

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 141
JUNE 2020

COVID-19:
Business Response

Rainbow Riders

Hall & Associate's
Frank Martin

Stephanie Rogol:
Perspectives
from a Restaurateur

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Our Road to Recovery

Keith Clinton
RT Smith's Deli

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

By the time you read this we may – may – already be in Phase 2 of what Governor Ralph Northam has dubbed the Forward Virginia program to help Virginia's economy reemerge from the grips of COVID-19. A physician by trade, Northam has been both praised and criticized for the pace at which he set the reopening dates for businesses – or for an expansion of their services and access to customers. It was a tough call no doubt – balancing physical health versus the health of an economy. In this issue we offer a snapshot on what the road to recovery might look like from a variety of angles and voices. Go out, eat, shop, see a movie, listen to live music – and do what you need to do to feel safe. That's your call.

Tom Field
Publisher

Gene Marrano
Editor

“”
We are all in this together.
— Page 23



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.

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The Road to Recovery **FROM SURVIVAL MODE TO SOLID FOOTING**

by Gene Marrano



“Out of disaster comes innovation.” — Page 12

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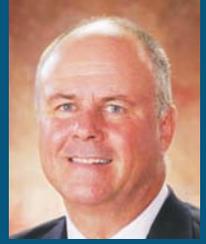
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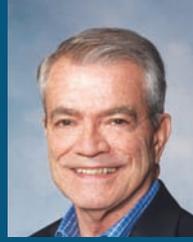
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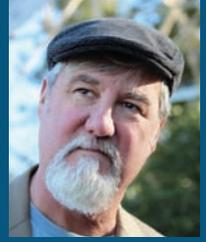
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Advisory Board

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

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“”
Many can leverage technology... but some were not so lucky.

— Page 46

“”
Disruption is the new norm.

— Page 34

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 40.

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The Road to Recovery
**FROM SURVIVAL MODE
TO SOLID FOOTING**

By Gene Marrano

We are nowhere close to being out of the woods but some key players in the battle to restart our local economy weigh in.

Small Business Outlook

Amanda Forrester is director of the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center in Roanoke, which is “hosted” by the Regional Chamber offices. The Virginia SBDC helps businesses all throughout their life span; Forrester says disaster mitigation is a key role, but many do not realize that “because we don’t have a lot of disasters in this area.” Much of that recovery involves around basic business planning practices, which she sees as a focus in the near term.

But there will be new companies emerging

from the pandemic says Forrester: “out of disaster comes innovation. People are seeing what’s there and what’s missing in the new environment.” Some have been homebound, planning to launch their own business, plotting their own future. As for current businesses that have been body slammed by the coronavirus shutdown/restriction, many will put a greater focus on resiliency going forward – having a plan in place to help recover from other disasters.

Making it more friendly for small businesses to thrive – less red tape, lower fees, better access to capital – will help regions rebound

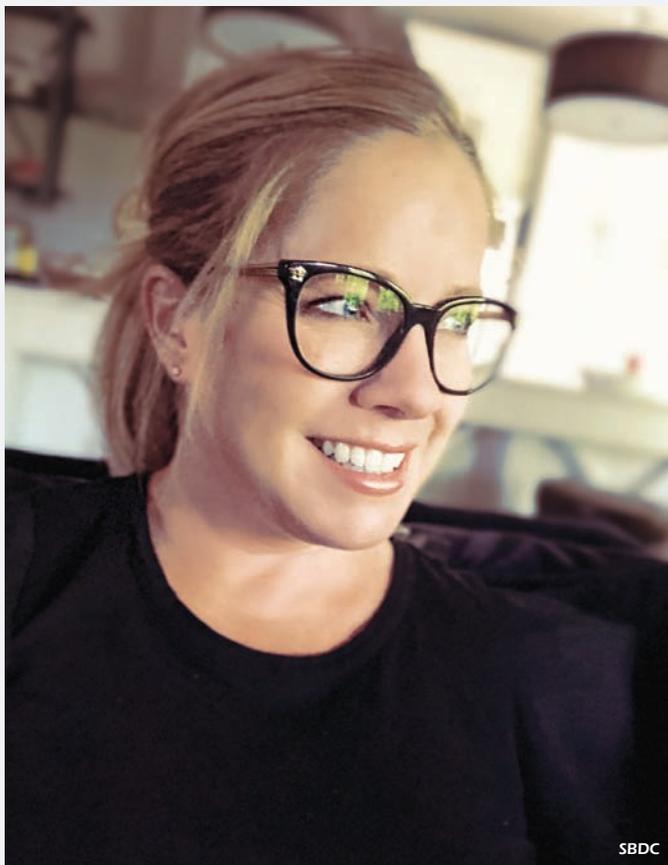
more quickly adds Forrester. The Virginia ABC loosening of the rules to allow takeout wine/beer/mixed drinks was a good example she notes of a positive change.

There are SBDC statistics showing 40 percent of businesses never recover from a major natural disaster, with 75 percent not making it past three years if they do not have reserves to hold on while their company regrows its customer base. Other data reveals that many small businesses only have enough in the bank to cover a few weeks of closure. She is curious to see how the CARES Act works, to see if making money available to save jobs made a real difference long term. "We have to get more capital in small business's hands. I hope that's a great learning tool from this [episode]." Forrester works with the regional Access to Capital committee, an arm of the Valleys Innovation Council, where that is a focus.

The view from local government

Roanoke County's director of economic development, Jill Loope, says there will be "adjustments at every level," of the business world, where for the foreseeable future enhanced safety measures to prevent the further spread – or a rebound – of COVID-19 will rule the day. Return to work

"Empty Downtown" and "Closed/Open Signs" photo spreads; Pages 8-11 by: FRONT



SBDC

Amanda Forrester, Roanoke Regional SBDC



quarantine measures has been a discussion at the state level says Loope - even how many people can be on an elevator at one time and mandatory hand washing breaks for employees: "a lot of unique things we haven't thought about before."

The new normal may include standard social distancing requirements, along with telework and teleconferencing becoming more accepted practices. A more cashless economy too, notes Loope. What happens to real estate then, something she helps promote by in-filling vacant buildings. What happens if a company decides they do not all need to be in the same building? More businesses will also have to expand their digital platforms to attract – and sell to – more potential customers online, something that has happened during the COVID shutdown.

Loope sees a greater demand for shared co-working spaces – think the CoLab on steroids perhaps. A trend towards "reverse urbanization" with people leaving larger cities where viruses are more easily spread for smaller communities – say the Roanoke and New River Valleys – could result in an influx of talent.

Statewide, Loope says trips abroad next year by Virginia companies looking for growth markets are selling out now, a sign of optimism. In the lemonade from lemons category,



RoCo

Jill Loope, Roanoke County Economic Development

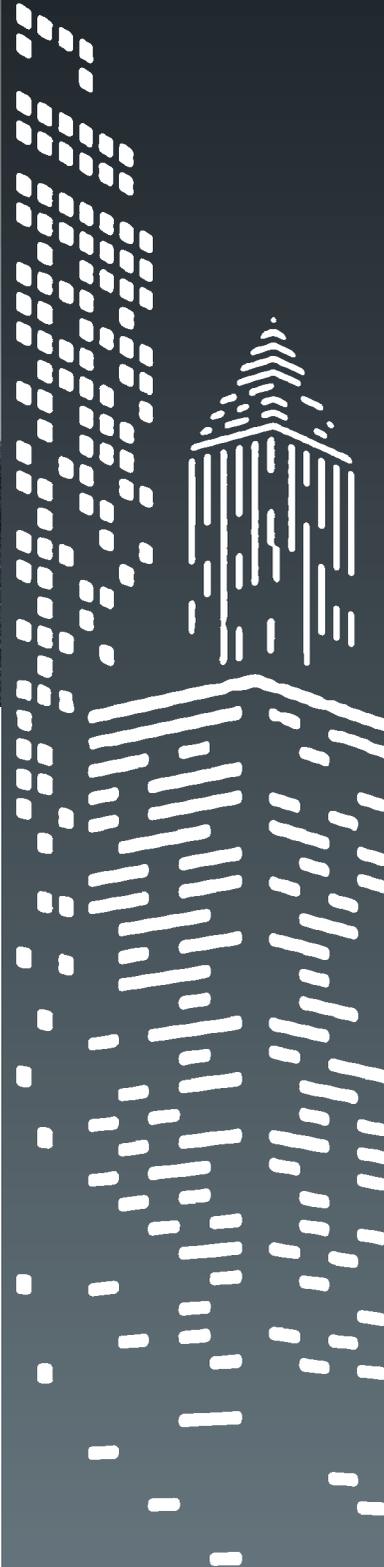


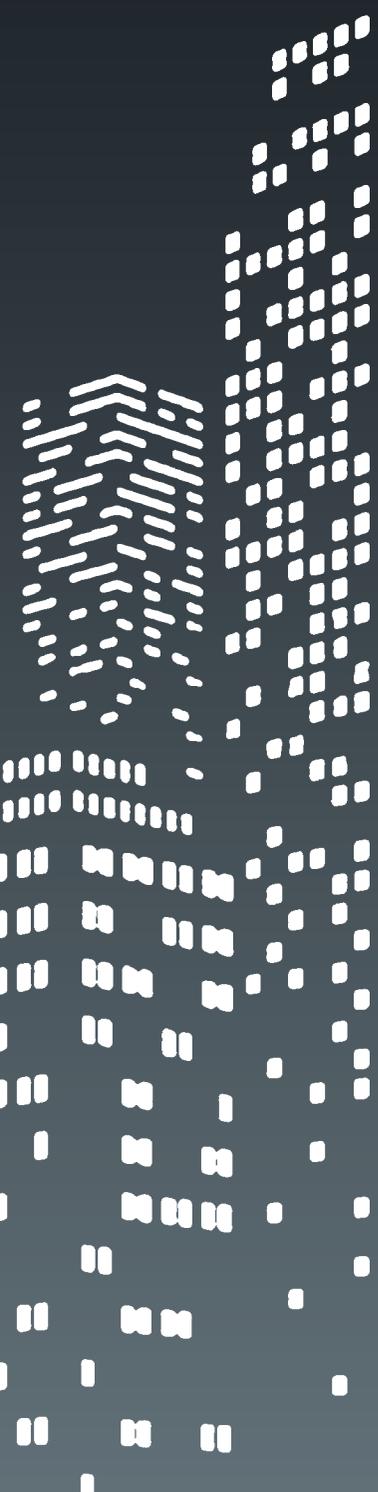
Bob Cowell, Roanoke City

at least one business in Roanoke County is willing to invest millions and hire several dozen people as it starts making Personal Protective Equipment says Loope, who was waiting on a grant last month to help with that process.

"My next-door neighbor's children have moved back [to Roanoke]," she also notes; connecting those young people to jobs and supporting entrepreneurs is the next step. "Very localized assistance," in helping people to find jobs can help fight what Loope thinks will be "a very slow ramp up in the labor market." Access to affordable and safe childcare is an issue if droves of younger families migrate to Virginia's Blue Ridge. "Most of them are ready ramp back up," says Loope about the county's business community; "they're ready to get started."

In Roanoke City they have created a small business fund available to those who qualify, to help pay the bills. In addition, a group has been assembled with representatives from key business sectors to help others get back on their feet, and "to see how things are going," said City Manager Bob Cowell during a mid-May virtual press conference. Another task force with business leaders should start meeting this month to forge a recovery agenda said Cowell.





Submitted

Joyce Waugh, Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce

Chamber chatter

The Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce has around 800 members according to President Joyce Waugh. She also says the Roanoke Small Business Development Center they host “has been nearly overwhelmed,” by those seeking help before Governor Northam started reopening Virginia’s economy with baby steps last month. Much of that came as businesses were figuring out how to apply for the Paycheck Protection Program forgivable loans.

