

Valley Business **FRONT**

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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Agriculture, Agritourism,
Agribusiness and the
Independent Farmer

LEAP

TruHarvest hemp

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Our Farmer's Challenge

Megan Seibel
Mountain View
Farm & Vineyard

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

We had planned this issue with its focus on local agriculture well before the economic crisis and social isolation associated with COVID-19 reared its ugly head – but the opportunity to head outdoors and talk to people who are growing fresh healthy produce (or grass-fed, lower stress cattle) seems appropriate. Eating healthier we are told won't prevent you from catching a nasty virus, but being healthier can shorten recovery time. And there are plenty of snippets in this issue about how local businesses are fighting to remain viable until the all-clear is given. Stay safe and look for the light at the end of the tunnel. There always is one.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

“”
During a crisis, it's time
to give orders. — Page 18

Dear Friend of the Rescue Mission,

Thanks to your support, this Rescue Mission has provided help, hope and healing for nearly 72 years. The need for the Rescue Mission's comprehensive, Christian safety net of services has never been greater. With current demands and an anticipated increase of first time guests coming for emergency shelter and food assistance due to lost employment, we need your active involvement. Help your Rescue Mission stay strong through this crisis by making a gift today.



RESCUE MISSION
ministries

402 4th Street SE,
Roanoke, VA 24013

HOW RECENT EVENTS HAVE AFFECTED MISSION NEEDS



FREE CLINIC FOR THE HOMELESS

Fralin Free Clinic is on the front lines, screening all guests and recovery participants, coordinating with local hospitals, medical providers and partners. Thanks to Orvis, all Guests, Staff and volunteers are provided with face masks. Steps to keep all safe continue with additional day shelter services for guests and around the clock provision for our area's neediest residents.



CHILDREN'S SERVICES

With the closure of Roanoke City Schools, Mission staff are providing 24/7 services for families with children who are experiencing homelessness. This includes supporting "at-home" education requirements, enrichment activities, games and family bonding time during these stressful days.



FEEDING HUNGRY PEOPLE

More families from the community are seeking food during this time and increasing numbers are coming for daily bagged lunches and dinners, as well as weekly Manna Food Box distributions.

Three meals a day are provided for Emergency Shelter Guests and The Way Forward Recovery Program participants.



RETAIL SALES & VOLUNTEERS

Thrift 460 and 2nd Helpings temporarily closed resulting in significant financial strain on the Rescue Mission. 100% of sales provide for daily Mission critical services. Staff from the stores are filling vital roles across the Mission to cover for volunteers who are unable to help at this time.

How can you help?

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Go to www.rescuemission.net and click on the "Donate Now" button

VOLUNTEER

Contact our volunteer department at: volunteer.info@rescuemission.net

SHOP

Shop our eBay store where 100% of profits go back to the Mission

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Shifting Landscape for Our Local Farmers

by Nanette Levin



“There is no quitting, no resignation, no giving in...”

— Page 31

Cover photography of Megan Seibel by Curt Dennison.

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Advisory Board

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

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“”
Zoom’s appeal is the ease of use.

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“”
Try a simple bow of the head to say hello and goodbye.

— Page 22

“”
Look for the Market Fair to reemerge.

— Page 61

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 28.

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Mountain View Farm & Vineyard

Megan and Andy Seibel atop chardonnay vineyards

Shifting Landscape for Our Local Farmers

By Nanette Levin

A snapshot of inventive solutions from our region's independent farmers.

Mother Nature is a small challenge compared to some of the other issues smaller farmers face. From federal mandates and competition from large corporate conglomerates to land costs and low margins, it's not easy being an independent farmer today.

Courtney Henderson of Cave Hill Dairy in Troutville is a 6th generation farmer on land her great, great grandfather converted for dairy farming in the late 1800s. A 2018 Virginia Tech graduate, Henderson milks 118 cows and helps maintain a herd of 350 head on 450 acres. The family rents an additional 200 acres to grow feed for their cows. She's leveraging knowledge gained from her degree,

generational resources, and cooperatives to stay viable through cost fluctuations.

Cameron Terry, owner of Garden Variety Harvests, created an urban model growing produce on tiny residential plots owned by others in exchange for weekly vegetable shares. He's planting less than ½ an acre total in the City of Roanoke and producing 7,000-9,000 pounds of produce annually.

Susanna Thornton, of Thornfield Farm in Fincastle, fills a niche by working the land almost entirely by hand. She started with vegetables and cut flowers six years ago but has expanded to include chickens and sheep.

Her company now employs six people.

Andy and Megan Seibel, of Mountain View Farm and Vineyard in Bonsack, have diversified their generational dairy operation to include grape growing for Commonwealth wine producers.

Thomas Williamson, of Williamson Farms in Troutville, is focused on ecologically sustainable processes and practices that reduce stress in his beef cows. He's also diversified to include 350 laying hens and creating a symbiotic pasture environment for his grass-fed angus beef.

Each has different approaches to putting food on our tables. All are passionate about agriculture.

Staying local

Small farmers tend to sell closer to home. In Courtney Henderson's case, she's sending 16,000 gallons of milk every other day to Winston-Salem for processing. The milk is then distributed to Kroger and Food Lion stores in our area.

"I chose to go with an urban model when I got into agriculture, which is a little more than two years ago now," says Cameron Terry. This keeps him close to restaurants, enables local deliveries, and allows for chef requests for customized crops. His focus is on high-value crops such as salad greens

COVID-19

Eating more healthy foods like fresh produce from local farms - or taking supplements that promise as much nutrition as multiple servings of fruits and vegetables - will NOT help a person avoid COVID-19. However, a Carilion spokesperson says the healthier a person is - eating well and regular exercise - may lead to better outcomes for those who do contract the coronavirus, or any other virus for that matter.

Courtney Henderson



Submitted



Cameron Terry



Thomas and Tara Williamson
with guard dog Belle

and root vegetables planted on other people's yards. "They get to feel like they're a part of the local food system."

"Our mix is about 60% farmers market and 40% percent restaurant customers," notes Terry. "This is my only income now. I thought it was important to be a full-time farmer from day one. I want to be an employer in this space. I think it's important to prove to our communities that growing food is not the work of poor people."

"This farm was originally purchased from my great grandfather over 100 years ago," explains Thomas Williamson. He took the reins in 2009 and now sells produce at farmer's markets, to restaurant owners, and directly to consumers in Blacksburg, Radford, Botetourt, Troutville, Daleville, and on his website. He manages 70-120 head of cattle on about 320 acres. "Usually it takes 1200 acres or more. We can do it on a lot less because we have a diversity of products to offer. We can do that directly to the consumer because the demand for that's good right now," he says.

The young farmer scene

"Being a young farmer is challenging, to say the least, because of all the new stuff and the

way pricing is," says Henderson. The milk industry is federally regulated. "I'm doing what I want to but I'm not being completely closed off to the reality of things. Older farmers have their established land. The young farmer, it's hard for them. We don't have the established land. We're trying to figure out how we can get what we need, especially if you're not a generational farmer. There are a lot of options out there." Henderson cites USDA young farmer loans, land grants, and programs designed to help new farmers access generational resources.

Andy Seibel of Mountain View Farm and Vineyard cites Farm Link as an interesting database designed to match older farmers without heirs with those seeking to start agricultural businesses. He also notes government loans for beginning poultry farmers. "On the horticulture side, you see a lot of young people that are getting into that," he says. Megan, his wife, adds "picking your own locations [are getting popular] if you're close enough to a population base that can come."

Both Seibels work full-time at Virginia Tech in agricultural-related positions. Andy runs the FFA (Future Farmers of America) program for the Commonwealth and Megan heads up the Adult Leadership Program for the Commonwealth. They believe there are opportunities for

establishing better mentorships, providing internships and educating youth. "There are 300 careers related to ag that aren't necessarily just straight up production in farming," explains Andy. He cites mechatronics, lab sciences, water quality testing, and animal management.

"I see a lot of young people coming into farming," says Terry. "from a mix of different backgrounds and different business skills. They're homesteading and selling leftovers. More young people are coming back to the table, which is really important."

Creative approaches

Twenty years ago, the Seibels added wine grapes to their mix. "The current situation [shows] there's not enough supply to meet demand," Andy explains. "The industry is supportive of growers trying to get into it. In the past 10 years, most tax collected from wine sales goes back into research – from production practices in the field to wine production at the winery – for improving quality, market value. It's benefitting everyone in the industry.

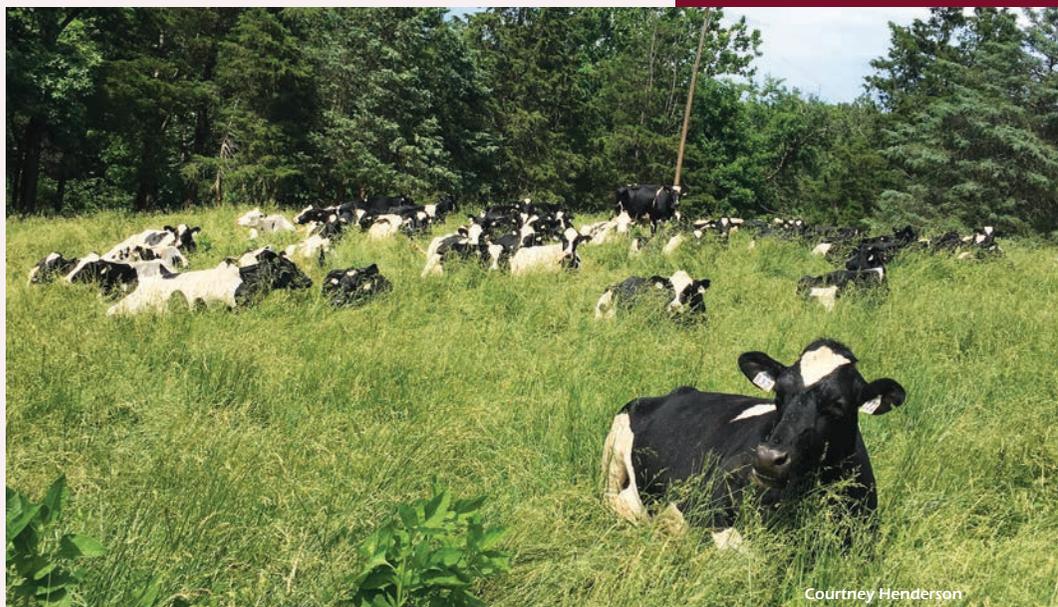
"Adding the grapes was a way to increase income since beef prices fluctuate from year to year," says Seibel, while cautioning it's a long-term process. "It's going to take about three to four years before you get your first crop. You can't just put grapes in and grow them." Quality is critical for demand. "Our grapes are sold years out."

"In the interest of animal welfare, every animal needs a friend group," says Williamson. He applies this through slaughter. "We always do groups of two to four. That reduces our stress hormones considerably, which affects the color and taste of the beef." Williamson studied agronomy at



Andy Seibel

Cave Hill Dairy cows relaxing



Courtney Henderson



Cameron Terry

One of Garden Variety Harvests plots

Virginia Tech, where he began to question standard practices. “The longer we can graze, the better. Healthy grass makes healthy cattle. Really, I don’t raise cattle, I raise healthy grass.” His chickens help with this, self-fertilizing cow pastures while eating bugs and weeds.

