tech / culture



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Mary Ann L. Miller
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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 40.



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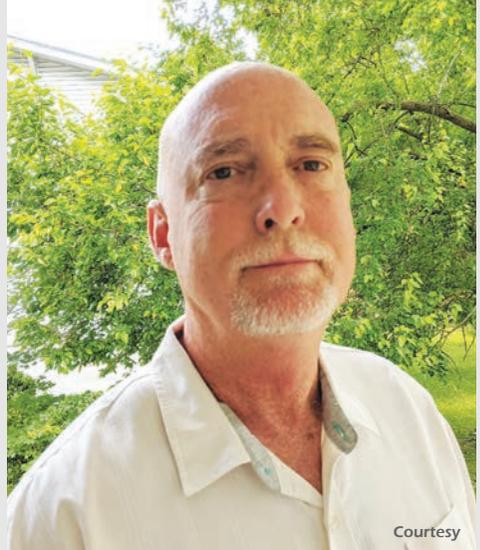
By Gene Marrano

High school students – and young adults – can take advantage of the Virginia Registered Apprenticeship Program to help land a good job.

Over the past several years, first Roanoke County and now Roanoke City and Salem public schools have teamed with their local government economic departments and employers like Graham White and the Western Virginia Water Authority to provide registered apprenticeship (RA) opportunities for juniors and seniors. It may lead to jobs or help them refine what path they wish

to pursue at the collegiate level. Tom Rowley is the economic development manager for Roanoke County; he says his predecessor in that position (Jay Brenchick) was instrumental in attracting a Virginia Department of Labor and Industry office to the valley: "it was important to get their presence here, to really speed things up and move the effort along."

The RA program is a mix of on-the-job training apprentices work around their regular school day – they are paid – along with theoretical classroom training. Roanoke County Schools recruits new businesses to the RA program every year and Rowley's department helps support that effort. He says around 150 students showed up to a recruitment night earlier this year where they could meet with local companies willing to take on an apprentice. Manufacturing and construction companies looking for skilled labor are always towards the top of the list. The majority of career paths in the U.S. only require a certification or credential that demonstrates a skill – not a college degree Rowley claims. "A lot of apprenticeships are aimed at that career path," he says, "and this is a way for them to get on the career ladder quickly."



Tom Rowley

Courtesy

The Western Virginia Water Authority now takes on about 10-15 apprentices a year says Mike Altizer, the WWVA's Fleet/Student Apprentice Coordinator. "Some start as juniors and some as seniors. We are starting into our fourth year beginning in August. The apprentice course that we created is 4000 hours and takes about 2 ½ years. [Students] work in different segments of the business 2-3 days a week, 8 hours a day and they still go to school," notes Altizer, a former Roanoke County supervisor.

"The value to us as we say, we are growing our own," adds Altizer. "Keep in mind that when they start, they are 16-17 years old and for most we are their first job. The hope and benefit is that we can hire 50% of our apprentices to full time positions."

Patricia (Trish) Morrison is Director of the

Division of Registered Apprenticeship in the state's Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI). The program is actually 82 years old and is always employer-driven, based on current worker needs. "They're seeking me out," says Morrison, adding that the skills learned and the credentials earned have currency elsewhere in the county, even overseas: "if you go to Ireland with an electrician's journeyworkers card from America- they know what that means."

Morrison sees the contact tracer role now being hired for to track down those who may have encountered someone infected with COVID-19 as a good fit for the RA program, but adds that, "we haven't made that [connection] yet." Building trades provide the most opportunities for the DOLI program says Morrison. CNC programming, tool & die, and other manufacturing niches are high on the RA list as well. There are

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programs for barbers, cosmetologists, nail technicians and the like. The Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR), which eventually licenses everyone in the service trades, now offers some apprenticeship programs as well, notes Morrison.

Roanoke County already has a strong technical career education program, much it based at the Burton Center or at each high school,

says Jason Suhr, Director of Career & Technical Education for Roanoke County Public Schools. When DOLI decided to promote the RA program at the high school level several years ago "we thought this might be a good opportunity for our kids." He calls it a work-based model ideal for students "who know where they want to go. They find a company that's invested in them." Smaller firms that may need to fill just a few spots and have "niche needs," have also taken advantage



Roanoke County Schools

Apprentice - Western Virginia Water Authority

of the program. With college debt loads seemingly on the rise regularly, Suhr notes that companies who hire apprentices may eventually help pay for them to go back to school. "It's another win."

Suhr praises the local businesses that have taken on apprentices. "The companies care about them; we found them to be very receptive and responsive to the students. The companies are [also] saying they can't find anybody and they're looking for a way to plug these holes in their workforce. This is one tool they have at their disposal ... to really grow their own." 

Editor's Note: As of early June, Tom Rowley said 19 Roanoke County businesses employ 36 apprentices—2 students and 34 adults. Across the region (Roanoke County, Roanoke City, Salem, Botetourt County and Franklin County), 89 companies employ 406 apprentices (38 students; 368 adults).



Roanoke County Schools

Apprentice - Balzer and Associates



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FASTFORWARD TAILORED TRAINING

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

A recently launched statewide program at New River Community College is fast-forwarding entry into new career paths for participants.

There are multiple winners when training the workforce at community colleges, according to Mark Rowh, New River Community College's Vice President for Workforce Development and External Relations. First, students are enrolled in short-term programs that help them obtain nationally recognized credentials. They can receive higher-paying jobs without lengthy or expensive schooling.

Employers benefit by having an appropriately trained workforce in the pipeline. Workers are credentialed, meaning employers know they have the necessary knowledge and skills. Lastly, both the New River Valley and the

Commonwealth win as the programs foster a more productive workforce and in turn economic growth, higher tax revenues and development.

New River Community College's (NRCC) Office of Workforce Development provides a myriad of services including credentialing, training opportunities, skills upgrading and career development programs, retraining, adult education (GED), and pre-employment testing. Rowh emphasizes that each of the state's community colleges tailors its offerings to local industry requirements. He said the workforce development program prides itself on flexibility, adapting quickly to

changing needs. The fluid nature of industry is a challenge, which means being “fast on our feet.”

As a specific NRCC workforce development program, FastForward provides clear paths to meaningful careers and helps people get the jobs they want and the salaries desired. FastForward programs are low-cost, short-term training courses to help fast-track training for careers in truck driving, manufacturing technology, medical assisting, nurse’s aides and pharmacy technician. There are also Lean Six Sigma Green and Yellow Belt quality control programs. Most courses take six to twelve weeks to complete.

FastForward was made possible by the New Economy Workforce Credential Grant Program, developed during the 2016 General Assembly Session, to create and sustain a supply of credentialed

workers to fill high-demand occupations in fields which support the state’s economy while making the attainment of these credentials more affordable. Many of those skilled jobs had been going unfilled, a mantra of then-Governor Terry McAuliffe at the time.

Rowh says that because of this grant, students only pay one-third of the cost. For those who qualify, additional financial assistance is available. Employers can also sponsor students. “This innovative model has garnered national attention,” said Rowh. It has proven successful as well. NRCC students taking the medical assistant national exam, for example, have a 95% pass rate.

FastForward prepares students for jobs with in-class or on-line instruction plus clinical or on-site work. State-of-the-art technology is important to



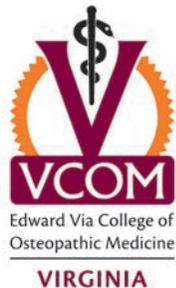
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ensure students are trained on what industries want. Rowh said there is emphasis on having updated equipment, aided by special funding from the state community college program. “We are often complimented by industry” in this area, he said. (It’s unclear what the in-person component will look like this Fall considering pandemic safety precautions.)

Rebecca Mills is now a pharmacy technician at Christiansburg Pharmacy after completing the program at NRCC. She was working in retail and didn’t know much about pharmacy until her sister, who was in the RN [registered nursing] program at NRCC, brought it to her attention. Mills went straight into the program without prior job experience in a pharmacy. “The class covered all areas of pharmacy, things that I feel like I wouldn’t have learned on the job,” she said. “We learned really quickly.” She liked learning with other people as a small class of eight students, and she had a “knowledgeable teacher” who gave extra help as needed.

Mills said that it was more than just a class: NRCC helped arrange the required certification test as well. “They teach you, then you could walk in and take the test,” she said. “They made the entire process smooth.” Part of the class entailed building resumes and interview skills. Mills says her current boss spoke

with everyone in the class - and ended up offering her a job. “The class is why I have the job I have,” she said.

Indeed, Michael Quinones, operations manager of Christiansburg Pharmacy, said that the program invited Christiansburg Pharmacy to interview students one time, and it worked out well, so they keep doing it. The NRCC pharmacy technician program is the only one of its kind nearby. “It’s nice when we are looking for staff members. If they have gone through the program, we can just pop them in,” he said, complimenting their understanding of the material. “They [NRCC] have done a good job.”

While these programs serve adults of all ages,” said Rowh, there is not a “typical” student. “Sometimes they are unemployed, sometimes they are employed but want something else,” he said. Students with four-year degrees have returned to NRCC’s workforce development program to obtain a new skill or switch careers.

One demographic Rowh mentioned serving was ALICE, an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living, “a population of working adults who want a better future.” He cited medical assistant program students who



doubled their salaries upon completion.

One challenge for NRCC is having enough students to sustain enrollment, said Rowh. Because of NRCC's strong tradition of technical programs such as welding through its traditional credit-based avenue, FastForward classes have been small. However, as the college pivots toward industry needs, new and popular programs are being added. One is apartment maintenance technician, a program in demand because of the plethora of apartments in the area associated with Virginia Tech and Radford University. Rowh said that apartment management companies approached NRCC with the idea, which was then developed and approved by the state. "Folks came to us," Rowh said. "That shows the need."

Rowh said that the college tracks job data constantly, monitoring demand so it can be responsive. While it is

impossible to know for sure, Rowh speculates that as the economy reopens from the pandemic there may be bigger demand for retraining because of lost jobs in sectors such as travel, retail, and food service. In other words, the reopening may point out why it is so important to have marketable skills that can help secure employment – the whole point of workforce development. 

Editor's Note: *New River Community College announced plans in mid-June for the coming academic year. Fall semester classes beginning August 24 will be offered online with the exception of some career/technical and workforce development programs (like FastForward) that require hands-on or clinical experiences. For the first two weeks of the semester, all instruction will take place online. Beginning September 8, classes that include face-to-face instruction will begin meeting, following COVID-19 protocols for small groups.*

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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
The myth that employees can no longer be trusted or productive working from home has been busted.

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
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To be, or not to be (remote)

Much has been written (with good reason) about the downside this pandemic has had on business operations. But as Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, "In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity." Indeed, there is opportunity for those organizations who see it and can take advantage of it! One of the opportunities revealed to organizations from the COVID-19 crisis is the ability for teams and staff to successfully work remotely.

In a recent survey by YouGov, 54% of professionals reported their productivity increased working from home due to time saved from commuting, fewer distractions, and fewer meetings. The myth that employees can no longer be trusted or productive working from home has been busted. And some employers now realize that business trips can be reduced, and office expenses can be cut by taking advantage of remote working technology. However, there have been some challenges.

In the same survey however, 25% of respondents reported lower productivity because it is harder to share information with colleagues and many homes are not optimally setup for work. Others reported difficulties with home/work balance and increased loneliness. To compensate, some are spending more time on social media (37%) or making more phone calls to family and friends during the day (49%).