“There is not a single business organization or non-profit entity that has not been affected,” says Waugh. Hospitality and entertainment, and smaller retailers were among the hardest hit. The impact has been compared to a combination of the 9/11 aftermath and the Great Recession of 2008-10. A 4th quarter 2020 or 1st quarter 2021 rebound assumes there are no major coronavirus second wave outbreaks Waugh adds. “We don’t fully know what the recovery is going to look like.”

For R.T. Smith’s Deli co-owner Keith Clinton in downtown Roanoke, early recovery meant becoming a butcher shop of sorts in May, offering that additional service to customers. He is skeptical about a phased-in approach to indoor dining capacity and may instead take out all the deli’s tables. “It’s

looking like it's not going to be until August for Phase 3 is even close to over. Then you have to wait for the [downtown] offices to show up. With all the events canceling, tourism season is basically done. I don't know what we're going to do this year in terms of getting people downtown."

Macado's owner Richard Macher says the number of outlets in his regional chain may be down from 21 to around 18 after this is all over, but he is readying a comeback that includes one-use throwaway menus and possibly disposable plates or utensils to help avoid any spread of COVID-19. A CARES Act loan enabled him to hire back 400-plus full-time workers when Macado's went to a takeout/curbside only mode. "This is a difficult time, [but] hopefully we come out of it and we learn something. You need to be proactive on certain things to provide that environment where people feel comfortable."

CHOP CHOP



R.T. Smith's Deli

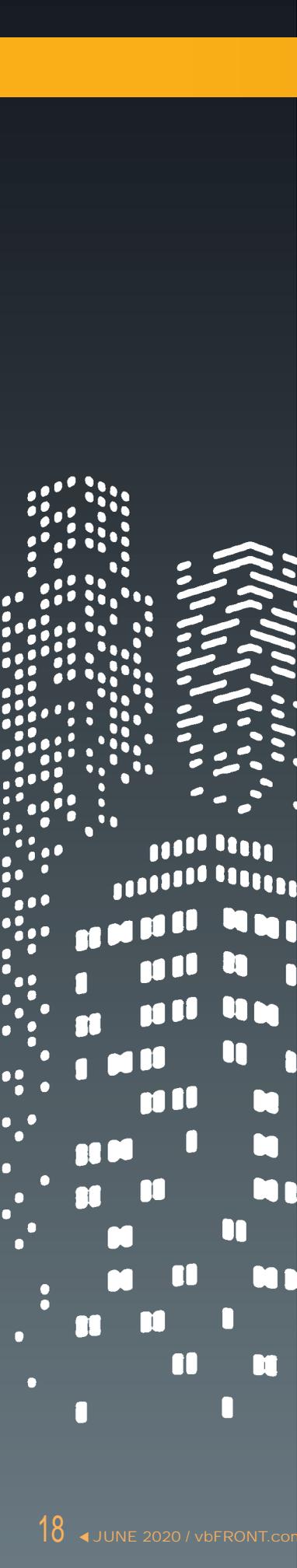
Keith Clinton of R.T. Smith's Deli is our FRONT-Cover model. On the day we took the photo, he was closing up shop early afternoon—something he hates to do. But it was COVID-19, shuttered businesses all downtown, and pouring the rain to boot. Customers were scarce—a rarity at the popular delicatessen where folks gather at the counter to grab their breads, cheeses, meats, pickles, soups, and the sought after Taylor Pork Roll from New Jersey or Bronx Bagel. To say Clinton is ready to get back to normal is quite the understatement. This year has been harder than a Kaiser roll; nothing like it since the shop opened in 2011.



Richard Macher, Macado's



Submitted



Where some businesses fail, others, say Joyce Waugh, “may be waiting in the wings [or] they make come back in a different form than before – a different model.” This region’s diversity – like the Chamber membership base says Waugh – is varied in size and type, which should help hasten the economic recovery.

She also hails the creativity and adaptation to a new normal that has and will continue to spring forth. Like a small women’s clothing retailer talking with customers by phone and then shipping them a “style box” with apparel for them to try on. Waugh looks for telemeetings via Zoom and other platforms to continue, even offering that there has been “better attendance,” on some of the sessions the Chamber has been involved with. “Sometimes it’s almost better than [live] face to face meetings. Some offices down the road will look a little different.”

Perhaps some will want to attend a music event live she says, while others – at least for now – will be content with paying a lesser “ticket” price to stream a concert at home. “There’s going to be a cautiousness in the regathering [of people],” Waugh contends, “and slower getting to a full force [economically].”



cheerleader feels the pain

As Congress rushed through Paycheck Protection Program legislation, they left out a certain classification of non-profits – 501 (c) (6) – where Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge hangs its hat. That meant VVBR could not qualify for the forgivable loans that would also enable the bureau to retain its full staff. That meant furloughs and pay cuts says President Landon Howard. VVBR is largely funded by a hotel tax – they help fill those rooms by promoting events when times are good – but the local hotel/motel sector was basically flatlined by COVID-19. “[That] industry has the potential to spring back quicker than just about any other,” he adds optimistically.

VVBR surveyed local businesses associated with the tourism industry and found it was “devastated by the pandemic. What we also found was how essential this industry is to the region.” Over 8000 are employed in Virginia’s Blue Ridge in hotel/restaurant/outdoors/events and related sectors says Howard. “Everyone is going to be eager for recovery,” says Howard. “What we are going to see is incredible pent-up demand once we are given the green light.”

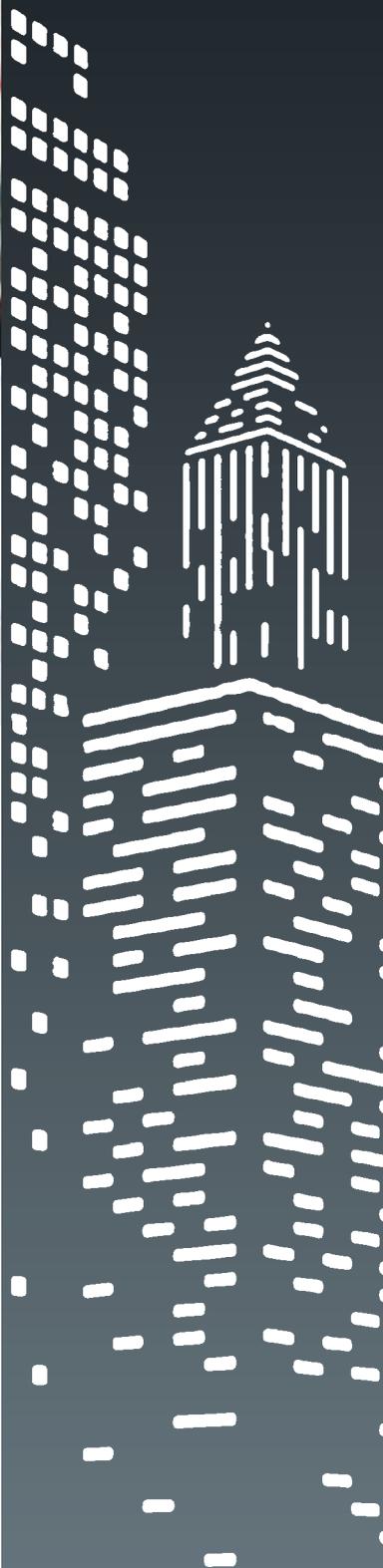
Howard hopes that the majority of businesses related to what VVBR promotes will be fully open by July, with adaptations for social distancing and routine cleaning in place to make customers feel safer. Avoiding a second COVID-19 outbreak is a must. “I think the Fall is going to be a really great time for people get out and enjoy the Fall colors,” is his prediction.



Landon Howard, Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge

In the meantime, VVBR's online "Worth the Wait" video campaign highlights what the region has to offer – and will when things open up and people start traveling again. One conundrum: the budget freeze has meant that Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge does not have funding to promote Worth the Wait and may not have it in place at least initially when all the restrictions on businesses in the Commonwealth are finally lifted. "We need the resources to be able to tell people, hey we're here, you need to come," says Howard. "People are looking forward to getting out." He frets about the ability of cultural organizations like Mill Mountain Theatre, Opera Roanoke and the Taubman Museum to bounce back quickly – since their operations typically involve bringing crowds together – and he urges people to make donations if they can in the meantime.

The wide-open spaces and less densely populated towns and cities make Virginia's Blue Ridge "ideally suited to recover from this quicker than most destinations." Howard has seen this before – people have tendency "to cocoon" after tragedies and disasters like 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina. "When they feel those dark clouds are finally gone, they'll venture out." Being better prepared nationally for such a disaster like COVID-19 might have meant not having to take the "extreme measures" put in place he laments. "We suffered as a lack of our preparation."





Beth Doughty, Roanoke Regional Partnership



The regional view

Beth Doughty wears several hats, primarily as executive director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership. She also serves as executive director of the Western Virginia Regional Industrial Facility Authority. When the business shutdown/restrictions first went into place, the Partnership sent out a survey to local businesses, where “overwhelmingly” they reported the biggest impact on the small or microbusiness level. “That’s really where the pain was being felt.” Doughty foresees a “thinning” of the small business population in the region.

It may have been easier than “some wanted to admit,” that working remotely was less difficult than they thought it would be, another tidbit gleaned from the online survey. Six months ago, a “vast majority” might have said working from home was not feasible. Doughty calls it a paradigm shift “that will hold moving forward.” That shift may help attract new talent to the area as they – or their employers – realize that yes, in many cases people can perform a job from anywhere – even their kitchen counter. People with ties to the region may come back home.

As for what the Regional Partnership focuses on – attracting new business investment to the region – Doughty says there is still interest and ongoing projects, but the problem is “they’re all on a kind of pause. All travel [to see potential sites] is off, basically.” The Partnership she adds is working on new ways to showcase the region until prospects are more willing to get on a plane or jump in a car

and come visit. For example: new drone video footage of properties like the 100 acre-plus Woodhaven Road tract (owned jointly by local municipalities comprising the Western Virginia Regional Industrial Facility Authority) is giving prospects a birds-eye view remotely. It may take several years to recover the jobs lost; that is what Doughty and others glean from what economists are saying, but it might take longer in a less urbanized region like the Roanoke Valley.

“We were just starting to gain that momentum,” says Doughty. That included job growth rates better than the last decade or more she says, bouncing back from losses associated with Norfolk Southern, Advance Auto and the like. Having a diverse economy – Doughty says the Roanoke area has the most diverse business portfolio in the state – should help. “The big impact is in consumer spending,” and hospitality has taken a huge hit. “Recovery depends on where you sit; it’s still incredibly difficult to predict.”

A few positive notes to end on

“I’m incredibly proud of our community,” says the SBDC’s Amanda Forrester, “everyone is trying to pivot and hold on, more so than I ever expected.” Jill Loope from Roanoke County is, “super-impressed with our business community and how they converted during this time. They’ve been amazing to watch.” Adds Landon Howard, “we are very well suited to open up - in terms of our product - and welcome people.” 

RECOVERY: THE VIEW FROM ACADEMIA



Sudipta Sarangi



Matt Kovach

Editor's note: Sudipta Sarangi was the program director for economics at the National Science Foundation before joining Virginia Tech as a professor and head of the Department of Economics in the College of Science. Matthew Kovach is an assistant professor in the Department of Economics. His research focuses on economic theory and behavioral economics.