Going Small – and filling a niche

Thornton and Terry’s inventive approaches to small scale operations offer affordable options for younger generations.

“There is a small community of us that does this type of farming and sell to farmers markets

and community supported agricultural groups (CSAs) in Southwest Virginia,” says Thornton. She participates at three farmers markets, has five restaurant clients, and supplies 120 families through her CSA program (where people order produce for their own use on a regular basis).

Both recognize the demand for variety, with Thornton selling cut flowers and 50 different vegetables and Terry with 40 options. They achieve volume on small plots by replanting the same beds several times a year. “We live off what we grow, and we really enjoy the lifestyle that it affords us,” says Thornton. “Every time we grow, we really don’t increase our net, we just increase our gross. This



Cameron Terry

The Garden Variety Harvest booth at the Grandin Farmers Market



Mountain View Farm & Vineyard

Mountain View Farm & Vineyard sign

business isn't about making money for me. People are craving a connection to their food in this society. We fill that niche."

"I think it's important that we really try to get creative about how we're sourcing our food," says Terry. "Stop trucking lettuce and tomatoes from California across the country. The footprint of that is inexcusable and it's time we do something about it. Small spaces can be productive and it's worth it."

Terry has a background in film production, photography and fine arts. He came from Denver, then applied what he learned about finance, communications, and business operations to his produce pursuits. His startup costs were about \$15,000, which he turned to a profit within a 15-month period. "My costs as a businessperson are relatively low and I'm really flexible. I can pivot with disease outbreaks and shift what I'm doing to make business revenue positive on a daily basis," he explains.

Challenges

Andy Seibel cites a labor pool as one of his primary challenges. "Some of the work that you do is specialized. We've been fortunate. Agriculture is hard work. If a young person wants to get into it, it's making sure you have enough help."

"We would not be able to keep the farm going if it weren't for off-farm income," says Megan Seibel. "It would be nice to be able to give up our day jobs." She encourages those in family operations to talk about future plans, particularly when there's more than one sibling involved. "[You're] trying to keep it going but want to be as fair as possible to everyone." Family interest and involvement impacts investments decisions. "There are complicated factors inside of families that they need to be able to think through."

"The state of most farms anymore is that it's hard to stay in business if you're not a large dairy," says Henderson. "The agricultural industry is moving more toward those larger farms. They have more land, can produce more, can do a lot more things with their herds in general."

Still, Henderson sees the family farm as part of the future solution. "By 2050 the world population is expected to be about 10 billion. There's not enough land for everybody." She expects there will be more niche markets as people gain interest in knowing where their food is coming from. "They don't want to buy food from a corporate farm, they want to buy it from the mom and pop down the road."

"If you don't already come from a farming family, it is almost cost prohibitive for a young person to get into it," says Williamson. "Land is exorbitantly expensive, equipment is expensive. It takes almost two years to get your cow to market."

"The knowledge of growing food is literally dying," says



Megan Seibel



Susanna Thornton



Nursing calf



2015 Cab Franc

Terry. He cites the average age of Virginia farmers as 59 ½ years. He's excited to see youth coming forward with inventive business models. "Our Grandin Village is the youngest Farmer's Market I've ever seen. I'd say half are under 40. It feels like a really tight-knit community and that's a really cool thing to be a part of."

Williamson adds "The average farmer is going up in age; we're talking up into the 70s. The age gap is skewed very much so toward the older generation and that's going to be a big problem in the next 20-30 years."

"At the end of the day, we care about our communities and people being able to be business owners and volunteers," states Megan Seibel. "You can't have people in those roles if their needs of food, clothing and shelter aren't met. It's necessary to not pit one type of a production process against one another. Less than 2% of the people in this country are growing food for everyone else. It's a noble profession and a service minded profession."

Trends

"Family farms in the US will always be the backbone of it," says Andy Seibel. "I think you're seeing more diversified operations. The dairy industry in our state has really declined, but if you look at Franklin County, where Homestead Creamery is, it has been very successful." He sees a future where unique marketing for products expands along with a reduction in middlemen.

Megan Seibel believes agritourism will

flourish. "It increases cash flow in a unique way," she says. "[It] brings people out, so there's a better understanding between the ag community in terms of what we do and how we do it."

It's going high-tech too: "[From] self-driving tractors to robots they're utilizing, these are really going to change agriculture over the next ten years," adds Andy.

"There is the trend, the demand continues to rise for people wanting the type of small-scale production that we do," says Thornton. She cites customers' increasing desire for choice and customized orders as the reason they've had a waiting list since inception.

The circle does get smaller however: "I am one of five dairy farms in [Botetourt] county," Henderson explains. "There used to be one hundred 100 years ago, fifty 50 years ago, and in the past few years it's dropped to five." She depends on the support of fellow farmers, neighbors and the community.

Hope springs eternal for these local farmers: "slowly, people are starting to wake up to the idea that the commodity farm system is not the most conducive [way] to getting us food for a healthy diet," says Terry. "Locally grown, sustainably grown, this is not just with veggies but meat also, slowly chipping away at the market share that the conventional system has. That's something that's encouraging for me." He cites LEAP's SNAP matching program "We're not just talking about people with means having access to this localized system. We're talking about everyone having access. That makes me happy." 



FARM STATS

SOURCE: USDA CENSUS (2017)

IMAGE: VALLEY BUSINESS FRONT / AGRITOURISM: AUG 2013

STATE	FARMS	TOTAL ACRES	AVERAGE ACRES PER FARM	ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE OF LAND + BUILDINGS (EXCLUDES EQUIPMENT, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE, LIVESTOCK, ALL PRODUCT)	
				PER FARM	PER ACRE
VIRGINIA	43,225	7,797,979	180	\$834,254	\$4,624
COUNTIES					
ALBEMARLE	913	182,781	200	\$1,980,339	\$9,892
ALLEGHANY	165	30,857	187	\$788,210	\$4,215
AMHERST	369	78,812	214	\$993,967	\$4,654
AUGUSTA	1,665	290,911	175	\$1,222,854	\$6,999
BATH	110	47,854	435	\$1,599,416	\$3,677
BEDFORD	1,418	211,087	149	\$654,822	\$4,399
BLAND	339	70,295	207	\$714,594	\$3,446
BOTETOURT	551	88,842	161	\$676,797	\$4,198
CAMPBELL	702	131,716	188	\$578,961	\$3,086
CARROLL	900	118,986	132	\$425,568	\$3,219
CRAIG	179	43,431	243	\$725,533	\$2,990
FLOYD	741	110,297	149	\$565,896	\$3,802
FRANKLIN	1,019	156,254	153	\$552,387	\$3,602
GILES	389	65,387	168	\$516,470	\$3,073
GRAYSON	716	119,340	167	\$692,467	\$4,155
HENRY	212	45,527	215	\$635,840	\$2,961
HIGHLAND	275	92,950	338	\$1,080,848	\$3,198
MONTGOMERY	584	101,672	174	\$842,923	\$4,842
NELSON	409	67,841	166	\$841,397	\$5,073
PATRICK	483	91,252	189	\$524,237	\$2,775
PITTSYLVANIA	1,157	246,322	213	\$603,542	\$2,835
PULASKI	394	77,504	197	\$692,087	\$3,518
ROANOKE	262	26,114	100	\$572,455	\$5,743
ROCKBRIDGE	752	134,789	179	\$881,466	\$4,918
ROCKINGHAM	2,026	228,542	113	\$997,634	\$8,844
SMYTH	663	123,214	186	\$544,580	\$2,930
TAZEWELL	512	137,943	269	\$737,125	\$2,736
WYTHE	819	151,563	185	\$725,643	\$3,921

OBSERVATIONS:

1. In our region, the counties of Augusta, Bedford, Pittsylvania, and Rockbridge represent the largest land use for farming.
2. In our region, Albemarle County commands a significant lead in value of real estate alone.
3. In our region, the counties of Albemarle, Amherst, Augusta, Bath, Highland, and Rockingham contain farms at the highest estimated value for real estate.



Submitted

RESTORING SOILS AND SOCIETY

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Glade Road Growing emphasized regenerative properties in the organic approach.



Submitted

An example of a monthly farm share bag available for purchase.

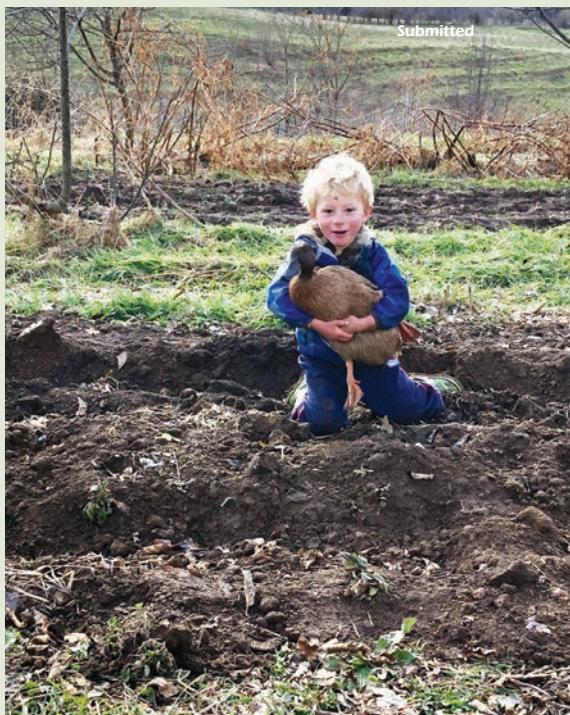
Regenerative agriculture is a practical movement, not a purist one. Locally, an example is the CSA (community supported agriculture) program Glade Road Growing. Sally Walker and her husband, Jason Pall, started the small family farm on leased land in Blacksburg in 2010 after they graduated from Virginia Tech.

“We are the kind of people who like to be outdoors, and we needed work that was meaningful,” she said. So they jumped into these uncharted waters, learning about environmental stewardship and healthy food as they went.

The farm's methods are based on building and maintaining soil health, biodiversity, and community involvement, like folks working there on a Saturday morning or buying their vegetables throughout the season. The couple does their best to serve as caretakers of the land by using organic matter-based mulches and cover crops.

The goal, said Walker, is to be "more regenerative than depletive." The couple has also come to value providing nutritious products that do not exist in grocery stores, said Walker, as the farm produces and direct markets vegetables, pork, chicken, turkey, duck eggs and more.

Walker and Pall believe that healthy food can be grown right here, and that engaging in organic farming forms lasting connections within the community, improves the soils directly beneath us, and strengthens human health with the added benefits of being outside and experiencing a different lifestyle. *For more information on regenerative agriculture, see the book "Drawdown," by Paul Hawken.* 



Submitted

Bringing their children to work every day is appealing to the owners.





Martha Parrott
Stroke recovery

from sudden stroke to

SINKING PUTTS!