So - is this an opportunity your organization should pursue?

It really depends on each organization's (and team member's) needs. Obviously, there is some work that simply cannot be done remotely (such as most manual skill jobs). For those that can, however, it is not a simple decision. Factors you should consider are productivity, technology, the need for face-to-face teamwork, HR and legal policies, and most importantly, the specific needs of each employee. Careful consideration should be given to how and when to utilize remote workers, a policy that is equitable, well-communicated, and beneficial for all involved.

The word "crisis" comes from the Greek work "krisis", which means decision. Generally, it means a decision point. The pandemic has indeed created many decision points that need to be addressed, including how your teams and employees will operate in the future. What will you decide? 📌

“”
Fifty-four percent of professionals reported their productivity increased working from home.

W2 or 1099?

My March 2019 column talked about the Tax Cut and Jobs Act (TCJA) and what it meant to “us” as average folk. The emotions that bill evoked with 2018 tax return changes are coming back as my clients wonder about their COVID-19 “new normal.” The TCJA is now a bigger factor.

Working from home is a reality many didn’t see coming. It’ll be a more prevalent option as we move into the future. Know, though, there are financial issues for both the employee and employer.

TCJA considerations

The TCJA has changed tax benefits for employer reimbursement of employee expenses. You can no longer use the unreimbursed employee expense option on Form 2106 for Schedule A itemized deductions. What that means for most employers is, if you decide to help cover staff costs outside of the office, it’s a benefit that’s not something you can claim on your tax return.

Employers will need to shoulder additional IT expenses and other costs required for shifting employees from onsite to home office work spaces. Even if your people are working remotely, you may still need to classify staff as W-2 employees. Under common-law rules, anyone who performs services for you is your employee if you can control what will be done and how it will be done.

Shifting to contract workers

This may be a good time to evaluate the relationship between employee and employer. Does it make sense to change the relationship to a 1099 from a W-2 arrangement?

This should be beneficial for both parties. Employees shouldn’t leave this decision up to the employer without knowing what actual costs will be, including the tax ramifications. If you’re an employer, spend time collecting data to help show your staffers the benefits of your proposed shift.

Done right, switching from a W-2 to a 1099 income tax filing arrangement can benefit both parties. Tax laws are complicated, though, and changing constantly. It takes smart strategies to ensure both the employee and employer prosper.

One thing an employer can do to help an employee realize maximum income potential is to offer consult with a professional advisor as a perk. I was recently able to save a client who changed from W-2 to 1099 status almost \$40,000 in taxes. This applies to employers too. Understanding the right ways to set this arrangement up can save a lot. This requires pre-planning, however, so it’s important to implement the right cost saving strategies from the onset. Expert input can help you make wiser decisions.

As you explore the options for your new normal, make sure you have all the facts. Getting creative in structuring these changing arrangements - with an eye toward tax costs and benefits - makes sense for everyone. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Are 1099s a better strategy in the “new normal?” – it’s not just an employer’s decision.

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



Submitted photos

Greenfield HVAC instructor Gary Young

When on-line can't replace hands-on

By Aila Boyd

Botetourt's Greenfield Center prepares students for marketable trade skills, including high-demand welding and HVAC jobs.

Virginia Western Community College's off-campus facility at the Greenfield Education and Training Center in Botetourt County had to quickly adapt when the COVID-19 pandemic stopped in-person classes halfway through the spring semester. Unlike some programs that are easily taught online, the two offered at the center, welding and commercial heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), require a high degree of personal instruction and hands on practice.

Dean of the School of Business, Technology, and Trades Yvonne Campbell explains that the lecture portion of the classes continued through online delivery. However, since both programs have lab requirements, spring semester students will have to return to campus once it's safe to do so in order to

complete their studies. "This is something that has never happened before. We've been doing a lot of planning," she says. Safety measures are already being put into place for the upcoming fall semester, including the reduction in the number of students allowed per class.

Assistant Professor Gary Young, the head of both programs, says students from all walks of life, ranging from dual-enrollment 16-year-old homeschoolers to retirees wanting to busy themselves by learning new skills, take classes in both certificate programs. In a given semester, between 75 to 100 students are enrolled in welding or HVAC.

"These are programs that are going to lead to careers," Young says. "The trades are in

demand. The money is going up. You're going to see these skills become more and more desired. When things start going bad, trades still keep going, even in the hard times that we're in right now. A lot of stuff has been shut down, but the trades haven't been. There's a lot of job security."

After moving from the main campus in Roanoke five years ago to the Greenfield Center because it offered more space, the welding program became accredited through the American Welding Society. Campbell notes that the accreditation "brought a level of professionalism to the program." Additionally, the accreditation ensures that students are prepared to enter the workforce. "With each type of welding technique that is taught, there is an industry credential attached to it," she says. Reaccreditation for the program was granted last fall.

Students who enter the welding program have the option of completing the 17 required

credits through the fast track option, two condensed eight-week semesters, or through the night option, which spans the traditional fall and spring semesters.

Campbell says welding is popular with students. There is currently a waiting list. "When they leave the program, many of them go directly into welding companies," she says. She adds that the commercial HVAC program is still in a growth phase. When creating the 16-credit program that can be completed in two semesters, the college partnered with Trane, a manufacturer of HVAC systems, on curriculum design.

Created out of a need expressed by local companies that there weren't enough technicians with commercial HVAC experience, it serves as a continuation of the residential HVAC program that is taught at the college's main campus in Roanoke. Once students have completed the residential courses, they are eligible to start the



Jill Graybill
Car accident

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Emanuel Brown instructor at right

commercial program in Botetourt. “Traditionally, commercial is going to pay a little better than residential,” Young says.

Many of the instructors in both programs are also full-time employees at welding and HVAC companies, which Campbell says ensures that the students learn the most up-to-date practices and allows them to make industry connections.

Both Campbell and Young stress that the location of the programs within the Botetourt Center at Greenfield is a big asset, as local students are being trained for the types of skills many of the companies nearby are looking for. Some Botetourt companies, including Altec just down the road from the Greenfield Center, allow students to make site visits at the beginning and end of the program. That allows them to see sample pre-hire tests as well, so they ascertain what types of skills they will be required to demonstrate before being hired

Although Virginia Western has been offering classes at the center for many years, significant changes have been made to the college’s use of the facility recently. In 2019 Botetourt County announced that it would be moving the majority of its administrative offices into the 40,000-square-foot facility.

That meant some of the office space the college was using needed to be transferred to mobile units; however, it still continues to use the large shop where the hands-on portions of the welding and HVAC classes are taught.

“We’re currently looking for ways to expand our capacity there,” Campbell explains. “We’re hopeful that we’re going to find some space within the next year.” With the demand for certified HVAC and welding technicians not likely to subside that sounds like a good plan. 



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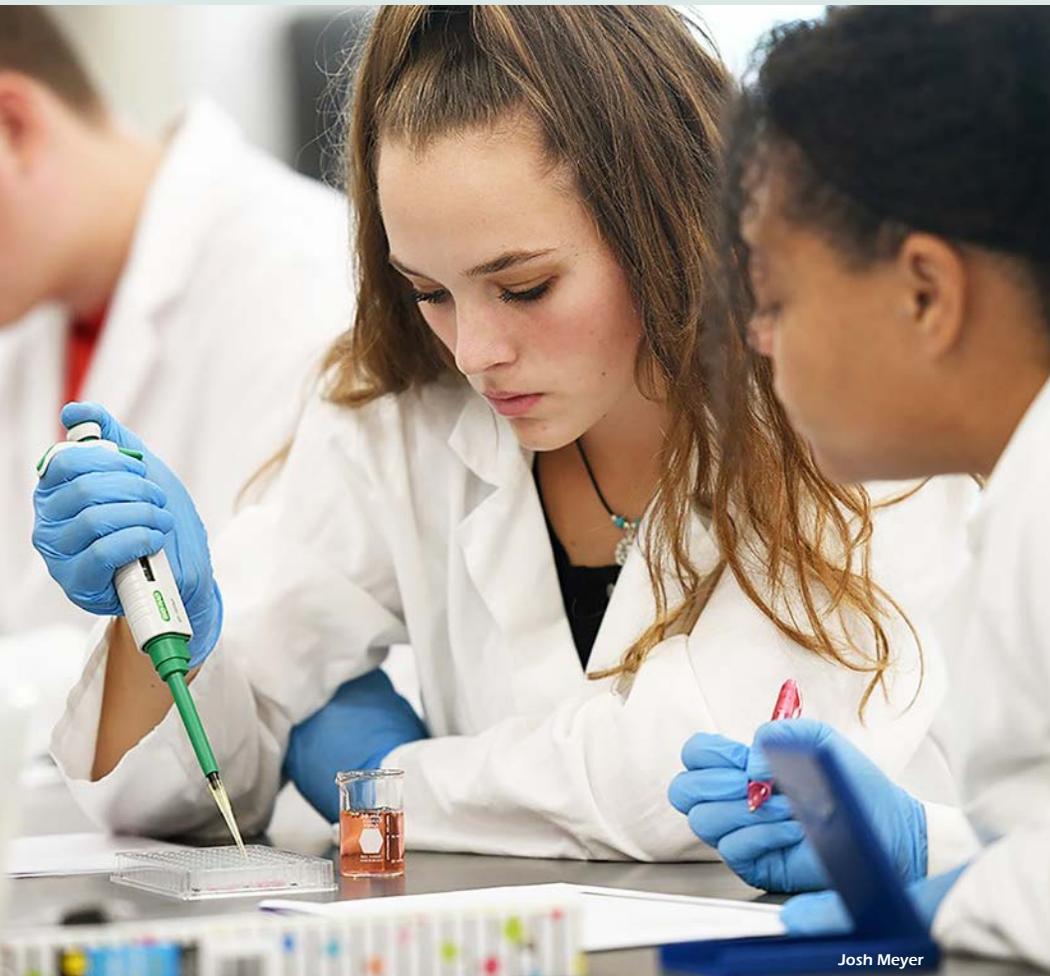
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Josh Meyer

Students at Virginia Western

TEACHING STEM IN A PANDEMIC

By Nanette Levin

Virginia Western Community College's STEM program responds to changing needs.

On the heels of the grand opening of Virginia Western Community College's \$37 million, 72,000-square-foot STEM building, the world turned upside down. "It's an odd time to talk about STEM because much of what we do, and most of what our new building is about, is face-to-face experiences," explains Amy White, Dean of STEM, Center for Science and Health Professions at

Virginia Western Community College. "We've been really creative and have found some great options this period that we're going to move forward with."

In fact, she believes Virginia Western's STEM students are ideally poised to help with solutions to current pandemic challenges. Curriculum Advisory Committees draw from leaders in

the local community who provide real-time input on current workforce needs. Students are already gearing up to assist at Fralin Biomedical Research Institute in the new COVID-19 testing lab. They're also training on robotic equipment specified by ELDOR Corporation in Daleville for today's automotive challenges. Internships at Plastics One (now P1 Technologies) lets students experience the current manufacturing reality first-hand. "We stay in close contact with industry so that we can provide the workers that they need," White says. "We're also pretty nimble and try very hard to meet that need quickly."