The Great Recession was a huge shock to the economy in 2008-2010, and there is a chance that this is comparable: “it really depends on how long this lasts,” says Kovach. The CARES Act federal packages helped this time. “Until we get a vaccine [for COVID-19],” it’s unknown what the long-range implications will be, he contends. Sarangi says worldwide it’s more comparable to the 1918 flu epidemic that killed millions – not hundreds of thousands. “Unless everyone recovers [globally] we are going to be affected. It’s not just the supply chains; [coronavirus] is something that hates people. It’s not only about pumping money [in].”

Bringing some manufacturing back onshore to ensure more reliable supply chains “is not going to happen immediately,” adds Kovach – that may take at least several years. Building new plants and equipment when still facing down the pandemic is the big challenge. “Investors hate uncertainty,” Sarangi says.

The expansion of technologies like remote working and teleconferencing may result in a “long term improvement in the economy,” according to Kovach, with more productivity and flexibility being a possible plus. Adds Sarangi: those who have been working from home the last few months “will tell you that there have been positives – and negatives. Certainly, there will be a greater push for teleworking.” He sees options like curbside pickup and deliveries continuing on a larger scale basis going forward.

Consumer habits may indeed change: “we’re really being forced to go online [more] with all of this,” says Kovach, as more people get comfortable with delivery services like Door Dash, Grub Hub and Uber Eats as well. He sees shared kitchens for delivery-only eateries accelerating – “less customer-facing jobs,” he calls it. Similar economic incidents in the past have made many less risk-averse to participating in financial markets – and more prone to holding on to their money. “We do want people to participate in the financial markets because that [benefits] long term growth in the economy.”

One other benefit perhaps, says Sarangi, is that people have become more aware of their communities, realizing that maybe they should not “have to rely on food [or other products] coming from far away. There is going to be greater community spirit after this. I think it’s going to push towards more local production and local consumption. I’m certain that’s going to happen.” One bright spot perhaps as the region, the Commonwealth, the country, and the world emerges from COVID-19.

—Gene Marrano



Anne Sampson

Stephanie Rogol

ADJUSTMENTS ON THE FLY

By Stephanie Rogol

FRONT asked a local business owner/operator of popular restaurants how she is negotiating COVID-19; a pandemic extremely threatening for the service sector.

My name is Stephanie Rogol and I am an owner of the Sharkey's restaurants in the New River Valley and Tizzone and Tap House in the Daleville Town Center. Like all other restaurants, this pandemic has provided for us many interesting challenges. The well being of our guests, staff, and community are what is most important. To help us do the right thing, our state government has been extremely helpful. They keep us informed, they give us plenty of lead time to help us figure out what to do, and they have even been quick to relax some ABC rules so that we can deliver mixed beverages safely. All of that has been extremely helpful; I am very grateful to be living in Virginia.

Switching to delivery and curbside only was

way more challenging than I would have thought. Besides having to gear up the phones and our software on our computers, scheduling very differently, and learning delivery, there was one challenge that never even entered my mind. What happens when everyone orders at the same time? With dining in the restaurant even if everyone comes in at the same time you can manage the flow. The max number of people is limited to our seating but when people order online you can have a massive number of tickets and it is just impossible to manage it. The staff ends up being overwhelmed and chaos ensues. It doesn't happen frequently since we are pretty slow, but it has happened on Tuesdays when kids eat free, and it happened on Mother's Day. We will figure out how

to address this issue before Father's Day.

For Tuesdays we fixed the problem by making a Facebook post explaining the situation and asking people to order earlier or later and that worked so well that we decided to have kids eat free on Thursdays as well. During this pandemic we want to be as helpful as possible to our guests and community. We are all in this together and anything we can do to make our community happier we want to do. I have discovered that the hardest part to doing only curbside and delivery for our staff is the limited interaction with our guests. Most people who work in the restaurant industry do it for the social aspect and right now that only happens in very brief interactions. We miss our guests!

Starting [in mid-May] we were able to open our outside patios at 50% capacity during "Phase 1." At Tap House we have two patios. One of them we will open to



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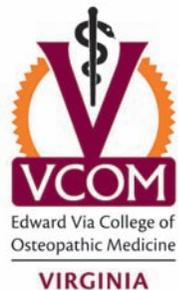


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Sharkey's Wing & Rib Joint

the public and the other one we are going to use to reserve for the police and other essential workers. During this lockdown, the police who have come in to get food have let us know how much they miss having a place they can go to eat when on duty. We want to be able to ensure they will have a place to eat whenever needed. We don't know when it will be safe to have indoor dining, I will leave that up to our Governor to make that decision, but we are all looking forward to things getting back to normal as quickly as it is safe to do so.

What might that look like? I'm guessing that staff will need to wear masks and

gloves, tables will need to be far enough apart to ensure social distancing, utensils and menus will need to be disposable, and everyone will need to be respectful of other guests. This all may be the "new norm" and many people may choose to not go to restaurants until there is a vaccine. Reopening safely will be challenging, but for the safety of our guests, our team, and our community, we will do whatever the experts think is necessary. 🍷

Stephanie Rogol grew up in New York, has lived in VA since 1990, went to graduate school at Virginia Tech for Philosophy and then became a restaurateur.



Tizzone



TapHouse

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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Despite all the recent chaos, the fundamentals have not changed.

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
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It is still about customer value

This pandemic has been quite the disruptor to business operations. In some way, the virus has affected everyone. Most of us have now adjusted to the “new normal” and pivoted to the current reality. Hopefully, you have now stabilized cash flow and adapted to operate with social distancing to protect your team and clients. Now what?

The biggest challenge most organizations now face is revenue. On a macro scale, the economy has shrunk as we have cumulatively reduced our spending on goods and services. Eventually that spending will return, and our customers will again be seeking us out. How will you get them back? Will you get them back?

Despite all the recent chaos, the fundamentals have not changed. Your ability to grow and retain your revenue depends on how well you can provide value to your customers. What HAS changed, however, are your customer’s needs.

When I started my business, it took me a couple years to learn what my customers wanted. Over time, I adjusted my services, gained new customers, and grew my revenue. Successful organizations usually do a good job adjusting to changing interests and demographics. But usually these changes happen over a timespan of years. This time, customer (and employee) needs have changed almost overnight. Businesses that attempt to return to “business as usual” might not get to “revenue as usual.” Now, if they want to stay in business and recover clients, they must revisit what their customers truly value.

My doctor’s office made a great adjustment. A few weeks ago, I called to delay my annual checkup because of virus concerns. To my pleasant surprise, they told me how they had spaced out the patients, scheduled the sick patients only in the late afternoons, disinfected each night, and had the entire staff wearing face masks all day. They had greatly reduced my risk and convinced me to come in. They had pivoted to the new needs of their patients and I left the office impressed with their changes.

Many customers are now putting more value in social distancing, face masks, senior care safety, working (and playing) from home, childcare, and educating their kids. Organizations that adjust to their changing customer needs will recover their pre-pandemic revenue the quickest. Have you asked your customers what they need now? 

“”
The biggest challenge... revenue.

The good side of sales

Before I became a business owner eleven years ago, I was a sales manager. Before I was a sales manager, I was a seller out in the field. Early on I decided I didn't ever want to be "that kind" of a salesperson. You know the type – the ones who don't listen or care for their clients and who do not value the work of the Account Executive, Account Manager, or Account Representative. They're usually referred to as "slimy" salespeople.

It's true. There are some of them out there and they're pretty easy to spot.

As I worked with hundreds of sellers before, and over the past decade consulted with hundreds more, I realized salespeople generally mean well. While there are people only in it for themselves, they typically do little harm – outside of giving the rest of the industry a bad name.

I'm not saying your friendly neighborhood salesperson will have banners hung that read "Heroes Work Here" any time in the near future. I can safely say – especially in times of economic recovery – there is a significant place for relationship building, problem solving, and considerate purveyors of business to business services. As America ramps up and adjusts to the ever-changing climate, here's a perspective for everyone in the professional sales world.

- Few people want to be sold to.
People want to be heard.
- No one has time to waste.
Prospects make time for people who care and help.
- Don't make it about yourself.
Focus on the problems your clients have.
- Cookie cutter answers rarely work.
Once you've listened, the real work begins.
- Tonality, timing, and value will serve you.
Don't go barging in where you haven't been invited.
- Don't just sell.
Fix. Solve. Help. Build value.

The recipe to landing on the good side of sales is pretty simple. The good ones simply pay attention to what works, and they take a breath before starting that sales process, or contacting that prospect. To those of you who sell professionally – you may not be heroes, but you are, in fact, an important part of the economic revival this nation is craving. 🍷



A LITTLE INSIGHT

By Bruce C. Bryan

Executive Summary:

In times of economic recovery there is a significant place for relationship building and problem solving.

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



Submitted photos

Kristi Snyder

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: AN ECONOMIC NECESSITY

By Michael Abraham

“The society that raises innovators will rule the 21st Century economy,” says NRV day care owner.

For Kristi Snyder, it’s about one word: respect. “We need to respect our children.”

Kristi is owner and administrator at Rainbow Riders Child Care Center in Blacksburg, the largest facility in Montgomery County. She said, “I’ll spend my entire working life at Rainbow Riders. It’s in my blood. I eat and sleep it.”

It is a recurring economic mantra

that our greatest natural resource is the minds of our kids. So why are many children in the United States of America, the greatest economy the world has ever known, lacking the education they will need to be successful in a growing, interconnected, and competitive world?

Snyder said, “We’ve learned so much about how the brain develops and works since I began my career. What we know now is there is a huge amount of brain development between zero and

five years of age. Researchers think that 90% of brain development happens during those years.”

Yet for the most part, unless a family qualifies for a government program like Head Start or Early Head Start, early childhood education is a responsibility of the parents. Unless they can afford to send their kids to a school like Rainbow Riders, education is often piecemeal or not at all. Children are parked in front of TV or computer screens.

Snyder began her career at Rainbow Riders at age 17 as a high school student and she just turned 50. She has a degree in early childhood education from Virginia Tech. She became director at age 22 and primary owner at age 26.

Schools like Rainbow Riders get no help

from the governments, either local, state, or federal. This is a different model from the rest of the developed world and even much of the emerging world, where childhood education is socialized just like our public schools. Countries like Netherlands, Finland, Belgium, South Korea, Norway, and New Zealand have such programs. For these and many other nations, investments in young children are the mark of prudent, wise resource allocation.

Even in nations where the system is private, centers that meet quality and affordability criteria are offered financial incentives from the government to make attendance affordable. Rainbow Riders gets 96% of its income from tuition, paid by the parents, typically \$800 to \$900 per month per child. As the COVID-19 crisis took hold, Rainbow Riders

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remained open with extremely low enrollment to serve families who are essential employees. “Many families were provided tuition assistance to be able to continue to pay for childcare,” said Snyder.

The organization was able to retain and pay almost all full-time staff, who continued either working staggered shifts, working from home, or stayed home due to high risk reasons. “The Paycheck Protection Program funds are in the bank and we will hopefully be able to provide the financial support to weather these tumultuous times,” Snyder said. Health and safety modifications are in place and Snyder added they were making plans by mid-May for ramping back up as Virginia’s phased approach to reopening unfolds.

In the infant room (during normal times), there are 3 babies per teacher, with fewer teachers for the older children. Yet Rainbow Riders still struggles to pay living wages to its staff. Snyder said, “They start at \$10/hr., and we’ve worked for 30 years to get to that. I have people who have been here for 20 years and still make under \$20/hr. It brings me to tears. It is unfair beyond belief. I’m looking to hire teachers who love children and have a willingness to learn, communications skill, and common sense. That’s a tall order at \$10 or \$12/hr.”

