

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 138

MARCH 2020

The Branch Group

Avis Construction

SFCS

SML Chamber's  
Chris Finley

Freedom First Credit  
Union's Paul Phillips

What's New in Wasena

[vbFRONT.com](http://vbFRONT.com)

A close-up portrait of Catherine Underwood, a woman with long dark hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a light-colored collared shirt and a pearl earring.

# Construction Rules

Catherine Underwood  
Branch Builds

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Left to right: Chase Clark - Chief Commercial Credit Officer, Scott Leffel - EVP Market Executive, William Dixon - VP Business Banking, Brent Jenkins - VP Commercial Lending, Paul Phillips - President & CEO, Neal Cummings, SVP Commercial Lending. *Not pictured: Brian Taylor - Commercial Lending*

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

This month's issue offers a snapshot of a few businesses in our local construction/design/redevelopment sector. You may have noticed an uptick in some development projects in your community; and we invite you to expand the story by sending us a note or letter to the editor ([news@vbFRONT.com](mailto:news@vbFRONT.com)).

Our book review section (which we've had since the beginning) is changing to encompass reviews on all arts... from music to performances to visual art to cultural events to culinary. We welcome brief takes on any of these experiences—particularly local productions—and you can include a photo. Inspired by a band? Art show? Theatrical performance or dance? Museum or gallery? Festival? Restaurant? Again, that feedback goes to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto:news@vbFRONT.com) (submitter's name and photo/image credit is required).

It is input and engagement like this that verifies our readers are "partners" with Valley Business FRONT.

Let's keep the story going.



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor



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**vbFRONT.com**

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# A GROWING BRANCH

by Cricket Maiden



“Fixing unskilled results is expensive.”  
— Page 21

Cover photography of Catherine Underwood by Cricket Maiden.

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# MARCH



Brian Bongard



Ally Bowersock



Mike Leigh



Cricket Maiden



Ian Price



Pugh & Rotanz

## Advisory Board

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

# 2020 CONTRIBUTORS



**Dan Dowdy**



**Tom Field**



**Lesa Hanlin**



**Gene Marrano**



**Denise Membreño**



**Carrie Poff**



**Michael Shelton**



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Wine Gourmet / retail



**Amy White**  
Virginia Western Community  
College / education



**Steve Zegarski**  
Branch Group / construction

“”  
When  
I first  
started...  
I was using  
colored  
pencils.

— Page 11

Biographies and  
contact information  
on each contributor  
are provided on Page 36.

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# A GROWING BRANCH

By Cricket Maiden

---

This multi-layered, multi-faceted Roanoke-based company covers all the bases.

After being in business for over 55 years, the Branch Group has constructed a vast array of public and private projects while simultaneously building itself into the 800+ person company it is today.

In the 1950's Bill H Branch, the company's namesake, teamed with C. W. McAlister to pursue road and site construction. After later purchasing the founding company outright from McAllister the business was chartered as Branch and Associates. Over the years Branch continued to grow by

adding other companies such as G.J. Hopkins, E.V. Williams Company and R.E. Daffan, Inc.

## Company Structure

Today the company is organized under the umbrella of the Branch Group, which also provides corporate services such as HR, Accounting and Finance, IT etc. to support its operating companies: Branch Builds and Branch Civil. There are also

Virginia Western Community College STEM Building

Courtesy of The Branch Group





Courtesy of The Branch Group

the MEPS or the Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing Structural companies - G.J Hopkins and L.A Lacy.

"Branch Builds does anything vertical (buildings) and Branch Civil does everything horizontal." notes Cathy Underwood, the Vice President of Branch Builds.

As for the MEPS, "Hopkins and L.A. Lacy don't do all the work on all of our jobs. They are an entity of their own. They have their own president, structure and their own people. They pursue their own work. Sometimes it can be a project that we are doing, but more often than not it is not a Branch Builds project," Underwood continues.

"We have a number of MEPS partners that we talk to and work with around the region. It has been structured that way intentionally since the beginning. We match up the best projects with the best subcontractors. We use the term value based — the trade partner that can bring the best value to a project is who we partner with."

## Growing Forward

Underwood has a unique perspective on how Branch has changed over the years, having been with the company for a little over 20 years. "The biggest change I would say would be our growth." With a bachelor's and Master's in Engineering from Virginia Tech, Underwood started with the company as an estimator in 2000. Back then Branch and Associates occupied a small portion of an office

Liberty University Library

Cathy Underwood,  
LEED AP, Vice President,  
Branch Builds

Cricket Maiden



Courtesy of Branch Civil

Southgate Bridge and entrance at Virginia Tech

building on Frontage Road in Southwest Roanoke, eventually expanding to take over the bottom floor. They outgrew that space and moved into their own dedicated building on Airport Road in 2007, while also opening offices in other cities.

“Even though Roanoke is still our Headquarters we now have offices in Northern Virginia, one in Richmond and most recently we opened one in Charlotte, North Carolina” notes Underwood, who

splits her time between the Roanoke and Charlotte offices.

## Embracing Technology

From a technology standpoint the construction industry itself has grown leaps and bounds. New software has enabled companies to take their work “past the paper,” streamlining workflow and opening better lines of communication.

Roanoke College Cregger Center

Courtesy of The Branch Group



# BRANCHING OUT

## The Branch Group Timeline

- 1950's Bill H. Branch and C.W. McAlister teamed to pursue road and site construction.
- 1960's Bill Branch Bill Branch purchases the founding company from C.W. McAllister.
- 1963 Chartered as Branch and Associates.
- 1970's Company adds a mechanical contracting division and a building construction division.
- 1982 Branch becomes an employee owned company.
- 1984 Branch and Associates purchases G.J. Hopkins, which Branch Mechanical was eventually merged into.
- 1986 The company reorganizes. The corporate and accounting departments of Branch and Associates become The Branch Group, Inc. At the same time, the highway and equipment division became Branch Highways, Inc.
- 1997 Branch Highway continues to grow with purchase of E.V. Williams Company, a site development and highway construction firm headquartered in Hampton Roads/Tidewater area.
- 2007 The Branch Group purchases R. E. Daffan, Inc., a general contractor based in Manassas, Virginia.
- 2014 Branch-Daffan, Inc. is formed with the merger of the two Branch Group, Inc. general contracting subsidiaries — Manassas-based R.E. Daffan and Roanoke-based Branch and Associates.
- 2017 The Branch Group consolidates its civil subsidiaries, Branch Highways, and E.V. Williams to form Branch Civil, Inc.

Underwood shares, "when I first started as an estimator, I was using colored pencils, scales and wheels. Now the estimators are doing pretty much everything on screen. Where everything was 2D black and white plans with a ton of [paper] sheets, we are now using BIM (Building Information Modeling). We have more of a 3-D representation of what the building is going to look like. We can use that for estimating and determining a budget. We can also utilize it to see how parts and pieces of a building go together. Once it makes it to the field you can zoom in and get a better interpretation of what the designers are trying to convey to us."

Another integral tool used by Branch is ProCore, a project



Courtesy of The Branch Group

Liberty University Library

management software. "I can go into any project that we have and see photos, drawings, and other information. In the field, the Superintendents have an iPad and can go into ProCore, pulling up the drawings for the job they are on. They used to have a big roll of papers."

## Overcoming Challenges

It is no secret today that one of the biggest challenges facing the construction industry is the labor shortage. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates there are about 300,000 unfilled jobs in the construction industry, which is expected to need an additional 747,000 workers by 2026.

How can a company continue to grow in an industry with a shrinking workforce? Loyalty is one way.

In 1982 Branch made the move to become an employee-owned company (ESOP). As of 2016, the most recent year for which data is available, there were only 6,624 ESOPs in the United States. How does this help Branch retain qualified employees? Underwood explains: "every employee has a vested interest in the success of everything that we do. Whether it's the completion of a project, the quality that goes into a project, if we finish on time, the satisfaction of an owner ... it's important no matter who you are in the company."

Virginia Tech Student Athletic Performance Center rendering



Courtesy of Branch Builds

# HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER

## The Branch Group Organizational Structure

### Branch Group

Provides corporate services and strategic leadership to its operating companies. It is comprised of the following departments:

- Strategic Leadership
- Human Resources
- Accounting & Finance
- Administration
- Safety & Risk Management
- Mergers & Acquisition
- Learning & Organizational Development
- Information Technology (IT)

### Branch Civil

Civil Construction, Site Development and Design Build.

Serves the transportation and infrastructural needs between and within communities throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast United States.

### Branch Builds

Construction Management, Design-Build and General Contracting.

Provides professional construction services on a diverse array of projects to a broad range of private and public sector owners.

### MEP (Mechanical, Electrical, & Plumbing) division:

#### G. J. Hopkins

Attends to the interior aspects of its multifaceted projects. Systems installed and serviced include: mechanical, electrical, plumbing, building automations, data communications, fire alarm.

#### L.A. Lacy

Offers a comprehensive range of mechanical and plumbing services.

Systems installed and serviced includes: mechanical systems, plumbing systems, special projects, industrial and process piping.

## Sustainability

The construction industry has seen a growing demand for sustainable building projects, i.e. those that do not negatively impact the natural environment. The number of LEED-certified projects in the United States rose from 296 certifications in 2006 to over 67,200 in 2018. Branch Group itself has 20 LEED certified professionals.

"The focus on sustainability has grown tremendously since I started. LEED was the most well-known organization in the beginning, but since then there has been a number of other groups that focus on sustainability through different programs and processes," notes Underwood. "Most clients



Construction at Virginia Tech



Another term that is relatively new to the industry and was not here when I started is lean construction

are already looking for energy conservation and efficiency, so you don't have to sell around sustainability. We find ourselves offering more of an educational role and guidance to help them maximize their dollars."

## Reducing Waste

"Another term that is relatively new to the industry and was not here when I started is lean construction," notes Underwood. "It's about improving productivity and efficiencies, not just saving on product [usage], but focusing on waste in a bigger perspective, including time. It's a big focus for us right now and not everyone in this industry is doing it."

Lean construction is a focused endeavor aimed at reducing costs, materials, time and effort to maximize value for all involved. It involves everyone, including contractors to subcontractors, to be on the same page and have a clear set of goals that are constantly checked and adjusted. Branch Group is so dedicated to this principle that they have a dedicated Lean Construction staff member.

Underwood adds, "we call it Team Centered Planning (TCP). We hired someone to put together what we call our playbook and we implement TCP practices on all of our projects. He does what we call a bootcamp when a project starts up and every trade partner is involved in the training. He educates our staff, our own superintendent and project manager, who then implement it every day in collaboration with all of the trade partners."

## Secret to Success

Branch Group has found a way to succeed and grow in a challenging and competitive economy through a series of innovative practices, which focus not only on its own



**FRONTLIST:****Notable Commercial Construction /  
GC Firms in Virginia's Blue Ridge**

- Avis Construction
- Blake Construction
- The Branch Group
- Building Specialists Inc
- Commonwealth Contracting
- Dollman Construction
- English Construction
- F&S Building Innovations
- Falconer Construction
- Fralin & Waldron
- Frith Construction
- G&H Contracting
- Halls Construction
- Lionberger Construction
- MB Contractors
- RL Lucas
- RL Price
- Snyder & Associates
- Thor Construction

*List includes principally commercial; comprehensive; local office; projects noted in business journal coverage; not specialty or primary residential*

**FRONTLIST:****Notable Commercial Architect/  
Design Firms in Virginia's Blue Ridge**

- AECOM
- Alam Design Group
- Architectural Partners
- Balzar & Associates
- Circle Design Studio
- CJMW Architecture
- Clark Nexsen
- Colley Architects
- Cundiff Architecture
- Dewberry & Davis
- Frazier Associates
- Hill Studios
- Hughes Associates
- Interactive Design Group
- OWPR
- SFCS
- Spectrum Design
- Wiley/Wilson

*List includes principally commercial; comprehensive; local office; projects noted in business journal coverage; not specialty or primary residential*

people, but all involved from the client side to the subcontractors. They have done so by utilizing the latest in technology and construction principles, which has helped the company grow to cover a geographic area that now includes seven states. As an ESOP, Branch has created a culture wherein its leaders serve employees and vice versa, helping to ensure its continued growth.

"It creates collaboration, partnerships and a level of accountability, says Cathy Underwood; "if there is something I can do to help you do your job better — I want to do that. It is within our culture to help one another." 