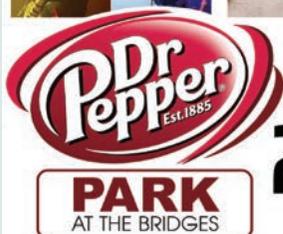


Amy White

Pandemic pivoting

Since stay-in-place orders resounded across the Commonwealth, the school has responded with 3-D printers, take-home equipment, robotics kits, and more. Teachers became creative in

providing science experiments students can do remotely, like scavenger hunt projects for finding specimens, and kitchen chemistry assignments. White notes a new focus on "exploring ideas on how to make these lab experiences come alive, even in a virtual world."



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- 10/09 Kid Rock Tribute
- 10/23 KISS Tribute



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Photos provided by Josh Meyer

David Berry, assistant professor and mechatronics co-program head, with students

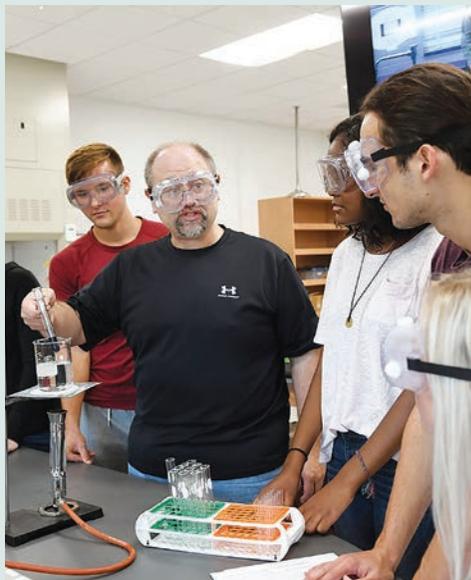
"I do want to emphasize that all of our student support systems are still in place," says White. "We pride ourselves in teaching our students where they are." This includes virtual advising, maintaining financial aid support help and access, and helping students without wi-fi or technology. "It may look a little different, but our goal is to serve our community. The needs are still there, so we have to be creative on how to meet those needs."

White adds however that, "we can't wait to get back ... we hope to be a resource to people for this crisis. We can offer a lot of hope for people that may be struggling with employment. If people are interested or need to change careers . . . call us because there will be a place for them at our college."

Local school system synergy

A good number of teachers working in area high schools also serve as adjunct faculty in the STEM program at Virginia Western, White notes, creating an ideal communications conduit for dual enrollment class opportunities and participation. These educators are included in meetings, curriculum decisions, and strategic planning.

In addition, the school cooperates with area four-year colleges with customized



Owen Lofthus, associate professor of chemistry, with students

transfer strategies for students, depending on the next higher education target, if they choose to go that route. White cites close relationships with Virginia Tech, VCU, Old Dominion, UVA, James Madison, and Radford on science AS programs. That includes general science, chemistry, physics, biology, health science, environmental science, the agricultural program, and math specialization areas that all tie into the Virginia Western STEM school and facility.

State-of-the-art equipment

"We have a number of just really incredible equipment [resources]," says White. This includes a scanning electron microscope used in both science and engineering classes. White cites the fracture analysis capability of this tool, which stretches material, as a powerful aid in biology studies. She also notes the elemental analysis capabilities enjoyed by chemistry students. Biotechnology students have access to a multiphoton confocal microscope for new perspectives on cells.

Other cutting-edge learning equipment includes a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) machine, a 5-axis CNC milling machine for subtractive manufacturing, three industrial sized robots, and a 24-foot-long indoor water flume. Students and instructors from every discipline in

the school of STEM from physics, to engineering, to calculus use the flume for learning, says White.

The new building also houses two IT labs. Classes are taught here but students can also go in and work on projects independently. Consequently, there's an instructor or tutor in these labs at all times. Programs in the new building, which replaced the more than 50-year-old Anderson Hall, include Mechatronics, Engineering, Biology, Chemistry, Biotechnology, Physics and Mathematics.

Hot Career tracks

"Obviously, healthcare, especially with our current situation," White responds when asked about where she's seeing a big need by employers, then adds "biotechnology, computer science, and information technology. It's also very nice because you can do that at home. Advanced

manufacturing and our mechatronics program are really positioning people very well." White explains these fields are areas where employers are still hiring, even as so many have lost jobs. She also notes that the biotechnology career studies certificate, which can be earned in a year with five classes and an internship, is a way to quickly get primed for current in-demand jobs.

"In the school of STEM, we've always focused on soft skills, critical thinking," says White. "We also have to be flexible. We have to learn to fix problems. When I spoke to the graduates, I said, 'everyone in the school of STEM is poised to create solutions for this [pandemic] problem. IT, healthcare, biotechnology, scientists doing research, engineers by trade and definition solve problems, biomanufacturing . . .'" She sums up the school's STEM programming philosophy today as simply, "Hey, what can we do to help?" 



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WELLNESS

By Ally Bowersock

Executive Summary:
Yeah, yeah, water is good for you. But why?

Ally Bowersock is the Co-owner of RunAbout Sports Roanoke. Contact her: runaboutroanoke@gmail.com

Drinking water – what’s the big deal?

We’ve gone from zero to 100 when it comes to humidity and many people fall short when it comes to drinking adequate amounts of water to compensate for added fluid loss. In fact, most people do not consume enough water on any given day, let alone hot and humid days, so the compounded dehydration can wreak havoc on your daily functioning. However, this is not an impact on function that you can necessarily feel, until you know what it feels like to be properly hydrated. Here are a few tips on how to check and how to increase hydration for optimal health.

1. Check your losses

Fluid is lost through sweat, saliva, feces, and urine. The easiest hydration “check” of the four is your urine color. On average, adequate hydration will result in a faint yellow color of urine, although medications and certain foods may alter urine color in a matter of hours and days. You can check in with your healthcare provider if any medications you take may alter your urine color - and let her or him know that you’re monitoring your hydration.

2. Sip, sip, sip!

There is no one gold-standard amount of water you need to drink but the AVERAGE recommendation is 2-3 liters of water/day depending on your body size, activity level, where you live (altitude, etc). This does NOT include recommendations for things like athletic competitions, when you should be adding hydration before, during, and after your activity. When starting an activity in a dehydrated state, your body is forced to work that much harder to cool itself. This adds excessive stress to the cardiovascular system, which in turn impacts the rest of the body trying to perform at optimal levels with suboptimal preparation. When you add sweating to the mix of existing dehydration, you bury yourself further in impaired performance and risk for heat-related injuries.

3. Add some flavor!

Chugging water all day may not seem all that exciting, so try adding a bit of flavor to your bottle to make the habit more appealing. Gone are the days when your only choices for flavored sports beverages came loaded with sugar and artificial ingredients. As many know, the field of sports nutrition is constantly evolving; we now have all kinds of products available that are both healthful and helpful when it comes to hydration and taste. Some come in the form of effervescent tablets, some in powder form, but there are now SO many choices that you don’t have to settle for zero flavor. Brands like Nuun, Skratch, and Untappd are just a few options we have available to meet hydration needs. Mention this article the next time you stop by the store (RunAbout Sports on Brambleton Avenue) and we will make sure to send you home with a few sample tablets of Nuun Sport- a low-sugar electrolyte tablet that is a staff favorite and sure to make your hydration habit stick. 🍷

The West End Center adapts

In 1979, Roanoke's West End neighborhood was overrun with poverty, crime and drugs. Vacant lots and deteriorating rental properties were widespread, and children had few positive opportunities for afterschool activities. In response to this growing problem, West End Presbyterian Church, West End Methodist Church and the Mountain View Neighborhood Alliance formed a coalition to establish West End Center as a safe haven for the neighborhood children. Since then, the Center has experienced tremendous growth, both in the number of children served and the available programs and services. Today, it serves approximately 150 disadvantaged children annually.

West End Center's goal is to equip these children with developmental skills needed to become productive, responsible adults. To accomplish this goal, the Center offers a comprehensive education program that focuses on literacy and youth development. Many that have taken advantage of these programs have gone on to college, have served in the Armed Forces and/or are pursuing successful careers. Some have come back to work for the Center. Each of these successful young people is a testament to the benefits of this grassroots, community-based program.

Like all of our local charities, West End Center has had to think outside of the box to continue to serve these children during the COVID-19 crisis. The organization continues its work via Facebook Live and does weekly check-ins on the children it serves. The Center has been helping families through the USDA food program, providing nearly 700 meals and snacks weekly. Families pick up meals and snacks three days a week at the Center, and staff delivers food to those without access to transportation.

With the opening of the Center's Summer Program, Executive Director Amanda Nastiuk says, "day to day operations will look different and present new challenges as we abide by Phase 2 rules for re-opening. Masks, children six feet apart, no swimming, no field trips, these are just a few of the things that we will navigate as we adjust to the new normal." The organization plans on having an even stronger focus on educational programming this summer, paying special attention to reading levels and assessing areas of need that have resulted from - or been exacerbated by - the lack of schooling due to COVID-19. Despite these challenging times West End Center is a community anchor that will continue to provide priceless value to the students and families it serves. 



GOOD WORK

By Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

Executive Summary:

A concerned coalition formed a safe haven for youth, added programs, and today still makes safety its priority.

Kaitlyn Van Buskirk is a grants associate with the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia. kaitlyn@cfwesternva.org



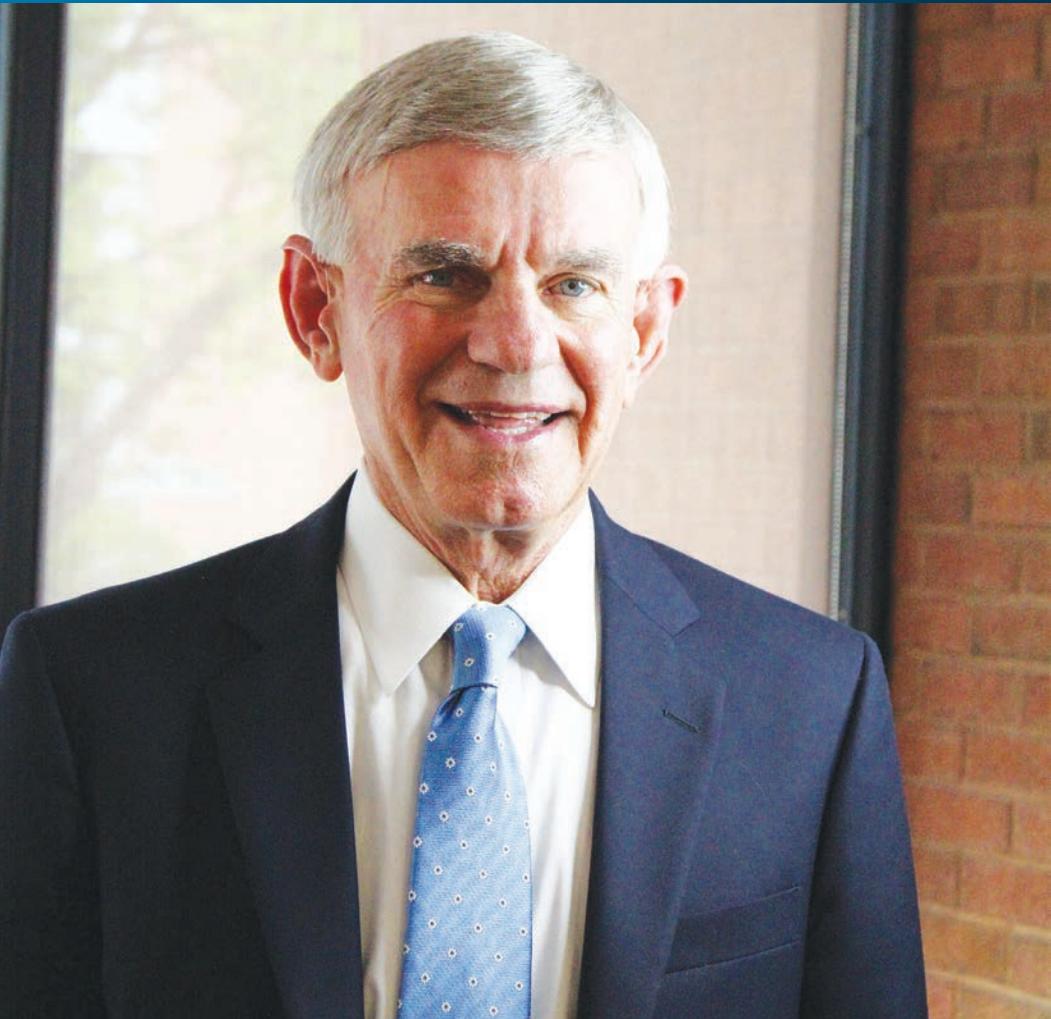
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Dr. Robert H. Sandel

A Mission Prioritized

By Tom Field

Virginia Western Community College president's mission involves a rather uniquely balanced attention on three components: education, workforce, community.