Rainbow Riders kids are more prepared for academics once in traditional schools, but they are also better socialized, better problem solvers, and far more likely to be successful and productive citizens as

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adults said Snyder. “Our teachers instill in these children the value of good decisions, every day. We teach caring, empathy, and citizenship. Our children do better not just in grade school, but for the rest of their lives.

“What our programs are doing well is creating innovators, problem solvers, and thinkers. The society that raises innovators will rule the 21st Century economy.”

What needs to change? “What we’re not doing well is involving all children. We

need to have significant change. We need to elect people who put children and families first. In many other nations, federal governments take care of people, young and old. Here it is a familial responsibility.

“It is essential to our future, for public safety, for national security, and our economy, for every child to receive good early childhood education, Kristi Snyder concludes. “We need to be producing children who have skills to compete in world markets. Our country’s future depends on it.”



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Submitted photos

Multimillion-dollar transformation >

The **Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center's Pine Room Pub** and the adjacent Palm Court Lobby will be closed until September as that area undergoes a multimillion-dollar transformation. The Pine Room will install an onsite open kitchen where patrons can watch their food being prepared, and a new outdoor dining area with Mill Mountain Star views will add 55 seats to the restaurant. Slated for the Palm Court Lobby is a 40-seat bar. A night sky mural seen in the pre-1939 hotel will return as well to the Curio Collection by Hilton property. Lionberger Construction is the general contractor.

Hotel General Manager **Brian Wells** says, "it's really going to activate that part of the hotel."



The new look is also about keeping up with other properties in the region that are looking to book major business conferences – which will hopefully see a revival this Fall. The renovated Pine Room Pub will also pay tribute to heroes of yesterday says Wells: "one of the things we know we can do better is tell the story of the World War II officer's club in the Pine Room. We've done some research there and will have part of the room that will be dedicated to showing that."





Submitted photos

New coronavirus test developed at Virginia Tech >

Virginia Tech scientists have developed a new COVID-19 test, securing federal and state approvals to process samples at on-campus labs in Blacksburg and Roanoke. The university is now supporting local health departments throughout the region to identify patients suspected of having COVID-19. No patient samples are being collected at either of the labs — that step is done by health departments or health systems working with health departments.

At the late April announcement, **Michael Friedlander**, executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC and Virginia Tech's vice president of health sciences and technology said that, "with expanded testing becoming crucial to controlling the pandemic, in Virginia and the nation, Virginia Tech faculty, staff and graduate students went to work to answer the challenge." Friedlander was profiled in the May *Valley Business Front* issue on health care research.





SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Annette Patterson

Executive Summary:
The president and founder of The Advancement Foundation takes the reins as this column's writer – she knows all about nurturing small businesses.

Radical business growth

Life before COVID-19 seems eerily stagnant now! In the midst of the pandemic, The Advancement Foundation shifted 150+ entrepreneurs participating in the 6th Annual Gauntlet Business Program and Competition™ - Virginia's largest - to a completely virtual platform. This shift included not only classes, but think sessions and mentor meet ups. What was a pressure point on March 13th has now become the fulcrum for exponential thinking and doing. Exponential organizations are able to pivot without being bogged down with the old version of itself.

Now, more than ever before, we recognize we need it all. Main street businesses doing their thing to feed, clothe, and entertain us. High growth companies working to expand innovations, brought to the world while bringing new revenues back to our region. And freelancers churning out project work to move us forward.

Disruption is the new norm, driving stronger support across the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In fact, technology innovators are cultivating new ideas for sales outside our local communities and mentors are improving the capacity of main street by overhauling commerce.

Whether it is the Advancement Foundation's Innovation Mill in Vinton, RAMP in Roanoke City, or the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center, there is an army of resource agencies looking to unlock the talent of our region by providing pathways, support, and resources to re-imagine and to develop innovative solutions.

As Peter Diamandis has noted, competition for Fortune 500 companies is increasingly coming from two guys in a garage with a startup, leveraging exponentially growing technologies. Think about it... YouTube went from a startup funded by Chad Hurley's personal credit cards to being purchased by Google for \$1.4 billion - all in less than 18 months. Groupon leapt from conception to \$6 billion in value in less than two years. And Uber [was recently] valued at almost \$17 billion, which is ten times its value of just two years ago.

It proves out that, "knowledge is our lever." If you double the information, you can double the performance. So, I say we bank on our regional talent, expand our relevant communities of entrepreneurs trying to solve problems, and share the bounty of information, resources, and financial growth.

Everyone reading this can "get in the game" – YOU have a "superpower," an expertise you probably take for granted, that could propel any venture forward exponentially just by your sharing YOUR knowledge.

Want to connect your superpower with others? Want to benefit from like-minded regional talent and grow exponentially? Whether you are an entrepreneur, a knowledgeable businessperson, or represent a resource for businesses, get more information on this network of exponential organizations. Join us virtually at Welcome to Biz NATION. YOU have something to offer business warriors working in our community to build a vibrant sustainable community. YOUR investments in local business development could even turn into the next Uber. 

It's normal to feel anxious about uncertainty

Times like these tend to make us reassess everything, including investment risk tolerance. Big market pullbacks are scary. The recent one was compounded by liquidity issues as people had trouble getting their money when they really needed it. It is no wonder some are reconsidering mattress cash stashes.

This pandemic has forced us all to reflect on what it's like to go without pay. Whether you are still gainfully employed or on the unemployment rolls, you cannot help but wonder how you might do things differently in the future. That's not a bad thing.

Experian reported 78% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck. That was before an additional 30+ million people filed for unemployment. With Americans shouldering an average credit card debt of \$5,700, according to the Federal Reserve, situations like these make it tough to dig out.

Changing money habits

These numbers are grim, and do not account for what is happened since COVID-19 made matters worse. Obviously, folks need more basic financial education. It is time to quit spending what we don't have. Emotional decisions should never drive financial strategies, unless you can afford to lose it all. Now's the time to get back to data-driven, logical investment decisions.

Now's not the time to follow internet advice encouraging fad investments or go-it-alone approaches to eliminate professional fees. It is never a good idea to buy high and sell low, but many do not have a current choice on the latter. What is important is to be more thoughtful about future money decisions.

This is a good time to seriously reflect on what you are doing with your money. Sure, today it probably involves some crisis planning, but it doesn't have to be that way tomorrow.

Spring cleaning isn't only for physical stuff. Consider if past financial decisions are wise moving into the future. Where is your money going or parked? Are what seemed like good investments at the time no longer sensible?

What you can do today

For those paralyzed by fear and uncertainty, start small. Eliminate unnecessary expenses. Craft a plan now to set emergency money aside. Talk to a professional to get some objective and expert advice.

If you came into this global pandemic with cash reserves and retirement savings, they have probably been depleted a bit. This is a good time to reassess your investments and consider potential tax benefits from reallocating poor-performing funds. Don't be too hasty to bail, though. History shows recovery follows retractions. Where ever you are, you will get through this. Hopefully, it will be with a smarter plan for the future that has you better prepared for the unexpected. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Looking ahead, it's time to quit spending what we do not have.

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



Mike Wilson

Frank Martin

The Go-To Guy

By Tom Field

A Senior Associate Broker with Hall Associates, Inc., Frank Martin has been an agent for some of our region's most notable business transactions.

Valley Business FRONT introduces Frank Martin, a 2020 advisory board member representing the commercial real estate sector.

There's a reason why we call Frank Martin the "go-to guy" for commercial real estate. That's right. We're the ones who called him that and convinced him to include

the moniker in the current ad placements you've seen in this business journal.

To begin, Frank knows the Roanoke/New River Valley Region, "the market" in general, as well as the submarkets that impact our local and regional economies. No doubt much of that is due to his background as a marketing researcher and consultant with his previous business, Martin Research. He's well-versed in the workings and behind-the-scenes machinations that drive Roanoke and its surrounding communities from one form to the next. He's intuitive on whether some business development will have lasting impact, or is just a passing trend.

To a local / regional business journal like ours, an "informant" like Frank Martin is indispensable.

That degree of understanding, the insight to small details as well as the big picture, certainly must play a part in Frank's success in commercial real estate. What business owner wouldn't appreciate an agent who is so connected to "the street" and so much of what's going down on the commerce front? A person who knows what has moved, who did what, and why?

Frank Martin's current listings include some of the most prestigious office properties in the Roanoke and New River Valleys. News making current and former clients include the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, American National Bank, Metis Holdings, the McLeod Foundation,

Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, and The Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, as well as several local investors and companies looking to expand their presence in the Western Virginia markets.

Since joining Hall, Frank has used his marketing experience successfully on behalf of his clients, combining the traditional approaches of signs in the yard and telephone calls with the new age technologies of web, video and social media to increase the visibility of his listings and expose the properties to more potential buyers. In 2019 he received accreditation as a Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM), a designation achieved by fewer than 10% of commercial practitioners nationwide.

Frank consistently earns Sales Leader awards with Hall Associates, Inc. (Region's Oldest Commercial Brokerage) and is recognized as a top performer in the Region. He's a lifelong resident of the Roanoke Valley and has been involved extensively in the Roanoke Community as a Board Member and Past President of the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra, Baseball Coach, youth volunteer and a host of various fund-raising activities. He currently sits on the Board of the Roanoke Higher Education Center Foundation, is a REALTOR with the Roanoke Valley Association of Realtors, and is a member of the Roanoke City Planning Commission.

To put it simply, he's a good guy to go to. 

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MINDFUL BUSINESS

By Beth Bell

Executive Summary:
Perhaps more than ever being part of a support and networking group like a chamber of commerce may be vital to keeping your doors open.

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

Chamber of Commerce

Businesses join chambers of commerce for a variety of reasons. Some join as a civic duty to support the growth and development of the local economy or to influence public policy. Others join strictly for business development and networking opportunities or professional development opportunities. No matter the reason you joined and continue to renew your membership, there are many chamber benefits that can help your business along the road to recovery.

Workforce & Talent Development—Unemployment was at or close to an all-time high recently and some employees are choosing not to go back to work for a variety of reasons. In addition to being the ultimate people connectors, your chamber likely offers free job postings and will cross promote them on the chamber website, newsletter and social media channels.

Networking—Area chambers have continued their “coffee connection” meetings, chamber check-ins, virtual happy hours and other lead generating opportunities among members. During the Monday morning Chamber Check-Ins at Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce, official business is still being passed and connections are being made.

Marketing—All area chambers have been sharing how members adapted during the shutdown, promoting them in weekly newsletters and on social media. Marketing is going to be especially important during recovery, to remind consumers that your business is open and let them know how to find you. Marketing will also be used to lure customers back in your place of business. “New” habits formed over the last few months like increased online shopping and curbside pickup may still have their niche, however. Chambers offer multiple ways to market your business: Hot Deals (public promotions), member to member offers, and enhanced business directory listings. Sponsorship of events, including your offering in member information packets, and publication advertising are additional ways to get your brand in front of thousands of community members through the chamber.

Business—AdvocacyChamber employees have worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to be a conduit of resources, relief, assistance and government updates. They will continue to serve in this role and also be there to provide policy updates and inform on how to influence those that impact your business. Join your chamber’s webinars, panel discussions, and subscribe to their newsletter to keep informed.

In addition to the benefits listed above, studies have shown that consumers prefer to support businesses who are members of their local chamber of commerce. A study by The Schapiro Group showed that businesses who are members of a Chamber are seen as more reputable, have better business practices and care more about their customers and the community than non-chamber members. You can join a chamber at any time; many are offering new programming and flexible membership payment arrangements to assist businesses during this recovery period. 

Reemergence

The word “reemergence” has taken on such an important meaning within our society. It describes what we are waiting for and hoping for, as the myriad of businesses and nonprofits that were integral parts of our collective lives not so long ago now struggle to regain their footing and strength.