Jack Avis

# Familiar Name Familiar Projects

By Gene Marrano

**You don't have to venture too far in the Roanoke or New River Valleys to find examples of work by Avis Construction Company.**

Hop in your car and drive almost anywhere along a main thoroughfare in the Roanoke and New River Valleys - chances are you'll go past a project where Avis Construction Company in Roanoke was the general contractor. Founded in 1977, Avis likes to say it uses the Team/Build or Design/Build model that brings together the project owner, contractor and design professionals. "Quality and Value" has the mission since the firm (around 50 employees not including subcontractors) was founded.

Theatre 101 (Virginia Tech), Webber Hall (Virginia Western Community College), The Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, the Colonnade II business center in Roanoke County on Electric Road, Magic City Ford ... the list is long. Jack Avis is the Vice President/Treasurer and son of the founder Lynn Avis.

(Troy Smith is the firm's president). Jack Avis went to work during his summers in high school (early 80's) before going on to earn a civil engineering degree at VMI and then an MBA at Virginia Tech. He's been full time at the company since 1989.

"We do a lot of schools, manufacturing, warehouses, medical," notes Avis as he sits in a conference room with pictures of multiple projects on the wall behind him. In the hallway, plaques noting numerous awards and recognition for the company's work also tell their story. Projects that have converted older buildings to apartment complexes – taking advantage of historic tax credits when possible – is also part of the Avis Construction portfolio.

Jack Avis says they normally like to work

Project photos courtesy of Avis Construction



Carrington Cottage Memory Care Daleville

within an hour's radius of the home office in Roanoke, although they did venture to Bristol to build a nursing home for a past client. More Avis projects: the new home for Haley Toyota, Salem's minor league baseball park, the new Raleigh Court and Vinton library

buildings in the Roanoke Valley, The Lofts at West Station (an adaptive reuse project at what used to be an old warehouse) and Church of the Holy Spirit in Roanoke County. Not to mention several Vistar eye care centers and the Carilion Daleville Center.

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Bristol Memory Care

The renovations at Cave Spring High School in Roanoke County, a project that has grown to more than 40 million dollars overall, is ongoing. "There's a lot more coordination," says Avis about working within an existing structure while also adding to its footprint. Its not the first time (Fallen Branch Elementary, George Wythe High School) Avis has built a phased project where they had to work around students

and faculty who may be onsite in other parts of the building.

Economy is "everything," says Avis, little work when it's in recession; skilled labor and inventory shortages when times are good, the "things we're looking at right now." That might mean posting a Craig's List ad at 6:30am looking for more help that day. Having so many visible institutional projects

Building 1971 Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center





that people recognize is “free marketing.”

The Claude Moore Education Complex that houses Virginia Western Community College’s culinary arts program and the phased-in Fallon Park Elementary School rebuild in Southwest Roanoke are other recent projects. The Rack Space building at Virginia Tech’s Corporate Research Center is an Avis job.

One key is the long-term relationships the company has built with subcontractors in the area. Those subs must agree to corporate social responsibility and environmental guidelines; “taking steps to minimize the impact on the environment.”

A lack of skilled labor with fewer people learning the construction trades and a lack

of demand for off-the-rack inventory that often means long lead times makes scheduling subs a challenge these days. The ability to review plans more easily on a tablet as supervisors roam the construction site is one plus. Safety standards are tighter now than 20-30 years ago and that’s “a good thing.”

Avis says the smaller size of the Roanoke and New River Valleys they work in typically makes it a competitive market when bidding against other general contractors. Pricing, quality and the ability to hit a deadline are all in the mix. “We do what we say we’re going to do, and we do a good job,” says Avis about a corporate philosophy. “[And] we do it on time.” That’s music to the ears of a project owner that typically has deadlines of their own to reach. 

Claude Moore Education Complex





## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Lesa Hanlin

**Executive Summary:**

*The path to your professional development might include helping someone find their way.*

*Lesa Hanlin is the executive director of Roanoke Regional Initiatives and works for Outreach & International Affairs at Virginia Tech. Reach her at [lesa@vt.edu](mailto:lesa@vt.edu).*

## Mentoring as professional development

When we think of Professional Development, we often think of something that we do, read, or learn so that we grow personally or professionally. I want to suggest alternative route to professional development, serving as someone's mentor.

Once you've had some life experience you have lots of advice to give and perhaps a few cautionary tales! A way to give back is to serve as someone's mentor. Surprisingly, though, mentors often find there are just as many rewards for them as for the mentee.

What are the obvious benefits of being a mentor? You provide an in-depth knowledge of your organization and its culture. You support someone less experienced and help the company retain quality employees. But there are some benefits that may not be as apparent.

Mentorship done correctly means really listening and being silent, helping set goals, reflecting back, and asking open ended questions to support the mentee in finding their own answers. These are supervisory skills that can be used in a multitude of settings.

In addition, you have to be self-reflective to be a mentor. Mentees are going to question you about decisions you've made. You're going to have to be vulnerable and share insights that you've kept to yourself in the past and that is not always easy.

Some of my favorite quotes from mentors in past formal mentoring programs are:

"Taking the time to share past experiences also gives the mentor an opportunity to revisit the learnings of those experiences. It is a productive way to refresh perspectives."

"This is a time consuming but rewarding experience that I would gladly do again."

"When you are required to sit back and answer the hard questions about yourself, your career, and the decisions you make and why, you can't help but grow."

Ask yourself who at your organization you could mentor, formally or informally. You'll get back as much as you give, if not more. 

“”  
You're going to have to be vulnerable.

## Issues to consider with tax preparers

Small business owners and individuals often struggle to find the right professionals. I know I've made mistakes with business service providers as well as trade specialists at my home. It makes sense. You hire people to do things you don't do. It can be tough to know who's right or wrong for your needs.

Fortunately, there are easy ways to identify a good tax preparer. It's not just the return preparation fee or mistakes made on current year reporting you need to consider. With the vast changes we've seen in tax law recently, mistakes are common with fees extending back three or even six years on returns.

**How much does it cost?** You've probably heard local firm claim they're cheaper than the big guys. I've learned the hard way to be wary of those competing on price. Fixing unskilled results is expensive.

How do the national tax preparation chains operate? They don't require experience from hires. There are no credentials expected. It's unlikely your preparer is current on tax law. According to Indeed, the hourly rate at H&R Block for an office coordinator is \$9.22. That's below poverty level for a family of three. Ouch. Makes you wonder what kind of expertise you get from firms that claim they're cheaper.

**What about credentials?** CPAs may not have current tax knowledge, so ask about this. Enrolled Agents (EAs) are licensed by the IRS and specifically trained in federal tax planning, preparation, and representation. They're also required to complete 72 hours of continuing education every three years.

It's important to hire someone familiar with the constantly changing tax landscape. With credentials, advanced education is a given; continuing education requirements are likely. If not, the knowledge you're getting may be old news. That's scary stuff to consider for the small business owner. The IRS admits small business owners are 150% more likely to be audited than other tax payers.

QuickBooks Pro Advisors are useful too. New balance sheet and other reporting requirements for small business owners make this tool a wise one to integrate into your bookkeeping.

**Focus on long-term thinking.** DIY or cheap might seem prudent for your small business tax returns, but chances are, hiring the right provider will save more than the cost. Tax returns aren't boiler-plate. A conscientious tax specialist can find tax saving strategies the "churn-mills" won't.

There's that peace of mind thing, too. Audits are stressful enough without the added challenge of trying to defend errors you can't justify. Someone who understands not only recent tax legislation, but also your financial goals, is an important team member to have. Choose wisely. 



## FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:  
*Enter Taxman –  
but choose wisely.*

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



Brenda Landes

Photos courtesy of SFCS

# Before Dirt is Turned Over

By Brian Bongard

**Before construction begins, there's the architectural and design process; Roanoke's SFCS describes.**

How do big sophisticated projects like the new cutting-edge Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, (STEM) building at Virginia Western Community College, or the new Bioscience center at Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC) go from vision to reality? It brings to mind the old question, "How do you eat an elephant?" The answer being, "One bite at a time."

But the more specific answer is that it takes a multitude of talented, hard-working people, from the presidents of the schools to the carpenters and bricklayers. Guided by a well-defined process, they work together to bring the vision to life. The process is important. The people create the magic.

In the case of the 72,000 sq. ft, \$37 million STEM building in Roanoke, it started with the vision of Dr Robert Sandel, long time President of VWCC. In a Campus News announcement, he said "We expect it to be a destination for students and industry partners who are interested in getting ahead in the region's growing STEM-focused economy".

The 40,000 sq. ft, \$16 million Bioscience building at BRCC was to be geared specifically toward educating skilled workers for the area's health care systems.

Then the Virginia Community College System gets involved. They are the government hub



for these projects. For over 50 years they have been facilitating the process of moving projects from the vision, to the specifics. Wish lists get sorted through, priorities are set, compromises made, and then it boils down to what is feasible. Space requirements are translated to square feet, an equipment list is created, a budget is agreed upon, and an RFP (Request for proposal) is posted.

Brenda Landes is a team leader at SFCS Architects in Roanoke, which eventually landed the design contracts for both of these buildings. She offered some insights as to how the process goes. “SFCS tracks the RFP’s [request for proposal], but we also make an effort to build relationships with the community college people. We generally have some information about what projects are on the horizon before the RFP is publicly posted.”

From there, the selection process is defined with submitting firms given about 2-5 weeks to put together an initial 15-minute presentation. Landes notes that, “those few weeks involve a lot of late nights and overtime [with her team] to ask questions, develop answers, and put the presentation together.” Specialists are sometimes brought in to consult on a project. In these cases, it was HERA Laboratory planners on the VWCC STEM building, and Page SST Laboratory Planners on the BRCC Bioscience project.

A presentation is made to the selection committee, which develops a short list of three to five firms that are asked to return with a more detailed proposal. The committee then makes a final decision, usually within a couple weeks, and awards the contract.

A “Construction Manager at Risk,” is engaged at this point. Kjellstrom and Lee was the construction firm and Ryan Amos the point man for them on the Bioscience building. He said “our job is to consult in the design process on complex projects, in order to identify

## SFCS TURNS 100 YEARS OLD



SFCS opened in Roanoke one-hundred years ago (1920) and now has offices in Charlotte, Philadelphia, and Louisville. In mid-February, the company (still headquartered in Roanoke) held its 35th annual “By Design” conference—a national event for CEOs, executive directors, administrators, board members, planners, marketers, building committee members, trustees of retirement communities and sponsors of senior housing. SFCS is an industry leader in the design of senior living spaces and communities.

gray areas and help save the client money. We are ‘At Risk’ because we sign a contract that ensures the building will be done on time at a guaranteed maximum price.” Adds Amos, “we could not have completed the project as quickly or as efficiently without collaborating with SFCS in the process. They were very attentive to getting any issues worked through and resolutions approved in order to keep the process moving forward.”

One more person brought in during construction is a 3rd party inspector. Hired by the client, they verify that all the details spelled out in the plans are up to spec as the project is built. For example, they would take concrete samples to test as the foundation is poured and ensure that windows and doors meet the requirements spelled out by SFCS.

There is usually a sprint to get to the finish line on time, which involves lots of inspections and punch lists of details to be handled. Ultimately, there is a Certificate of Occupancy issued. Ribbon cuttings, press releases, congratulations on jobs well done, and the buildings are ready to start enriching the minds of students - and contributing to the local economy. The vision has become a reality. 





# BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

**Executive Summary:**  
*The best "skills workshop" may be the lessons you teach every day on the job.*

Send your questions or comments to [Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com](mailto:Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com)

## Workshop waste

I recently received a solicitation from a company that sells training materials to develop soft skills. For a reasonable price, I could purchase all the handouts, slides, and guides I would need to conduct a 1-day workshop on a wide selection of topics, including Team Building, Personal Productivity, Communication Strategies, and Conflict Resolution.

Frequently I'm asked if I can provide a half-day or full-day workshop on a variety of topics, so this sounds like a good fit for me, right? But it's not, and I almost always turn down workshop requests. Why? They are usually ineffective and a waste of time and money.

Buying and participating in workshops for soft skill, leadership, and team development is not usually effective. They don't work for creating change and improving organizational results. Workshops and other one-shot training activities are fine if only seeking knowledge (I sometimes do them myself for this reason.) But don't expect that knowledge to be applied and behavior to change in the long run.