Three priorities.

That's the "top priority" of the current president at Virginia Western Community College. Three priorities. Not one.

Go ahead. Ask him.

You're not going to hear one primary area of focus. He can't do it. His view of the role of an educator involves three areas that are equally important. And it's not that he's

confused or indecisive. This man is as plainspoken as you can get. He leads one of the largest educational institutions in the state; but he speaks with an authority that doesn't come off authoritarian. Along with the consistency of message, there's a humility and impeccable character of service evident when he talks about the students in VWCC's charge. Uncertain about the mission? Hardly. He's been saying the same thing for over three decades.

Go ahead. Ask anyone.

Dr. Robert Sandel has earned an impressive reputation at Virginia Western Community College. In his tenure here, the community has watched a number of developments materialize that have clearly benefitted the region. In front of our eyes, we've seen the erection of the Fralin Center for Health Professionals, the Student Life Center, and the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) building. Impressive and imposing structures that change the view of the campus, which appears more formidable than ever. (Not to mention the new roundabouts that keep traffic flowing.)

Not in front of our eyes, but every bit as significant, we watched what was essentially a fundraising campaign fold out to assist more students than ever, with reduced and free tuition. Hardly a parent in Roanoke City, Roanoke County, City of Salem, Botetourt County, Franklin County, and Craig County hasn't heard of the CCAP program (with free tuition for eligible high school graduates).

Equally newsworthy, is the program offering. This business journal and others have collected numerous success stories on the results and output from training for the healthcare, STEM, industrial (machining, welding, HVAC, automotive, truck driving, heavy duty equipment, construction), hospitality and culinary sectors. These trades are just a part of VWCC's mix, but you may notice they're ones in high demand. That's not accidental.

Which brings us back to Dr. Sandel's tri-mission. He believes educational,

"IN BRIEF"

NAME: Robert ("Bobby") Sandel

POSITION: President of Virginia Western Community College

LOCATION: Roanoke

BACKGROUND: Born in Orangeburg, SC; The Citadel – Bachelor's Degree; South Carolina State University – Master's Degree; Mountain Empire Community College president; Virginia Western Community College president

RECOGNITIONS: Roanoke City Citizen of the Year (2013); Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce chair; Pre-K Committee for Smart Beginnings chair; LewisGale Medical Center Board of Trustees president; Greater Blue Ridge Region March of Dimes Star Regional Honoree; Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council Ruby Award recipient.

FAMILY: Married (Jane); 4 children; 14 grandchildren

PULL QUOTE: Education is the great equalizer

workforce, and community needs are co-dependent on one another. He weaves all three into any discussion he has about the overall purpose of this community college.

"Education is the great equalizer," Dr. Sandel begins, saying that's the idea he always starts with.

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“Education provides opportunities that many have never had before. It enables one to get to the next level, whether you’re 18 or 80.

And our community college—is a great way to move to the next level. The value, cost... it’s a great start and ‘on-ramp’ to being productive and successful.”

Sandel frequently cites the role of other educators as well as employers in the equation that builds a quality education.

“Community college should be a resource, providing a great workforce. I am a big supporter of K through 12 folks. We must work together to make more career pathways. Two-thirds of our people go right into the workforce. Employers want skills; but they also want critical thinkers.

We demand high expectations. There are no shortcuts.”

Sandel says VWCC has “wraparound” services. That’s where the college pays closer attention to the student, making sure he or she is not missing classes or struggling with a personal crisis. Conventionally, that kind of attention has not been the purview of a college, but Sandel says VWCC has added more counselors, advisors, and tutors.

“There is no more ‘drive-in, drive-out’ [commuter college model],” Sandel quips. “Some need a pat on the back, some might need a kick in the fanny.” Again, that’s a shift from many of the past models, where a college offered its wares, and left it up to the student (consumer) to engage with whatever intensity he or she extended.

On the programming side, Dr. Sandel is as adequately versed whether describing the benefits by jumping quickly between the various academic and vocational tracks, or burrowing into the details of any single promising practice or study.

“So many jobs pay much more than a four-year degree will ever pay,” Sandel claims, unabashedly. He says that economic reality is based on one thing: the skills gap.

“There are jobs,” he says. Employers are always coming to VWCC for help with

filling a most critical pipeline.

Education and training prepares the individual for the workforce, which in turn, fortifies the community. A well-functioning community college can serve as the hub for those three forces that should move together. And in fact, Sandel says that’s precisely what Virginia Western is doing here in this market.

“I couldn’t be more proud of our faculty and staff,” Sandel boasts, when asked how Virginia Western Community College is negotiating the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. “Everything was turned upside down. We had to convert to fully online, and our people turned that on a dime. We had to be nimble, flexible. Everybody pitched in and we have lost hardly any students. A tough circumstance... we made it work.”

Sandel confirms that his “main charge as college president—is safety.”

He said he is glad he doesn’t have the dining halls and dormitories (of other colleges); but the restrictions have probably caused a lot of current and prospective students and parents to “rethink the conventional campus.”

The value of conventional resident campuses has to change when so much has been converted to the online model.

While there are distinctions between college models, Sandel doesn’t hesitate to assure we’re all in this together.

“I am proud to work with our four-year universities,” he says. “I commend all our sister colleges.” Virginia Western has robust transfer agreements, whether students trek through a well-defined course to the undergraduate degree, or even if they enter college unsure of their future career.

While cheerleaders rally up the fans with loud voices and dance moves, there’s a community college president getting energetic support in a rather reserved fashion. He’s with a team more than eager to form alliances with the community and its workforce. It’s one way to demonstrate proven results.

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New transit center planned seeks design feedback >

With the current **Valley Metro** bus transfer center at Campbell Court reaching the end of its days, **Greater Roanoke Transit Company** is moving ahead with plans to build a 10-million-dollar up-to-date facility just down the road on Salem Avenue. It's part of an effort to provide a better mass transit experience says Kevin Price, the general manager at Valley Metro/Greater Roanoke Transit. The city is now looking for local feedback; there has been opposition from residents and businesses in the Salem Avenue

neighborhood of downtown Roanoke's West End, some of whom believe the transit station will negatively impact the community.

"With our design we want to make it welcoming; we want to make it smart – and something that someone could say and say, wow, Roanoke Virginia is really moving forward," notes Price. Residents and local businesses can view the proposed design on the City of Roanoke website, and leave comments there as well. One in-person "open house" type of event was held last month and more are likely. The project still requires an historic review and approval by Roanoke's Board of Zoning Appeals. Valley Metro is seeking additional grant funding to lower the local cost burden.





Making the most from a difficult situation >

The coronavirus pandemic put an end temporarily to the classes held on site at **The Making Foundation**, which was profiled in Valley Business FRONT last year. Aaron Ray-Dykstra and his staff preach another type of education – the time-honored living some can make with their hands as welders, woodworkers, screen printers, cabinet makers and the like. “Empowering through making” is how Dykstra, the founder and executive director of The Making Foundation terms what the small non-profit does. Now the staff has found a new way to keep in touch with students.

“We as educators were certainly dead in our tracks in terms of what we could offer,” says Dykstra, who was able to keep his

staff on the payroll thanks to the CARES Act. But in March the students (mostly from Making Foundation programs with Roanoke City Schools) stopped coming due to pandemic safety precautions. So, he and his staff started posting how-to videos on the Foundation’s Facebook page, with the materials suggested for those that could be find without leaving the house during the Stay at Home period. Three new “Make the Most” videos were posted every week. Dykstra says the business shutdown and the loss of jobs – those without “essential” skills were often among the first to be furloughed – again highlight why learning a trade is another sound education alternative. “We are certainly going to have to better equip our youth to survive and thrive in this new landscape.” Dykstra was still planning to hold in-person summer camps at his Patterson Avenue Maker Mart storefront at last word.



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TECH TALK

By Rob Turcotte

Executive Summary:
Roanoke area non-profit organizations creatively respond to the COVID-19 challenge using virtual platform technologies.

Still learning after all these years

Leaders at three of our one-hundred-year-old institutions have innovated in ways that may never have occurred if not for a virus-provoked lockdown. With their dining room and common areas closed (for the duration of the pandemic according to its website) Roanoke's Shenandoah Club members picked up meals and that month's featured wines for tasty at-home dining. Recently, fifty members and guests gathered on Zoom video conferencing for a virtual wine tasting along with the backdrop of a club-provided meal. In the virtual tasting room, engaging wine maker Count Sebastiano of Tuscany joined from Italy to showcase three of his wines and to share winemaker's tasting notes. The club's Chef Light says that was a hit with members. Another innovative event is in planning for this summer. When members are able to visit the reopened club, he wants them to feel that they never skipped a beat.

The Kiwanis Club of Roanoke has met weekly for over 100 years. When COVID-19 threatened in-person lunch meetings, Mike O'Brochta enthusiastically enlisted as Virtual Meetings Chair, determined to extend the weekly meeting count to 101 years. Now using Zoom, President Cheri Hartman expertly runs an upbeat virtual meeting that hosts a presentation from a Roanoke-area leader. Attendance has been near pre-COVID-19 levels since the first virtual meeting in April. A recent count of seventy-two members and eleven guests proves members resilience and determination. With the continued good health of their members in mind, conversation is under way to develop hybrid meetings where members may attend in person or on-line, starting in July or August. (To attend as a guest, email club secretary John Montgomery at jmonty@cox.net.)

Family Service of Roanoke Valley is another of our over one hundred years of age non-profit organizations that adapted their model to a socially distanced world. Linda Hentschel,

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President and CEO, knew their Youth Development Program must continue when her staff could no longer meet with students in person at Roanoke City Schools. Counselors quickly developed pregnancy prevention and safe relationship video messages, posted them on Facebook, and promoted their presence. There are three positives about the new video delivery: teens can click and watch whenever they want, the lessons don't walk out of the classroom forgotten, as students may review videos at any time, and a parent can see a video so that conversation continues at home. One-on-one relationships are strongest when combined with video. With that thought in mind, plans are under way to improvise a hybrid model. Linda says the wider reach of on-demand video when combined with in-person time will strengthen the Youth Development Program in ways that could only have happened during unfamiliar times.

Who says you can't teach one-hundred-year-old non-profit organizations new tricks? Each interview for this article included a testimonial about how COVID-19 inspired change that will strengthen their non-profit organizations, as we emerge from social distancing. We look forward to hearing more about your new tricks. 