Let’s pivot here for a moment. Interestingly, the word “reemergence” also plays a role every seventeen years in the life cycle of the periodical cicada. Around this time of year, it shows up. Then after less than a month, it disappears from our daily lives. Gone, nowhere to be seen after over a decade and a half waiting patiently underground.

So, what in the world does the cicada have to do with the serious challenges facing us all; specifically the many nonprofit organizations that populate our community and their respective efforts to not only survive - but once again thrive? I would pose that there are a number of lessons to be gleaned.

First comes perseverance. The cicada nymph, when it looks around, all it sees for a long time is soil and darkness. But ultimately it experiences the warming sunshine. We, too, must hold on amidst dire circumstances and have faith that good days are ahead for our organizations.

Second comes change. The discarded cicada exoskeletons hanging on trees represent the epitome of change. We must likewise be adaptable and must be willing to change our operational models as needed, using the experiences of the last several months as teaching moments rather than disaster moments.

Third comes urgency. The cicada packs in its life above ground in just three weeks. This pandemic has clearly shown how vital our efforts are to the lives of so many in our community, so we must not become complacent as things “normalize” but rather remain fully-engaged every day in our missions with renewed urgency.

And finally, from the countless 17-year cicada cycles over the centuries, comes the perhaps the most important lesson – the realization that YES we WILL reemerge. We, the nonprofit community, will make our presence even more loudly known and hopefully show that we can be even better at what we do. 🦋



GOOD WORK

By Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

Executive Summary:

What in the world does the cicada have to do with the serious challenges facing us all? It’s a teachable moment.

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



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

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

Brian Powell is the owner and operator of Wine Gourmet in Roanoke Virginia.

Brian moved to Roanoke when he purchased Wine Gourmet in 2011. Brian attended Virginia Tech and is an avid Hokie Fan! A member of the Guild of Sommoliers, Brian resides in Roanoke and enjoys time with family and friends.

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

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]

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How is COVID-19 affecting Virginia's legal system?

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Virginia's legal system tremendously, placing business owners in a somewhat awkward position. Whether from effective suspension of collection or eviction proceedings, closure of the courts to all but emergency civil hearings, or other legal consequences, every business has had to adjust.

For example, with the Supreme Court of Virginia limiting the conduct of most civil hearings, over 763,000 civil cases have been continued in Virginia's courts through [later dates]. Non-emergency civil matters mostly have been kicked down the road. Most collection matters and evictions have been effectively halted in their tracks. Even filing deadlines, discovery deadlines and certain statutes of limitations in non-collection civil cases have been suspended temporarily. Though a new order of the Supreme Court of Virginia issued May 6 lays out additional guidance for resuming somewhat normal court business, many cases in the Roanoke Valley with original hearing dates in March or April have been continued to August or September.

Litigants also will have to adjust to a different paradigm for new cases filed from here on out, in that getting a "quick" hearing will be much harder. Additionally, courts will probably be reluctant to grant requested continuances over the next several months as they work through the backlog of cases. The existing lack of adequate administrative support in court Clerks' offices around the state will exacerbate delays. If there is a "second wave" of the virus causing another shutdown, things could get very difficult.

When hearings are once again permitted, we will see months more of continued virtual hearings by telephone or over the internet. Until alternate procedures are put in place to allow for prior submission of evidence by the parties or their attorneys, evidentiary hearings

LEGAL BUSINESS

By Tom Ashton

Executive Summary:

The pandemic has also slowed down the courts, as a legal system "new normal" takes hold.

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



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and trials will probably be curtailed or continued.

Litigants should take these things into account when they are negotiating contracts or settlements. Mediation and arbitration are likely to be somewhat more in demand, as they are likely to result in faster resolution. However, there may also be a bit of a backlog forming in mediation or arbitration as more disputes are shifted away from the courts.

Finally, attorneys are adjusting to this “new normal” as well. Modifying business models and practices, as well as client communication protocols, attorneys are working to establish more effective ways to meet client needs under the new and constantly changing restrictions. Businesses and litigants ought to be mindful when seeking advice from attorneys, as there is much more uncertainty as to the administration of justice in Virginia (and elsewhere) than there was only a few months ago.

Whatever happens, one thing is certain: we’re all in for a bumpy ride. 



When hearings are once again permitted, we will see months more of continued virtual hearings by telephone or over the internet.

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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

Insights from our publisher, who preferred strong recommendations over forced closings.

Confessions of a Luddite

I feel guilty.

I want to help. I want to support. I am an advocate, after all. Pretty much a top advocate and our region's biggest cheerleader for small business, as the founder and publisher of our business journal.

But I have difficulties (if not stress) in converting to the virtual. I use all the online conferencing apps. I've reluctantly signed on to livestream sessions, forced myself to revisit downloads, watched webinars with all the passion of a teenager asked to mow the lawn. Don't like them. Not the slightest impressed with even the newest technologies.

Turns out I'm a Zoomaphobe.

Which brings me back to the guilt. Although I'm not impressed with gadgetry, I am outright in awe of my fellow business men and women who have incorporated the virtual world into their operation that was hardly conducive to online transactions. We all know it. It's not the same engaging a professional service provider, a restaurant, a retailer, an entertainment venue through a screen on some digital device. The business owner/operator knows it, too. But they dish it out—their wares for us to consume. They do what they have to. They adapt the best way they can, and ask that we indulge a little inconvenience to adapt and be flexible enough to continue our support, our patronage, and at least a fraction of our consumption.

I've done that part. I exerted a little effort to continue fractional support. But I could have done more. I should have placed more orders and engaged more, rather than allow my displeasure to rule. Just because I believe our small businesses should have been allowed to operate and enact their own safety measures on behalf of their staff and customers, that kind of support does them little good during the great sequestering.

Yes, consumers have the right to choose who they do business with and how. But while we're off fighting to restore freedom and what some of us see as more reasonable measures, we still need to buy our local product or service at home, regardless of our preferences and inconveniences.

A Luddite is someone who resists technology and automation, primarily because he believes the change is not really an improvement or it destroys a way of life that is just fine the way it is. Historically, Luddites sabotaged the machinery at factories, because it threatened their jobs.

Those Luddites aren't around anymore. As someone who actually appreciates technology and sees it as one of the best sectors to cover in this business journal, I'm not really anywhere close to a Luddite. But I can act like one.

I'm sorry. 

Lessons from the “New Normal”

By the time you read this hopefully Virginia is already in at least Phase 2 of a three-part reopening of the economy, in the wake of COVID-19 restrictions that shut down or restricted many businesses – and no doubt will put some out of business, despite federal government intervention in the form of forgivable loans when a staff is kept intact through the end of this month at least.

How different this whole episode that, let us not forget, has killed almost a thousand of Virginians at last count and infected thousands of others has been. Its also become a political flashpoint over the debate about when to reopen the economy, versus keeping more Virginians safe from coronavirus infection. There is no doubt the outbreak has dealt a body blow to the economy.

Some things you probably learned more about during the pandemic: social distancing, wearing a mask (required when indoor public gathering places as of May 29 by Gov. Ralph Northam), working from home, ordering takeout in part to help local eateries hold on, picking up mixed drinks to go – and walking out of a restaurant with them in broad daylight, thanks to a Virginia ABC bending of the rules to allow restaurants to sell beer, wine and then mixed drinks for off premise consumption.

We learned the terms N-95 (for the masks most needed for healthcare workers), PPE, teleworking - many trying for first time ever as they work from home; telehealth, curbside-only pickup. Many realized how difficult it was to homeschool their children. We saw massive efforts on several fronts to send food home to those children, some of whom struggle to have a decent meal when they are not at school. We saw the generosity of local restaurants fighting their own battles to stay afloat but taking the time and dealing with the expense of preparing food for embattled healthcare workers – putting their own well-being on the line – and first responders.

We read, heard or watched on the news that some will have mental health issues associated with being socially isolated or living under the fear on contracting a virus for which there is no vaccine or cure at the moment. Some of us get choked up at news stories or commercials depicting those battling COVID-19, with slogans like “We’re in this together,” the battle cry.

We missed eating out with family and friends, making the craft brewpub scene, going to a movie or concert, being on the greenway or in local parks with a group, hugging a friend in public - just being normal. Lets all hope we learn from this cycle, we emerge from it better prepared for future pandemics, and perhaps take a away a few ideas (expanded remote working, more flexibility for what restaurants can sell, enhanced online features for small retailers etc.) that can ultimately make our economy even stronger. 🍷



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Is there really going to be a “new normal”?



GUEST COMMENTARY

By **Eddie Amos**

Executive Summary:

It's hard enough to recover with one – have a disaster plan in place.

The realities of a COVID-19 world

We live in unusual times. When pondering the various events of the past several months, nothing has shaken the confidence of the business world more than the scenario playing out with the COVID-19 pandemic. Alec Levenson (2020) of the MIT Sloan Journal reports that the U.S. is in the middle of a historic rupture to the economy. COVID-19 has created economic and financial uncertainties that will likely last for years. Organizations across the globe are adopting what some call the “new” normal.

As Governor Northam unveils a three-phase reopening of the Commonwealth, business as we know it will change for the foreseeable future - if not forever. There will likely be more remote workers, new distancing standards, and greater use of technology. I have been impressed by how quickly many organizations have adapted to the changes. A growing number of organizations are conducting business using technologies like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Virginia Tech, Virginia Western Community College, and our public schools are conducting classes using various online classroom software. We are fortunate that many can leverage technology to stay engaged, even if it is remotely. But some organizations were not so lucky. Many had no plans or technology to get them through this period, but it's never too late to start planning for the next event that may disrupt your business.

Business owners invest a tremendous amount of time, money, and resources to make their ventures successful, so it would seem natural to take steps to protect those investments. I can't tell you how many times that I've gone into a business and asked to see their Disaster Recovery Plan and were told that they would need to find it, or it hasn't been updated in a couple of years. This runs counter to the purpose of the plan and is usually not noticed until an actual disaster occurs.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires that most businesses with ten or more employees have a written emergency plan. Still, many may be outdated or only deal with a disaster, and not ongoing business functions. While COVID-19 may be a one-time event in our history, consider the following:

- According to the Department of Homeland Security - the number of declared major disasters have more than doubled since the 1990s.
- An estimated 25 percent of businesses do not reopen following a major disaster, according to the Institute for Business and Home Safety.
- A business can be hurt indirectly when disaster strikes customers or another business, such as a supplier or distributor.

- The realities of a COVID-19 world and an increasing dependency on computer technology calls for the additional protection of business operations.

The Department of Homeland Security stresses the practical benefits of building or updating your Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan (Make A Plan, 2020).

- Preparedness enhances a company's ability to recover from financial losses, loss of market share, damages to equipment or products, and business interruptions.
- Facilitates compliance with regulatory safety requirements of federal, state, and local agencies.
- It helps companies fulfill their responsibility to protect employees, the community, and the environment.
- Bolsters a company's security and enhances its credibility with employees, customers, suppliers, and the community.
- Preparedness steps taken by business

owners and operators may help reduce insurance costs.

As your business reopens, take the time to revisit your organization's future-readiness. First, make sure you have a plan. If you do not, there are excellent resources available from FEMA at www.ready.gov. Next, make the plan a living document and update it once a year. You should have a key employee responsible and make training mandatory. Update the plan to reflect the nature of your business and supply chain. Every organization requires a new focus on providing tools and guidance for remote working and thinking "outside the box" to solve problems related to business disruptions. 

Eddie Amos retired from GE as a Corporate Officer and Senior Vice President of GE Digital's portfolio of applications and solutions. Before GE, Amos was the Chief Technology Officer at Meridium. He was previously a Partner and General Manager of the Developer Platform and Tools group at Microsoft. Since retiring he spends his days working with various startups and serving on local technology boards.