Many organizations love workshops because they are more convenient and less expensive than more effective options, and leaders can show they are investing in their teams. But money and time is being wasted, and most organizations know it. Is it therefore any surprise that training budgets get cut when finances are tight?

Soft skills such as listening, time management, coaching, and customer service are behaviors. But our behaviors are a result of our habits, attitudes and beliefs. Forming new habits and attitudes simply doesn't happen from a single training session, no matter how good it is. Repetition and application are necessary.

Neuroscience, psychology, and numerous studies tell us how to make training more effective by forming new habits and behaviors. When evaluating training options, look for these features:

- **Spaced repetition.** Are the skills and knowledge presented to the learner only once, or multiple times over a period of time?
- **Application.** Are the skills and knowledge applied and practiced in real-world situations? (Role playing in classroom workshops is rarely sufficient.)
- **Behavior monitoring and coaching.** Is there a process built-in to observe and monitor the application and practice of the new skill? Is there a way for the learner to reflect on this practice or get coaching feedback?

Unfortunately, having these features may still not be enough. Sometimes, organizational culture gets in the way of development. Watch for my next article when I'll explain why. 

## Do you have a social media strategy?

If you're trying to represent a business online, make sure you're giving it the same amount of effort that you would any facet of your business. Here's the hard truth: people use the internet to learn information about businesses more than any other means today. They use it to look up hours, specials, menu items, reviews, photos, etc. In fact, the first thing my wife does when we want to try someplace new is look for their website/social media.

Look, we know you know this. We also know that posting consistent and engaging content can be overwhelming. At Harvest, we have seen every sort of attempt that businesses take to stay relevant online. But what it boils down to lies more in reasoning and motive than the how-to.

See, marketing and digital marketing are no longer separate things. If you have no social media strategy in 2020, then it's safe to say your efforts are lacking. For the past few years, small business owners have given little to no effort towards digital marketing efforts because they either 1. Don't see the value in spending time and money on these platforms or 2. They just didn't know how to use the digital tools correctly.

Though these various social media tools and platforms can be difficult to understand, there is no perfect way to beat the system or outsmart the algorithm. The most important thing you can do is take your time and publish good quality, consistent content that serves your audience well.

We understand that as a business owner, it's important to feel comfortable with where you put your money and energy. That's why our aim is to highlight the value of digital marketing by finding measurable results. If you don't have room in your budget for hiring a marketing team, it is essential that you find room within your schedule to plan out content for your social media platforms. If you need assistance with this process, follow us on Facebook and Instagram @harvestdm for helpful tips and tricks. 📱

“To stay relevant online... what it boils down to lies more in reasoning and motive than the how-to.”



## TECH WHISPERER

By **Spencer Pugh**  
and **Maggie Rotanz**

### Executive Summary:

*"Anything worth doing is worth doing right."*

- Hunter S. Thompson

*Harvest Digital Marketing helps local businesses turn online subscribers and followers into paying and loyal customers through digital media creation and marketing strategies.*

*Contact us with tech questions or comments Instagram & Facebook: @harvestdm | 540.3534013 harvestdigitalmarketing.co*



# This Main Street – reborn

By Ian Price

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**Most construction projects aren't new; this Roanoke neighborhood village is on a comeback, thanks to redevelopment.**

It's evident as soon as you drive down this Main Street. The fresh colors and repaired facades that now make up the Wasena area is a game changer. For years, there was the Wasena City Tap Room a block away, drawing people to the area that otherwise felt—residential.

Then The Hive—Blacksnake Meadery opened up in a bright yellow building in the fall of 2017. Other than mead, their tastings include spirits like wine and cider. They even helped get the neighboring

coffee shop up and running. Roasters Next Door or RND Coffee started as a pop-up in the Meadery.

“It was a nice collaboration with Steve and Joanne over there” says RND Coffee co-owner Steffon Randolph. He continued “while we were there the Garlands had already purchased and started renovating” the building RND is currently in. RND has completed a kickstarter campaign for a separate space on Garden City Blvd to house its coffee roasting operation. The



owners also hope to get their coffee into retail stores one day.

Randolph didn't shy away from the color scheme of the surrounding buildings either. He says they went with purple for several reasons including an affinity he has for the Minnesota Vikings. "It was kind of suggested by Monica, who has a good eye for color theory," Randolph said about the

owner of the business occupying the cyan building on Main Street. The color is also labeled online as "electric cyan," fitting for Electric Eye Custom Tattoos.

"RND has brought a lot of people, more daily traffic" says Tattoo apprentice Tori Melson, who started working there just before RND opened up. "Bloom [the restaurant across the street] brings a

**Jill Graybill | CAR ACCIDENT**

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Nate Sloan

different class of people to the area” she adds, “people that you didn’t see walking around the area before.” She says even the long-established Getty Mart is under new management, adding that “everybody knows everybody” making it really cool to be part of the community.

Bloom is the newest revitalized building to open in Wasena. Located next door to the Getty Mart gas station and across Main Street from the colorful buildings, Bloom is described as a neighborhood restaurant and wine bar. “Revitalization is important to us” says Bloom owner Nate Sloan. He

says they wanted to be part of an up and coming neighborhood.

“Proximity to the greenway, and the welcoming nature of the community” were several reasons Sloan listed for picking Wasena. It also had a lot to do with the specific spot Bloom opened up in. “I would drive past this space and think about how great that location would be for a restaurant” says Sloan.

The Barber Shop that did occupy the darker blue building sandwiched between Electric Eye Tattoo and The Hive is currently vacant. However, the talk on the block is that



something else will be opening there shortly—likely another barber or hair salon.

Speaking of development, the praise for Garland Properties is consistent among the new businesses. John Garland says another developer did The Barber Shop and Electric Eye Tattoo spaces, “then we were able to acquire four buildings down here,” he noted at the Bloom grand opening last summer. He says Bloom used to be a furniture upholstery shop. Garland adds that “most of these buildings ... were filled with furniture from floor to ceiling. The buildings themselves were a challenge because they were falling down.”

Says Aaron Garland, John’s son and a partner with Garland Properties, “it was done in Wasena, we can have similar things [village center redevelopment elsewhere] in the future.” Aaron is putting his money where his mouth is by the way. “I’m personally moving there - I’ve enjoyed the process

of getting to know the neighborhood association and being involved there”

RND Coffee’s Randolph says, “we wouldn’t be here without the Garlands [John and son Aaron],” that their knowledge of setting up buildings and laying out a brick and mortar store were also essential. Bloom’s Sloan says, “we feel very fortunate that Garland was able to [redo] the building from the ground up.” Garland says it’s great to help open businesses in the area because “it will support a neighborhood village.”

Bloom is still the newest thing on the block, until the Floyd-based Buffalo Hemp Company opens soon in the green building on Main Street with farm-to-retail CBD/Hemp products. Co-owner Derek Wall says, “I love Roanoke and I love Wasena.” When he saw the vacant building Wall says, “I aggressively went after it.” This Main Street and the residential neighborhood around it appears to be moving in the right direction. 



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## WELLNESS

By Ally Bowersock

**Executive Summary:**  
*Sometimes a group dynamic is the best motivation.*



*Ally Bowersock is the Co-owner of RunAbout Sports Roanoke. Contact her: [runaboutroanoke@gmail.com](mailto:runaboutroanoke@gmail.com)*

## Multitasking fitness and networking

Business after hours, golfing, breakfast clubs: common opportunities to connect with other business owners and area professionals. Have you considered free community fitness activities such as pub runs for such an opportunity? Perhaps less conventional of a choice, but here are a few reasons why you should make a “pub run” your next business-after-hours activity:

**Meet new like-minded people:** the folks already attending these activities have the same goal as you: get in a workout. The pace and distance covered may vary, but the end result is the same. There is already a shared bond with the group! This can be a major positive if you are looking to recruit someone to your work team who is motivated, high-energy, and cares about personal health. The blossoming “medical education corridor” along South Jefferson Street in Roanoke has brought a tremendous influx of bright, talented, and driven young people to the region, many of whom live in the apartments adjacent to Starr Hill Pilot Brewery and Side Stage, where our Thursday pub runs are hosted. By extension, our pub run has attracted many of these new folks (along with others from all age groups by the way) as they see us gather, quite literally, outside their front door, every Thursday throughout the year.

**Find motivation to push yourself physically:** You may care less about running a 5k, but perhaps your company health insurance provides reimbursement for healthy habits like gym memberships or fitness equipment. Some companies reimburse for positive health changes like improvements in blood pressure and cholesterol. Save the money you would spend on a gym and come walk/jog/run for free with any of these activities AND find the built-in support system for which many people join a gym! There are folks of all ages, fitness levels, and personal interests- from walking around the block a few times to running a marathon- our pub run offers a variety of options for all fitness levels.

**Outdoor exercise checks all the boxes:** So maybe you don't want to meet new people or care to push yourself physically- but you're in a personal or professional rut. Ask your colleagues to join you at the pub run/walk for a walking meeting! Being outdoors is beneficial for your body AND your brain, and as the seasons change to longer sunlight, there's the added benefit of natural Vitamin D which is vital to our emotional health as well. We call our event a “pub run” for rhyming purposes but plenty of people walk as well, so bring the whole work team for an outdoor meeting and save an hour at work get a few other things checked off that to-do list.

If you're planning to join us for the first time, give us a shout! We love to host new folks and would love to know you're coming out. We meet at 6:30pm at Starr Hill every Thursday- hope to see you there! 

## Training the next generations of filmmakers

If you had entered architect John Zink's new and beautiful Grandin Theatre in March of 1932, the cost to see ARROWSMITH would have been 25 cents. You and 943 other lucky viewers would have experienced the first "talking picture" shown in Roanoke, Virginia. Over the ensuing 88 years, the Grandin has hosted live performances of musicals, screened classic movies, featured world-famous musicians and even a comedic actor. Throughout its history, the theatre has closed down three times due to various financial issues. However, it was purchased by the Grandin Theatre Foundation in 2001 and a new outlook on the Theatre began. The Foundation's goal now is to preserve the Grandin "as a cultural and educational resource devoted to film and the cinematic arts for Western Virginia."

In 2016, the historic Grandin Theatre created the Grandin Theatre Film Lab. Housed across the street at the Grandin Co-Lab, this educational opportunity for high school students is designed to prepare them for careers in film, entertainment and many communications industries. The yearlong course requires the student be present twice a week from 4 to 7 pm. It is designed to help students grow as writers, actors, filmmakers, producers and engineers. Accepted students follow an intensive curriculum focused on film production, lighting, screen writing, storytelling, acting, sound engineering and film acumen. They also they have access to Roanoke's and the nation's film industry professionals. The program strives to offer hands-on experiences in the art of filmmaking. By spring, students will have at least one completed film that is submitted to local, regional, national and international film festivals. Tuition for the course is \$325, with some scholarships available. Interested students can apply online at [www.grandintheatre.com/film-lab-program](http://www.grandintheatre.com/film-lab-program). Applications for the 2020-2021 year will be online in April 2020. 📺

“Accepted students follow an intensive curriculum.”



## GOOD WORK

By Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

**Executive Summary:**  
*Could the next Spielberg or Scorsese be right here in Roanoke learning the ropes?*

*Kaitlyn Van Buskirk is a grants associate with the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia.  
[kaitlyn@cfwesternva.org](mailto:kaitlyn@cfwesternva.org)*



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# First major retailer in downtown Roanoke in decades coming soon >

The apartments for lease should be ready for leasing by early spring but the **Mast General Store** that will open inside the old Heironimus department store at Church and Jefferson on the ground floor and mezzanine is looking like sometime this summer. This will be the 10th location for the North Carolina-based chain, which carries everything from food items to home goods and clothing, to rocking chairs, shoes and outdoor equipment. Spokesperson Sheri Moretz, who describes herself as “storyteller,” also says they have a following that draws fans to cities they’ve never been to before to check out that Mast General Store. “We can’t forget the old-fashioned candies and toys you haven’t seen in a long time.”



In late January representatives from the Mast home office were in Roanoke when they accepted applications for employment. “We’re much more than a store,” adds Moretz, “we like to look at ourselves as a destination for our communities.” That includes directing visitors to their stores to local places to eat and other attractions. “We believe in giving back and getting involved in what’s going on [in the community].” Moretz says unique stores in older structures - like the former Heironimus department store – is a Mast General Store trademark.