Counselors quickly developed pregnancy prevention and safe relationship video messages, posted them on Facebook, and promoted their presence.

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Mary Ann Miller

When Opportunities Knock... Answer!

By Cory Crouser

Valley Business FRONT introduces Mary Ann Miller, a 2020 advisory board member representing the financial / banking sector.

Mary Ann Miller, Bank of Botetourt's VP of Business Banking & Community Relations, operates by one simple rule: "Be thankful for what you have... And work hard for what you don't."

While studying Communications and Public Relations at Bridgewater College, Miller, who entertained lofty ambitions in the field, received a generous offer from her longtime employer, The Bank of Fincastle.

"[The Bank of Fincastle] offered me a full-time job as a loan officer," Miller explains. "While that wasn't my first choice [of career], I seized the opportunity and made an effort to learn the many aspects of community banking.

It wasn't long after she transitioned into the loan officer position that Miller found herself presented with another opportunity

"I covered for [The Bank of Fincastle's] marketing officer during her maternity leave on occasion," Miller explains, "and when she decided not to return I transitioned to VP of marketing." Miller also assumed oversight of the bank's online banking program. But it doesn't end there. The young executive also found herself responsible for a veritable laundry list of other bank operations, from flipping foreclosed properties to community outreach, the latter of which she says came quite naturally. Miller also managed the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) operations for the bank, a program which

provides guidance and support to low-to-moderate-income earners, aimed at raising the overall standard of living in our region. She planned and hosted community breakfast events as part of the bank's CRA program to teach financial literacy and provide community outreach.

In 2016, Bank of Botetourt presented Mary Ann with an opportunity to join the bank. She began in April as AVP and Communications Officer. Within her first six months at the company, she was promoted to VP of Business Development and Communications Officer.

"I'm a social and outgoing person," Miller explains. "I enjoy visiting with others and learning about them and their businesses. My job is to network and develop relationships, [to connect] people... As a community banker, I enjoy seeing familiar faces around town."

A Roanoke Valley native, Miller says she understands the value of community-focused business practices. "We're lucky to live here," Miller says

"I'm from Daleville and still reside here. My father's family put down roots generations ago and farmed orchards with apples and peaches. [They farmed] dairy and beef cattle. They also started a local telephone company, Roanoke and Botetourt Telephone Company, [which operated] for more than 100 years.

"Visiting with people and helping them with their finances and businesses is a pleasure and a joy I look forward to daily. Many of these customers have become dear friends and we enjoy touching base often.

"Roanoke is diverse," she adds, "We are fortunate to have... theatres, art museums, science museums, ballet, outdoor concerts and social hours; [the] transportation museum, zoo, pinball museum, kids square, trampoline parks, greenways and blue-ways."

Although she's presently working from home (assisted by her 15-month-old, Ira), Miller's staying busy. "My day to day varies, [and that] helps keep things from becoming monotonous. Because I manage different

"IN BRIEF"

NAME: Mary Ann Miller

AGE: 34

WORK: Bank of Botetourt, VP of Business Banking and Community Relations; She facilitates the needs of customers and the community with business bankers, treasury, merchant services and commercial lenders. She manages the bank's advisory boards, and facilitates the business development meetings for the bank, and oversees the creative and marketing for business banking, and the bank's social media platforms. As head of communications, she drafts and publishes press releases, and internal bank messages; customer relations; event management, networking, fundraisers

LOCATION: Daleville

BACKGROUND: Lifelong Botetourt County native (Layman family); Lord Botetourt High School (2004); Bridgewater College (2008); Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management at Darden (2019)

FAMILY: Married (Matthew); Son (Ira)

TAKEAWAY: Be thankful for what you have and work hard for what you don't yet have.

facets [at Bank of Botetourt] that are constantly changing, I am continuously challenged, which helps me continue to grow..."One of my main priorities is to facilitate the needs of customers with our business bankers, treasury, merchant services and commercial lenders to align their needs. Other responsibilities include recommending and presenting financial solutions to commercial customers, planning events, managing the bank's advisory boards in Salem and Cave Spring, and facilitating our business development meetings, overseeing the creative and marketing for business development and banking, and overseeing the bank's social media platforms. I also manage the communications, which includes drafting and publishing press releases, and internal bank messages." 

CONTRIBUTORS

Ally Bowersock, PhD, is the co-owner of Runabout Sports and several other businesses with her husband and fellow fitness fanatic Tyler. She is also an Associate Professor at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and consults with local companies on employee wellness. [runaboutroanoke@gmail.com]

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.

Lisa Clause is senior director of marketing and philanthropy at Richfield Living. She is a recent MBA graduate with distinction of Liberty University and has a bachelor's degree in marketing and minor in professional and technical writing at Virginia Tech. She began her career at the Roanoke Times, moved to WSET television rising to national sales manager. She co-owns Fine Line Interiors with her husband, and enjoys gardening, bike riding, and church activities.

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]

Cory Crouser is a graduate student at Hollins University earning his MFA in creative writing; from Portland, OR, he's a writer, photographer, producer, and enjoys film and acting. [corycrouser@msn.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@vbfFRONT.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.

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]

Nanette Levin is a senior correspondent for FRONT business journal and owns a writing and consultancy firm, Roanoke Revealed. And outdoors advocate, when she's not creating strategies

for clients, she enjoys growing fresh vegetables and herbs, seeing the sights in the area, and occasionally hopping on a horse. [nlevin@fulcrumny.com]

Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning 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.

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]

Robert Turcotte is an information technology specialist, employed at Entre Computer Center in Roanoke. [rturcotte@entre-roanoke.com]

Nicholas Vaassen is a graphic designer with 19 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]

Kaitlyn Van Buskirk is a grants associate with Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia. Her experience includes development, planned giving, philanthropy, and fundraising roles with non-profits and community service organizations, and she has a BA from Sweet Briar College focused in business, management, marketing, and related support services. [kaitlyn@cfwesternva.org]

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 VWCC since 2003.

“ Stay safe and socially distant. — Page 43

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...could have planned for a rainy day, but no one thought it would rain so long. — Page 59

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Listen up

I feel compelled to share my opinion on our government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the instability in our race relations, and the upcoming national election.

ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By **Tom Field**

Executive Summary:
The fantasy of persuasion.

There. Did I change your mind?

That's what I thought. Most of us—myself included—prefer to follow or listen to the voices that amplify our own opinions. We might reshape the clay in our head; but we never tear it out and completely rebuild something else. The very thought of changing our minds wholly, extensively—is terrifying. That's why unity among us is never possible in a complete fashion. We could certainly do much better in our current American society; but when we face troubling times, we're left with three responses: fight, flight, or advance our wishes in the manner of my commentary above. If you can solve problems without fundamentally changing people's minds, you're quite the leader. We could use your service right now. 🍷

Random notes

Equity – it’s a big topic these days; social equity, criminal justice equity and economic equity, or call it equality if you will, in the aftermath of the George Floyd death and related protests. The City of Roanoke has introduced interwoven or social equity into its updated 20-year plan – giving more African Americans and other people of color, and immigrants to the area more seats at the table when it comes to economic development and business growth. The George Floyd related protests here were largely peaceful, with no burned-out buildings or smashed storefront windows as in some bigger cities, but the call for change was the same. It seems that accessing a largely untapped pool of potential minority small business owners, entrepreneurs and job creators would be a win for everyone involved, many say. Indeed, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce announced last month it will partner with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on a national initiative to address “inequality of opportunity.”

Dining options – One thing Phase 1 restrictions laid bare was a relative lack of outdoor dining options. Of course this is not California or Florida; we do have seasons and humidity, but the paucity of spaces where outdoor dining was feasible – especially in more “affluent” and populated areas like Southwest Roanoke County, makes me ponder that more of these and future eateries need to think outside the box when designing or seeking permits for their spaces in the future. Perhaps more flexibility by local governments when it comes to allowing for outdoor dining as well, whether temporary or more permanent. Kudos to venues like Table 50, Farmburguesa and Mister P’s in Roanoke County – where they set up tables in the parking lot for diners.

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs – You may have noticed that our FRONT Career section has been rather skimpy in recent months, for the types of hiring or corporate job promotions that wind up in periodicals like Valley Business FRONT. That’s because there is not a lot of new hiring going on right now as businesses hold off on staffing due to pandemic uncertainty. Even the May jobs report that showed an unexpected 2.5 million jobs added nationwide was later tempered by the fact that most of those “hired” were furloughed workers being recalled. When you start to see FRONT Career fill up again – besides the Virginia Tech listings, which never seem to end – you’ll know we are on the right track economy-wise.

Face coverings – I’m not really crazy about having to cover my face when I enter a public gathering place, but folks if it means that helps slow the spread of the coronavirus and helps us towards a complete business and school reopening sooner, then that’s okay. I don’t get bent out of shape when I see others without their masks in a supermarket for instance, but just remember, this is temporary and will be even more so if all we do our part. Besides, I think my black and white gaiter or buff as they call it is pretty cool looking. Stay safe and socially distant – still the best way to avoid COVID-19 say the experts. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
On protests, eating outdoors and face coverings.

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.

Now THAT'S leadership

Franklin & Washington: A Founding Partnership by Edward J. Larson (HarperCollins, 2020) may make some pine for the visionary, energetic and forward-thinking duo – Benjamin Franklin and George Washington – who helped shape the early days of the American experiment. (By the way those that looked disapprovingly on the George Floyd protests that sometimes turned violent, see the birth of this country with the Boston Tea Party and skirmishes with the British as they tangled with local militia.)

Franklin and Washington were in and out of each other's lives for decades and some details of their time together were not recorded, so Larson, a former Pulitzer Prize winner, surmises some of the encounters. As Washington cobbled together a rag-tag army, Franklin was often overseas at an advanced age, courting the French as he sought military aid and funding. He also helped secure a final peace and open trade again with Great Britain when the American Revolution finally ended. Both were instrumental figures at the Constitutional Convention, when it was obvious a loose confederation of states would not be enough to assure that the new republic would survive. A bit scholarly at times, *Franklin & Washington* is well worth the read for those that want to know about the two most revered figures in the early days of this American experiment – one still being perfected apparently. These were not

perfect men: like others at the Constitutional Convention, the slave-holding Washington and the abolitionist Franklin deferred on solving the slavery question. That was in order to keep the southern states on board with the new and fragile federal government – agreeing to the 3/5ths compromise when it came to counting slaves for the census.

—Gene Marrano

What matters most

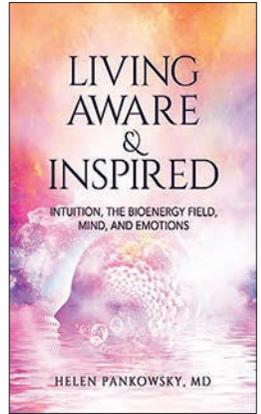
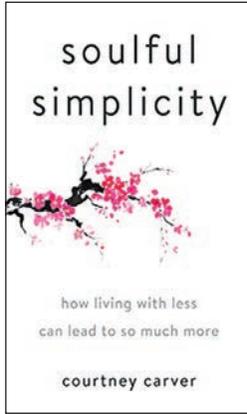
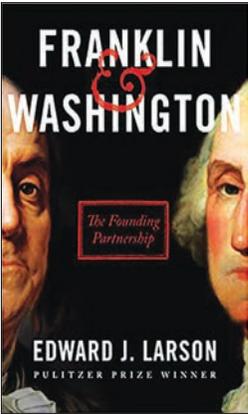
What better time to read a book on simplicity than during quarantine? Well, probably when things, places, cities, and people start opening back up. A reminder to focus on what matters as the world attempts to heal and shift back to “what was normal.” I'm sure we've all had time to think about what's worth shifting back to and what new habits or mindsets we pray remains instilled.