Letters

Squashed it

I like that you've done the agri-business cover feature [May 2020 edition] in the spring in lieu of harvest time.

I came running into the house this afternoon yelling to Robert to "Come! Come! Hurry!" I had spotted a Squash Borer which meant all hands on deck to protect the summer and winter squash we have growing all over the place. Robert hurried out thinking I was bleeding and needed bandaging having no idea whatever a Squash Borer was. It's a nasty bug, darling. The plants needed spraying.

As an avid urban vegetable gardener in these uncertain times, I am more and more impressed with the need for all of us to be more aware of where our food comes from and to produce it whenever we can. The

current pandemic is going to reveal how shaky our food production network really is. Just as I could lose several squash plants and most of my harvest to one Squash Borer, farmers are dancing on a delicate line actually plowing under produce when people are lining up in cars miles long to get grocery handouts.

I think it is a great story to write about farmers, what their economic situation is like, and what they have to offer. Growing up on a working farm I heard this nightly at the dinner table and early morning before school on the radio hog prices broadcast. Farmers still are the backbone of this country and we need their brand of courage.

Well done.

Jane Dalier
Mississippi
(retired, former and charter account executive with FRONT)

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

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.

Two for neurodiversity

The term neurodiversity was coined by Australian social scientist Judy Singer and refers to the range or diversity of ways humans think, learn and relate to others.

Neurodiversity incorporates diagnostic labels such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia but it represents a paradigm shift in how these disabilities are viewed, especially in the workplace. Whereas in the past there was generally a greater focus on the negative attributes of neurocognitive differences, now there is emphasis on the special strengths and talents such diversity can bring to organizations.

Author Victoria Honeybourne focuses not only on the social justice case for offering employment opportunities to those with different brain wiring, she also makes a compelling business case for doing so. In *The Neurodiverse Workplace: An Employer's Guide to Managing and Working with Neurodivergent Employees, Clients and Customers* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers), Honeybourne provides examples of organizations that have benefited from the different perspectives of, and innovation driven by, their neurodivergent workforce. She highlights the ways in which they contribute creative solutions to age-old business challenges. Honeybourne encourages employers to leverage the talent of neurodiverse employees by understanding their individual needs and making the

“Diversity among brains is as enriching as cultural and racial diversity.”

necessary accommodations that will set them up for success.

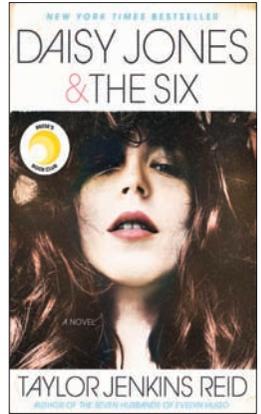
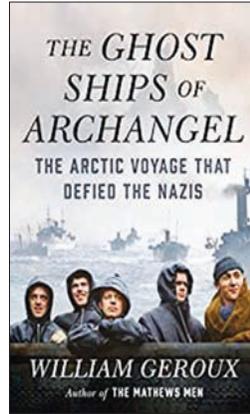
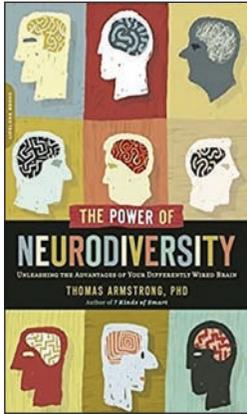
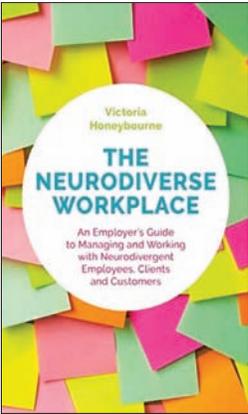
In *The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain* (Da Capo Lifelong Books), Thomas Armstrong recommends focusing on the specific abilities of each individual instead of regarding them simply as the sum of their disability label. He makes it clear that diversity among brains is as enriching as cultural and racial diversity, with chapters highlighting “the positive side of being autistic,” “the joys of the hyperactive brain” and “the anxiety advantage.”

As Armstrong states, “there is no standard brain, just as there is no standard flower, or standard cultural or racial group.”

—Shahina Piyarali

A war story you may not know

You may never have heard of the Allied convoys – American and British mostly – that ventured from Norway through the North Sea close to the Arctic Circle during World War II, delivering much-needed military supplies to Russia, our then uneasy military partner. The convoys were surrounded by escort ships equipped with guns and torpedoes, but still were often sitting ducks for Nazi U2 boats and aerial bomber attacks. Former Richmond Times-Dispatch reporter William Geroux writes about one such ill-fated convoy in *The Ghost Ships of Archangel: The Arctic Voyage That Defied The Nazis* (Viking, 2019),



in vivid detail. It's also a tale of bad decisions made from afar, as an Admiral in London gives the order to scatter the convoy, leaving dozens of military and merchant ships in the convoy ships even more vulnerable. Concerns over a vaunted Nazi battleship that never even joined the fight, the Tirpitz, led to the order.

More than half the ships in the PQ-17 convoy wound up at the bottom of the North Sea. Those that did make it to the Russian port of Archangel got a birds-eye preview of the Soviet regime to come during the Cold War: citizens treated brutally and starved to death. Ghost Ships refers to four convoy members who defied the scatter order and decided to band together – at one point hiding in ice fields less than 600 miles from the North Pole – and painting their ships white so it was harder to detect by Nazi subs and scout planes. The supply convoys were halted after PQ-17 until the Nazis were forced to pull their North Sea military assets to fight elsewhere as the Allies made advances that led to the end of the war. Geroux's book is a fascinating, easy to read tale of courage, ingenuity and decision making gone wrong, one that is hard to put down.

—Gene Marrano

Rockumentary Transcript

Bummer, man. I was all prepped to love *Daisy Jones & The Six* (Penguin Random

House; 2020). This was supposed to be all about recapturing my times. The 70's rock and roll feel good coming of age free spirit living—right there in the mix with the *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* and *Almost Famous* flicks. And there you have it... That's why Taylor Jenkins Red's story didn't jive with me. It was simply the wrong medium.

Our format wasn't as clever (for me) as I know it was intended. Ninety-nine percent pure transcript, with occasional brief intro setups (in italics); it's simply a written record of band members talking. In this case, the fact that it's a fictional report didn't exactly enhance the reading experience. At least an actual documentary transcript allows you to empathize or judge the characters. The voices of our characters weren't very distinct from one another, either. Because I love the era, I kept going; but Daisy is a little flat and just ok. The format is all ready and easy for a movie though... (and crazy that I just Googled to find a television series *IS* under works, pseudo-Fleetwood Mac, thanks to a bump by Oprah and production by Reese Witherspoon). On screen HAS to be much better.

—Tom Field

The reviewers: **Shahina Piyarali** is a writer and review for Book No Further's Shelf Awareness communique; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT; **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT.



The cattle are back >

Livestock haven't grazed at the **Catawba Sustainability Center** in Roanoke County for more than 20 years. But this spring a herd of Angus cattle is pastured on the 377-acre center as part of a program to help beginning farmers. The center's small-farm incubator program gives beginning farmers a "place to get their feet wet," Manager **Adam Taylor** says. "Access to land is by far the No. 1 thing that deters young farmers or beginning farmers. You don't have to go buy something before you know if agriculture is right for you. You can do it with training wheels on because it's a Virginia Tech farm, so there is always someone here from whom you can ask advice."

Tech ramps up face shield production; asks for community support >

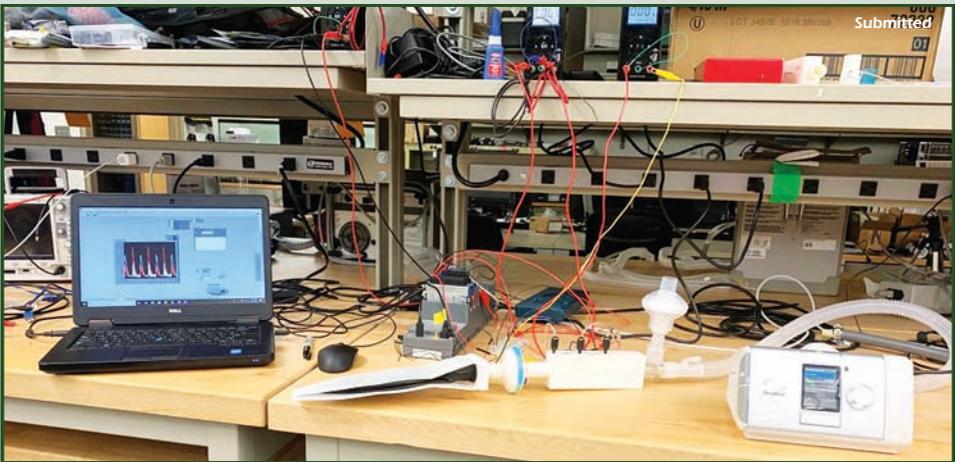
In late April **Virginia Tech** launched an effort to create thousands of face shields for medical personnel in the New River Valley who need protection while treating patients with COVID-19. The production team also reached out to volunteers who own or have access



to 3D printers to help make headpieces for the face shields, which are being delivered to hospitals in the Roanoke and New River valleys and to local emergency responders. Demand for the face shields was high: LewisGale Hospital Montgomery requested at least 300 shields after second wave of prototypes was sent to employees. The goal was to make 200 to 300 a week.

VTC Med School will expand >

The **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine** has received all approvals needed to grow its class size from 42 to 49. The expansion will start with the Class of 2024, which is set to begin study this fall. Last fall Dean **Lee Learman** formed a Class Size Incremental Increase Task Force to look at possible expansion. The result – the next First Year class will go from 42 to 49 students. After another year or two of analysis, Learman, who succeeded founding Dean Cynda Johnson last summer, says that number could go to 56. Any further student class size expansion might involve the need for a bricks and mortar building expansion Learman said in late April. (Johnson targeted a future class size around 100 during an exit interview in 2019). "If there was ever a time when we needed a strong, health-systems minded physician workforce, it is now, said Learman, "we look forward to welcoming 49 incoming students in the Class of 2024 to increase our contribution to that workforce."



Responding to possible ventilator shortage >

To address potential ventilator shortages, mechanical engineers at **Virginia Tech** partnered with a **Carilion Clinic** physician to upgrade bilevel positive airway pressure (BiPAP) machines, commonly used for treating sleep apnea, into makeshift ventilators. "Carilion Clinic has gone to great lengths to prepare for a surge of Coronavirus patients. Right now, ventilators are well in hand, but we know that proactively preparing for the worst-case scenario, while hoping for the best, is the smartest move we can make," said **Edmundo Rubio**, Carilion's chief of pulmonology and critical care medicine, and a professor of medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. In late April "If at some point, we run out of ventilators, we now have a back-up option, thanks to our collaboration with Virginia Tech." One UVA model shows the Virginia COVID-19 infection peak may not occur until late summer.

Warm Hearth Village steps up for their own >

The **Warm Hearth Village** senior living community in Blacksburg held a fundraising campaign recently - led by the Warm Hearth Foundation, residents, family members, fellow employees and community members that donated more than \$20,000 to support employees and their families. Hourly employees unable to work from home, whose standard hours have been cut by 25% or more, and employees furloughed due to COVID-19 are eligible to receive assistance from this fund. It also provides financial assistance for any employee or close family member who has been diagnosed with the virus. **Amy Slone**, Associate Director



of Development said the Foundation has been overwhelmed by the support received for the fund. "This is an unsettling time for everyone, yet we have received donations from near and far to help support our staff."