"Martha's stroke was totally out of the blue – all of a sudden I had to make big decisions for her recovery. LifeWorks Rehab was amazing – they were there for both of us every step of the way. Having her back home is just a miracle. She's even golfing again!" - John Parrott (Martha's husband)



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Crisis response

I was going to write the second part of an article on culture, but it will have to wait. Did you hear we are in a crisis?

This column is on business operations, and we are arguably in the middle of the biggest global crisis to impact business operations that the world has ever seen. EVERY organization is being impacted.

No matter how much you prepare or try to anticipate unusual or emergency scenarios such as this, we simply can't plan for every contingency. Almost overnight, millions of businesses have found themselves in an emergency, trying to stay afloat.

There is probably nothing I can say in this column that would magically save your business or your job. But there are some guidelines to consider that just might help you in this and in future events.

- Take care of the team! If you don't take care of your team, you are done. Period. During a crisis like this, the needs of employees have rapidly changed. Talk regularly with every team member and colleague to see what they need and try to help them. There is no higher priority.
- Focus. Identify the few things that absolutely MUST be done now and ignore everything else. For most companies, one of those critical items is cash flow. Hopefully by the time you've read this, you have taken bold and swift action to preserve cash flow. But don't forget priority #1 above.
- If you are a leader, it's now time to lead. There are times when a leader can't wait to build consensus or engage employees but must be decisive and directive. That time is now. This is how military leaders operate. Good military leaders spend 95% of their time practicing all those good servant leadership skills. But during a crisis, it's time to give orders.
- If you are a follower, it's time to follow. The best way to support your organization and your leaders in an emergency is to follow directions. If you have an idea, speak up. But in an emergency, rapid action is also needed. Your issues and concerns need to wait.
- Look for the opportunity and go after it. There truly is opportunity in every problem. Find it and pursue it.

Once you get through the crisis, then get the team together to evaluate it. Who on the team stood out above the rest? What was truly needed? What was truly not needed? Take the lessons learned and update your crisis plans.

I hope you, your family, and your organization get through this crisis safely. Please contact me if I can be of assistance. 

“”
During a crisis, it's time to give orders.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
*First order of business –
take care of your people.*

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
OpXSolutionsllc.com

Seek out investment support

If you've ever engaged a financial planner, you've probably seen percentage fees deducted from your portfolio each year. Do you know how much? Generally, these fees should be in the .5% to 1% range, but they can be really hard to find. Broker and fund companies get paid this way too, so your annual costs are likely significantly higher.

Sometimes that's not all they take.

Sales load fees: These are upfront and applied before your money is even invested, so you're earning on less. Advisors usually get commissions on these, so they're incentivized to recommend them.

Expense ratio: This is an annual fee calculated as a percentage of your portfolio. It increases with the value of your investments. This should be well under 1%, but often isn't.

Commissions: These need to be factored against expense ratios. Sometimes it's better to pay a higher commission to avoid growing fees year after year. These days, most commissions for purchases are small. If yours isn't, question your professional's motives.

Hidden annuity fees: Look out for both M&E and Benefit Rider fees on your policy. These can range from .5-1.5% and go to the insurance company for guaranteed payouts. Costs might be worthwhile if you're using them. Many don't but are charged for them anyway.

A Financial Consultant can help you see the many hidden fees you may be paying and provide guidance on whether these costs are prudent or should be eliminated.

Consumers are getting smarter as they've realized how much of their hard-earned money is being depleted from their accounts annually. This can be particularly frustrating for wealthy individuals or those who have seen significant portfolio losses. Financial advisors who earn their keep based on a percentage of your investments get paid whether you lose money or not.

Today, some financial planners have adopted a more transparent and fair approach to how they bill for services. They bill by the hour. Most spend considerable time staying current on the best likely investment opportunities. In half a day or less, you can review all your financial holdings, then walk out with a plan to implement yourself. You're charged for their actual time instead of paying a percentage annually whether they work on your behalf or not.

Particularly these days, with the wild swings many investors are seeing in their account value, it makes sense to ask your financial advisor if they offer flat fee consults. Seeing advisor's fees deducted every year from your account when your retirement savings are plummeting can be maddening. 📉



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

In these financially perilous times it may be more important than ever to make sure you are holding on to every dollar you can.

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



Sinkland Farms

CONTINUING THE LEGACY VIA AGRI-TOURISM

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Sinkland Farms remains a top showcase for success in agritourism.



Sinkland Farms

The author's daughter, Inessa, and her friend Cameryn Norris visit the pumpkin patch in 2008. The author's barns and outbuildings are visible in the background (her house is hidden by the landscape).



Jennifer Poff Cooper

I catch a glance of the lazy horses, the glimmering pond, and the spruced-up outbuildings as my car rumbles up my driveway, which parallels Sinkland Farms near Riner. A smile crosses my face.

I have a special connection to this land, as my late grandfather once owned the property on which Sinkland Farms now sits. He ran the first Grade A dairy barn in Montgomery County there, but I didn't know that at the time. What I knew were days spent petting calves and helping my grandmother round up cattle in the car we called Old Nellie.

In 1981, my grandparents, Edwin and Edna Keith, retired and sold half of their farm to Henry and Susan Sink (our family still lives on the other half). Henry had a newly minted degree in agriculture from Virginia Tech and our family was thrilled to find a farmer instead of a developer to purchase the land.

The Sinks continued to run the dairy farm, but later coined the name Sinkland Farms and moved into agri-tourism to keep the

farm afloat as the climate for agriculture became more difficult. Susan Sink has implemented additional innovative ideas since Henry's untimely death in 2007.

"Sinkland Farms aims to be a beautiful and family-friendly community gathering place," said Susan Sink.

Its signature event is the Pumpkin Festival each October (home of the pumpkin catapult and hayrides). It also hosts school field trips, events such as proms and company parties, and weddings. It has won awards as "best farm to visit," "best pumpkin festival," and "best wedding venue."

Sink said, "Agriculture is the top economic driver in Virginia and tourism ranks second. Agri-tourism incorporates the farm experience with family enrichment."

As I return home down the same driveway, my heart feels happy that there is still activity buzzing around this farm. My grandparents would smile, too. 



ETIQUETTE MATTERS

By Kathleen Harvey
Harshberger

Executive Summary:

Wait! Wash your hands from all our previous advice on shaking hands... at least for now.

ETIQUETTE *Still* MATTERS

What to do or what not to do personally and professionally in this constantly changing world

KATHLEEN HARVEY HARSHBERGER

Handshaking hiatus

Last Fall (with the invaluable help of Tom Field, gallant publisher of The FRONT) I published *Etiquette Still Matters*. * The very first topic in this book is called "Effective Handshaking." Who could have predicted that this ritual, which dates back to the 9th century BC, and perhaps farther, would be eliminated in the space of just a few months?

The coronavirus has completely transformed the way we interact with others. Handshaking, in order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, has been abolished as the standard custom of greeting. It is a *major* "no-no."

Remember the old adage "You can take the measure of a man (or woman!) by his (her) handshake?" According to anthropologist Dr. David Givens, humans "...long for tactile connection, and this [instinct] reaches back 60 million years!" He further states that "Hands hold all the neurological circuitry that we need to make contact [and receive unspoken messages] with our fellow human beings." Heavy stuff indeed! Does the instinct to reach out to physically touch another reside in our DNA?

I mention Dr. Givens' research because some medical professionals have cited the pandemic as an opportunity to call for a permanent end to handshaking. Well, it might not be that easy if we are to believe Dr. Givens! Handshaking is a custom that, until now, has been accepted universally. It allows one to look another in the eye, and touch that person. A handshake quickly tells us a great deal about the other, and we often receive these messages on a subliminal level.

There are challenges in calling for a permanent end to handshaking. In the professional world a firm handshake is part of how we make a good first impression. It is the beginning and end of a meeting. It seals a transaction. In days gone by it was legally binding, when common law acknowledged a "gentleman's agreement," which was sealed with a handshake.

What do we do in place of the handshake? Some are elbow bumping, fist bumping, even foot touching. I think these efforts look awkward – even comical.

How do we greet each other in these times of social distancing? Consider the following suggestions. Try a simple bow of the head to say hello and goodbye. Sort of a modification of the Japanese bow. Or perhaps the Tai greeting, by pressing your hands together as in prayer. Or this, which comes from Dr. Givens: starting with your right arm at your side, bend your elbow, with your palm facing the person whom you are addressing. According

to Dr. Givens, this ancient gesture indicates openness, friendliness, and a lack of intent to harm: positive traits that we should try to project at all times.

Pick a gesture that is comfortable for you. Remember whatever greeting you choose, now is the time for our good manners to shine through. Greet with a sincere smile, good eye contact, and make sure your body language matches your smile!

So...Avoiding handshaking makes great sense at this time. Will the "no more hand shakers" win out, and ban handshaking for all time? I think not. The ritual has been with us down through the millennia. It may be eliminated in the short term, but I believe we humans will always have a need "to reach out and touch someone."

**Etiquette Still Matters* is available on Amazon.



Pick a gesture that is comfortable for you. Remember whatever greeting you choose, now is the time for our good manners to shine through. Greet with a sincere smile, good eye contact, and make sure your body language matches your smile!

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Campbell Avenue

LEAP JUMPS INTO THE COMMUNITY GARDEN WORLD

By Gene Marrano

It seemed like a natural pairing of missions – both centered on promoting locally grown produce.

After a decade-plus of advocating for and finding leased or donated parcels to establish public plots, the Roanoke Community Garden Association folded last December and handed off the management of those four spots (in southeast, southwest and northwest Roanoke) to the Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP). For a nominal fee, local residents in neighborhoods typically designated as “Food Deserts” by the United States Department of Agriculture can grow their own fresh produce. The RCGA to LEAP transition seemed logical, since both organizations promote fresh, local produce – either raising it for personal consumption or for purchase by Roanoke Valley residents.

LEAP operates two farmer’s markets every spring-summer (Grandin Village, West End Village) and a mobile market that makes regular stops when the growing season is in full swing, focusing again on those food deserts; neighborhoods where access to

fresh local produce is limited, non-existent or only accessible by transportation not readily available or out of reach cost-wise – those who cannot afford a car for example. The mobile market is a big part of that – establishing routes in areas where finding fresh fruits and vegetables is often difficult. (Since 2015, Carilion physicians have been writing Fresh Rx “prescriptions” for produce worth \$25 that patients can pick up at the mobile markets. All LEAP farmer’s markets also take SNAP/EBT cards as well).

Sam Lev is the director of programs and operations for LEAP. “We’ve been all about connecting our community - local food producers and local consumers.” He says almost everything grown, raised, baked and for sale at LEAP markets is sourced within 100 miles of Roanoke. The non-profit LEAP was 10 years old in 2019, after being founded by local developer/business owner Brent Cochran and other local food system advocates.