## Mack Trucks to roll out of Roanoke County plant >

**Mack Trucks** is investing 13 million dollars and expects to hire 250 employees at a new medium duty truck production plant it will open in Western Roanoke County at ValleyTech Park. Governor Ralph Northam was on hand for the late January announcement in what was formerly the RR Donnelly printing facility. Mack had been installing assembly lines and building a prototype there for over a year. When fully operational the annual economic impact to the area was estimated at 364 million dollars. The new medium duty trucks are smaller than the tractor trailers produced down the road in Pulaski by Volvo Trucks North America – like Mack Trucks part of the Volvo Group.

Filling out ValleyTech Park just south of Salem and near I-81 is closer to reality says Roanoke County economic development director Jill Loope. The RR Donnelly building had been vacant for over 3 years said Loope. "This project came along shortly thereafter. [Mack] has been in the building for over a year." Production is expected to commence by this summer. Loope said there is one site left to fill at what she called a smaller business center. She also said the Mack Trucks building footprint can be expanded if suppliers for the medium duty line want to be onsite. "We look forward to growing this business," said Mack Trucks president Martin Weissburg of what will be known as the Roanoke Valley Operations (RVO) facility. For Governor Northam it was the second time in less than two weeks he had been back in the area for a major economic development announce (Traditional Medicinals tea in Rocky Mount being the other.) "I'm from rural Virginia," said Northam, "you don't have to ask me to come twice to rural Virginia. Anytime we can bring in a company like this and produce this amount of jobs I'm glad to be here."





Paul Phillips

Cory Crouser

# Banker for good

Freedom First Credit Union's leader says their mission leverages "the ripple effect" to generate the most impact in our communities.

Valley Business FRONT welcomes Paul Phillips as a 2020 advisory board member representing the region's finance/credit union sector.

Freedom First Credit Union has served the Roanoke region since 1956, and it experienced significant growth and forward momentum under the leadership of President and CEO Paul Phillips. But what drew him to credit unions in the first place?

The unique blend of the traditional banking that he loved and mission-oriented values is what ultimately prompted him to become involved with credit unions. "Credit unions are member-owned cooperatives," Phillips explains. "All decisions are made locally by management under the direction of a volunteer board of directors."

Currently with over 200 employees, 10 local branches, and \$600 million in assets, the credit union's size has already surpassed that of HomeTown Bank (\$565 million in assets) prior to its merger with American National Bank in April 2019. The size and structure of Freedom First is important because it can't or won't be purchased. It is here to stay.

A great deal of Freedom First's recent growth under Phillips' leadership is due to expanded delivery channels and a laser focus on the member experience. "Because of our focus on technology and the ever growing mobile first mentality, banking with Freedom First is easier than ever."

Freedom First's Commercial and Business teams uphold its mission of giving back to the community by engaging in community redevelopment and rehabilitation projects, providing capital investments for neighborhoods facing continued disinvestment.

"I'm proud of what we're doing for people in the Roanoke and New River Valleys," says Phillips. "Every local business that we help by providing necessary capital often means more local jobs. Every commercial loan funded in a target reinvestment area means more economic vitality, which will in turn encourage more businesses to follow. It's a ripple effect."

Phillips concludes with this: "Because we are truly locally owned and operated, the very people we serve – of all walks of life – can directly benefit from the community capital that Freedom First is able to deploy. And that's something I can't help but be proud to be a part of." 

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# CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

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

**Dan Dowdy** is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading services (proofingprof.com). His background includes service in the U.S. Air Force and an extensive career in education, including teaching college-level writing

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

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

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

**Ian Price** is a radio and print journalist in Roanoke who looks at things through a Millennial's eye. The Radford University communications major is also a pretty good DJ and trivia host, some say. [ianprice23@gmail.com]

**Maggie Rotanz** and **Spencer Pugh** were born and raised in Salem, VA. Maggie graduated from Ohio University with a degree in Photojournalism in 2016 and Spencer graduated from Virginia Tech in 2015 with a degree in Communication Studies. Upon exploring similar career paths, Maggie

and Spencer decided to team up to start Harvest Digital Marketing to help local businesses turn online followers into paying and loyal customers. [helo@harvestdigitalmarketing.co]

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

**Steven Zegarski** is the vice president of corporate real estate for The Branch Group. Steve is originally from Cincinnati, Ohio and completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Dayton. After completing his graduate studies from Virginia Tech, Steve moved to Roanoke and has enjoyed a career path that has included teaching, youth ministry, pharmaceuticals and real estate. Steve and his wife, Kirsten, have three children and enjoy family vacations and home improvement projects.

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“ You and 943 other lucky viewers would have experienced the first ‘talking picture’ shown in Roanoke. — Page 31

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## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

### Executive Summary:

*College should not just be an expensive wristband for admission to the festival of job interviews.*

## Jack, the unqualified

Reasons why we can't hire Jack:

- He doesn't have a college degree. (And HR has a mile high stack of resumes of individuals who DO have their degrees. Number one, they've paid their dues, shown they can complete a goal. Number two, it's our company position to prequalify the best pool.)
- There might be other reasons; but with no degree, there's no need to interview.

Reasons why we can hire Jack:

- He shows competency in the skills we need.
- He's willing to learn, train and adopt our processes (which even a college graduate doesn't know yet).
- He'll attend college or other training programs after hours if it helps our business.
- He's demonstrated a passion and commitment to our industry and will likely advance in it.
- He shares good ideas, thinks independently, exercises reason.
- He's a living example of our belief in the individual, not the paperwork.
- He's likeable, reliable, honest, upstanding.
- He wears nice shoes.

Maybe the last qualification isn't required. But you're as likely to get a great employee from someone with nice footwear as you are from someone who just has a college degree.

Did you know it is not up to—nor was it ever up to—the education system to determine the necessity and value of a college education? When we point at higher education as the culprit for issues like exorbitant costs and mounting high pressing student debt, we're pointing in the wrong direction. Colleges and universities may fail at matching programs to our labor market, but the rising costs and necessity for employment only happens by the permission of one entity: the job market.

Yes, college is valuable. Today, it's often necessary to even enter many professions and vocations. Some programs are incredibly worthwhile. But there are overwhelming examples of folks in the workplace who could be in the same position whether they "served" those four years or not. Let's be honest. You and I know them... if we are not one of them. Have you been hoodwinked on the precise value and necessity of that \$100,000 degree (typical four year public institution cost today) demanded from your job applicants?

If so, it's possible you don't know Jack. 

## It's a dirty job, but ... a different construction niche

Older housing and commercial buildings in southwest and central Virginia that are prime targets for renovation often come with baggage: they may be full of asbestos installed in the past to retard the spread of fire, or lead-based paint may have been used for interior walls and ceilings. Both are bad news.

That's where family owned Strahle Construction comes in, carving out its special niche since 1984 from Lynchburg to Roanoke and down to Bristol. The family-owned company based in Goodview also works with the City of Roanoke's Lead Safe program when another round of HUD funding lets his crews remove lead paint chips and lead dust from houses owned or rented by a lower-income Roanokers who must meet eligibility guidelines, have a child age 5 or under living there – or visiting regularly.

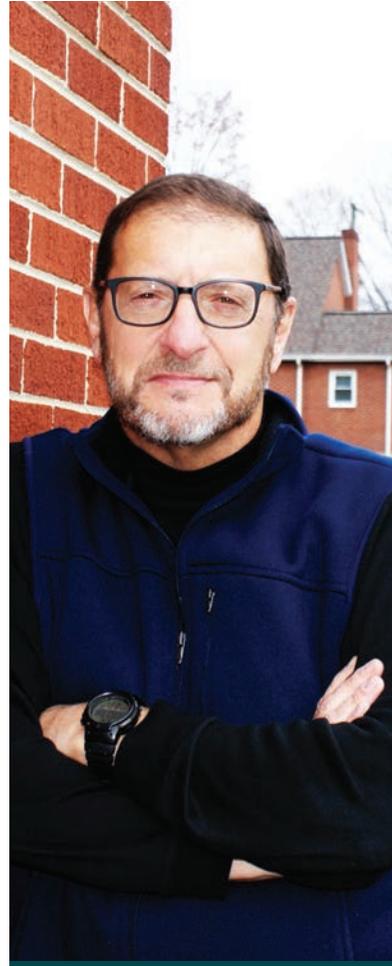
The home must be pre-1978 as well, when lead based paint was still used before its potential to cause brain damage, behavioral problems and to stunt growth was discovered. The very young are the most vulnerable. Intact lead-painted surfaces that are not chipped or turning to dust due to contact with a friction surface can remain as is. Windows often have to be replaced where lead has leached into the wood.

Brian Meadows is the Vice President/Asbestos Supervisor/Safety Compliance Officer for Strahle. On a recent Lead Safe Roanoke project in a southeast neighborhood he said they've done "hundreds and hundreds" of lead abatement projects over the past decade. His crews are licensed, undergo extensive training, must wear hazard suits and masks while removing lead dust and chips before repainting. Meadows said there is a 30-to-1 return on the dollars spent to make houses lead safe: fewer medical issues and crimes committed down the road for those impacted physically or mentally by lead paint.

An assessment company will test - by first wiping a surface with a cloth - before Strahle crews and Lead Safe Roanoke (the program leaders work for the city) get involved; with a plan of attack following the test results. Anything 10 micrograms or over per square foot is a fail: "if you take an Equal packet and distribute it evenly throughout this house it fails the clearance," said Meadows.

Beth Deel and husband John are the owners of an older house on Greenbrier Avenue SE that had qualified

continued on Page 41



Gene Marrano

## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

**By Gene Marrano**

**Executive Summary:**  
*Strahle Construction  
tackles the tough jobs on  
environmental cleanups.*



## GUEST COMMENTARY

**By Carrie Poff,  
Owner/Operator  
Brown Hound  
Tree Services, Inc.**

**Executive Summary:**  
*How to find a home for  
your business.*

### Do as I say, not as I did

As entrepreneurs, we research, we network, and we tap into unlimited resources, put there to help us every step of the way in our business-building. However, despite these resources, I still learn things the hard way. One of my greatest challenges has been finding a location for my business. Sounds easy enough, and it would have been if I had started in the right place.

We're in the service industry. Our little grassroots venture rapidly outgrew our home. With an expanding fleet of commercial vehicles and employees, we chose a building recently purchased by a friend, and we were anxious to move in. There was something about signing a lease that made our business feel more legitimate.

We have a scalable but complex business model requiring industrial, commercial, office, warehouse, and retail space. Not wanting to spread our operation out and to be centrally located to our customer base, we thought this property, zoned as I-2 would be perfect, because it allows all of those uses.

When we moved in, we began improving it. We didn't ask permission, we just did it. The building had been sitting empty and falling apart for the better part of 10 years; surely the powers that be would be happy to see our progress.

We pressure washed and painted our 6000 sq. ft. space. Offices and dividing walls were built. We hired someone to draw up a site plan. To be a retail space, we would have to build two bathrooms, a handicap ramp inside and out, a deck out front, install ADD-rated doors, and put in a drinking fountain. No problem, we're capable.

Or so I thought. I headed down to the Roanoke City Planning Department to pull building permits. Two days later, several officials showed up in force. Unbeknownst to us, the building was in several states of violation, all needing to be corrected before permits would be issued.

This is what I was trying to avoid. Better to beg for forgiveness than ask for permission, right? After all, we know people who occupy buildings with no Certificates of Occupancy, and we know of businesses that don't have paved handicap spots... but that's beside the point.

After several meetings, we would now have to tear down and rebuild all office walls, hire a Registered Design Professional and a Civil Engineer to draw up fancy printed site plans, pave a parking lot, build a fire wall, plant trees, get an electrical drop and a new meter separate from the rest of the building, and have separate trash service. They told us told point blank, "we don't think you can afford to do this."

So here we sit, 15 months later, having invested so much already into a building that we know is the best option for



us, unable to open our doors, wanting to move but not wanting to back down from a challenge.

Here's how to avoid our situation when looking for a location for your business:

- Make an appointment with someone in the Economic Development Department in the locale you wish to do business. Show them your business plan and take their advice.
- Contact a commercial real estate agent. Have a budget and total square footage in mind.
- Visit the online real estate GIS and tax maps. Research what zoning and allowed uses would best suit your needs.
- If you're just starting out, lease. Figure out what works and what doesn't before you buy.
- Be realistic. Finding a location may take quite some time, especially if you're in a niche market.
- Don't sign a lease until you see proof of the most recent Certificate of Occupancy and make sure your intended use for the property is allowed.
- Don't take advice from unlicensed contractors.
- Keep your vision at the forefront and *don't give up*. 📌

## Marrano / There's something

from Page 39

for the Lead Safe Roanoke Program in January: "I really want to make sure my family was safe in this house. Community development is one house at a time, one neighborhood at a time, one person at a time. We can make our homes safer."