WHV has also committed \$30,000 per month in supplemental pay for hourly, front-line employees who continue to work on campus, (or in the greater community through Warm Hearth at Home), during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We are eager to thank our employees for their dedication to the residents and clients we are privileged to serve, under extremely challenging circumstances" said **Ferne Moschella**, President and CEO, in a news release.

SML says it's Stronger Together >

Nearly 30 community leaders from across the region including County Administrators, Board of Supervisors, CEOs, and small business owners, have come together to support the



#StrongerTogetherSML campaign, an initiative spearheaded by the **Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce (SMLRCC)**.

It was launched at the start of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to inspire residents and visitors to support local businesses in a variety of ways including online shopping, buying gift certificates, and ordering takeout, curbside, or delivery service. "The #StrongerTogetherSML campaign is intended to project unity, strength and togetherness as one lake community," stated **Christopher Finley**, executive director. "The Smith Mountain Lake community has faced many times of trial before. Together, we will endure this crisis and emerge on the other side better and stronger than ever."

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

A casualty of the (Coronavirus) war >

Wall Street Tavern

In downtown Roanoke it was closing permanently in mid-May. A note on Facebook from the owner **Catherine Justice**: My heart is very heavy today as many of you have heard the news about Wall Street Tavern, Roanoke closing our doors for good. We are just one of many, many small businesses affected by Covid-19. I will be forever grateful for the years that Roanoke supported and loved us. Above all.... we had the BEST staff in the world. A staff that took me under their wings and guided me through a business I have no background in..... that era of human kindness will be the ultimate impact that WST has on my heart & soul. If anyone else in the small business world is feeling hopeless, confused & simply defeated; do not hesitate to reach out. For now I will focus all of my attention to my other small business Punch Boutique. Godspeed and I love you all.



VT President tells seniors we've got your back >

During what became regular town hall meetings during the COVID-19 campus shutdown, **Virginia Tech** president **Tim Sands** and other senior university officials told undergraduate students in late April that the university stands ready to offer them support as they complete the 2019-20 academic year under "extraordinary circumstances." Added Sands, "I'd say the defining word for what we're experiencing, especially with our students, is 'disruption.' Our seniors have missed out on the end of their academic year in Blacksburg, or wherever they were planning to be this last couple of months of their time at Virginia Tech. That's disappointing for everyone."

VT officials spoke about emergency financial aid that might be available, online resources to help complete the academic year and a fall semester where social distancing and perhaps some hybrid online/on campus class model may be in place. Those decisions could be finalized by this month during Board of Visitors meetings. At a subsequent Town Hall Sands says they anticipate the fall semester taking place at the Blacksburg campus – as close to normal as possible.

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EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Miller

Ken Miller has been appointed vice president for finance at Virginia Tech. Miller has served as interim vice president for finance since the retirement of Dwight Shelton in fall 2019. In the role Miller is a strategic business partner to the senior leadership of the university. He received a bachelor's in accounting from Virginia Tech and is a licensed Certified Public Accountant.

Virginia Tech alumna **Elsa Murano** has been selected as the sole U.S. representative on the newly formed Food Security of the Americas Advisory Council — created to address the mounting food supply issues



Murano

that are resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. "The initial members of the Food Security of the Americas Advisory Council include representatives from eight countries. After earning her Ph.D. in food science and technology from Virginia Tech in 1990, Murano went on to serve as the undersecretary for food safety at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as a member of the board of directors for Hormel Foods, and as Texas A&M University's first female and first Hispanic-American president.

The Roanoke County School Board has selected **Jill Green** as the new principal at Northside High School, effective

July 1. Green will be returning to Roanoke County Public Schools after having previously served at Glenvar Middle School and Northside Middle School. Green replaces Jason Breeding, who is leaving RCPS to pursue other interests. She began as a teacher at Andrew Lewis Middle School. In 2001, she became the principal at Glenvar Middle School. Green left Roanoke County Public Schools in 2005 to become an instructional supervisor in Botetourt County. A year later, she was named director of human resources for Botetourt County Public Schools and has remained in that position until this new announcement.

LEGAL FRONT

Spilman Thomas & Battle (Spilman) announced that **Risa S. Katz-Albert** has joined the firm as an associate, where she focuses



Katz-Albert

on general litigation. Katz-Albert previously worked as a staff attorney with The Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, as an assistant commonwealth attorney for the Campbell County Commonwealth Attorney's Office, and as a judicial law clerk for the 23rd Judicial Circuit.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

Lumos Networks, a fiber-based telecommunications provider, has added **Chad Baldwin** to its regional small business sales team, to support new and existing business customers in Lynchburg, Roanoke, and neighboring communities. Baldwin

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Baldwin

previously was a Business Account Executive with Comcast Business. He is a native of Roanoke, an honors graduate of Liberty University, and a resident of Botetourt County.

SENIOR FRONT

Richfield Living has announced the recent hiring of **Vickie Meeks Miller** as Community Engagement Manager. Miller is a graduate of Old Dominion University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications. She brings with her greater than five years of experience in the senior care industry in both enrichment and leadership roles.

Compiled by
Gene Marrano

Have a career announcement?

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



New Kiosk in Floyd

The **Town of Floyd** received funding from the Virginia Tourism Corporation to design a creative and artistic point of interest map to guide tourists and residents through the town, encouraging walkability and repeat visitation amongst our wealth of business establishments. Maps are available at the Floyd Visitor Center and many local businesses, as well as a digital interactive version on the town's website.

"Once the map came to life we considered

additional ways we could use this new tool to bring awareness to the assets within the Town of Floyd" stated **Kayla Cox**, Town Manager. "With the support of **Citizens Telephone Cooperative**, we have purchased and installed a weatherproof, touch screen informational kiosk at the Warren G. Lineberry Park restroom facilities." The kiosk will highlight each of the town's local points of interest such as lodging, retail, dining, historic locations, as well as outdoor recreational opportunities and events happening in Floyd.

Citizens' Web Designer, **Paul Harris**, created a web interface that can be updated by the town. **Citizens' Security and IT departments** also assisted with the installation.

"The new kiosk is available 24/7 and provides a great resource for residents and visitors. It is a wonderful tool to support our local businesses and an information center showcasing current show casing current local events." shared **Pat Sharkey**, Floyd Tourism Director. "A big THANK YOU to both the Town of Floyd and Citizens."

Citizens Telephone collaborated with the Town to provide internet service to the device, as well as free WiFi services to the patrons of the Warren G. Lineberry Park.



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Airport gets funding as passenger traffic takes nosedive

A CARES Act federal loan of almost 21 million dollars means Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport should be able to avoid the worst when it comes to financial impact from the pandemic. Airport Executive Director Tim Bradshaw told Roanoke City Council in late April that the facility was losing about a million dollars a month during as COVID-19 stay at home and distancing requirements took hold. Airlines were not paying landing fees and car rental companies could not pay for their space at the airport said Bradshaw. The number of flights at ROA had been cut in half to around 60 per week in late April. "It's going to be a long road to recovery for us. It's unfortunate. We were doing extremely well. One day last week we had 25 people flying." Some good news – Bradshaw said ten million dollars of that CARES act money will be used for airport capital projects that will also create local jobs.

Help for local food bank

Feeding Southwest Virginia received a \$25,000 grant in mid-April from Carter Bank & Trust for COVID-19 relief efforts. The money was earmarked to purchase food to distribute to "food insecure" families in Southwest Virginia where the Salem-based food bank saw the most need. Other organizations including Truist and P1 Technologies have also stepped up recently with challenge grants and outright donations.

Feeding Southwest Virginia also started its summer feeding program early this spring, helping to support programs being organized by school systems as they sent food to children who were normally assured of a nutritious meal at least once a day - when their schools were open. The \$50,000 grant from Truist Financial Corporation purchased 4,500 pre-packaged food boxes - enough food for a family of 4 for four days.

City of Roanoke steps up for small businesses

Roanoke City officials announced a COVID-19 relief fund intended to help small businesses recover as soon as possible. Businesses that apply can receive up to \$3000 to go towards utilities, rent, or other needs, but those applying must meet certain requirements. It's a partnership between the city, the Economic Development Authority and TAP.

Layoffs impact public sector also

It is not only the Virginia and national workforce that was losing jobs at numbers approaching the Great Depression as the coronavirus business shutdown/restrictions took full effect. In late April Roanoke County announced it would lay off 287 part-time employees while all County facilities are closed to the public due to the coronavirus pandemic. The layoff was intended to be temporary and part-time employees will be given the option to return to work. "The County took early and

positive steps to keep all of its employees working where possible," said County Administrator Dan O'Donnell in a news release. "We simply don't have the revenue stream to support regular staffing levels." The cuts affected 232 part-time employees working in Parks and Recreation, 50 in the Public Libraries and five from other departments. The majority are utilized at the Green Ridge Recreation Center, Brambleton Center and six libraries, all closed as of March 23 until further notice.

RoCo library staffers donate PPE

Roanoke County Public Libraries employees donated off 50 face shields to the Roanoke County Fire & Rescue staff in mid-April. The face shields were made by staff members with a 3D printer at the South County Library (the public normally has access to that printer when the libraries are open). The face shields were provided to the Fire & Rescue staff to provide additional protection for first responders.

VVBR says coming to the region is "Worth the Wait"

Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge (VBR) has launched an online Worth the Wait marketing campaign. Saying it is a message of optimism and hope, Visit VBR developed an in-house campaign, encouraging local residents and future visitors to "get inspired and dream about making new memories in Virginia's Blue Ridge." It

features a Worth the Wait video on the Visit VBR website and social media channels, with resources, virtual activities, online tours, virtual events, coloring sheets, and VBR-themed games including trivia and bingo. There are also listings of opportunities to support local businesses with VBR takeout maps, online shopping options, and ways to participate in local campaigns and fundraisers.

Local business owned by Valley Business Front columnist recognized

Leadership Management International, Inc. (LMI), recently announced its top franchise and associate awards for 2019. OpX Solutions, based in Roanoke, was recognized as the #3 LMI franchisee in the World and #1 franchisee in the Americas Region (North, Central, and South America). Additionally, Lois James, OpX Solutions' Director of Leadership Development, was recognized as Rookie Sales Associate of the Year for the Americas Region. This award is given to the LMI associate with the highest annual sales who has been with LMI fewer than two years.

Mike Leigh, President of OpX Solutions (and author of our Business Operations column), recognizing his team's performance, commented, "It was great to be recognized by LMI for the incredible success we've had. Our business has steadily grown for the past eight years as more organizations have learned how we effectively develop teams and help them achieve their goals.

I'm extremely proud of the team we've put together at OpX Solutions, and their dedication to helping others achieve greater success."

Private school, day care operator launches meals program

HoneyTree Early Learning Centers and the McLeod Family Foundation (which owns HoneyTree and operates a growing private school now grades K-2 in Roanoke) instituted a Meals Program in April, offering free, nutritious meals to the children and families in the Roanoke and New River Valleys who were not currently being served by other food distribution programs. In its first week, the Meals Program delivered over 2,000 meals to families and 570 meals to its front-line employees.

This service was made possible said the Foundation through a partnership with locally owned/operated restaurants. HoneyTree and the McLeod Family Foundation are providing meals for over 150 staff while also supporting local restaurants hard-hit due to COVID-19 related

mandates. Several local restaurants have partnered with HoneyTree and the McLeod Family Foundation to offer substantial discounts that have been extended to all staff. In turn the program is helping to keep more restaurant employees on the job as well, helping to prepare those meals.