Submitted
Hurt Park

Within those four community garden spots that came from the RCGA (Mark Powell was the founding director in 2008) are 100 smaller plots worked by around 75 neighborhood gardeners last year according to Lev. They are located in the Mountain View SW neighborhood, downtown on Campbell Avenue in concert with Commonwealth Catholic Charities (which owns that space behind its building), in the Hurt Park northwest neighborhood and in Morningside Park SE,

alongside the Carilion Urban Farm - which is similar in mission and is used as a teaching tool for local residents who want to sharpen their green thumbs before attempting to raise their own vegetables. "People can see the food system in play," as they watch those fruits and vegetables grow adds Lev.

Lev and LEAP took over the RCGA plots on short notice at the end of 2019 when that non-profit's board of directors saw it as no

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Mountain View

longer sustainable according to Lev. LEAP then put out a call for donations, looking to raise about \$10,000 in what he called a bridge year, hoping they won't have to ask for that additional monetary boost again in 2021. Now the plan is to "get our heads around community gardening this year and figure out what the model will look like for us." Going forward Lev says they hope to offer educational programs for local residents who want to garden, much like the RCGA had been doing in recent years.

Lev says LEAP has been successful in bringing choice – the option of supporting local farms – to the forefront, for those willing to look past their grocery store. "I think it's a lot easier now than it's ever been in Roanoke." LEAP also offers a Farm Share program, a

weekly box of fresh produce shipped to consumers and supported by dozens of growers in the area. The LEAP Kitchen in Roanoke's West End neighborhood is designed to incubate new and growing small food businesses that need a preparation space before they are ready to pay the rent on their own place.

Local restaurants and caterers have also connected with regional producers, often with the help of LEAP says Lev. The next phase is being more involved on the wholesale level to make more of those connections; he says they are studying the "infrastructure pieces," now. Let the farmers grow the food he reasons, with LEAP worried about storage and sales/distribution to local eateries. After the COVID-19 social dis-

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Morningside

tancing precautions were established, LEAP also established an online marketplace, where orders can be placed Wednesday through Saturday, with pickups on Tuesday at the West End Farmer’s Market. (see leapforlocalfood.org for more details)

Taking over the Roanoke Community

Garden Association fit into the LEAP ecosystem, if you will. “I think its really empowering to grow your own food. It made a ton of sense for us to take on this project,” says Lev. “[Its about] food access and community health. Those are two things we’re really invested in. We’re really excited about that.” 



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“ ”
It takes almost two years to get your cow to market. — Page 13



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WELLNESS

By Ally Bowersock

Executive Summary:
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off-limits? Working from
home making you more
sedentary? Stay strong.*

*Ally Bowersock is
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Homebound health homework

Now is a great time to focus on your fitness, especially your muscular strength and endurance, as we are more limited in our opportunities outside the home. We can focus on what we can do in our living rooms and, as it turns out, you can do a lot with very little.

1. Core strength

Can you hold a flat plank for one minute? If not, this is a great goal to set during this time. Even if your time is ten seconds then stopping and starting again, every little bit counts. The flat plank is a great total-body stability exercise that strengthens the deepest core muscles as well as the muscles of the lower back. Basically every muscle is stabilizing something while you hold this pose.

You can add variety by moving to your sides- the side-plank or reverse plank (belly faces up toward the ceiling) allows you to work all sides and angles of your core. Not to mention, this exercise can be done anywhere with no equipment. The key with this activity is to remember to breathe - focus on controlled inhale and exhale. If you feel breathless, you should take a break and resume later when breathing is controlled and relaxed.

2. Structural strength

Can you stand up from a seated position without pushing off from the chair? If not, this is an equally great goal to set for your homebound fitness goals. The ability to sit and stand without assistance can help determine your independence into older adulthood and it's never too late to start strengthening these muscles! This exercise, the bodyweight squat, is one of the best ways to train your entire body to fire on all cylinders in order to help maintain balance and avoid falls when getting off the toilet, couch, or bed. Start with small "quarter squats"- standing with feet shoulder-width apart and rotating hips back, hold the position, return to standing.

If this exercise seems relatively easy, you can progress to the full sit-to-stand activity of sitting on a firm seat and resume the standing position- all without touching the seat. Once you progress to this point with ease, you can add another level of difficulty by elevating one leg and resume the sit-to-stand all on one side. This move is much more challenging so only complete this exercise when you can safely execute the double-leg move with no safety concerns.

Most people are not consistently strength training at all, so completing these exercises a few times per week should help improve your balance, coordination, body composition, as well as your overall ability to complete daily activities with relative ease. Challenge your friends to follow along with you - being at home doesn't have to mean being without new ways to improve your health! 

Nonprofits also hit by virus

Given world events over the past many weeks, putting pen to paper for this monthly article on nonprofits has been a struggle. Like most of you, I have never been through a global pandemic, and some days it is hard to see the good amidst lots of sadness and fear. But it is there.

The nonprofit sector, which is the third largest employer among Virginia industries, is being called upon to meet unprecedented increases in demand for services while facing major shortcomings in its tangible, financial and volunteer resources. But there is no quitting, no resignation, no giving in for our local organizations, and therein lies the sunlight in the storm.

Organizations that provide food for the most vulnerable in our community have been struggling mightily to access that food from suppliers due to nationwide shortages, but they somehow are still finding ways to see that hungry children are being fed. Cultural organizations have had their primary funding-source events canceled, so they instead have turned to virtual platforms to continue bringing the arts to us. Local non-profit funders have established emergency funds or re-directed their assets to specifically target issues caused by the pandemic. Across the board, there is example after example of our charitable organizations standing tall together and displaying amazing resilience in these fierce headwinds. We must also acknowledge the role of the many corporations and individual donors who, while their own businesses and resources are suffering, are likewise stepping up in special ways to underpin the work of these nonprofits.

The current conditions, while hopefully improving, will no doubt continue to pose challenges and have serious ramifications for our organizations for many months, if not years, to come. That is a message that simply cannot be lost. Throughout the coming months, nonprofits will not simply return to their prior status quo. They will need help more than ever as they seek to reconstitute decimated staffs, rebuild inventory, restructure vital events and more. Based on past history, I am confident this community will no doubt put its caring and generous spirit on full display and rise to the occasion. For that, we say "Thank You!" 🙏



GOOD WORK

By Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

Executive Summary:

Nonprofits are struggling like other business sectors – and they need your support perhaps more than ever to do their work.

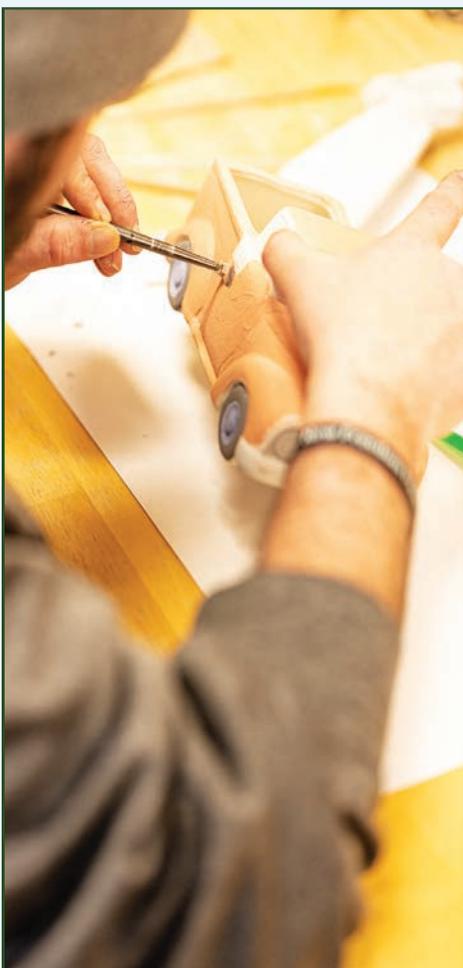
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Adapting business model to the new normal >

Glazed Bisque-It in Southwest Roanoke County has always provided take home kits for its patrons, who can pick up a pottery blank of their choice, plus all of the paints in colors they select, and the paint brushes needed. They bring the painted pottery back to owner Pam Golden, who then fires it in an 1800-degree kiln to cure it. With the shop closed to in-store customers as of March, Golden made a few changes with COVID-19 restrictions in place: less expensive brushes that can be thrown away instead of having to be returned, and only one party allowed in the Starkey Road shop at a time to return or pick up their pottery masterpieces. "I've been getting pictures [of home creations], it's been heartwarming = the whole family painting at a table," says Golden.

The kits can be ordered on-line via the **Glazed Bisque-It** Facebook page or patrons can come in and choose a style, again, one group at a time. "I put it on the table [after its returned painted] and let it sit for 24 hours, after that I go ahead and glaze and fire it," says Golden. "Certainly 1800 degrees burns anything [like coronavirus] off." **Glazed Bisque-It** has been a popular family and group outing activity for more than two decades, dating back to its original location in downtown Roanoke. "It's gone over very well. I think families are looking for something else to do," Golden said early last month, one day after she was gratefully "slammed" on a Saturday afternoon by a surge of customers.



John McLung photos

Grandin Farmer's Market stays open ... with a few tweaks >

The Grandin Village Farmers Market operated by the Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP) remains in place outdoors behind the Grandin CoLab on Westover Avenue SW in Roanoke. There were a few tweaks put in place towards the end of the winter market season; (i.e limiting the number of patrons in the market at any one time and shoppers were not able to touch the produce). "The market was great", said LEAP's Ned Savage when the first outing of the year with coronavirus-originated restrictions in place (see photos) took place in late March. "Lots of people stocked up, some farmers had record sales, particularly meat vendors." For the summer season that debuted in late April however the restrictions are even tighter – for now. Patrons can only preorder online at leapforlocalfood.org and pickup orders are by drive-thru only at the Grandin Farmers Market. The West End Farmers Market (Tuesday 3-6) also operated by LEAP will continue its year-round season on Patterson Avenue at last word.





Matt Hagan

Submitted



Submitted

Flower of a hemp plant

Harvesting Hemp

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

It's legal again and it could be a big cash crop. But there are pitfalls too.

When Matt Hagan is passionate about an endeavor, he goes all in. He has been a championship race car driver for 13 years. He owns a cattle farm which has grown from 1,000 acres in 2014 to its current 2,700 acres. And his latest effort, industrial hemp farming on TruHarvest farm, yielded more tonnage per acre than any other hemp farm in southwest Virginia in its first commercial season.

Hagan wanted to start production two years ago. During his racing travels, he met an Oregon hemp farmer who showed him profit numbers and sold him on the prospect. However, Hagan couldn't sell

the idea to his father, David Hagan, and Larry Shelor, co-owners of the Shelor Motor Mile empire, because they considered it a "gray area" of business since hemp was still a controlled drug.

But fast-forward to 2018, when the federal farm bill made hemp legal and hemp a non-controlled substance. Virginia followed suit in 2019 by abolishing the research requirement. As a result, Hagan said, he got the "green light."

His first move was to surround himself with "people who are smarter than me and work harder than I do," he said.



One is Kelli Scott, TruHarvest's Marketing and Production Manager, a former Virginia Cooperative Extension agent. Scott took a leap of faith in leaving her job with Virginia Tech for a new business, but she said she saw an "opportunity with a farm positioned for success." In addition she likes the educational component: "I was excited to be part of a farm to learn about the hemp industry."