A fifth round of HUD funding means Roanoke City has now put around 500 houses total through the Lead Safe rehab program, more than 60 on this latest cycle. Marla Robertson is the education and outreach coordinator for Lead Safe Roanoke: "86.9 percent of the city was built before 1978," noted Robertson; "we could be doing this for another 20 years and not get every home that we need to do." That also means niche companies like Strahle Construction should very much still be in demand. 📌



## FRONTReviews >

**Readers and patrons of the business journal are invited to submit reviews (along with an optional photo) to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto: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.**

### *Straighten up*

And fly right. It sounds glib to recall that song title when reading this book of letters from inmates. The subject—so heavy. The warnings—so dire. The advice—so poignant. The stories—so heartbreaking. And yet that song is indeed the essence of our valuable teachings. The book, a local production entitled *Insights from Inside* (Blackwell Press; 2013) is a mission in print. A collaboration by people who care, spearheaded by Thomas Gerdy (who refused to take any authorship), what you get is a simple compilation of short letters (most are around a page and a half).

Directed to all, but specifically to young people, you're going to want to read each contribution... grammatical errors and all. "Insights" indeed. From short timers (if you consider a year of your life no big deal) to five, ten, twenty, forty years to life, here are voices worth listening to. The words slip through bars like vapors escaping a container. Although I heard familiar warnings, two recurring lessons leapt out letter after letter. One, do whatever you can to NOT come here (in prison). It is hell; and whatever you think about prison, it is a thousand times worse. So many inmates extol education and avoiding the street, whose attraction is utterly worthless. Two, I am amazed and reminded how early one's path to incarceration begins. Almost all our admonitions are for teenagers. I keep thinking 14-year-olds. Think before you act, our letters constantly beg. You're one bad decision away, we hear time and time again. I want to share so many thoughts from our 18 letters; the loneliness, the despair, the evil, and the wish from every single writer that he or she could take it all back. But you should read it from the source.

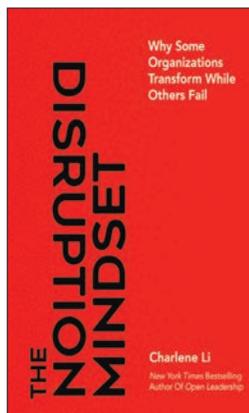
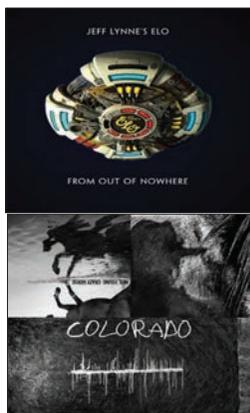
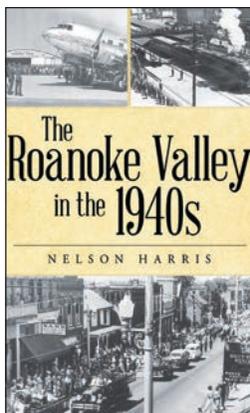
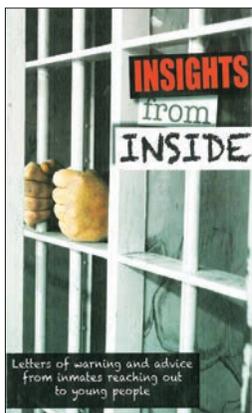
Flying right starts with a proper takeoff. Can we watch out and help 14-year-olds stepping on the runway? ( Get this book at [www.insightsfrominside.com](http://www.insightsfrominside.com) )

—Tom Field

### *A detailed trip down memory lane*

Many of the history-based books former Roanoke City Mayor Nelson Harris has authored about days gone by in the Roanoke Valley (more than a dozen) are thinner volumes heavy on old photos dug out of archives or even borrowed from local residents and then captioned. But *The Roanoke Valley in the 1940's* is different, a 600 page-plus more academic volume that makes a good reference source for the era. It was published this month (Arcadia Publishing and The History Press) and Harris has related events planned at several venues including the Salem Museum in March. It took Harris six years to assemble the book – he read every issue the Roanoke Times printed in the 1940's on a microfiche reader in his basement that was borrowed from the Virginia Room at the Roanoke Public Library.

Flipping open to one random page in the middle of the book: In 1945 Roanoke City Council approved an annual budget of just over 3 million dollars for the next fiscal year; city employees would receive a five-dollar monthly wage hike. Truly a different world. Harris has called the 1940's "a dynamic period in the Roanoke Valley." Woodrum Field (now Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport) came online; there was a boom in downtown development. Carvins Cove



started supplying water to the city. The past president of the History Society of Western Virginia touches on downtown theaters long gone, the debut of the Mill Mountain Star, the stirrings of the local civil rights movement – and when major league exhibition baseball came to town. And yes, there are still those archival photographs; *The Roanoke Valley in the 1940's* features around 300.

—Gene Marrano

## *Dinosaur rock is alive and well!*

As someone whose musical tastes reside largely in the 70's and 80's (but not exclusively) two titles caught my eye recently and I took the plunge. Jeff Lynne's ELO is the retitled Electric Light Orchestra that the pop rock wizard hatched in the early 1970's and he has reemerged with *From Out of Nowhere*. Gone is the string section (I do miss that) and many of the cuts sound as much like the Traveling Wilburys (the late 80's supergroup Lynne was part of) as they do ELO, but this album full of short, pop rocking numbers (*Losing You* is a highlight) that are even Beatles-like at times. Nowhere is worth picking up for those that were fans of ELO back in the day. Meanwhile as a former 8-year resident there, Neil Young's new album *Colorado* had me at the title. Recorded in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, Young is backed by Crazy Horse, the band which seems to bring out the best in him. Young is in fine voice (and harmonica) on an album with both quiet and more rocking numbers that often evoke images of the mountain west he seems to be shooting for. (*Green is Blue*, *Rainbow of Colors* stand out for me.) ELO and Neil Young fans who download

or purchase these two new recordings should not be disappointed.

—Gene Marrano

## *Balance shift*

Growth is always hard, but in today's rapidly changing work environment, breakthrough growth is even harder. It is considered disruptive because it shifts the balance of power in established relationships—between customers and companies, between players in an industry, between people and departments within an organization. Growth challenges our attachment to proven revenue streams and customers while nurturing our ambitions to discover new ones. Best-selling author Charlene Li knows the struggles leaders face when trying to thrive in the face of disruption.

*The Disruption Mindset: Why Some Organizations Transform While Others Fail* (IdeaPress; 2019) shifts the conversation, exposing what we've been doing wrong all along, offering guidance for moving toward more lasting disruptive growth, and backing it up with case studies, interviews with impactful disruptors across a variety of industries, data-backed research and, most importantly, pragmatic steps to build your own disruptor's agenda. A must-have resource for today's corporate leaders.

—Jane Reilly

The reviewers: **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT; **Jane Reilly** is a publicist with Smith Publicity in Cherry Hill, NJ.



## GO Virginia Region celebrates >

Virginia Western Community College hosted business executives, local government officials, educators and other stakeholders in late January, marking the first round of accomplishments for the initial 15 grant recipients from the Go Virginia public-private partnership that includes parts of Southwestern and Central Virginia in Region 2, from the New River Valley to the Roanoke Valley and beyond to Lynchburg and surrounding localities. The Region 2 Council has more than a million dollars annually it can dole out as seed money for entrepreneurs creating high tech jobs.

“These grantees are no doubt assisting in the economic landscape in our region,” said Go Virginia Region 2 Council Chairman Raymond Smoot. After watching a video with commentary from some of the initial grantees many stayed to tour the new STEM building at Virginia Western – where students can be trained for the types of jobs those grantees – and other Region2 startups in the future – may create. “I think some business leaders [elsewhere in the state] were frustrated about how long it was taking to ramp up the growth,” said Vice Chair Ab Boxley at the GO Virginia Region 2 celebration; “now we’ve got the process down and people are seeing that it works – [there is] a lot more traction.”



## SML Chamber awards >

The Smith Mountain Lake Chamber of Commerce honored local businesses and community figures during its annual dinner last month at The Waterfront Country Club. Among those cited was the Harvester Performance Center in Rocky Mount as Tourism Advocate of the Year. Franklin County Sheriff Bill Overton Jr. is the Leader of the Year. Haywood’s Jewelers is Business of the Year and Business of the Decade is Capps Home Building Center. (see story on SML Chamber elsewhere in this issue)

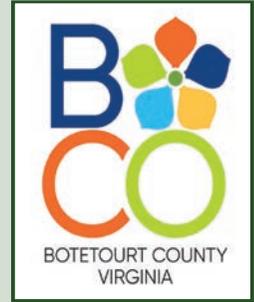
## More cakes and cookies in Rocky Mount >

Empire Bakery Commissary LLC has cut the ribbon on an expansion at its Rocky Mount plant, where it produces ready-to-sell decorated cakes and cookies for grocery retailers throughout the U.S. affiliated with the Kroger chain. The \$10.4 million investment includes 32,000 sq. ft. of new space, renovations to 12K sq. ft. and \$2.3 million in new equipment. In all it will create 75 new jobs; Empire Bakery employs around 200 currently. The company moved from Roanoke to a Rocky Mount business park in 2010. Said H-R recruiter Anthony Johnson: “ my goal is to ensure we [find] long term associates and retain those people, going out to the market, partnering with different job sources, trying to attract talent.”



## New logo for BoCo >

A new marketing identity and branding was unveiled at a Botetourt County Board of Supervisors meeting in late January – the first of the County's 250th anniversary year. It was called "fresh and vibrant," reflecting the growth and diversity of Botetourt, and a celebration of the County's unique history. Said Board Chairman Billy Martin about the new brand, "This is not what I was expecting; it is better. It really stands out and makes a statement. I like that." The new logo incorporates a nickname for the County that has organically emerged in recent years, "BOCO". It also features the five-leaved flower, or cinquefoil, a component of the original Baron Botetourt seal. County Administrator Gary Larrowe said the new logo "breaks the mold" of traditional governmental brands in order to communicate the real spirit of Botetourt. "This is an exciting time for the County, and we are thrilled about the future. This logo proudly proclaims our heritage while expressing our excitement about what is to come. It speaks to all of those things in a unique and engaging way."



## New name, same mission >

Feeding Southwest Virginia is the new name for what was Feeding America Southwest Virginia, the food pantry non-profit based in Salem. Feeding Southwest Virginia also has a satellite warehouse in Abingdon and operates the Community Solutions Center in northwest Roanoke City. Look for some signage changes and a website update. This is not the first name change:

what was Second Harvest Food Bank became Feeding America after a rebranding in 2010. President & CEO Pamela Irvine says each of the food banks are independent but members of the Feeding America national organization. The name shortening "will ... help the public understand that we are local. There's a lot of donor confusion for people that give monetary gifts. We are the local organization that feeds 26 counties in Southwest Virginia."

## Smart2Start >

United Way of Roanoke Valley has rolled out Smart2Start as part of the Smart Beginnings of Greater Roanoke program, designed to make it easier for parents of all demographics and socio-economic groups to find the best preschool program for their children. Beginning with the new school year this summer, parents/guardians can fill out one application that goes into a portal, matching them with the best options for Pre-K learning – whether based at a school or a private entity. A state grant is helping to get the pilot program off the ground. Studies show kids who arrive at kindergarten after attending a preschool helps give them "a critical foundation needed to succeed in school and life," says United Way of Roanoke Valley President & CEO Abby Hamilton. "Imagine a workforce that does not have access to childcare," she said at the launch for Smart2Start; this is an economic development issue for us in the local community – but also something of interest here in the Commonwealth." Virginia Secretary of Education Atif Quarni says if successful Smart2Start could be implemented in other localities.





## Major “get” for new Franklin County Business Park >

The 550-acre Summit View Business Park on US 220 between Boones Mill and Rocky Mount may be built out 10-15 years sooner than the 30 first projected. That was the word from economic development director Michael Burnette when Governor Northam and Franklin County officials revealed that Traditional Medicinals, a leading producer of bagged organic wellness teas based in California, will build its east coast manufacturing and distribution facility at Summit View. “This is already the third company coming into the park. It’s a great day – another fantastic company moving in,” said Burnette. The company will invest almost 30 million dollars to build a 125,000 sq. ft. facility on 30 acres, creating more than 50 jobs to start with an annual wage around \$48,000 – above the average for Franklin County.

