

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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Real Estate
and Development

Hartwell Design staging

Video Conference
Platforms

Moss Arts Center's
Katie Gehrt

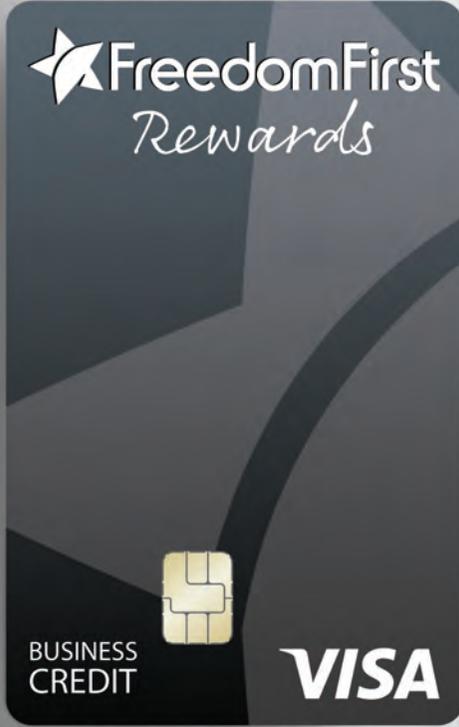
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Not Slowing Down

Jeanne Stosser
SAS Builders

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Many business sectors are hurting of course with restrictions in place due to the pandemic – restaurants, arts organizations, brick and mortar retailers etc. Witness the closure of the 4-decade old Country Cookin chain and Jerry's Restaurant in Vinton, which hopes to reopen in the spring after shutting down last month with colder weather no longer making outdoor dining a feasible option – and the indoor capacity unprofitable. The venerable Homeplace restaurant in Catawba has also shut down for the rest of the year – at least.

But the residential real estate market is booming, fueled in part by a shortage of inventory. Read about that in this issue and learn more about a development company (female owned) that's helped transform living spaces in the New River Valley.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

“ Virginia was blessed in that real estate was not banned... considered essential. – Page 15

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SAS and the Stossers: a Bedrock in Blacksburg

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

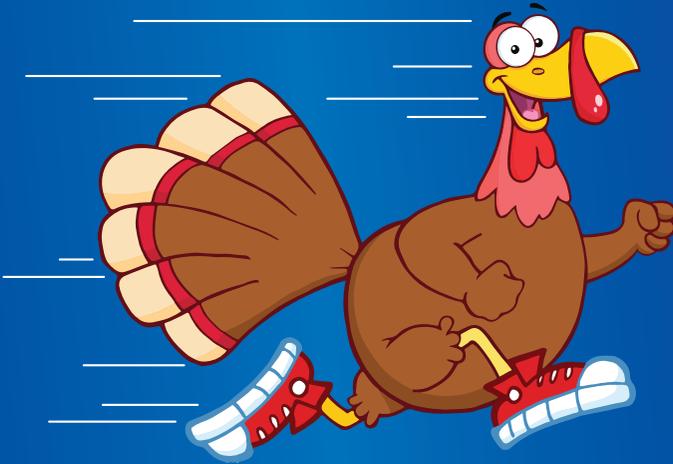


“”
Plan in advance... drive business
on otherwise slow days. — Page 26

Cover photography of Jeanne Stosser by Tom Field.

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2020 CONTRIBUTORS



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Mike Leigh



Michael Shelton



Nicholas Vaassen



Robin Weeks

“”
We hope to connect with a wider audience... and give an emotional story to what community support can do. — Page 41



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Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport / transportation



Lisa Clause
Richfield Living / senior development



Mike Dame
Carilion Clinic / healthcare



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She is a visionary. — Page 12



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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 50.

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Edge Leasing Office

SAS and the Stossers: a Bedrock in Blacksburg

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Says Scott Stosser of his mother and company president Jeanne, “She is a visionary.”

A casually dressed petite woman enters the SAS Builders lobby carrying a tiny dog wrapped in a blanket. She hands off the canine to an associate, who clearly is accustomed to it. At first it is difficult to believe this is one of the most influential women in Blacksburg. But soon it is obvious that developer Jeanne Stosser is serious about her profession and her community.

Stosser, President of SAS Builders, Inc., invites her son, Scott, Senior Vice President, to join the interview. (Stosser’s other son, Jeffrey, is also a Senior Vice President.) Both Stossers are animated when discussing their business, and neither mentions plans to slow down.

Jeanne Stosser has been involved in real estate since 1975, when she obtained a real estate license after attending New River Community College. She worked with local agent Carl McNeil for five years and learned about “cutting up land,” she said. The Woodbine subdivision was the first development that Stosser was involved in from the ground up.