Scott explained that the hemp business is not new, having provided fiber for textiles for many years, for example. But more recently, cannabinoid is "where the market is," she said. Its derivative cannabidiol (CBD) dominates the make-up of hemp plants. CBD oil is well-known but producers are limited on making health claims until the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gives permission. "Consumers are figuring it out on their own," said Scott, based on the rise in demand.

In fact, "saving lives" is one reason Hagan said he wanted to enter the hemp business. He lost a brother to prescription opioid addiction when he wonders if CBD oil could have controlled his brother's chronic pain. Hagan himself said that CBD oil has reduced his back pain and helped him sleep.

What Hagan especially likes about TruHarvest Farms is that he is confident its final creation is safe because they are taking the hemp plant from the ground through processing to pure product.

"I know what it is and stand behind it," he said.

Scott said TruHarvest has two categories of customers. One is the retail consumer, wanting the final product. Additionally, there are other farmers to whom TruHarvest sells propagated plant material. Often, said Hagan, farmers embark on hemp farming without realizing the potential pitfalls. TruHarvest offers solutions, like "mother plants" that have proven successful versus seeds which encompass a lot of unknowns. Hagan recommends new farmers align with a proven entity like TruHarvest to enhance chances of success.

Part of TruHarvest's marketing is its visibility just off I-81 between exits 109 and 114. Scott outlined plans for an online store to augment the retail base, plus branding such

as apparel. Hagan said they also want to educate the public, "pushing away from the stigma of marijuana," a related plant that is psychoactive unlike hemp. (However, hemp crops that are tested to be "hot" – too much THC – cannot be legally harvested and sold. Weather can play fickle with that THC level, which has been called to be set at higher levels than it is now by politicians like Senator Tim Kaine and Congressman Denver Riggelman.)

Even when Hagan gets paid to do what he loves, as with both racing and farming, there is much behind the scenes work to keep the businesses in the black. In its year of research with Virginia Tech (2018) and its first non-research year (2019), TruHarvest's staff "weeded through a lot of dos and don'ts," said Hagan.

The biggest challenges included the unknowns of a new industry, a saturated market, finding buyers, and "wearing a lot of hats," said Hagan. While regulation would seem to be a trial, Hagan actually welcomes more FDA involvement. Only when the FDA sets more regulations will farmers be able to sell to big companies – for example, said Scott, to put the product into food.

Hagan's advice to anyone interested in hemp farming is to start small because it is not a stable market. "Don't risk money that you can't afford to lose," he said. "High risk, high reward." 



Submitted

Kelli Scott, Marketing and Production Manager



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
A popular social media post retort is almost always misused.

Educate yourself

What's better than saying, "You're stupid!" –or– "No, you're stupid!"?

Well, how about this. Just imply the person is uneducated.

Except we have a problem, Houston. In recent popular usage, when a keyboard warrior disagrees with a statement posted on social media, it's apparently hip to offer an opposite statement, followed by the simplest, abrupt two-word conclusion: "educate yourself."

Big marketing kudos to one Evelyn McPherson of Beaconsfield, Iowa; who, in the summer of 2019, is credited as the first person to slap that fancy little two-word ditty on a Facebook post about a missing ear of all things. Some art aficionado posted the famous Vincent van Gogh self-portrait and made a comment about the artist cutting off his own ear in a fit of madness. Our dear Miss Evelyn couldn't let such a blatant historical revision stand, and promptly provided her fact, clearly indicating our artist actually loss the appendage in a fight. That's right... his friend lopped it off with a fencing rapier, she replied.

"He wasn't mad," SHOUTED Evelyn McPherson (the text was all caps). "Educate yourself."

Bloody ears aside, our two-word retort is actually being misused on current issues and in more significant fashion. The COVID-19-Wuhan-secret lab-superflu-wet market-germ warfare-SARS-Cov2-Chinese-novel coronavirus-global pandemic-invasion disease provides a most suitable host for our communicable communication error. "Educate yourself" on this topic, has quite a track record, spreading far and wide. And though, like the viral disease, it too does not discriminate, it does tend to attach itself to peoples who consider themselves educated.

I anxiously await the flattening of the "educate yourself" curve.

So, what's the great misapplication? When the retort is applied, it rarely has anything to do with education. In the cases I've seen (and I have my own test kits), it almost invariably means "you didn't go with my sources."

That's right. Try out the test. Substitute "educate yourself" with "my sources are accurate and valid while yours are not" and see how well it holds up. On an open platform, with all credible sources available, there is often compelling contradictory evidence. One can choose which position is true or false; but an "educated" conclusion doesn't always solely reside on one side. And if history has taught us anything, it's that the most educated person could be the most wrong.

I regret what Evelyn McPherson started with that so-easy-to-use phrase. But let's not be too hard on her. After all, do you really believe we could accurately trace back that simple phrase to just one ordinary person making a Facebook post last summer? Come on... I made it up.

Educate yourself.

News from the frontline in the battle against COVID-19

I don't cook a lot anyway, but I have been consciously ordering more takeout these days, exploring the world of Door Dash for instance, or calling ahead for a pickup. I don't want to see restaurants go out of business as they wait to put out the "we're open for dining," signs again. El Rodeo on Brambleton Avenue in southwest Roanoke County was slammed on a recent Saturday night as I killed time for a half-hour plus with perhaps a dozen other parties – all doing our best to social distance – waiting on my Arroz Con Pollo.

One business sector that appeared to be thriving – Home and Garden Centers like Lowe's, Home Depot and Northwest Hardware. What better way to social distance yourself without being stuck in the house than to putter around the yard? Overheard at Lowe's when I picked up mulch and hanging plants was one employee telling a customer "there is as much overtime as we want." That of course is not the case most places, as workers are furloughed, outright laid off or have their salaries or hours cut.

Meanwhile in recent weeks both the Roanoke Regional Partnership and Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge have been surveying local businesses about how they have been impacted by the coronavirus and the stay at home order. Some of this information (including responses on any obstacles to telecommuting) is being collated and will be shared with other agencies and local governments, with an eye perhaps on putting procedures or assets in place to reduce the impact of future similar scenarios.

Hopefully that never comes – many in the business sector say they have never seen anything like this. Kudos to local companies that are finding ways to be creative – for example delivering not only food but now beer, wine and mixed drinks – yes margaritas to go! Props to the Commonwealth and Virginia ABC for being adaptable to life as it's been for the past few months.

Local businesses and even attractions at venues including Center in the Square (which is hurting financially and is asking supporters for donations), the Taubman Museum, the Salem Museum etc. are going virtual, offering gallery tours and other online events – designed to make sure homebound residents don't forget they are part of the community fabric.

Meanwhile Roanoke County, Roanoke City and other localities have posted a wide array of COVID-19 information and links to help for businesses and the newly unemployed – loans that may be available, who is still hiring, etc. Roanoke County has sent mailers to 4300 business license holders, looking for their feedback on the coronavirus impact. "We need to understand our business needs and the current situation," says Roanoke County Economic Development Director Jill Loope. "We're all trying to support the business community and steer them in the right direction." Keep steering please. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
*What are you seeing or hearing out there?
 What's encouraging?*



GUEST COMMENTARY

By Robert Turcotte

Executive Summary:

Once upon a time – like a few months ago – it was more of an oddity, but the pandemic has led more workplaces, schools and families to use remote online conferencing.

Meeting in this virtual world

A salesperson who travels across North America is taken out of the sky, a virtual soccer practice, and an on-line kindergarten class reunion. A few weeks ago, we would have considered these events unthinkable. Today a virtual presence is the way we adapt.

Remotely connecting with others brings several easy-to-solve issues.

For those who like simplicity and inclusiveness (everyone has a phone, right?) — remember telephone voice conferencing, available on many corporate phone systems (even on many cell phones too). On-line you can use freeconferencecall.com. My friend AI tells me that call quality is improved.

Video conferencing has exploded in use. Despite some security concerns, Zoom.us is the current darling, having grown from 10 million users last year to 100 million today. Zoom's appeal is the ease of use. Attendees can join a conference by voice-only using their phone or add the video experience by using a camera. Alternates include WebEx, Google Hangouts, and Skype.

Even a kindergartner can use video conferencing! My teacher friend Kathy recently held an on-line kindergarten class where 17 of her 21 students participated in show and tell. She said it was a unique way to teach, in that sometimes we talk and sometimes we listen. Free Zoom conferences can last up to forty minutes with up to 100 participants. Sending conference invitations is quick and easy.

At home, there are new challenges. At Sara's house in Charlotte, North Carolina she set up three offices. Hers to communicate with insurance clients, her husband's for his banking clients, and their son's for on-line classes. Her son also participated in a thirty-minute virtual soccer practice that emphasized cardio drills and encouraged players to touch a soccer ball daily. Their offices are separated so that everyone is in a quiet space.

Liza was often on a plane traveling from Charleston,



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South Carolina to a potential client's office. Her role is especially important now, in assisting medical organizations. A pleasant visual backdrop is her newly fashioned at-home office. Content screen shares help visual learners. Now that hair salons are closed, she is relieved that perfectly coifed hair and makeup is optional. Her virtual happy hours and meals with friends relieve isolation. Liza has used video conferencing so much that she gets "Zoomed out!"

Clint participates in on-line Toastmasters meetings. Normally in person, now on-line, club members practice leadership and speaking skills. The new virtual meetings teach members to adapt to unusual and challenging public speaking settings.

A few pointers. Most conferencing providers allow you to visit their site to practice before you go live, especially helpful to ensure that your video and

sound capabilities work correctly. Lighting other than from your monitor will correct skin tones. When using a camera, position it at eye level to help others feel more connected to you. If you don't have a pleasant backdrop available, most video conference software will feature virtual background options – like being at the beach with palm trees in the background! When you are not talking, be sure to mute so that others don't hear your sneeze or the dog barking. Match security needs to software capabilities.

A bit of creativity can help make the best of today's isolation. With an assist from on-line capabilities you can easily connect with business and school contacts — and continue to maintain close relationships. 📺

Robert Turcotte has been buying and selling information technology since 1979. He is employed at Entre Computer Center in Roanoke.



Nothing is Going to Break Our Stride to Serve You

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

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



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FRONTReviews >

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

Aficionados appreciate

My husband and I went to River & Rail with a gift card one of his family members gave us. This family member, by the way, lives in Boston, MA and would be considered a “food snob” by most. He did his research and said it “looked like one of the best restaurants in the area.” We determined he was right! We *loved* our dinner, the service, and the overall vibe. I am a red wine drinker and the house cabernet was served at the perfect temperature. My husband ordered one of their signature cocktails and really enjoyed it as well. Definitely recommend River & Rail if you're looking for something different without compromising quality, taste, or service.