At the Traditional Medicinals announcement it was also revealed that the plant was headed for Botetourt County when Summit View was added as the last site to be looked at by company executives. CEO Blair Kellison and Co-founder/Chairman Drake Sadler were on hand for the announcement. Sadler said the southern hospitality he was shown everywhere in Franklin County helped win him over: “you have something there- it’s rare.” No date was given for construction or a target opening date. More than 70,000 retail locations in the U.S. and abroad sell Traditional Medicinals bagged teas. Grants or loans from the Commonwealth Opportunity Fund and the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission totaling almost \$500,000 are earmarked for the project. Franklin County is providing the 30-acre site at no cost and a grant of \$360,000 for utility extensions. The company was launched in 1974.



## Chimes= Chaos >

The latest initiative by Downtown Roanoke Incorporate to attract more people to the historic City Market area and surrounding environs took place last month when “Chimes” took over the market plaza. This interactive art exhibition (as illustrated from its appearance elsewhere) reacts to wind or human touch by producing random musical sounds. DRI called it the chaos theory. It’s a light show at night as well.



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## Salem educator wants to help spread robotics >

Growing interest in the award-winning robotics program at Salem High School - and STEM related courses - is a model one teacher there plans to bring to other parts of southwestern Virginia and beyond. Technology education teacher and head robotics team coach Randy Brinkley says there is a symbiotic relationship between robotics and STEM courses. And he says STEM class enrollment would dramatically increase at other high schools that establish robotics programs. Brinkley, who brought his students to a demonstration of the robotic surgery equipment used by LewisGale Medical Center in February, plans to launch ASAP - the Appalachian STEM Assistance Project - in the next few months, recruiting high school technology teachers in a southern Appalachian region that reaches to northern Alabama. It's all about building a better worker skill base says Brinkley, and it may take 10 to 15 years.

ASAP has been under development for about a year. Brinkley also says there are corporate grants - from Microsoft, Boeing, John Deere and the like , to help launch high school robotics teams. "We can help [students] tap into the economic opportunity and educational opportunities that are realized on a daily basis in the larger metropolitan areas," says Brinkley.



## Impact of Coronavirus here? >

What's been labeled a "global Pandemic" - the Coronavirus - could also impact financial markets. By how much might depend on how long it takes to isolate and defeat this deadly strain. Sealed off cities and factories in China, trade restrictions, reduced shipping and travel bans - all of that has the potential to roil US financial markets says Clarence Rose, a professor of Finance at Radford University. He adds however that in recent times the US stock market has already been on a roller coaster. Dr. Rose, who also heads up Radford's center for financial education, said last month only if the coronavirus spreads extensively in this country does he believe we might see a major impact on financial markets here. "The long-term trends are very good. Our market right now and our economic environment are running very, very smoothly."



## LewisGale offers new birthing option for moms >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem has launched a nurse-midwives program, where women seeking to deliver their baby with less medical intervention can do so in a hospital setting that provides a safety net during labor if it is needed. Three Certified Nurse Midwives head up the new service. The hospital-based nurse-midwives program at LewisGale is the first of its kind in the Roanoke Valley. Kris Conrad is the director: "I just love midwifery care. I feel every woman should have access to a nurse-midwife if they want that." LewisGale Health System CEO and Market President Lance Jones was on hand for the announcement in mid-January as well.

## Ironman expected to be big draw >

The inaugural Carilion Clinic IRONMAN 70.3 Virginia's Blue Ridge Triathlon on June 7 will be a sellout well before 2600 or so participants line up to swim, bike and run 70.3 miles through Botetourt and Roanoke Counties, through the City of Roanoke – and now on the Blue Ridge Parkway after the National Park Service gave its blessing to closing a 21 mile segment of the BRP for the event. It has drawn registrants from all over the region, the country, even internationally. At the announcement revealing that the NPS will allow Ironman bikers on the Parkway, Carilion Clinic Chief Medical Officer Dr. Patrice Weiss said being the title sponsor for the event fits with "our continued focus on fitness and improving the health of the communities that we serve."



## Floyd Companies recognized >

Red Rooster Coffee Company and J.T. Copper (producers of a turmeric syrup product) have been named winners of the Good Food Awards. More than 2000 entries in 17 categories competed; three food crafters from each region of the country were honored. The Good Food Foundation states it is looking to “humanize and reform our American food culture.”



## Salem-Roanoke County Chamber Awards >

RunAbout Sports was named the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce 2019 Small Business of the Year at the Chamber’s annual awards breakfast in January. Pictured is RunAbout co-owner (and Valley Business Front columnist) Ally Bowersock. Other Chamber 2019 award winners: Josh Webb, Salem Police Officer of the Year, Roanoke County Police Officer of the Year Todd Webb, Kembel Tax Service (Small Business-Salem), Salem Red Sox (Large Business-Salem) and Richfield Living (Large Business-Roanoke County). One another note about RunAbout Sports: former Fleet Feet employees Monica and Andrew Holbrook are now co-owners of the store that sells running-related gear on Brambleton Avenue (with store founders Ally and Tyler Bowersock.)



## Carilion partnership with Lab Sports official >

February 3 marked the official beginning of a partnership and space-sharing arrangement between Carilion and Lab Sports Performance at the 9th SE Street industrial park in Roanoke that used to be American Viscose plant. Carilion has almost 5000 square feet of office and therapy room space available there to diagnose and treat orthopedic injuries. Next door Lab Sports has another 13,000 square feet of indoor turfed field where the injured members of local athletic teams and the more

serious weekend warriors can rehabilitate with agility training, powerlifting and other routines. Dr. Taylor Griffith says Carilion has been looking to take its physical therapy offerings to the next level for years. The partnership with Lab Sports Performance was about two years in the making. "We're trying to help the more sports-related population get back ... to their activity. It's a little more specific than our other clinics with Carilion."

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

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## FINANCIAL FRONT



Miller

**Brooke Miller** has joined The Bank of Fincastle as a commercial loan officer. She has been in the industry for over 17 years, most recently with First Citizens Bank. Miller graduated from Radford University and was a 2019 Leadership Roanoke Valley Program graduate as well.



Cauley

Member One Federal Credit Union has promoted **Lori Cauley** to the position of Chief

Brand Officer, where she will focus on strategic branding plays for Member One in the markets it serves. Cauley joined Member One FCU last March and brings more than 15 years of corporate experience in marketing and advertising, brand management, project management, business development, community development, and public relations.



Juidici

National Bank, which has 25 locations in Southwestern Virginia, has welcomed **Raymond "Ray" L. Juidici** as Vice President and Trust Officer. He brings 15 years of experience to the new position. Before joining National Bank, he led the local office of US Bank Wealth Management in Appleton, Wisconsin. Juidici has also served

as an Adjunct Professor on financial and economic subjects.

## LEGAL FRONT



Thompson

**Rachel L. D. Thompson** has been named a partner of Salem-based Poarch Law, which is now Poarch Thompson Law. Poarch Law is a female-led law firm founded in 2003 to focus on advocacy and protection of Southwestern Virginia's immigrant community. Thompson began at Poarch Law with an internship during her pursuit of a J.D. at Liberty University School of Law and joined the firm as a full-time lawyer in 2012. "I am thrilled," states the firm's founder, Christine

Poarch. "Rachel has been an amazing part of our firm for the last seven years."

## DEVELOPMENT FRONT

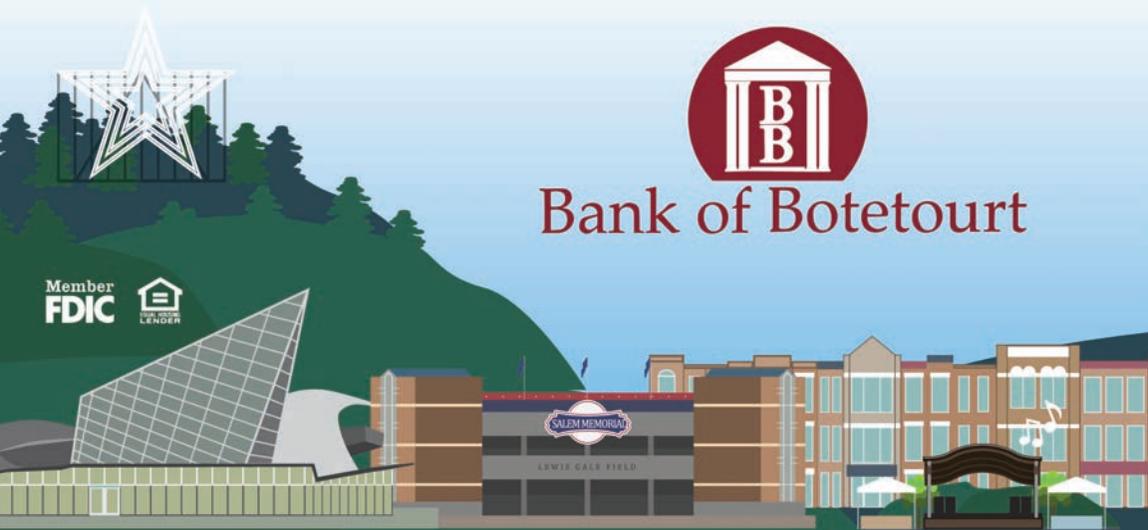


Huff

Poe & Cronk Real Estate Group has promoted **Matt Huff**, CCIM as the company's new President. He had previously served as the Executive Vice President/COO of Poe & Cronk. Huff succeeds Dennis Cronk, who will serve as the Roanoke-based company's Chairman/CEO.

## EDUCATIONAL FRONT

The 13th president of Hollins University will be **Mary Dana Hinton**, currently the president at the College of Saint



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FDIC





**Hinton**

Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota. Effective August 1, Hinton will succeed interim president Nancy Gray at Hollins, who stepped back into that role after Pareena Lawrence resigned last June. "St. Ben's" has been ranked as a top 100 Liberal Arts School by U.S. News and World Report.



**Collins**

The Dean of Engineering at Cornell University, **Lance R. Collins**, has been selected by Virginia Tech as the inaugural Vice President and Executive Director

for the new Innovation Campus being built in Alexandria. Collins is described as being a "key member" of the team that partnered with New York City to build the Cornell Tech satellite campus there. Collins starts his position with Virginia Tech on August 1.

**Carolyn "Lyn" Ringer Lepre**, Ph.D. will become the new Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Radford University in July following a national search. Lepre comes to Radford after a decade at Marist College in New York, where she most recently served as a Dean in the School of Communication and the Arts.

**Lindsey A. Haugh** has



**Haugh**

joined Virginia Tech's Office of Research and Innovation as the director of marketing and communications. Haugh joined Virginia Tech as an employee and is also a graduate, with a degree in fine arts and graphic design. Her new role includes networking with communications directors throughout the university.

Virginia Tech Dining Services has named **Mark Bratton** executive chef for Southgate Center. The new



**Bratton**

position oversees the university's commissary kitchen and was created as the department expands the services the facility provides to dining centers across campus. Bratton had been executive chef at the West End Market at Cochrane Hall previously.

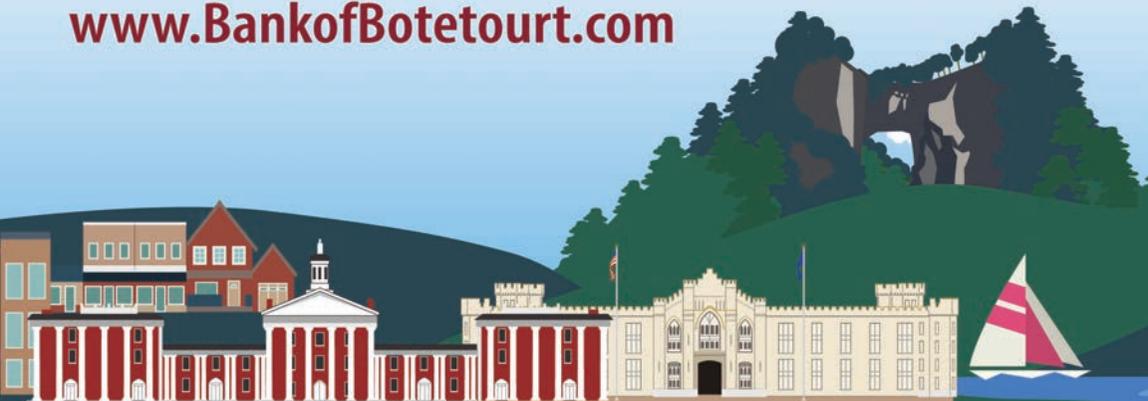
**Mary-Ann Ibeziako** has been named assistant vice president for utilities at Virginia Tech. Within the Virginia Tech Facilities Department, Ibeziako is responsible for

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Ibeziako

direct oversight of campus utility services and infrastructure on the 12-million-gross-square-foot Virginia Tech Blacksburg campus. She comes to Virginia Tech from the University of Maryland.