Botetourt Kiwanians: dining with a purpose

Botetourt Kiwanis members started converging on local restaurants offering curbside service in mid-April, doing their part to help out local businesses losing money due to the governor's stay-at-home order said club president Ed Lynch. "Members simply want to say Thank You to a local business." Kiwanians chose a Restaurant of the Week, starting with Botetourt businesses that have supported Club activities in recent years. "These are people who have stood with us when we've needed to sell ads for the magic show, or get sponsors for our golf tournament, etc. It's now our turn to stand with them until they're allowed to

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re-open for regular business." Lynch, who chairs the political science department at Hollins University, said he hoped the Kiwanis Club's effort would be copied by other service organizations.

Salem Red Sox Unveil New Premium Seating

While the 2020 Salem Red Sox season is delayed (as of early May due to COVID-19) ballpark improvements continue with new premium seating, located directly behind home plate. Strike Zone seating will feature 184 "4Tops" stadium seats, with durable, breathable mesh, creating airflow that reduces surface temperature and provides extended comfort. "We are very excited to have the new 4Tops premium seats at the ballpark for

Red Sox fans to enjoy," said Wendy Delano, City of Salem, Director of Civic Facilities. "This section of seats will bring a new level of experience to the ballpark – these are certainly going to be the best seats in the house."

This ballpark enhancement comes after months of planning and a collaboration between the City of Salem and the Salem Red Sox to develop a long-term plan to preserve the history and economic vitality of the ballpark. "Salem and the surrounding valley should be proud of their community leadership," said Salem Red Sox Managing Director Jeff White. "All recognize what a precious asset the Ballpark is. It's now over 25 years old, but the setting is still beautiful, and the structure is as



The 'Worth the Wait' video campaign [Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge] highlights what the region has to offer. — Page 19

handsome and fitting as ever. We look forward to keeping it that way.”

Historic Gish's Mill property in Vinton to be repurposed

At a mid-April Vinton Town Council meeting, there was news that a buyer has been found to redevelop the historic Gish's Mill property. Redeveloper David Hill is working with David Trinkle, the owner of several "Fork" restaurants, to re-imagine the property. Trinkle says the silos could be turned into Air BnB units. Also planned is a possible specialty market and a wraparound deck facing Glade Greek. The contract is subject to several terms during a nine-month due diligence period.

More healthcare workers in the pipeline

Governor Ralph Northam signed an executive order in mid-April as it was estimated that up to 30,000 additional workers are needed in Virginia's hospitals, long-term care facilities, and public health departments, should a COVID-19 surge occur. The order adds physician offices and other health care facilities, including hospitals, nursing facilities, and dialysis facilities to have out-of-state licensees provide in-state care. It allows Virginia-licensed nurse practitioners with two or more years of clinical experience to practice without a collaborative agreement. It provides additional flexibility to hospitals in the supervision of interns, residents, and fellows, and allows hospitals to use fourth year medical students in the

provision of care. Executive Order Fifty-Seven also allows for expanded use of telehealth. The order is in effect through June 10 unless amended or rescinded by a further executive order. It comes days after Northam also called for additional medical and non-medical volunteers as part of a statewide effort to combat novel coronavirus.

Taking out Hunger in the region

A group of local organizations are working together to provide "a socially distant dinner with dignity" to the most vulnerable families during COVID-19, while also supporting locally owned small businesses in the Roanoke area. The organizations involved include Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia, United Way Roanoke Valley, Boys & Girls Clubs of SWVA, Child Health Investment Partnership, Feeding Southwest Virginia, Kids SOAR, Local Office on Aging, Orchard Hills Achievement Center, and West End Center.

"Takeout Hunger" is a 7-week campaign (through mid-late June) looking to provide 2,000 hot meals to local families per week through existing distribution channels by purchasing meals from local restaurants. The total fundraising goal is \$100,000. Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia has committed \$10,000 to kick start this regional effort. One hundred percent of all donations to "Takeout Hunger" will be used to purchase meals from local business own-

ers. "By supporting local businesses and families, we are all working together to ensure our community is strong and we are ready to reopen for business when the crisis has passed," says Michelle Davis, CEO of Boys and Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia.

RU says it will be full speed ahead

Radford University has announced that it will reopen for the Fall 2020 semester - with full operations, such as on-campus housing, dining services, and face-to-face instruction beginning August 24th. In a news release Radford says each vice president will develop a "phased approach" for the return of employees, based on divisional needs and priorities.

Task force looks at how to get Virginia working again

In late April Governor Ralph Northam announced the COVID-19 Business Task Force, "to provide advice and guidance to the [State] Cabinet on a safe, responsible strategy for easing restrictions on businesses and individuals." The task force comes from a variety of Virginia industries, scales, geographies, and backgrounds across the Commonwealth, including restaurants, breweries, wineries, small and large retailers, fitness centers, hair salons, barber shops,

spas and estheticians, museums, hospitality groups, campgrounds, and entertainment venues. "They understand that our public health and business interests are aligned—we must take measures that both ensure the safety and confidence of consumers and prevent the spread of disease," said Northam. Members of Virginia's COVID-19 Business Task Force from this region include Katy Brown, from the Barter Theatre in Abingdon and Franky Marchand, from Volvo Trucks North America in Pulaski.

Tech expects revenue drain

Virginia Tech officials are projecting they could lose between 50 and 67 million dollars in revenue over the spring and summer due to the economic fallout from the pandemic. School President Tim Sands believes in the fall semester, Tech could lose anywhere from \$48 million to \$240 million, estimates which do not include the potential impact of reduced state funds from the pandemic impact.

COVID job impact

The Roanoke region could experience job losses of 20 thousand to 35 thousand at the peak of a recession caused by the pandemic. According to the Roanoke Regional Partnership, these job losses would translate into unemployment levels reaching between 12 and 20 percent. The

most severe effect will be seen in hospitality and entertainment businesses, which have been forced to close or significantly cut back due to the pandemic. The Partnership estimates more than half of those jobs will be lost - and potentially as many as 85 percent.

*RoCo Supervisors:
let's get back to work*

Led by board chairman David Radford, all five Roanoke County supervisors held a May 1 news conference outside the shuttered Green Ridge Recreation Center, describing a letter they then sent to Governor Ralph Northam, imploring him to consider reopening businesses in the Commonwealth on a regional basis – starting with areas like the Roanoke Valley where the impact to date of the COVID-19 virus had been far less impactful than in northern Virginia for example. “We are confident that our businesses can reopen in a safe and sanitary manner. They can follow the same health and safety guidelines adopted by the essential businesses that are currently open. We also trust that our citizens will be personally responsible in practicing preventive measures, such as social distancing and good personal hygiene,” read the letter in part. That is exactly what happened – on the Governor’s

timetable- when Phase 1 commenced on May 15. Parts of Northern Virginia and the City of Richmond however received permission to delay that reopening – the first leg of the “Forward Virginia” plan – to May 28.

Matt Hagan update

With the National Hot Rod Association drag racing season on hold until August due to COVID-19 precautions, race car driver/cattle farmer/hemp farmer Matt Hagan (profiled here last month) and his Don Schumacher Racing team are doing what they can to fight COVID-19. The team is 3-d printing masks for nurses and doctors. NHRA drivers are donating autographed items to be auctioned off for a relief fund as well.

Grandin Village businesses try to keep afloat

Before the Phase I lifting of business restrictions began a three-part and indefinite (timewise) reopening of the economy, Grandin Village merchants put out a call for support from Roanokers. “The most important thing the public can do right now is interact with us and spend money locally. Our businesses have risen to this challenge and reinvented themselves, and now more than ever we need the surrounding community to help us

make ends meet,” said Karen Kessler, Grandin Village Business Association. Among the suggestions made: shop online if not at the store; buy gift certificates, write an online review, and share the “buzz” about those merchants with neighbors and friends.

Foundation issues COVID-19 grants

The Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia issued more than \$90,000 in a second round of COVID-19 Disaster Relief Grants. Those recipients include Bradley Free Clinic, Children’s Trust of Roanoke Valley, Mill Mountain Zoo, Healing Strides, Restoration Housing and several other non-profits.

Help from United Way’s special fund drive

United Way of Roanoke Valley announced recipients that were awarded a combined \$60,000 in the first phase of funding through the United Way of Roanoke Valley COVID-19 Community Response Fund. (More than \$100,000 was raised in total). “We are grateful for the community leaders across our region for coming together as part of this team to thoughtfully guide these decisions and determine how to best maximize available resources to do the most good,” said Abby

Hamilton, President & CEO of United Way of Roanoke Valley. Phase 1 Funding from the COVID-19 Disaster Relief emergency funds went to Feeding SWVA, Local Office on Aging, LEAP, ARCH Roanoke, KIDS SOAR, Roanoke Area Ministries, YMCA of Franklin County and Faith Network of Franklin County. Phase 2 Funding will culminate in another round of assistance in June.

FloydFest 2020 is shut down

July’s FloydFest 2020 “Vision Quest” was canceled in mid-May due to the coronavirus pandemic. Across the Way Productions will soon announce a new logo and theme for FloydFest 2021, which will take place next year from July 21st through the 25th. Organizers are asking 2020 ticket holders to consider options other than a refund to help keep the festival financially viable - and they are offering incentives for those that do that, like VIP passes for 2021. Sam Calhoun is the Chief Operating Officer for Across the Way Productions: “ it was definitely the right thing to do. It was the smartest and safest decision for the patrons at our festival. We really put our heart and soul into everything we do, so it was a very difficult decision to say goodbye to 2020 – but [we] look ahead with much positivity to 2021.”

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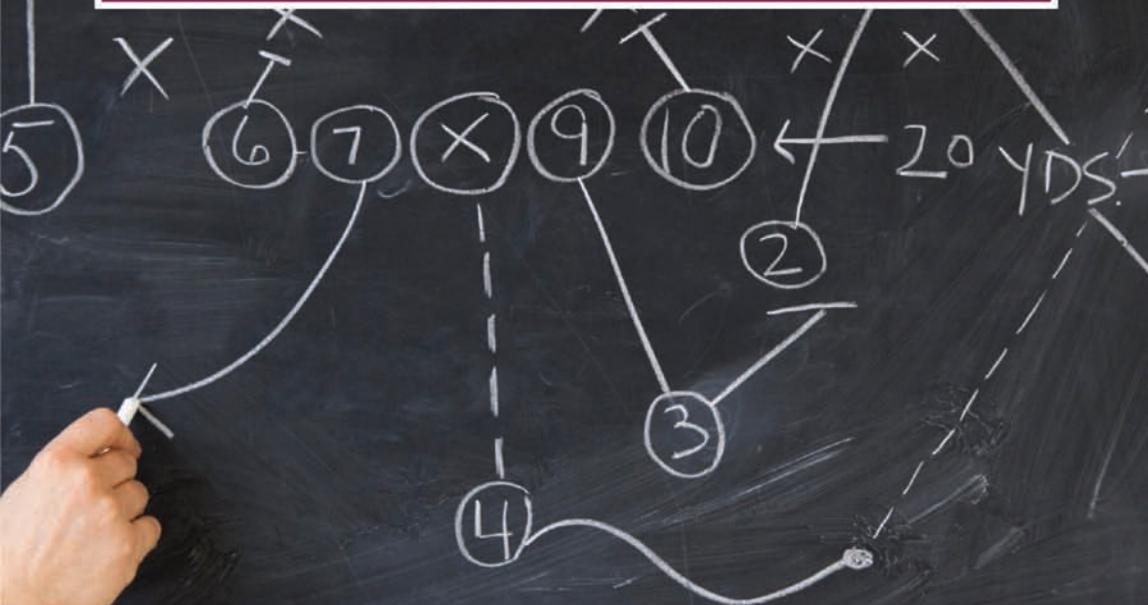
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