—Kelsey Monahan

Bitter, though we go

In a word—poetic. Justin Torres's *We the Animals* (Mariner; 2011) offers a gritty muster of Flannery O'Connor, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Ralph Ellison, with a dash of *Lord of the Flies*, minus any nostalgia. Our mixed Brooklyn-Puerto Rican family of three boys in a coming-of-age story is told with such brevity, you're amazed at how much of a wallop it packs. It's one thing to have rough edges; it's quite another thing to show that without melodrama or sensationalism, yet still manage to hook the reader with virtually zero plot.

Told in the voice of the youngest child, starting as a seven-year-old, we are fully entrenched, though we may not even realize we never know for sure the time period. We're in a sad

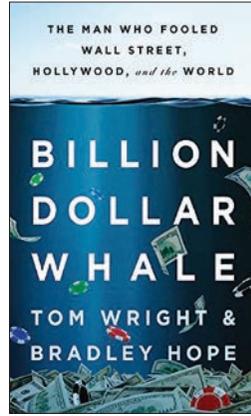
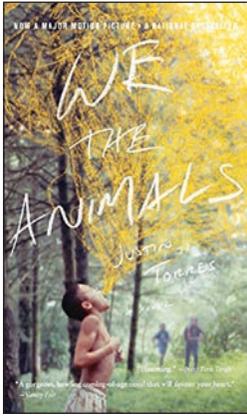
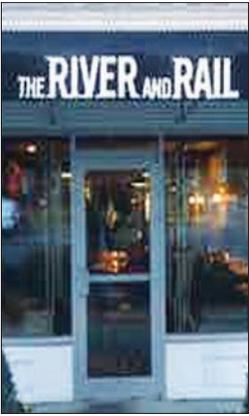
life, we see what we see, and we somehow understand at no higher level than our child. Perhaps the brevity is also a reflection of a victim's assessment of our societal misfortunes and unfairness. When there is no escape (a consistent theme) it's not that complicated.

—Tom Field

Greed is not always good ... in the end

It's hard to keep track of all the players all of the time – and it would make a great Netflix series someday. It's the story of a Malaysian man and Wharton School of Business graduate who came from some money, millions from his father's various ventures – but set himself up to look like a billionaire investor with ties to the rich and connected. It was all about deal making for Jho Low, and *Billion Dollar Whale: The Man Who Fooled Wall Street, Hollywood and the World* (Hachette Books, 2019) lays it all out in painstaking, edge-of-your-seat detail. Tom Wright & Bradley Hope coauthored the book. “Whale” refers to the term casinos use when someone is losing big at their tables – something Low was wont to do with other people's money.

The *New Yorker* called Billion Dollar Whale “global intrigue, financial crime, wealth porn and absurdity.” Basically, Low set up shell companies like a Ponzi scheme, moving money around in offshore accounts, convincing oil-rich Middle East investors, high-level bankers and government officials to invest billions under shady circumstances. Meanwhile Low, a shadowy background figure, used



those investment dollars to throw obscenely lavish parties with guests like Leonardo DiCaprio and Jamie Foxx in tow. He was a media darling for a while in doing so.

Low wanted to be a bigtime movie producer too and his Red Granite company financed – appropriately – *The Wolf of Wall Street*, the DiCaprio/Martin Scorsese vehicle that was also an ode to greed. Leading banks, country governments and Goldman Sachs (shades of 2008?) were ensnared in the lust for questionable dollars. In the end it all came crashing down when regulators finally wised up but as of now Jho Low has been charged with various crimes but has disappeared. “An incredible story of a con artist at the height of his game,” says David Plotz of Slate. A tale of piggishness, carelessness and looking the other way, hoping for the next big score: a tale as old as time.

—Gene Marrano

No Damsel in distress for this Fincastle native

Fincastle native Erin Lunsford is no stranger in these parts, despite having lived in Charlottesville and now Richmond for more than a decade. Her mother Cheryl Lunsford still lives in Botetourt County and teaches guitar. Erin & The Wildfire have long been a staple on the local music scene with live shows at pubs, restaurants and in recent years at FloydFest. The band has undergone some personnel changes but is still viable – but now Erin Lunsford has launched her first solo project, *The Damsel*, which harkens

back more to her roots, more folkish, with her playing guitar and banjo again. “I’ve been generating material this whole time but didn’t really focus on turning it into a project,” she notes.

In recent years her work with The Wildfire had evolved, with Lunsford shedding the instruments on stage, signing more torchy numbers. *The Damsel*, a project she says has been in the works for almost a decade with all original songs, is also about strong independent women who rely on themselves – not relationship partners to hold them up. It’s about being ok to be on your own she says. Of course in normal times Lunsford, who like her mom also teaches music (online these days), would be doing a “weekend warrior” thing as she calls it to promote *Damsel*, with local live shows, but COVID-19 put the kibosh on that (an early April gig at 5 Points Music Sanctuary in Roanoke was canceled). She’s been doing some online concerts from her couch, asking for donations instead. As for *The Damsel*, Lunsford says her solo project “was a long time coming. I had a lot of material to choose from.” Fans of some of the earlier work she did with The Wildfire – or those that might have been lucky enough to see Erin Lunsford on stage solo with just a guitar and that dynamic, powerful voice – will appreciate *The Damsel*.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Kelsey Monahan** is a technology sales agent in Salem; **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT.



Gearing up for testing >

Carilion Clinic opened its first COVID-19 testing referral center on March 19 in Southwest Roanoke County (4064 Postal Drive). in Cave Spring. At least initially only patients who met symptomatic criteria for the coronavirus and have an order from a Carilion physician were to be tested at the site. As availability of test kits increases, Carilion planned to implement additional testing site locations. Meanwhile Carilion conducted a short-term drive asking for masks, gloves and other PPE's – personal protective equipment – and Habitat for Humanity in the Roanoke Valley came through

with a haul of the Ng5 facemasks that have now become part of the everyday lexicon. **Dr. Stephen Nussbaum**, the chair of surgery at Carilion Clinic, was on hand to accept them in the parking lot at Tanglewood Mall in Roanoke County, just outside the old JC Penney store being converted into the Carilion Children's medical center for outpatient services: "we encourage the donations that come in but if [other health care facilities] are in more desperate need than us I'm sure we'll find a way to share all of this generosity from the community."

Online sales up for local bookseller >

Book No Further owner **Doloris Vest** shut down her downtown Roanoke Market Street location with street traffic slowed to a crawl and then the restrictions on crowd gatherings put in place to minimize any risk of spreading COVID-19. But Vest, profiled in Valley Business Front last fall, said in late March that online book sales had picked up – even from some new customers she didn't recognize by name. "We're doing local delivery in the Roanoke Valley; we're getting some people that I don't recognize as having bought from us before." Vest said she will start posting some reviews and recommendations online as well to help customers make a choice.



Language services company adapts to the current reality >

Arara Language Solutions offers interpretation services in 70 languages. Brazilian native **Joslaine Austin** founded the company in Roanoke more than four years ago and was the subject of a Valley Business Front story then. Arara means macaw in Portuguese and some Spanish dialects – "the parrot that repeats what you say," notes Austin. "What has changed [since COVID-19] is that we are no longer on location. The assignments have been canceled or transferred to over the phone



interpreting." Medical facilities and legal/courtroom assistance are just several of the business sectors that Arara services. "It's a different set of skills, you have to [closely study] tone of voice. I don't think it's more difficult – it's just different." Clients typically prefer face to face interpreters says Austin – but in most cases that's not an option right now. Arara Language Services was the Roanoke Regional Chamber's Micro Business of the Year in 2019.

Bricks 4 Kidz adapts online >

While they waited for the all-clear that would enable parents, children and others to come back to its Oak Grove Plaza (southwest Roanoke County) physical location, the **Bricks 4 Kidz** outlet owned locally by **Shelly Whitaker** started posting videos on its Facebook

page, showing people at home how to build some of the STEM-based LEGO projects they would normally undertake in person. It's a way to stay in the customer's eye and Whitaker said the Facebook posts (at B4K Roanoke) drew plenty of attention: "under normal circumstances we would be running classes at our creativity center, we'd be having birthday parties, home school classes, camps, field trips – and we would be out at schools around the Roanoke Valley."



Another perfect match rate for VTC Med School grads >

The 45 soon-to-be physicians in the Class of 2020 at the **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine** all matched to residencies in a specialty of their choice, continuing the school's 100 percent match rate set by the six graduating classes before them. Due to COVID-19 and efforts to stop the spread, students learned about their residency match via email at their home with small numbers of friends and family.

"A successful match is a triumph for each individual and each group of family, friends, helpers, and supporters that made the journey possible," said VTC Dean **Lee Learman** said in a video message to the class. "You have so much joy to share – we can feel it even at a distance!"

Members of the class, which launched in 2016, will go into programs representing 14 specialties in 16 states, including the District of Columbia, and 35 different academic health centers. The most represented specialties in the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine's class of 2020 include emergency medicine, internal medicine, and general surgery. The matches for the class include such programs as Cornell University, Duke University, Emory University, University of California San Francisco, the University of Virginia, and Yale University.

Nine students from the class of 2020 will stay in Virginia for their full residency. Of those, five will do their full residency in Roanoke, with another two doing their preliminary year here. This brings the total number of VTC School of Medicine graduates who have done part or all of their residencies in Roanoke to 38.





Every T-Shirt Sold is \$10 to the business of your choice.

100% of proceeds support local business in #HereForGood

T-shirts to help ease the financial crunch >

Like other small businesses, **Big Lick Screen Printing LLC** in Roanoke's Wasena neighborhood has been rocked by business closures and restrictions related to the coronavirus. So, owner **Marj Easterling** deployed the Here For Good program, wherein any local business could submit artwork for a T-shirt, which would then be produced at no upfront charge and sold online at BLSP.rocks. Those tees can help advertise that business – keeping them in the public's eye. Half of the twenty-dollar sale price goes to that small business; half stays with Big Lick Screen Printing to help keep it afloat. "Time is of the essence," says Easterling, "small businesses cannot afford to not have cash flow. We just don't operate like that." Now supporters of the businesses with T-shirts for sale at BLSP.rocks can go the extra mile by purchasing and then wearing those shirts in public.



The Father of pro hockey in the Valley passes away >

"Today we mourn the loss of **Henry Brabham**, a man that truly laid the groundwork for ice hockey in the Roanoke Valley," the **Roanoke RailYard Dawgs** noted in a late March Facebook post, "we thank you for all you did leading up to the RailYard Dawgs era of hockey." Brabham also was the original owner of the Lancerlot Sports Complex in Vinton, which resurrected its ice rink last year several decades after the roof collapsed during a heavy snowstorm. Brabham was a founder of the East Coast Hockey League and owned the Salem Raiders/Virginia Lancers in the 80's. Brabham, also a former Mayor of Vinton, was gone when he passed away on March 30.



Submitted

Doing its part >

Among the local companies shifting gears to create PPE's – personal protective equipment – in recent weeks is the Bedford upholstery manufacturer **Sam Moore**. The company started sewing facemasks from its material, then donating hundreds of them to Centra Bedford Memorial Hospital and Roanoke Fire-EMS. The cotton masks are not medical grade but are intended to help reduce the risk of person-to-person transmission of the COVID-19 virus.