Davis

**Gannon Davis** has been appointed director of business and financial affairs for the Division of Information Technology at Virginia Tech. He has more than 15 years of experience in higher education financial management and has served at Virginia Tech since 2007



Brentley

**Tyler Brentley** has been named the new director of the Black Cultural Center at Virginia Tech, effective March 25. Brentley, a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, native, earned an undergraduate degree

in pre-law from Youngstown State University, Ohio, and is a graduate of its Master of Science in education in a counseling program. As director of the Black Cultural Center and reporting to the Office for Inclusion and Diversity, Brentley will support the university's diversity and inclusion efforts by developing programs, events, and services that facilitate the personal, social, academic, and cultural well-being of Black and African American students.



Faires

**Billy Faires** has been named executive director of marketing and communications at Hollins University. He comes to the Roanoke County campus from Episcopal High School in Alexandria, where he had served as director of communications since 2016. A graduate of the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, Faires also holds an M.Ed. from Vanderbilt University.



Huang

**Ching-Hsun Huang** has been named head

of the Department of Sustainable Biomaterials in the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech. "The department ... is uniquely positioned to demonstrate how an academic department can contribute to problem-solving in the context of advancing technologies," said Huang, who comes to VT from Northern Arizona University, where she recently served as interim executive director of the School of Forestry.



Dantzler



James

**David Dantzler** and **Rick James** have joined the Board of Directors of the Virginia Western Community College Educational Foundation. Dantzler is District Manager for Kroger Mid-Atlantic and a member of the Foundation's Scholarship and Grants Committee. James is Executive Vice President of Adams Construction Company and a member Foundation's CCAP2 Campaign Cabinet. The Virginia Western Community College Educational Foundation is an

independent nonprofit dedicated to enhancing awareness of the college and securing private and public funds.

## SENIOR FRONT



Grahame



Winter

Retirement Unlimited, Inc. (RUI), has announced the promotion of **Brian Grahame** to Executive Vice President of Clinical Services for the family-owned and Virginia based Senior Living Community management company. Grahame will oversee clinical operations and compliance as well, and implement efforts aimed at future growth and expansion. Grahame started his career with the Fralin and Waldron companies in 2009 at RUI's sister company, Medical Facilities of America, which is also based in Roanoke. Meanwhile **Steve Winter** has been named Vice President of Plant Operations for RUI. Winter joined RUI in 1999 at a Virginia Beach facility after serving in the US Navy for 13 years.



**Stephens**

Friendship has hired **Sarah Stephens** as the community's development officer, a position that is new to the organization. Stephens, a graduate of Centre College, joined Friendship in December 2019. She joined the non-profit industry in 2011, serving as the volunteer coordinator for Goodwill Industries of the Valleys.

graduate of Radford University with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, joined Richfield earlier this year. She has more than fifteen years of experience in the senior care industry in both sales and leadership roles.

business development firm. "It's the perfect time for Kyle and Adam to join us," said Bruce C. Bryan, President of B2C Enterprises. "The end of 2019 brought us substantial growth and a rise in clients interested in interactive, eye-catching websites."

President of FemCity Roanoke, a local chapter of an international women's business networking community that has grown to hundreds of members over the past three years. Bell graduated from Radford University with a degree in Business Administration, Management and spent 15 years with Anthem, Inc, primarily in process improvement projects. She is also self-employed as publisher of the hyper-local, online resource for families, Macaroni Kid Roanoke. As for her Chamber role, "it's all about our relationships and our genuine concern for each other," says Bell, "I really want to install that type of culture here. I think it already exists; more people just need to know about it."

## OTHER FRONTS



**Draper**



**Bell**

The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce has named **Beth Bell** as its new executive director. The Chamber says Bell (also a Valley Business Front columnist) will focus on providing support and resources to the Chamber's growing membership base through recognition, strategic connections, relevant events and partnership opportunities. She had been

*Compiled by Gene Marrano*

"I almost always turn down work-shop requests."

— Page 24



**Hanks**

Richfield Living has announced the selection of **Jennifer Hanks** as Director of Admissions for The Oaks and The Joseph C. Thomas Center. Hanks, a



**Thompson**

B2C Enterprises in Roanoke has hired **Kyle Draper** as an account manager and **Adam Thompson** as a designer, for the full service creative and



## A Mission of Quality Service, Excellent Support and Advanced Technology

Citizens began with a vision, a need for communications in rural America. From the front steps of the Floyd County Court House evolved what would become Citizens Telephone Cooperative. From that February day in 1914 to today, the mission to provide quality service, excellent support, and advanced technology remains steadfast.

Today, with just over 60 employees, Citizens continues to be a leading-edge technology provider offering services that complement its core services of voice, video, and data. Citizens has grown from a local telephone company to the technology company of the future. With full-service offerings for residential, small and global businesses, Citizens brings it all together for you.

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## *Export assistance*

### **P1 Technologies**

in Roanoke County (formerly Plastics One) has been accepted into the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's two-year Virginia Leaders in Export Trade (VALET) program. It's designed to give Virginia companies help with their international exporting business as a growth strategy. VEDP's VALET program currently has 44 participants. P1 Technologies is a custom manufacturer that provides product design, 3D printing, prototyping and component requirement testing.

## *New reason to drink wine*

The **Beliveau Farm Winery** in Blacksburg has launched a new Sit & Sip Bistro at the Manor House. It runs every Saturday and Sunday from 12-6, featuring seated wine tastings and new items from the Bistro kitchen.

## *Fed bucks for Ag*

Virginia Democratic US Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine have announced more than \$1.5 million in federal funding for the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech for agriculture research. Warner and Kaine said in a joint news release that agriculture is a significant part of the state's economy and the funding will be a boost to that market sector. Funds will go towards

data science, the study of how invasive species spread and protecting agriculture from cyber security threats. A U.S. Department of Agriculture initiative focused on data-driven solutions made the award.

## *LEAP jumps in*

### **The Roanoke Community Garden Association**

voted to dissolve in December 2019 after a decade-plus of establishing community gardens rented for a nominal fee to local residents in what are often "food deserts," with little access to healthy food or produce. But into the void has stepped LEAP – the Local Environmental Agriculture Project, which has taken over operations of a handful of leased garden spaces in several quadrants of the city. LEAP officials say the concept of growing your own produce fits with their mission to get fruits and vegetables to more people in the valley. LEAP is asking for donations online to get it through the 2020 "transition" year.

## *Real Estate notes*

### **Maxim Healthcare Services**

has leased space at the Century Business Center on Plantation Road in Roanoke. A restaurant and food market, Super Amanecer Inc., has leased more than 9000 square feet at Towne Square. In Salem Little Caesar's plans to relocate to Spartan Square and in Christiansburg Chipotle has leased more than

2300 square feet at the Christiansburg Marketplace.

## *Ribbon Cutting for family builders*

The **Alam Design Group**, and architects and builders company based in Roanoke, has opened its new offices at 4311 Appleton Avenue. Its Family Builders LLC subsidiary is a licensed Class A contractor in Virginia.

## *Big check from railroad giant*

### **The Norfolk Southern Foundation**

has awarded Salem-based Feeding Southwest Virginia (new name) a grant of \$75,000. The funds will be used to support the organization's food distribution programs in its 26-county, 9-city service region, which includes the Roanoke Valley. Says Pamela Irvine, Feeding Southwest Virginia CEO, "our food bank continues to struggle for resources and this grant will make a serious impact in fulfilling our mission to serve our neighbors with food, hope and dignity every day of the year."

## *More broadband in Franklin County*

**Franklin County** has been awarded almost 2.4 million dollars from the Commonwealth's Virginia Telecommunication Initiative to continue development of a hybrid solution that could deliver high speed broadband internet to underserved rural parts

of the county. The Franklin County Broadband Authority identified those areas in August 2019, which also included a phased approach to connect broadband fiber to homes in designated areas. The VATI grant was part of more than 18 million parceled out to various localities in Virginia

## *Goodwill in NRV celebrates renovations*

### **Goodwill Industries of the Valleys**

cut the ribbon on its newly renovated job training center in Christiansburg in late January. The Goodwill Learning Academy on Peppers Ferry Road features computer classes, certifications, workshops and other training courses.

## *An angel taking care of medical bills*

The Secular Society, a non-profit corporation located in Blacksburg, will provide up to three million dollars over the next three years to eliminate medical debt accrued by citizens of twenty counties in Southwest Virginia. These funds will buy and abolish the medical debt of individuals owed to hospitals, physician practices and debt collectors. This action is anticipated to eliminate \$350,000,000 to \$600,000,000 of private citizen debt for individuals and households whose income is less than two times the federal poverty level guideline or who are insolvent. The Secular Society has

partnered with RIP Medical Debt, a non-profit corporation headquartered in New York, which will buy and abolish this debt. Recipients cannot apply for this random act of kindness, which will be restricted to residents of the following counties: Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Craig, Dickenson, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe.

*Buy more furniture from regional companies urge lawmakers*

U.S. Senators **Mark Warner** and **Tim Kaine**, and Congressman **Morgan Griffith** have joined a bi-partisan letter asking the U.S. State Department to consider Vaughan-Bassett Furniture in Galax and other U.S.-based manufacturers for a Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) to supply the department's furniture purchases, instead of State's current practice of sourcing much of its furniture from companies that

manufacture in part outside the U.S. "Of particular interest to us is the opportunity to promote American jobs and industry, ensure consistent high safety standards, and to help the Department of State leverage more buying options into greater competition and value for the taxpayers," the members of Congress wrote.

*Help is on the way for I-81 travelers through the Roanoke Valley*

The **Commonwealth Transportation Board** (CTB) has awarded a contract to widen two miles of Interstate 81 in Roanoke County. The \$27.3 million contract was awarded to Branch Civil, Inc. of Roanoke, to construct a third lane on northbound and southbound I-81 between exits 141 (Salem) and 143 (Roanoke). Approximately 70,000 vehicles use this section of Interstate 81 each day, the mostly heavily traveled section in Virginia. Work is expected to begin on the widening project in spring 2020 and be

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completed in summer 2022. Longer term VDOT plans include widening I-81 from Daleville to Christiansburg with another lane.

*New designation for Carilion Clinic*

Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital (CRMH) is the region's only Level 1 trauma center. Now Carilion Children's Hospital (within CRMH) is now also a designated Level 1 program for treating pediatric patients. Designation happens at the state level, and Carilion Children's is one of only three Level 1 Pediatric Trauma Centers in the state, and the only one west of Richmond. Level 1 Trauma Centers can provide the most

comprehensive services to care for injured patients from hospitalization and recovery-total care - from prevention through rehabilitation.

*More jobs, investment in Pulaski County*

The **Patton Logistics Group** will invest \$12 million to establish a new logistics and warehousing operation in the New River Valley Commerce Park in Pulaski County. Patton provides integrated supply chain solutions for clients throughout the United States and Canada. The facility will also serve as a hub for motor carrier freight services. Virginia competed with North Carolina for the project, which will create 33 new

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jobs. A \$150,000 grant was issued from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund to assist Pulaski County with the project. Patton Logistics is also eligible to receive state benefits from the Virginia Enterprise Zone Program, administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

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### *NRV growing faster than Roanoke*

**A Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service** study estimates that Montgomery County has surpassed the City of Roanoke as the largest municipality west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, with a population of more than 100,000 in 2019. Roanoke City's population is estimated to have fallen from the 100K mark to more than 99,000 in the same time range. Research points to Virginia Tech's growing enrollment (see our August 2019 cover story at [vbfront.com](http://vbfront.com)) for much of that population increase in Montgomery County.