Soulful Simplicity: How living with less can lead to so much more (TarcherPerigee; 2017) by Courtney Carver is a self-help book unlike others. It's not about organizing your pantry to be Instagram-worthy, but more about searching for our individual “why” simplicity matters. What are you throwing out clothes from your closet to make more room for? Do you really think your future-unborn daughter actually wants your ballet costume from 1994? This book touches on every sensitive topic for the Americans of today — like “less show, more soul” and really causes self-reflection at the deepest of levels. The main theme being “simplicity is the way back to love.”

Just when you think those drastic, meditation, hippie methods aren't for you — the next chapter calls that out and brings in religion, realistic baby-steps, and phased instructions that make the adoption of simplicity more palatable.

Highly recommend this book and 100% will be passing it along to family and friends.

—Kelsey Monahan



A fresh, healthy change of pace

Fantastically fresh and friendly, RainBowl Poke Salad and Grill in Southwest Roanoke County at the Forum Shopping Center (Starkey Road) makes it easy to eat healthy. And Staying healthy is more important than ever these days! RainBowl offers up a selection of fresh ingredients that not only satiate the palate but provide a visual delight of vibrant color. From the deep greens of arugula and kale to the yellows of fresh eggs and chickpeas and the pinks and reds of pickled ginger and watermelon radishes, you'll have a rainbow of options to select from for your very own salad or bowl. (Start with a base of rice or noodles). The knowledgeable and friendly staff explain all your options, making the process of building your unique masterpiece fun and engaging. Truly there are endless combinations that can be dreamed up by those that venture to this enchanting wonderland of fresh eating, giving all diets a plethora of choice! Opened just earlier this year, RainBowl (offering takeout and delivery until allowed to seat patrons again) is Keto-friendly, vegan-friendly, vegetarian-friendly.

—Kimberly Whiter

A deep dive into the unseen

Helen Pankowsky's *Living Aware & Inspired* (WriteLife Publishing, 2019) is a valuable addition to the literature on intuition, the human bioenergy field, blocked emotions, and more. I hesitate to mention key chapters

on chakras and past lives, because then things might sound too woo-woo. That's decidedly not the case, as Pankowsky's credentials are scientific and Western—she's a medical doctor grounded in peer-review research methodology and a specialist in psychiatry. From a young age she was highly intuitive, and she was wise enough as a resident to trust those instincts, which at times resulted in life-saving quick and accurate diagnoses. Throughout her career she delved deeper into alternative therapies and studied with some of the masters. Her references range from Jung to Valerie Hunt to Paramahansa Yogananda to Viktor Frankl. Her writing is clear and accessible and full of respect for her readers. The book is packed with what she terms "evidence-based information" as well as things she can't prove but knows to be true. She offers several guided meditations, new ways to understand your emotions, and keys to bring into conscious awareness what your mind and body already know. All of this is to give the reader tools to greater self-awareness; her aim is that "you can live your life in the richest, most robust way, in your fullest capacities, and in the greatness of your soul."

—Andrea Brunais

The reviewers: **Kelsey Monahan** is a technology sales agent in Salem; **Kimberly Whiter** is CEO and Cofounder of Elder Care Solutions Inc. and lives in Roanoke; **Andrea Brunais** resides in Bluefield, WV, and is the author of *Hillbilly Drug Baby: The Story; On the Drop Side of Yonder*; and *Mercedes Wore Black*; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT.



Millstone Kitchen Awards \$10,000 to Food Entrepreneurs >

Millstone Kitchen in Blacksburg has named the winners of its From Scratch food entrepreneurship business awards: **Katherine and William Harris** (Beyond the Pail), and **Jud Flynn** (On Site Culinary Solutions), will each receive \$5,000 to start or expand their Blacksburg-based businesses. Despite the delay in culminating the From Scratch competition and a host of uncertainty due to the onset of COVID-19, these entrepreneurs remain optimistic. "Things are looking up," shared Jud Flynn, "we are ready to evolve and respond to the market as things continue to open." The Harrises are excited to get their food truck operational. "We were ready to go before all this happened," William explained, "now we are just waiting for people to come back." Their operations will be based at the Millstone Kitchen, a shared use facility. From Scratch was a free course for aspiring entrepreneurs. Industry professionals shared expertise on business planning strategies, food safety requirements, legal parameters, marketing ideas, and finance options. The class was fully booked with 39 participants, seven of which submitted business plans to be judged by a committee for awards.



A good sign >

"We're open ... and now hiring." Music to the ears of both patrons and business owners in the especially hard-hit food service industry in the throes of the pandemic. **419 West** in southwest Roanoke County saw its parking lot filled to overflowing once again when Phase 2 allowed indoor dining at 50 percent capacity; it was also seeing healthy outdoor dining only under the Phase 1 reopening guidelines as set forth by the Governor's office.

New name, same mission >

Virginia Housing is the new name for the Virginia Housing Development Authority. The agency is also unveiling a new logo. The change reflects the evolution of the organization as it prepares for its 50th anniversary in 2022 says the agency. Virginia Housing (formerly VHDA) assists renters, homeowners and

future homeowners, with partnerships in government, industry, nonprofits, academia, citizens and communities, "Our shorter name, Virginia Housing, and our refreshed logo more clearly identify who we are and what we do," said Susan Dewey, the CEO for Virginia Housing. "We began this branding refresh in 2019 and decided to make it official".



Eatery opens in Roanoke amidst pandemic >

Maintaining a business during the COVID-19 pandemic is tough but starting a new business during the shutdown presents its own challenges. A new downtown Roanoke restaurant on Salem Avenue near the City Market Building where The Quarter was located, **Crescent City Bourbon and BBQ** is being run by co-owner and head chef Tyler Mason, who says the pandemic gave him time to work out details. Mason says Crescent City is making BBQ the "right way." That means smoking the meat it for 16 hours daily on a stick-burner outside in the courtyard where

diners can also sit. "I've been perfecting it for the past four years. I wanted to make something that's good to eat and affordable, and that everybody enjoys," said Mason, "I mean, barbecue is the one thing you can find across the planet." That means when they run out - they're OUT - which he says is a sign of quality BBQ. Early on Mason said he faced the tall order of completely staffing a restaurant with the fear of COVID-19 still very alive. Crescent City Bourbon and BBQ got rolling just as Phase 2 allowed 50% indoor seating.



Submitted



Finally, open >

After a setback of several months from a proposed April launch, the **Mast General Store** in downtown Roanoke cut the ribbon in mid-June. The 11th outlet in the regional chain, which has sort of a cult following according to a spokesperson, has something for everyone of all ages. It occupies the first floor and mezzanine of the long-dormant Heronimus building on South Jefferson Street, with apartments on the upper floors. "We are very excited to share the store with our guests, who have been so patient as our opening was delayed by the COVID-19 outbreak," said Lisa Cooper, president of the Mast General Store in a news release. "This location was a downtown destination for decades, and we look forward to being a part of the continued re-emergence of the downtown area here in Roanoke."

Elsewhere the natural and organic food grocer Earth Fare was expected to reopen its Roanoke location at the Ivy Market on Franklin Road in late June. An investor and several principals from the former and much larger Asheville-based chain purchased the rights to a handful of former Earth Fare locations, including the Roanoke store opened in 2017.



SML Eatery has new owners >

Waller's, a Smith Mountain Lake waterfront restaurant for nearly a decade, has new owners and a new name – **Drifter's**. **Ryan Walters** and **Jaclyn Westfall** purchased the restaurant on June 5. Waller Perrow opened eatery at Crystal Shores Marina in 2011. It features a family-friendly atmosphere, casual dining with indoor/outdoor seating and live music. Walters and Westfall have worked on the Waller's management team for a number of years. Perrow, who assumed ownership and management of Mariners Landing in May with development partner Tom Branch, said he still plans to man the grill at Drifter's on occasion.

Harvester on the comeback trail – with changes >

Live music is back at the **Harvester Performance Center**, starting July 3. Its live and outdoors for now, following all recommended guidelines for coronavirus safety. "The venue has a wide array of bands and talented acts scheduled with outdoor and indoor shows running through the rest of the summer and early fall," states the intimate Rocky Mount music venue in a news release. The outdoor location is across the street at the Rocky Mount Farmers Market. The Harvester staff will take the temperature of all attending the concert as they enter. For indoor shows there will be "seating pods" in 6-foot circles marked for social distancing. The first concert on July 3 features Tin Can Locomotive, led by Franklin County native Kyle Scott Forry. Outdoor seating will be capped at 1500 attendees; when they do resume indoors, capacity will be 200 for now. During the pandemic shutdown, the Harvester live streamed shows that featured an array of bands and drew more than 300,000 views on social media.

"Emotionally, spiritually we want to bring the magic back that is the Harvester," said **Gary Jackson**, the venue's general manager. "We want people back and enjoying their favorite artist in a safe outdoor environment."



Reimagine Oak Grove planning recognized >

The National Association of Counties (NACo) has recognized **Roanoke County** with an Achievement Award for its Public Schools Planning Workshop program. A collaboration between Roanoke County, the City of Roanoke and Roanoke County Public Schools, the program met the goal of soliciting public input from residents, including students and teachers under age 50, also exposing them to the planning profession. The input received tied into the County's Oak Grove Center Plan, which envisions future development, transportation and public amenities in small group mapping exercises. Meanwhile - the Reimagine 419 Town Center plan centered around the Tanglewood Mall area in southwest Roanoke County officially gets underway this summer with the construction of another right turn lane and pedestrian-friendly improvements leading to the intersection with US 220/Franklin Road.



Waiting perhaps for Phase 3 and beyond >

Many Roanoke Valley restaurants wasted no time welcoming patrons back to inside dining spaces at the mandated 50 percent capacity when Phase 2 of the statewide business plan reopening was launched. However, the cozy **River and Rail** in South Roanoke doesn't serve many diners at once even in normal times - 60 maximum says operating Partner **Aaron Deal**. "We're going to really dig into the numbers and see if it's going to be realistic for us to be sustainable from a revenue standpoint at 50 percent capacity," he said in early June. Deal added that their operating model offering takeout (including the Family Meal Program) along with non-food items like selling bouquets sustained them in recent months. Deal also says the safety of his workers and mandated COVID-19 safety procedures could diminish the fine dining experience to the point it can't meet their goals or customer expectations for inside dining, at least in Phase 2.



FloydFest doubling down on 2021 >

FloydFest 2020 was scheduled for next month but was canceled due to coronavirus concerns. In mid-June Across the Way Productions announced one of the headliners for FloydFest 2021 "Odyssey" - The Avett Brothers. The North Carolina-based folk rockers first played at FloydFest 15 years ago. ATW says they will announce another headliner about once a month and some of the groups that had been booked for this year will be back in 2021. **Kris Hodges** is co-founder of the two-decade old music and outdoor festival - he says most of those with tickets for this year's FloydFest intend to be back on the mountain next summer from July 21 through the 25: "we gave folks a good solid month [to ask for a refund] and we found that nearly 80-85 percent of our patrons rolled their tickets over, even without an announcement [about 2021]."