Scott Stosser returned from college saying he wanted to “build things,” says his mother, so he found mentors, starting as a laborer to learn the foundation level of construction, then studying custom home building. He built three houses on his own to prove himself.

His first development was Sleepy Hollow in Christiansburg.

Mother and son soon began working together and SAS (an acronym for Scott A. Stosser, or Stosser and Stosser) was born, with Jeanne Stosser buying the land and Scott Stosser building the houses. "It was just Scott and me doing our thing," she said. At the beginning, circa 1990, SAS built affordable housing in the \$120,000-\$130,000 range.

Meanwhile, a class called Making It Big on Little Deals "ruined my sales career," said Jeanne Stosser, as it showed her that financial independence would instead be achieved through investment properties. The Stossers added their own portfolio of multi-family housing to the single-family homes, concentrating on student housing. (Their affiliate is CMG Leasing.) Stosser said that what set them apart was "tiny things," like phone jacks in bathrooms and closets with automatic lights.

The blessing and curse of SAS has been prototyping myriad building concepts. SAS engaged in green building before its time by using biodegradable materials with no waste. Once, Stosser saw in a trade publication an article titled "Honey I Shrunk the Lot" about a new idea being tried in Seattle, and off she went to investigate. The concept was smaller lots and houses where land was becoming scarce - as in Blacksburg. Stosser studied how the company, Mithun, reduced lot sizes, increased density, and "made it look right."

She always wanted the opportunity to make a difference, to improve Blacksburg and bring it into the 21st century. But not everyone was on-board with what Stosser saw as progress.

With people locally resisting change, it made for a "somewhat rocky" relationship between Stosser and the Town of Blacksburg. When Stosser ran into a roadblock with the town, she said her standard question was, "Why not?"

Now, Stosser said, "the wall seems to be softening." Developers can communicate better with the town government. Mayor Leslie Hager-Smith is "a breath of fresh air," said Stosser. "She listens, analyzes an issue, and steers things in the right direction."

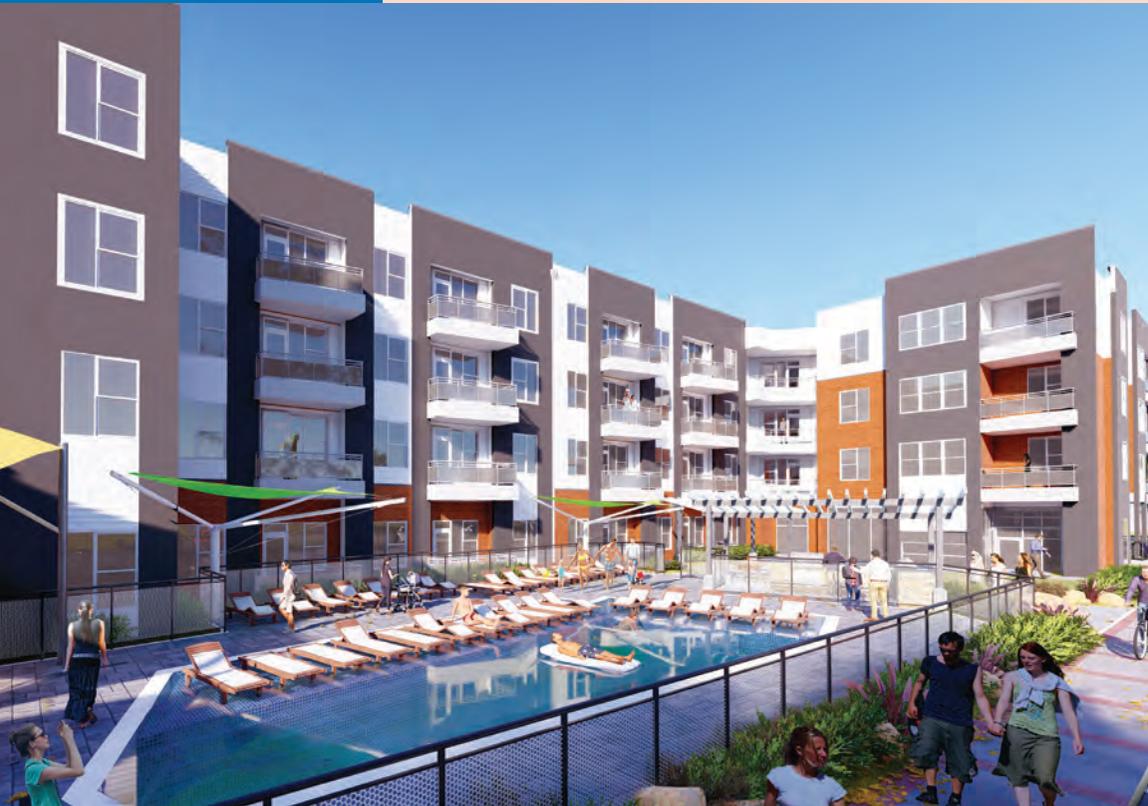
SAS's "pride and joy" is The

“ ”

She always wanted the opportunity to make a difference, to improve Blacksburg.