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### *Virginia's Blue Ridge keeps rolling*

It's quite the winning streak - 2019 was the 10th straight year of hotel room revenue growth in Virginia's Blue Ridge: a 3.7 percent rise over 2018 and 116 million dollars in total revenue. There was an increase in hotel room demand of just over one percent. Catherine Fox is a Vice President for Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge; the closure of

the Blue Ridge Hotel and Conference Center in Roanoke (formerly a Sheraton and a Marriott) - especially the large meeting space there - is a concern says Fox, with few rooms that size available in the valley for regional conferences, especially if the Hotel Roanoke ballroom is booked. On the other hand, "we are looking at growth in the hotel room inventory side of things," notes Fox, citing a new property opening this summer in the Roanoke Valley near US 460 and several others that could break ground. Fox also says VVBR will conduct a survey of those who visit their website - to see if they came to visit after doing the research, what they came to see and if they left satisfied.

---

### *Big Player in the Valley*

The University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service's Center for Economic and Policy Studies has crunched the numbers for 2018 when it comes to Carilion Clinic. The analysis found that Carilion generated more than \$3.2 billion dollars and nearly 24,000 jobs in its service region in 2018. The date analyzed was for the Carilion fiscal year ending on September 30, 2018. The Weldon Cooper Center study examined growth in Carilion's employee base, payroll and investments locally. The indirect impact of what the health system's employees purchased was also in the mix. Said President and CEO Nancy Howell

Agee, "this study provides a snapshot of our operations, and its encouraging to see the ripple effect that extends far beyond our walls."

---

### *New seating all paid for*

A capital campaign to raise \$180,000 dollars for all new seating at the historic **Grandin Theatre** was completed in January. By the end of February, the seats in all four screening rooms including the main theater were scheduled to be replaced. The funding also allowed for acoustical wall panels to be installed in that space as well. Each comfy chair cost around \$360 to purchase and install says Grandin Theatre Foundation executive director Ian Fortier. "It's a really good way to build community equity and get people involved. We had over 360 donors participate in the campaign and over 240 of them bought at least one seat."

---

### *Rosie's means big bucks says study*

A study conducted by **George Mason University** projects the Colonial Downs Group that operates a horse racing track in New Kent and Rosie's Gaming Emporiums in localities that include Vinton will generate more than 4200 jobs directly or indirectly in 2020. The study claims it will also produce \$26.1 million in state tax revenue and almost \$18 million in tax revenue for Rosie's host localities like Vinton - where it will generate about \$50,000 monthly

for the town's coffers. Overall economic impact expected from the Colonial Downs Group in 2020 is \$445 million statewide. Colonial Downs also announced that for many of the employees at the Rosie's sites, the minimum wage will be raised to 15 dollars an hour.

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### *Good news for hemp farmers*

Growers of industrial hemp in Virginia - which has only been legal to grow again since 2019 - received good news when the U.S. Department of Agriculture approved 84 counties in Virginia for eligibility in two insurance programs that will protect those crops against unforeseen disasters in 2020. Among the localities eligible for the crop insurance program are Bedford, Botetourt, Campbell, Floyd, Franklin, Montgomery and Pulaski counties. "These additional protections will help hemp growers tap into this thriving industry," said Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine in a joint statement.

---

### *Expansion for Bedford company*

**Blue Ridge Optics** in the Town of Bedford is investing almost \$700,000 to add new equipment, upgrade infrastructure and hire up to ten new employees. The firm was launched in 2006 by a former Lockheed Martin engineer, producing laser optics and thin

film coatings. The new equipment will help meet requirements for military and defense contracts. The company currently employs more than 40.

### *Earth Fare closes*

Opened with great fanfare in November 2017 the **Earth Fare** "healthy supermarket" on Franklin Road in Roanoke – and all other locations for the niche grocer – announced in February they would be going out of business. "The decision to close our doors [after 45 years] was not easy," read a

corporate statement. Earth Fare specialized in organic, natural foods processed without additives. Roanoke City economic development officials were already looking to fill that space as soon as the going-out-of-business notice went out.

### *IT company branching out locally*

A North Carolina based tech firm plans to expand operations into downtown Roanoke. Clarkston Technology Solutions, which operations its Roanoke

branch in a location on Market Street SE, has purchased a building on 5th Street, which will serve as its new headquarters. Company officials say the expansion will allow it to increase its workforce to 100 technologists, developers, and coders.

### *Commonwealth Games record*

Another record for the **Virginia Commonwealth Games** in 2019 when it comes to economic impact - the Liberty University-based games generated 7 million

dollars - more than \$6.5 million in the Lynchburg area alone. There were more than 14,000 athletes in 50 sports, up over 2000 from 2018. The 2019 event was also the State Games of America, welcoming participants and their families from outside of Virginia. Roanoke-based Virginia Amateur Sports stages the Commonwealth Games, centered around a Main Games weekend every year with some events in other parts of the state as well.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*

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(L-R) Andie Gibson, communications director; Laura Moritz, community relations director; Cheryl Ward, special events director; Christopher Finley, executive director; Christine Rizzio, membership director; Ed Conant, weekend supervisor; and Laura Healey, office administrator.

# ONE LAKE

By Denise Allen Membreño

There are big shoes to fill at Smith Mountain Lake, but the new executive director knows the area well.

When Christopher Finley first heard Vickie Gardner was leaving the Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce (SMLRCC), he was excited about the possibility of coming back and the chance to offer a fresh perspective to the community he loves. His next thought was how to fill Gardner's shoes.

"I was intimidated because my predecessor had been in the job for 17 years. She is a huge champion and cheerleader for the lake community," said Finley, Executive Director of the SMLRCC since the summer of 2019. "My dad said, 'Son don't think of it as replacement. You're succeeding her, so it is up to you to leave your mark and legacy.' That to me really solidified my deciding to come on board." (Gardner's tenure was jarred by the fatal on-air shooting of two WDBJ-7 journalists in 2015 as they interviewed her; it left her with serious gunshot wounds.)

Finley had served on the Chamber Board

for three years during Gardner's tenure as executive director, so he knew the caliber of leadership she brought to the table. At the time he was the marketing director with Willard Companies, a position he held from 2004 to 2015. His connection to the Lake goes back even farther. His family has owned Lake property his entire life and it has been the backdrop for vacations and family gatherings.

When the executive director position opened, Finley was the communications manager with defense contractor BAE Systems. His experience at BAE and Willard Companies uniquely prepared him for his new position.

"During my tenure at Willard there was both the economic boom and the recession," said Finley. "I had the opportunity to really market Smith Mountain Lake as a tourism destination for vacationers or potential real estate investors. It really was positioning Smith Mountain Lake globally."

Through that experience Finley learned how to build a brand and membership for Willard Company golf courses during difficult economic times. At BAE Finley worked with the government and with organizations in the community.

“Those experiences will serve me well in this position as I work with area legislators to support or oppose bills that impact the Lake and the greater community — supporting and advocating for our business members in the three surrounding counties,” added Finley.

The SMLRCC has more than 700 members in those three counties. Finley’s first order of business has been to make sure the Chamber has the staff on hand to meet membership needs. “Over the last year we not only lost an executive director, we also had some other staff turnover. My primary focus was to rebuild our staff. We have a new special events director and a dedicated membership director.”

Finley is working with the Chamber Board to develop a strategic plan detailing how to best serve its members and the community. Short term goals include a lake area restaurant week and a 12-month engagement plan that will give the board, ambassadors and Finley the chance to engage with members on several occasions over the year.

“I would like to incorporate a leadership program,” added Finley, “to borrow from

the skills I gained as an instructor with the School of Communications at Radford University and build a curriculum so businesses can sponsor an employee that is aspiring to grow with [them].”

The Smith Mountain Lake Wine Festival is also moving from Crazy Horse Marina to Mariner’s Landing, which offers lodging and indoor amenities that could be used in the case of inclement weather.

“We are a regional Chamber and it’s my job to make sure we represent the members in all three counties,” continued Finley. “We are one lake. I don’t want to be divided by county lines. My approach is to blur the county lines. That’s easier said than done when working with legislators, and supervisors or councils.” Franklin, Bedford and Pittsylvania Counties all border the manmade lake created in the 1960’s to produce hydroelectric power.

Finley also wants to use out of the box techniques to market the Lake as a whole. “We’re going to be launching a contest — to stay for 3 days, dining, lodging provided and possibly working with businesses to provide a cruise or fishing trip. People would register to win the stay. Then the Chamber will turn around and market to the registrants.”

And how about those shoes Finley is trying to fill? Gardner stopped in to see Finley shortly after he accepted the position, offering her full support. “To have her has a proponent and advocate for me felt good.” 

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““

When you are required to answer the hard questions... you can't help but grow.

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““

I don't want to be divided by county lines.

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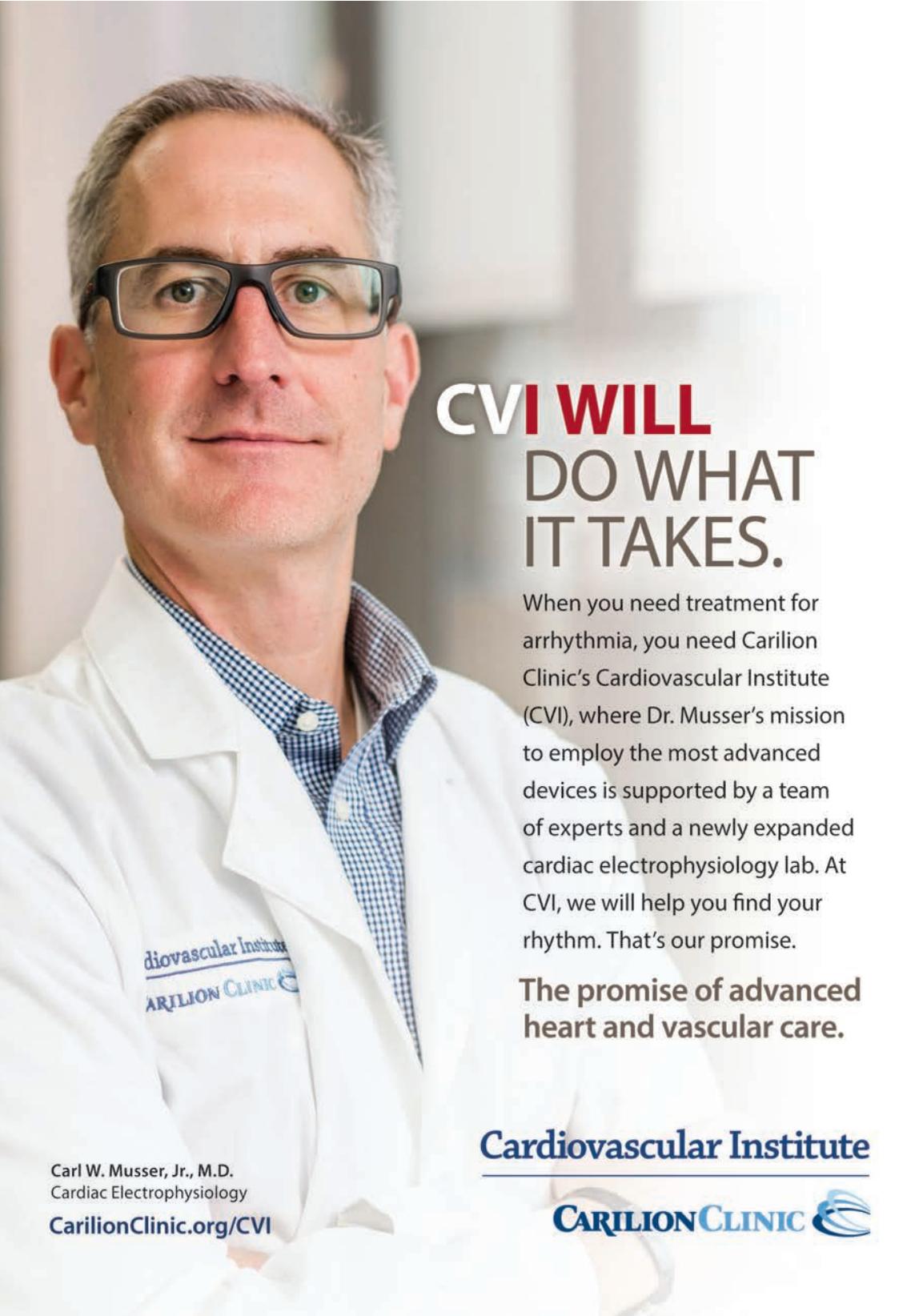
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