Pop-up outdoor dining in Grandin Village >

When the Phase 2 restrictions on indoor dining - 50 percent capacity – didn't work for **FarmBurguesa** in Roanoke's Grandin Village, the farm-to-table burger joint instead went outside. Along with Grace's Place Pizza, Local Roots and Taaza, FarmBurguesa leased the paid parking lot behind those eateries, turning it into an outdoor seating area where patrons can enjoy their meals without having to bring it home first. FarmBurguesa doesn't take orders at the table but will bring the food outside after ordering online. "It's really nice to see how it's kind of flourished and become its own thing," says **Kat Pascal**. The outside seating area holds around 45 diners and was at capacity on its first Saturday night she notes.

The co-owner (along with Jimmy Delgado), Pascal says neither FarmBurguesa location, including the original Vinton counter seating-only storefront, opted not to offer inside seating "at the moment," just curbside, delivery and pickup only. "We just don't have the space [under Phase 2 guidelines]," said Pascal, saying the Grandin Village layout is almost like community dining, making it she says "logistically impossible. [And] we wouldn't be able to staff appropriately. We are waiting until we are able to be at 100 percent opened and are able to seat people wherever they want to be seated." The alternative with limited seating – but extra staff costs for kitchen help and waitstaff – would have meant raising prices and Pascal says they weren't ready to go that route.

Pascal doesn't know how long the outdoor seating option will be around but says they may revisit it down the road, if they can lease the paid lot again at a reasonable rate from the owners – whom she calls sympathetic as small business owners themselves. One positive note from the partial COVID-19 shutdown: Pascal says FarmBurguesa's delivery business grew steadily and now will endure after a recent deal with DoorDash to take over that service.



Ian Price



Instagram photo

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

MARKETING FRONT



Carter

5Points Creative in Roanoke announces the addition of Strategic Communications Consultant **Meg Carter**. She will be assisting the 5PC team with key client communications, brand development, and the expansion of their leadership development work. Carter has recently worked as a freelance consultant specializing in internal brand communications, crisis and strategic messaging, and assisting business leaders with workforce optimization challenges.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Verletta White is the new superintendent of Roanoke City Public Schools, effective



White

July 1. White succeeds Dr. Rita Bishop, who is retiring after 13 years in the position. White was recruited to the City of Roanoke from Baltimore County, where she held a variety of position after starting out as a teacher – including interim superintendent at one point. “When you get here and meet the people there’s no way not to be excited. Everybody person I’ve encountered so far has just been so incredibly nice,” said White about relocating with her family to Roanoke.

The Virginia Tech College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences has named **Farida Jalalzai** as associate dean for global initiatives and engagement. Jalalzai most recently served as professor and head of the Department of

Political Science at Oklahoma State University. Her research focuses heavily on the representation and behavior of women and minorities in politics and the role of gender in the political arena.



Widdowson

Mark A. Widdowson has been appointed head of the Charles E. Via Jr. Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Virginia Tech. Widdowson assumed the role in late April after serving as interim department head since last July and as assistant department head from 2009 to 2019.

Orsolya Balogh, associate professor in the Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences in the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech, has been



Balogh

named the JoAnne S. O’Brien Professor of Theriogenology by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. Before joining the veterinary college last year, Balogh served as a senior clinician and researcher at the University of Zurich for nearly a decade. She completed a residency in theriogenology at Cornell University and became a diplomate of the American College of Theriogenologists.



Fox

Michael A. Fox, director of the Center for Neurobiology Research at the Fralin Biomedical

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Research Institute at VTC, will transition from his current leadership position into a new role as director of the School of Neuroscience within the Virginia Tech College of Science. Fox stepped into his new position on July 1, while remaining a professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute. Fox will step down as director of the institute's Center for Neurobiology Research but will maintain his research programs there.

FINANCIAL FRONT



Johnson

First Bank & Trust Company, a financial services firm, has announced that **Steven M. Johnson** has been appointed as Vice President and Branch Manager. Johnson has over 19 years of

experience, most recently with Wells Fargo Bank. He assumes the role of Branch Manager for the First Bank & Trust Company office in Christiansburg.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

Roanoke-based VA811 founder and CEO, **Rick Pevarski** has retired as of June 30, 2020. He will stay on in an advisory capacity until July 2022.

Scott Crawford, currently the Company's Vice President, will assume the role of President and Chief Executive Officer in July. A811 (Miss Utility as its also known) was a startup organization Pevarski created in 2001; before that he was a 17-year employee of Roanoke

Gas Company, where he served as Vice-President of Operations & Marketing.

VA811 provides one-call notification services for the Commonwealth of Virginia, alerting utilities of upcoming excavation work so they can locate and mark the underground facilities to prevent possible damage to underground utility lines — also preventing injury, property damage, and service outages.



Milburn

Jason Milburn is the new director of the New

River Valley Emergency Communications Regional Authority. Said Marc Verniel, Chair of the NRV Emergency Communications Regional Authority, "his service to our community in public safety and fire and rescue for more than two decades has provided him with the vast field experience and the proven dedication we need and value." Milburn has worked for Montgomery County in public safety for nearly 22 years. While at the Sheriff's Office, he worked exclusively in field operations and served in various assignments to include Canine Handler, SWAT, and Crash Reconstruction.

Compiled by
Gene Marrano



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*Mill Mountain
officially goes dark*

The Mill Mountain Theatre Board of Directors and producing artistic director **Ginger Poole** made the tough call public in late May: all live productions have been cancelled for 2020 – at least until the Christmas show, Holiday Inn. Mill Mountain Theatre is asking patrons who have purchased tickets for the 2020 season to roll them over for a future credit – or donate that money to help sustain the non-profit playhouse. Meanwhile all of the acting summer camps have gone virtual; those classes started in mid-June. Poole also says there will be extensive coronavirus safety precautions put in place whenever productions resume. “The outpouring of [support] was immediate,” said Poole. “Of course, people are disappointed and it’s a sad, sad situation, but the positivity and uplifting from our community – it’s pretty doggone amazing.”

Roanoke College poll shows signs of optimism from respondents

The numbers were grim – almost 39 million new unemployment claims since March for example (through late May). While the latest Consumer Sentiment survey reflects the pandemic-related downturn there is hope beneath the surface. (a healthier than expected hiring report in early June came out after the survey – although later it was announced many were furloughed workers

back on the job). The Virginia Index of Consumer Sentiment as measured by The Institute for Policy and Opinion Research at Roanoke College plummeted almost 16 points from a near record high in February says senior analyst Dr. Alice Kassens. What Kassens and company found however on the second quarter phone survey of 629 Virginians (in May) was belief in a strong rebound – perhaps because the economy had been doing so well before COVID-19 led to severe business restrictions.

The second quarter Index of Consumer Sentiment survey also found that Virginians are even more optimistic about the economy than the nation as a whole. “They know what their household finances were like, how their businesses [were] doing; that feeling is giving them optimism once they start to open up or return to normal.” How strong and how fast the rebound depends on the U.S. consumer says Kassens, in this consumer-driven economy: “if people feel good about what’s going to happen, they’re going to keep spending now and also into the future. It kind of makes it a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge wants to know

Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge (VBR) says it is continuing to monitor the changing tourism climate with the region beginning to reopen as part of the Commonwealth’s “Forward Virginia” plan.

“Building back consumer confidence is key to recovery during this economic crisis,” says VBR, which is asking local businesses to keep them up to date by emailing details with the latest business model being used – hours open, indoor dining allowed, curbside delivery etc. Send emails with ongoing updates and changes to partnership@visitvbr.com. Meanwhile the VBR visitor’s center inside the O. Winston Link Museum opened in mid-June with COVID-19 safety precautions in place for those that come in seeking information about what to do in the region.

Doing their part

Hollingsworth & Vose has two plants and a research center in Floyd County, where it is one of the area’s largest private employers. Like a handful of other regional companies that have started making facemasks, face shields, medical gowns and hand sanitizers in recent months, Hollingsworth & Vose started producing the filtration materials used to produce N95 masks, surgical-style masks and surgical hoods recently.

Friendship earns rare long-term designation

Friendship, a senior living and rehabilitation organization, announced in May that Friendship Assisted Living (FAL) earned a three-year license from the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), which it claims is rare in the

senior healthcare industry. According to the VDSS website, a three-year license is issued to a facility with activities, services, management and overall performance levels that routinely exceed the basic care, program and services required by the minimum standards. “This is quite a feat and I’m so proud of the team,” said President and Chief Executive Officer Joe Hoff.

College raises funds students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Roanoke College’s second annual **Day of Giving**, a 24-hour event held on May 13, raised more than \$1 million for students who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. 840 members of the College community — alumni, parents, students, friends, faculty and staff — raised \$1,047,498, providing funds and resources to assist impacted students and families. These funds will go towards academic resources, student scholarships, and immediate financial support for any students experiencing unexpected hardship.

Longtime local business closes its doors

Back Country Ski & Sports on Apperson Drive in Salem has closed after 27 years in business. The company says its Blacksburg location will have to remain open “by appointment only” due to limited staffing and the plan for a wider

reopening in Blacksburg will be updated at a later date.

Kudos for Film Lab, aspiring movie makers

The National Academy of Television Arts and Science, National Capital Chesapeake Bay Chapter, has awarded Film Lab film top honors in the 2019 Capital Emmy High School Fiction category to Grandin Theatre Film Lab students Bryce Knick, Lainey Auwarter, Zane Farmer, Carter Schaeffer, and Sophia Kelley. They all walked away with the BEST LONG-FORM FICTION in the High School division for their film, HOURGLASS. The

Capital Emmy comes after HOURGLASS won Best Narrative Student Film at Longleaf in Raleigh, NC in early May. Hourglass is a fiction short film that tells the story about a woman plagued with terrible visions until she confronts what lurks within them. The film is product of the after-school program sponsored by the Grandin Theatre Foundation. All the films created by the Film Lab Students are available to watch on the Grandin Theatre's website.

Hotel makeover

Work to turn the former **Blue Ridge Hotel and Conference Center** building on Hershberger

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Road in Roanoke into an apartment complex that will feature 346 units is underway. It could anywhere from a year and a half to two years to complete. Local tourism officials have expressed concern about losing the Blue Ridge Hotel (which had several other names) conference space; when the Hotel Roanoke Conference Center is booked that

could mean a shortage of larger spaces and the need to turn away larger meetings they say.

Changing hands

The founding owner at Roanoke Mountain Adventures, located at Riverhouse in the Wasena area, announced he has sold the business after 5 years. In a



Nothing is Going to Break Our Stride to Serve You

Just like you, we miss business as usual. There's so much we took for granted. A bustling Friday night, people running errands and stopping on the street to chat.

While things are different now, there's one thing that's never going to change, and that's our commitment to you. You are why we come to work everyday, and we're dedicated to keeping you connected to those you love, then, now and always.
We are here for you... We'll keep you connected.

Facebook statement, owner James Revercomb said he has no doubt that RMA will be in good hands and thanked the customers and community for their support.

Revercomb says he will be managing the shop and helping with the transition through the Summer

Mack Trucks county plant opening pushed back

Mack Trucks is planning to start production of the new Mack M-D Series medium-duty truck models at its Roanoke Valley Operations facility on September 1st. The launch date was delayed from July as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. A Mack spokesperson says work is underway now at Roanoke County's Valley Tech Park for the start of production in September, and hiring is ongoing.

250 jobs were forecasted along with a 13-million-dollar investment when Mack Trucks said they would come to Roanoke County earlier this year.