Jeanne Stosser





SAS Builders



SAS's pride
and joy is
The Edge
complex...
current
project is
Cedar Pointe...
next is The
Vue... most
visible is
Midtown.

Edge complex on Price's Fork Road, said Stosser. She bought the old buildings there at auction, demolished them, and created the "best located purpose-built student housing." It is within walking distance to campus and has bed-bath parity (one bathroom for each bedroom), a bus stop nearby, and amenities like a gym and pool.

SAS's current project is Cedar Pointe, behind Bojangles. It is furnished professional housing with an industrial flavor and EarthCraft designation, also with bed-bath parity (which is even more important to people during the pandemic, Stosser said).

The next housing project is The Vue, coming to the VT Corporate Research Center, and aimed at professionals and medical students. With an easy walk to work or school and bus transportation available, no car will be necessary for residents.

The most visible SAS development now is Midtown, on the old Blacksburg Middle School site. It will feature a police station, public safety building, parking garage, and mixed-use hotel, restaurants, office and residential buildings, plus a three-acre public park. The site has a complicated history; it sat for 10 years while Montgomery County and the Town of Blacksburg were at an impasse regarding its fate. Finally, the county "got out of the middle," said Stosser, and a contract was approved in May 2019. SAS is developing Midtown and building one mixed-use retail and residential structure there.

Prominent developers

We asked Jill Loope, the Director of Economic Development for Roanoke County – who are some of the more prominent developers that have made their mark locally?

“Of course, there's Ed Walker (who helped kick off the downtown Roanoke residential boom), Fralin & Waldron, and Steve Strauss, and Robert Fralin (about to start the 130+ residential Simms Farm project in Salem), who have been instrumental in regional development deals. A few others that come to mind are Wilkinson Development (Dale Wilkinson, projects in Vinton), Cherney Development (Jim Cherney, investing in new projects here – like Happy's Flea Market and industrial projects) and there are some other smaller groups that often "fly below the radar."

Also, there are several out of region development groups such as Waukeshaw Development, Edward Rose and Cathcart. They vary in specialty from those that focus on commercial, to residential, to industrial. Waukeshaw (Billy Byrd apartment complex in Vinton), Edward Rose (Sunscape Apartments) and Cathcart (The Reserve apartments in Daleville) have all invested in projects within our region.”

-Gene Marrano

“It has been a long, expensive, arduous, painful project,” said Stosser. But Scott Stosser added, “It is a shot in the arm for downtown. People can live, eat, and work there.” Barbara Shaver is SAS’s Midtown project and site





Edge Pool

“
SAS is
largely
a female
company.”

manager, a notable position for a woman, said Stosser (see the sidebar on Shaver.) In fact, SAS is largely a female company. Stosser said that as a woman in a man's world, she has had to “work twice as hard.” She noted, “I can't make a mistake.”

SAS faces other challenges. The lack of a local trade base for employees is one. Building regulations are another. Scott Stosser said that they agree with regulations such as clean water in principle, but the cost they add to houses prices the working class out of the market. “It separates the haves and the have-nots,” he said.

SAS has grown from a basement office space to its own building in the industrial park. It has teamed up with a Richmond group, Eagle Construction, where SAS purchases the lots and land while Eagle builds houses with its full-time labor pool. Scott Stosser now specializes in semi-custom homes locally.

The Stossers suggested the keys to their success: willingness to take risks, the quality of their product, long-term employees who are treated well, and Jeanne Stosser's creative thinking. Scott Stosser said of his mother, “She is a visionary.” Because they are local residents, Stosser said of what they develop and build, “It better be right - because we have to live with it.” 

Lady in the lead

"I was born into this business," said Barbara Shaver, project and site manager for the Midtown project.



Submitted photo

Barbara Shaver, project and site manager for Midtown, said that because of new environmental regulations she spends "a lot of time on storm drains."

The hometown Shaver cut her teeth in the family excavating business, which has done work for Jeanne Stosser for years. Shaver doesn't run heavy equipment but

handles the managerial side of things. Her degree from Virginia Tech is in business management, and Shaver previously worked for Stosser in property management. She moved to a contracting firm in Dublin, but happily came back to SAS and Blacksburg to take on this project.

Her Midtown job description is extensive. Shaver is in charge of the coordination piece, everything from ensuring people and materials arrive in a timely manner, to keeping the site tidy, to bringing the project in on budget. She spends the majority of her time on-site. "There is a lot of field work. I spend a lot of time walking," Shaver said.