Name, location change >

B2C Enterprises is now **5 Points Creative**, a full-service creative firm in Roanoke founded by **Bruce C. Bryan**, who is also a Valley Business Front columnist. "We started 5 Points Creative 11 years to the day that we started B2C Enterprises," says Bryan. The new office on Walnut Avenue in Roanoke is located in an area commonly referred to as 5 Points – and he says it also "represents the five ways we help businesses – marketing, advertising, digital, branding and communications. Everything we do fits into one of those 5 categories." 5 Points Creative has grown past its Roanoke roots to take on more regional and national clients.

Correction >

Our new legal business columnist Tom Ashton told us he thought the April issue with his first column "looked great!" But we also got his e-mail wrong. The correct one is tom@ashtonlawoffice.com. Sorry about that Tim ... I mean Tom! Ashton's next legal business column appears here next month. Again, its tom@ashtonlawoffice.com



Heartfelt note from North Cross Head of School >

(North Cross Head of School Christian Proctor issued this excerpted memo of encouragement to his school community as the Roanoke County private school finished its first week of remote learning in mid-March)

As a community, we feel an isolation and an inability to regain control of our lives. It seems that things happen around us and all we do is respond. I have been here before, watching my house and my city being swallowed up by the flood waters of Katrina, a refugee four hours away from my home, buying clothes at Walmart because we only packed for a long weekend away and everything

we owned was back in New Orleans. I didn't know if I still had a job, or whether I was going to receive a paycheck, or whether New Orleans would ever be rebuilt. We were helpless and our lives were dependent upon the largesse of others.

So, let me pass on some lessons I learned during Katrina that I think will benefit the North Cross community: the news comes fast and furious, everything is an emergency, and our discomfort is maximized. With each passing week, the new normal becomes less new and we accept what we have. It is too much for this letter, but if we see each other, you can ask me the significance of "turning left" during our Katrina recovery.

Each week will get easier as we all determine the best path forward and each time we hit a bump in the road, we will figure out a way around it. I have that much confidence in our community. Secondly, focus on the things that you can control and try to make your life as normal as possible. Treat school as the daily routine your kids always have. Find a "classroom" where your children can get into school mode as distinct from the rest of the house where they can be in non-school mode. Prioritize family meals as times to discuss the day. Bedtime and wake up times should remain the same. Have the kids dress for school, if not in dress code, then at least something that shows a transition to school mode.

And finally, recognize that school is a really important part of our culture. Children spend one-third of their week in school and it is not only academics, it is the primary vehicle for socialization. Do not be afraid to relax constraints on social media use to allow vehicles for appropriate friend-to-friend interaction. Things that I hated as a parent, like on-line video games, can provide an outlet for fun and connectivity between kids. Help put your children in touch with their friends.

We were the first school to reopen in New Orleans following Katrina and the school was one of the very few things in our lives that was normal. At North Cross, we are trying very hard to create and maintain a school that reflects the old normal while embracing the realities of the new normal. In this, we are helped by a tremendously talented and dedicated faculty and staff. The professionalism they have demonstrated in transitioning to distance learning is evidence that they each understand the important role they play in our community response to a crisis. I could not be more thankful for how they have heeded the call, and I am very appreciative of the positive emails you have sent to them.

Let me close by saying that the Katrina year in New Orleans is among my favorite years as a headmaster because of the way our community pulled together. While very different and more isolated, I fully expect North Cross to emerge from this crisis a more tightly connected community, and a stronger school for all of our trials.

Please stay safe,
CP

Salt Foot Sanctuary goes on the road >

With the **Salt Foot Sanctuary at Hotel Roanoke** shuttered due to COVID-19 and social distancing mandates – and the **Tour Roanoke** minibus not making its way to local brewpubs, vineyards or eateries either – **Larry Landolt** and company came up with another idea to generate some cash flow. Via social media outlets they are now selling and shipping Stay-at-Home “Pamper Packs” with foot and body powder and foot soak jars (filled with minerals) locally and across the country for those who want to escape the anxiety of isolation and coronavirus news for a bit with a relaxing foot soak. “It’s been surprisingly really good,” says Landolt, also noting that instructions for foot massage techniques is included with each order. “Let us bring the Ahhh of our foot soaks directly to you,” is how the online ad reads. See SaltFootSanctuary.com for details; Pamper Packs range from \$36 to \$50.



Zoo gets ready for Black Bears >

Mill Mountain Zoo is turning what was once part of Ruby the Tiger’s lair into a home for one or more black bears native to this region, with arrival scheduled sometime this summer. A private family donation is covering the construction costs; the Zoo board was on hand for a recent ceremonial groundbreaking.

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

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The Hemp Mill



High Hopes Dog Training



Thrive by Heart



Westlake Golf Course



Queenpin Family Wellness



Star City Breasties



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EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Sandu

Corina Sandu, professor of mechanical engineering and associate department head for graduate studies in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech, has been named the Robert E. Hord Jr. Professor of Mechanical Engineering by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. A member of the Virginia Tech faculty since 2003, Sandu has made contributions to research and scholarship in foundational theories and practical applications of multibody system dynamics and vehicle dynamics.

Radford University has named a new Executive Director of General Education.



Hendrix

Professor of Criminal Justice **Nicole Hendrix**, Ph.D. began this position May 1. She will lead the general education efforts, oversee its ongoing integration into undergraduate degree programs at Radford University and serve as a member of the Academic Affairs Leadership Team. Hendrix has served in a variety of roles at Radford University since 2006, including Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice, Radford University has named Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders and Waldron College of Health and Human Services Associate Dean **Corey Herd**



Cassidy

Cassidy, Ph.D. as Executive Director of the newly created Academic Success Center effective June 1. Cassidy has served in a variety of roles at Radford University since 2007.

LOCAL BUSINESS FRONT

Michael McAllister has joined Professional Network Services as a Client Account Manager. He brings more than 25 years of experience in communications to the business, including sales, business operations and management. McAllister is a graduate of Roanoke College.

Amber Durham joined Professional Network Services (PNS)



Durham

September of 2019 as a Client Account Sales Manager. Amber has been working within the sales industry for 15 years, specifically with technology sales for over 5 years. She is a graduate from Radford University.



Underwood

Branch Builds announces the recent promotion of Vice President **Cathy Underwood** to Senior Vice President & Regional Business Unit Leader. Underwood is responsible for identifying and

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pursuing new business opportunities and managing business operations in Roanoke and Charlotte.



Borak

Inorganic Ventures, a Christiansburg-based manufacturer of analytical inorganic standards for testing in a wide range of industries, announced that **Tom Borak** has been appointed as Customer Experience Manager. He returns to Inorganic Ventures after having served as Marketing Communications Specialist for Qualtrax in Blacksburg. Previously, he served as a Marketing and Communications Specialist for Inorganic Ventures from 2018 – 2019. Borak earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Mary Washington College.

Have a career announcement?

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

Richfield Living has announced the promotion of **Stephanie Scott** to Controller. Scott, a graduate of American National University with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and The Management Institute at Roanoke College, joined the team in April 2016 and most recently held the position of Richfield Living Business Office Manager.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

The City of Roanoke has appointed **Samuel Roman, Jr.** as the next Chief of the Roanoke Police Department. Roman had been the Police Chief in Lexington



Roman

for 2-plus years, after having served for 25 years in Roanoke, rising to the rank of Deputy Chief before retiring. He stepped into the new position just as the City of Roanoke and the

Commonwealth tightened restrictions on crowd sizes and temporarily closed gathering spots like the Roanoke River Greenway. Roman said his officers will approach enforcement with an education first - not citation frame of mind, expressing confidence that the average Roanoker understands the possible impact of coronavirus spread.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

“” There are 300 careers related to [agriculture] that aren't necessarily just straight up production in farming. — Page 11



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COVID-19 impacts local health system

Carilion Clinic furloughed some workers — cutting pay and hours for others — as it deals with the COVID-19 impacts on the health care industry. In a video message last month to all employees Carilion president and CEO Nancy Agree said while some employees are working long hours to care for those with the virus, many other departments have seen dramatic slowdowns. Senior executives took pay cuts. Carilion is also suspending working on all capital projects until later this year, including expansion of Roanoke Memorial Hospital.

In a news release Carilion revealed that it had halted all non-essential services and procedures, leading to a 40 to 70 percent reduction in ambulatory and inpatient volumes. Agee and her executive vice presidents are taking a 20 percent pay cut, and all senior vice presidents and vice presidents are taking a 10 percent pay cut for at least the next six weeks. “We’re making these difficult choices now so that we can come through the other side of this pandemic stronger, and ready to address the pent-up medical needs of our community,” said Agee.

Feeding school kids in the City of Roanoke

Roanoke City Public Schools delivered almost 50,000 meals to homebound students during the week of March 16-20, as outlined in a memo from the administration office. “The District is very

appreciative to the members of our staff, SodexoMAGIC, and Durham Student Services who pitched in this week to help during these unprecedented circumstances,” read the message. The meal deliveries are expected to continue in some form through the end of the current academic with all school campuses now closed – online or take-home packet learning only.

Dawgs take hit when season ends early due to COVID-19 precautions

(From Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs team president Mickey Gray in mid-March; excerpted) Myself, the ownership group, and staff all support the SPHL in this decision. Despite the devastating financial impact, we believe this to be the right thing to do at this time for the safety of our players, staff and most importantly the great fans of this organization. While sitting here I can’t help but think about all of the people who have contributed to this team’s season and who are affected by this cancelation ... I will not lie to you, the financial impact of losing one fourth of our home schedule this season will be substantial. Despite this setback, we will pick ourselves up off of the mat and we will endure. We have been fortunate to have this phenomenal and supportive fan base in our four seasons in this community. That support will be important now more than ever as we navigate through this challenging time. I hope

that you all stay safe throughout this ordeal and I cannot wait to see you all on opening night for the 2020-21 season. -Mickey Gray President, Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs

Shop online says Goodwill

With onsite **Goodwill Industries of the Valleys** job training programs paused - with coronavirus social distancing mandates in place, the nonprofit then closed its thrift stores to the public temporarily in mid-March. Goodwill was still accepting donations at most stores and at stand-alone donation centers – and shopgoodwill.com is still open for business online. Spokesperson Chelsea Moran also says they are taking extra care to sanitize donated items, the sale of which supports Goodwill programs. “We continue to ask for these donations – to continue to offer these virtual services to the public during this critical time,” said Moran.

Roanoke Valley Gives big

The **Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia** says \$715,490 was raised during the fifth annual Roanoke Valley Gives day on March 18. More than 150 local nonprofits participated. Roanoke Catholic School raised the most money in the large organization category, Lake Christian Ministries (medium) and Orchard Hills Achievement Center (small) were also atop the leaderboards. 3,287 total gifts were made during the 24-hour event. This year, the

average gift was \$217.67, the largest average in the 5-year history for Roanoke Valley Gives.