Star City Strong

Roanoke City has launched its Star City Strong task force, that will work with community members and local stakeholders on a pandemic recovery plan. The task force will help decide how to disperse funds of at least four million dollars, mostly federal funding, to aid in that recovery. City Council, the Roanoke City Manager and several organizations representing minority groups selected members – from local

business sectors as well as residents. The Task Force is expected to make its recommendations on how to dole out those funds to Roanoke City Council on July 20.

VT says tuition is frozen for next academic year

The Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

has voted to approve a tuition freeze for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students for the 2020-21 academic year. The board also approved a preliminary budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year. President Tim Sands added that at first only about 30 percent of the typical student experience this Fall will be on campus due to COVID-19 safety precautions.

Belt tightening at RU

The Radford University Board of Visitors

has adopted a resolution regarding budget reduction strategies following information and directives issued by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Rector Robert A. Archer stated, "The approved resolution is in accordance with and in response to the Board's fiduciary responsibility for the financial affairs of Radford University as a result of the COVID-19 global health pandemic and the subsequent economic downturn."

Added Archer in a news release, "the impact, which will be both challenging and significant, is anticipated to fully develop over the course of the Commonwealth's upcoming biennial budget.

The Commonwealth will be making reductions to the biennial budget, thereby impacting all state agencies and public institutions. Radford University must begin preparing for significant reductions for the upcoming biennium ... through June 30, 2022."

Phase 2 is here

Governor Northam

said restaurants were permitted to have indoor seating at 50% of capacity when Phase 2 of the COVID-19 recovery plan rolled out in late May. Gyms may conduct indoor activities and workouts at 30% capacity. Many outdoor facilities like zoos are permitted to re-open. Social distancing is still recommended, and face coverings are required at indoor public gathering places. At last word, the indication was that Phase 2 could last 2-4 weeks, which means late June/early July could be a timeframe for Phase 3, on the road to a full economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In case you hadn't noticed

The longest economic expansion in American history (from the 2008 Great Recession) is officially over. The National Bureau of Economic Research has declared that the recession began in February. The pandemic-induced economy collapsed so rapidly that NBER wasted no time in announcing a recession, as opposed to previous downturns when the body took upwards of

a year to declare what many had already realized. This was the fastest that NBER has declared any recession since the group began formal announcements in 1979.

Social distancing requirements imposed to fight the pandemic have crushed broad swaths of the US economy, from airlines and cruise ships to restaurants and Broadway shows. "The unprecedented magnitude of the decline in employment and production, and its broad reach across the entire economy, warrants the designation of this episode as a recession, even if it turns out to be briefer than earlier contractions," NBER wrote.

Making it easier to find a job is the goal

A new suite of technology tools to help Virginians take better advantage of services available through the Commonwealth's workforce system has been launched. The Virginia Career Works Referral Portal is a statewide platform designed to streamline intake processes across state agencies and connect individuals with training, certification, education, and employment services to help them find a job or advance a career path. The new Virginia Career Works Dashboard is a data visualization tool that makes information about Virginia's labor market and workforce system more accessible to workers, businesses, and policymakers. Said

Governor Ralph Northam in announcing the new VCW features, “this ongoing health crisis requires our government systems to respond faster and with more flexibility than ever before.” See the Virginia Career Works website or <https://app.virginia.myjourney.com/> for more information.

Bike rental kiosks will disappear

The coronavirus impact has led to the end of the **Zagster Bike Share** service, which had already been suspended since late March due to safety concerns. Jeremy Holmes, the director of RIDE solutions says the service ended because of the pandemic, not because of low ridership. “We were very pleased with how the system was used and how it had grown over the years since we launched it in 2017.” RIDE Solutions had sponsored the bikeshare service, which often meant riders

pedaling along greenways and local streets were on bikes they could rent via a phone app. Holmes says he hopes Zagster or a similar program will return to the area in the future.

More outdoor dining spaces

Phase 1 of the business reopening plan meant outdoor dining only due to coronavirus safety measures. That led to a boomlet in temporary new outdoor eating spaces, like in downtown Roanoke on Market Street where Table 50 set out rented chairs and tables for patrons. Meanwhile business owners in the growing Wasena neighborhood near Main Street are coming together to create a new space for that community and adjacent businesses. Step one was to set up tables rented from the city of Roanoke in the grassy area next to the Buffalo Hemp Company. Quincy Randolph,

co-owner of nearby RND Coffee, says he came up with the idea to create an outdoor space, something he says the Wasena neighborhood has been asking for.

LOA gets shot in the arm from the Cox Foundation

The Local Office on Aging normally supports more than 3,000 families and individuals in the Roanoke Valley, but these are far from normal times. Recognizing that COVID-19 has put a growing strain on feeding the community, in May the James M. Cox Foundation charitable arm of Cox Enterprises (Cox Communications is one property) awarded the Local Office on Aging Meals on Wheels program with a \$25,000 donation. This came after a \$10,000 grant on behalf of Cox Charities to LOA Meals on Wheels in March. “We were shocked and thrilled to get this support,” said President and CEO Ron Boyd. “We’re thankful for

those in the community who are recognizing the needs of area homebound seniors.” With the donation the LOA was able to restock its food pantry – at least for a short while - and send more emergency food bags out to seniors.

Help from Go Virginia

Governor Northam’s office has announced almost 15 million dollars from the GO Virginia fund to be issued as part of a new “Economic Resilience and Recovery Program,” to help mitigate the impact of the coronavirus. In Region 2, Virginia Tech will receive \$100,000 dollars for its COVID-19 rapid testing project. The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council gets almost (\$97,200) as much for virtual education, mentoring, and business assistance programs.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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The Road to Recovery NRV Style

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

The road to recovery will be a long and winding one that may take many months – or even years.

“No one could ever have predicted this,” said Casey Jenkins, Executive Director of Downtown Blacksburg, Inc. (DBI), of the pandemic during a recent interview. What will this unprecedented time of upheaval mean for businesses in the New River Valley?

Three local leaders – Jenkins; Sharon Scott, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce; and Craig Meadows, Montgomery County Administrator – agree that the biggest overall challenge is uncertainty. Meadows said, “We’ve entered uncharted territory and we are all doing our best to navigate.”

“I wish I had a crystal ball,” said Scott. She praised local governments for “mobilizing quickly.” Businesses have needed sustained

leadership from local governments and also advocacy groups such as the Chamber, DBI, and Downtown Christiansburg, Inc., which have businesses’ best interests in mind. “When people talk about their businesses,” she said, “it’s like they’re talking about their children.”

With its summer festivals canceled, DBI has gone from being primarily an event planning association to a merchants’ “catch all, one stop shop,” said Jenkins. Activities have included economic development, education, leadership, and marketing. DBI has been working to identify government resources for its businesses, and has aided them in creating online campaigns to promote themselves to the public. This has helped generate cash flow, which Jenkins said

has been critical. Even if businesses had financial reserves to tap, those are finite.

“They could have planned for a rainy day, but no one thought it would rain so long,” he said. The Chamber, too, has been assisting businesses, and not just its members. Scott is proud that the Chamber board agreed in March to open up services to all businesses, though this has stretched its resources including time (Scott gets 600-700 emails per day) and money (because closed businesses could not pay their Chamber dues).

Meadows said, “During the COVID-19 pandemic, the County’s Economic Development team has been holding conference calls with existing industry contacts to determine how COVID-19 is affecting them. County staff have spoken with large manufacturers, technical supply, and software development company representatives. In one particular instance, our staff helped connect a small manufacturer with layoff aversion funds provided through the Workforce Innovation Board, assisting with the company receiving \$4,690.” Through newsletters, conference calls, and social media county staffers directed businesses early on to the Small Business Administration (SBA) or their local SBA banker to apply for EIDL (Economic Injury Disaster Loan) loans or PPP (Paycheck Protection Program).

“Are we recovering? Yes. Rapidly? No,” said Scott. Both Scott and Jenkins said their members are “cautiously optimistic.” Scott

said there was a wide spectrum among businesses regarding re-opening, from “uncomfortable” to “can’t wait,” with most being somewhere in the middle.

Recovery will depend on a number of things, she said, including whether there is college football, whether events such as club sports and robotics tournaments return to the area, and whether tourism pick up from dips that extended into Phases 1 and 2 of recovery, Governor Northam’s 3-phase “Forward Virginia” program.

Radford University says it will be fully operational on campus in the fall, and Virginia Tech is planning to welcome students back under a hybrid in-person / online class model. On the importance of those announcements, Scott noted that students are one-third of the local population: “even if college students are not a business’s target audience, their money circulates throughout the community and affects everyone.”

Scott also said recovery is partly about re-open dates, but also about the extent of health protocols employers have to provide. Jenkins agreed, saying that the number one priority of businesses now is to make employees and customers feel safe and confident. (Phase 2 mandated that face coverings should be worn when people go into public gathering places, although they can be removed in restaurants). Patron confidence depends largely on media, particularly social media,



Submitted photo

Craig Meadows-Montgomery County



Submitted photo

Sharon Scott-Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce

which transmits praise or concern about businesses so they “want to do it right,” he said.

While Phases 1 and 2 are “encouraging - one step back toward normalcy,” Jenkins feels that it will be Phase 3 before restaurants, particularly, fully recover due to current capacity constraints and stringent health protocols. Some eateries in the area declined to open for inside dining with 50 percent capacity limitations under Phase 2, saying it did not fit their business or logistical models.

Jenkins predicted most small businesses will survive, though there have been some casualties as the coronavirus compounded existing financial problems. Scott, though, quoted a Small Business Administration statistic that concerns her greatly: up to 40% of small businesses nationally might not recover. It’s a number she thinks is high but distilled down to the local level it could mean 300-400 business don’t reopen. “Our local economy cannot sustain that,” she said.

“It is up to us, the community, to support the local economy, said Scott. Jenkins agreed that the “shop local” mantra is more important now than ever, whether it is through traditional shopping or partaking of curbside or online shopping with local businesses. He implores consumers to stay informed about their favorite businesses by following them online.

Scott described “My Footprint,” a Chamber

initiative launching in August to increase local business. Through consultation with economists at Virginia Tech to make the number realistic, its goal will be to have citizens “dial back” shopping online by 10-50% to help the New River Valley stabilize and grow.

Consumers are changing their behaviors as a result of the pandemic. Scott pointed to management consulting company McKinsey & Company, whose research shows that two-thirds of consumers are back shopping. One-third, the loyal customers, came out immediately. Another third wanted to wait a few weeks to assess safety. The last third, perhaps the immune compromised or the elderly, is reluctant to venture out as quickly.

In the end, successful businesses will have adapted to stay relevant, said Jenkins. They will be “stronger and more resilient” from learning to use multiple channels to reach out to consumers. New business models such as online platforms and curbside pickup may stay intact. Others will have learned the importance of remaining well-connected with customers and the community. Scott concurred, saying that commerce will become “not just transactional but relational.”

Both Jenkins and Scott used the word “pivot” when discussing lessons learned from this period. That could be a business changing its business model to adapt to what customers want, or an advocacy group moving rapidly to help businesses. Meadows noted, “while it’s uncertain just

how long recovery will take and the specifics of it, we know our citizens, like all Americans, have a strong and resourceful spirit.”

Jenkins complimented the patience of local consumers with the changes required by businesses. He also touted local owners grit: “Business has slowed, not stopped, and will be back stronger than ever.”



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