Earth Fare will return

When the 55-store **Earth Fare** chain filed for bankruptcy in February all its natural foods grocery stores eventually closed, including the one opened with great fanfare at Roanoke’s Ivy Market development less than three years ago. But that’s not the end of the story – several former Earth Fare executives and an investor purchased the name, intellectual property and a handful of stores – five right now, including the one in Roanoke. Look for an opening around the time the stay-at-home mandate is lifted, although Bethany Turon (a former Earth Fare VP) notes that grocery stores are considered “essential,” meaning it could open earlier than June. She says Roanoke “was a profitable location,” so it “made sense” to bring it back. Also returning will be the original Roanoke store manager and some former store associates. Dennis Holsing (Holsing Enterprises) is the principal investor in the “new” Earth Fare. Randy Talley is part of the new venture and was an original founder of the natural/organic/no additives grocery chain: “the day it went out of business I started working with locals in the community to buy it out of bankruptcy.”

Gift Cards for Good

North Carolina-based **Mast General Store** was set to open its 11th outlet

in downtown Roanoke last month, pushing up a summer date first announced – until the coronavirus reared its ugly head. Now that opening won't happen until mid-June at least, assuming Governor Ralph Northam's stay at home order, social distancing and the closure of non-essential business (or restrictions on how many can enter) remain in place until June 10th. But Mast president Lisa Cooper came up with an idea to replace what the company normally gave to non-profit partners. With their own bottom line hurting, Cooper launched a "Gift Cards for Good" promotion in each market where there is a Mast store. 20 percent of each gift card

purchased at mastgeneralstore.com goes to local non-profits.

Around here that means Feeding Southwest Virginia, the food bank straining to keep up as it helps supply meals to children out of school due to COVID-19. The other 80 percent helps keep Mast afloat. The cards can be used at the Mast store online – or wait until the Roanoke location in the former Heronimus building does indeed open. "We want to give back as we wait for those better days," says Cooper. As for the Roanoke location on South Jefferson Street: "the store is absolutely beautiful. We can't wait to show it off and celebrate with the people of

Have an announcement about your business?

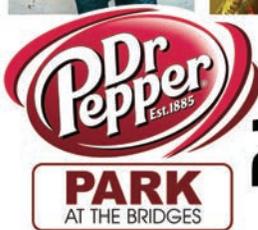
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Roanoke. The whole store is our latest-greatest pride and joy. We've been looking at that building for years."

Wiping out germs instead of bugs

The **Spectrum Brands Holdings Home & Garden** business unit, which normally produces Cutter brand insect

repellents at its Blacksburg manufacturing plant, instead shifted to making a hand sanitizer last month. The first batches went to other Spectrum plants to aid in the battle against COVID-19 spread, with Carilion Clinic among the first to receive the product outside the company. Plans were made to provide consumers with an opportunity to purchase



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- 08/08 Jamey Johnson
- 08/14 Bee Gees Tribute
- 08/21 Queen Tribute
- 08/29 Roanoke Wing Fest 2020
- 09/11 Tim McGraw & Garth Brooks Tribute
- 09/25 Prince Tribute
- 10/09 Kid Rock Tribute
- 10/23 KISS Tribute



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the hand sanitizer product locally as well – often hard to find on shelves or online these days. “It’s a natural extension of the brand portfolio to expand the Cutter line beyond insect protection, to fight germs as well,” said Steve Schwallie, Division Vice President of Marketing at Spectrum Brands. “We are pleased to be able to move into this segment and provide these products for our community partners.”

Ironman 70.3 postpones for a year

After assessing all scenarios, the **Ironman Group** now says inaugural Carilion Clinic IRONMAN 70.3 Virginia’s Blue Ridge triathlon that was originally scheduled for June 7th this year has been rescheduled to June 6th, 2021. The 3-year agreement has been extended through 2023 as well. The Ironman was expected to draw around 2500 athletes to swim, bike and run, plus around 10,000 athletes. By one estimate it would have had an \$8 million economic impact. Governor Ralph Northam’s stay at home order through June 10 (subject to change) was the final straw for the Ironman Group, which held off postponing the event here as the coronavirus shut down many other activities.

United Way steps up again

After polling dozens of its community partners

and other agencies in the region **United Way of Roanoke Valley** has created a COVID-19 Community Response Fund, designed to raise funds and distribute them quickly in an effort to address several needs that came up repeatedly during those ongoing conversations. UWRV President & CEO Abby Hamilton says among them are personal protective equipment – PPE is a buzzword these days – and food geared towards those who sometimes go without if not at school. Make donations at the United Way of Roanoke Valley website (uwrv.org). “This [pandemic] is bringing together a lot of people, which is a wonderful thing,” says Hamilton, who hopes to raise \$100,000 or more as quickly as possible. Hamilton says the COVID-19 Community Response Fund launch “became an organic process,” with several underwriters, and “100 percent of the donations ... will go out to partners for them to do their work – making sure we are deploying resources where they are needed most.”

Chamber gearing up for recovery

The **Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center** based at the Regional Chamber office in downtown Roanoke is asking for volunteers “who share a love of small business and want to have an impact

on its recovery from COVID-19.” The SBDC is looking for current or former business owners, accountants, financial advisors, HR professional, bankers or professors, to review finances, help with loan applications, assist on day to day operations decisions etc. See roanokesmallbusiness.org to volunteer your expertise and help a business get back on its feet after the coronavirus brought things to a near standstill. The SBDC also helped local business owners with the paperwork required to apply for loans from emergency federal legislation like the CARES Act – which turn into grants if all staff is retained at full compensation for a designated period of time during the coronavirus shutdown.

Building materials company setting up shop in Bedford County

Lewisburg, WV-based S.J. **Neathawk Lumber Company** will open an outlet in the Montvale area just off U.S. 460 and is prepping the site now with plans to open once the U.S. COVID-19 surge is passed. A showroom and a warehouse for home building and renovation projects will be featured. “With the growth we are experiencing in Bedford County, we are excited to have a building supply company move to the area,” said Jim Messier, Chairman of the Bedford County Economic Development Authority. S.J. Neathawk plans to add 10 new jobs

this year and up to 20 new jobs in Montvale over the next 3-5 years.

Delta Dental steps up for employees, oral health services

Roanoke-based **Delta Dental of Virginia** has donated \$500,000 for a statewide dentist relief fund, with an American Dental Association poll in April showing that 76% of all dentist offices were then closed except for emergency work. That means no billing patients and insurance companies to help pay the staff – and to pay off those dental school loans. A similar amount was directed towards “safety net” clinics and non-profits (many do not qualify for stimulus loans); local organizations including the United Way COVID-19 Response Fund, the Roanoke Rescue Mission, Boys & Girls Clubs and Bradley Free Clinic were beneficiaries. Delta Dental of Virginia also took care of its employees – retaining all of them, shifting 95% of them home – even providing a monthly stipend to offset costs associated with telecommuting. Chris Pyle is Vice President for Marketing and Government Relations: “taking care of our employees was the first priority; we said we have to start at home first ... before we started looking around at other needs.”

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

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— Page 13

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De Faustina Camacho, Zahin Mahbuba, Chammolis Mout (L-R)

When Liberal Arts Means Business

By Cory Crouser

Hollins University launches its Entrepreneurial Learning Institute program centered around marketability and cross-disciplines.

“There’s a stigma surrounding entrepreneurial activities in the liberal arts,” says Hollins University freshman Zahin Mahbuba, 19. “People don’t associate these disciplines—(the humanities, social sciences, etc.)—with marketable ideas. But that’s just not the case...”

Since 2017, starting with a slow roll-out

under the leadership of then-school president Pareena Lawrence, Hollins University’s Entrepreneurial Learning Institute (ELI) has sought to combat the notion that the liberal arts aren’t marketable, an idea which Karen Messer-Bourgoin—Professor of Practice in Economics and Business at Hollins University and ELI’s founder/director—considers problematic, if not entirely retrogressive.



Cory Crouser

“There’s a lot of talent here [at Hollins], explains Messer-Bourgoin, “and there’s a lot of untapped insight within the liberal arts, at large.”

Premised upon the belief that problems

of all types are most solvable by diverse teams of innovators, ELI’s purpose is to foster multidisciplinary collaboration. (Commenting at its inception Lawrence said many businesses look to hire liberal arts majors for their creativity in solving problems.)

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"We run an Innovative Internship program," says Messer-Bourgoin, "[wherein] ELI places students inside various organizations with the understanding that they will play an active role in reimagining organizational systems and structures; that they'll engage in insightful, innovative ideation."

"There are a couple schools of thought when it comes to entrepreneurial problem-solving," explains Mahbuba, who also serves as president of ELI's student club. "You can approach things from the 'technology solves problems' angle, using the Silicon Valley Model. Or you can take a more humanistic approach. This is called the Social Entrepreneurship Model. That's what [ELI is] all about."

"The Social Entrepreneurship Model asks the questions, 'How do you take unique expertise

and connect it with business? And how does this collaboration, [once established], benefit society?" says Mahbuba. "It's a lot less profit-driven than the tech-heavy model, a lot more focused on humanitarianism."

In February, ELI club-members De Faustina Camacho, Olivia Dannon, Chanmolis Mout and Mahbuba participated in North Carolina's Elon University's Innovation Challenge, wherein representatives of several colleges and universities engage in a one-day-long social innovation competition to address a real-life problem. Hollins finished fourth, earning an honorable mention.

"This [activity]... enlightened me as far as both problem finding and problem solving," says Mahbuba. "But we also do things on campus!"

Under Mahbuba's leadership, the Hollins ELI club had planned to host a bazaar this



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spring, the Spring Market Fair. Students—both club-members and non-members, alike—would have had the opportunity to sell their goods, paying ELI 10% of their revenue for booth space, should they make more than \$20.

“We want to encourage people’s confidence in their products,” says De Faustina Camacho, an ELI club member. “And hopefully they’ll be more capable of selling their products afterward.” (This was before the COVID-19 pandemic shut campuses down.)

“Not only that,” adds Mahbuba, “But they’ll be practicing entrepreneurship, also.” Look for the Market Fair idea to remerge once life returns to normal at Hollins and elsewhere.

Mahbuba says the ELI club is also busy with other projects: “We’re hosting the Virginia Tech entrepreneurship club on a Roanoke Trek. It’ll be a tour around the city to some

of the influential organizations.” Roanoke Trek also serves an opportunity for ELI’s club-members to establish connections with the Virginia Tech students, connections that might be beneficial to both groups. With both Trek and the fair not being held this spring as planned, “they have been postponed to the Fall semester. Fingers crossed everything calms down by then,” Mahbuba noted in an e-mail update recently.

“Hollins needed a seat at the table,” explains Messer-Bourgoin. “We created ELI for the students, but it also serves as a way for us to connect with local and regional organizations.”

And with better local connections, with regional notoriety, comes brand equity: “At the end of the day,” says Messer-Bourgoin, “This can draw new students to Hollins; [the Entrepreneurial Learning Institute] can be a selling-point.” 

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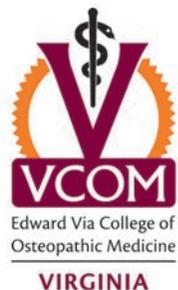


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