Shaver likes the challenge of the job – "there are always different and exciting things to do" – and working with people in the industry, though COVID has made the personal aspect more difficult. It is easy to get "bogged down in regulations," said Shaver about her least favorite part of the job.

While being a woman is not the primary reason she was hired, said Shaver, Stosser knew that Shaver could hold her own with men in the industry. "Women have to be more aggressive in this field," said Shaver. "You can't be a shrinking violet."

Shaver also credits Stosser for being her mentor and helping her gain confidence in her abilities. What's after Midtown? With certifications like RLD (responsible land disturber), Shaver does other consulting work for Stosser, as well as for Scott Stosser in his single-family home business. "You never know what will come up," she said. "There's always something in the pipeline."

-Jennifer Poff Cooper



NRVA of Realtors

This Radford house sold for more than listed price - with multiple offers.

Buyers best be quick in this seller's market

By Nanette Levin

What some local REALTOR organizations think about the current state of the market.



Submitted photo

Laura Benjamin

There's unprecedented demand for homes in Southwestern Virginia. "It's an incredibly active, robust market in all areas of the greater Roanoke Valley, which includes Smith Mountain Lake," says Laura Benjamin, Chief Executive officer of Roanoke Valley Association of REALTORS. "We're breaking records every month: number of homes sold, number under contract, many homes get multiple offers. We are also seeing an increase in the average price of houses."

Walter Grewe, President for the Roanoke Valley Association of REALTORS adds, "buyer demand is through the roof right now." He cites low interest rates driving a demand that's reduced average time on the market by about half.

According to James Nolen, President of NRV Association of REALTORS, the average sale price of homes in the New River Valley has gone up 7% from \$195,950 in 2019 to \$209,950 in 2020. Homes in highest demand are in the \$300-\$445k range in Blacksburg and \$150-\$300k in Christiansburg, he says.

Pandemic accommodations

"I've been very proud of our members stepping up and working with sellers and buyers for what's best for them," says Nolen. This includes wearing masks, sanitizing after showings and, at times, wearing shoe coverings and gloves. "Outside of that, really it's business as usual, just following those guidelines."

"Virginia was blessed in that real estate was not banned, so realtors were able to continue," states Benjamin. Real estate offices were considered essential business



Submitted photo

Walter Grewe

with government distancing mandates. "We had a very active market all the way back to March," she explains.

"Realtors pivoted to safe ways to buy and sell properties," Benjamin continues. "Sellers



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Submitted photo

James Nolen

cooperated by opening their doors and cabinets so buyers would have to touch very little." Carpooling was eliminated and only decision makers attend closings.

"We've all had to learn how to use Zoom, so it's a lot easier to have a face-to-face conversation with your client without having to be together," Benjamin explains. "Accommodation is just a watch word for 2020. Everyone's participated in making it possible to continue so people can list, buy, and sell property. Everyone from realtors, to home inspectors, to contractors, to the lenders and those who actually closed the transaction every step of the way participated in creating a safe process."

Technology's role

"Early on, back in the spring, when kind of the big push came for everyone to

quarantine, we were seeing more virtual tour requests," says Grewe. "I think as we've moved through this that's become less and less. Houses aren't staying on the market long enough. We put one house on the market about 7:30 on the Friday before the 4th of July and had an above list price offer by 2 p.m. and my client went with it because it was a cash offer."

"The demand has lessened (for virtual tours) and a lot of that is due simply to the pace of the market," Grewe notes. "Listing inventory is about one-third of where we are normally historically, so people are kind of foregoing all of that to go see houses in person."

"A lot of folks in our market have adapted . . . [with] virtual showings with Zoom, Skype, Facetime, virtual tours as part of the listing package," says Nolen.

Eyes in the sky: Grewe notes that some



NRVA of Realtors

Another Roanoke area home listed on a Friday and under contract on Sunday. This one listed for \$239,950 had 6 offers and sold for \$246,000

agents are employing drones, including his photographer, but he hasn't seen demand increase due to pandemic safety concerns. Benjamin adds "That's not new technology, but certainly there are those that have drone photographs. We see that at the Lake and in Botetourt where there's a lot of land. I wouldn't say it's common, but it's always striking when you see it."

The 2021 housing forecast

"The national forecast is still extremely strong," says Benjamin. "The low interest rates are fueling some of that. Nationwide, people realize [the need] to work from home and [are thinking], 'maybe I need a house with a dedicated office or a dedicated space for my children to take online school.'" She notes people are also relocating from large metro areas like

Washington, D.C. to avoid traffic and find a better quality of life.

"One thing we've learned this year is it's just hard to predict anything," Benjamin states. "Nevertheless, there's no reason to think this will stop. You can get a lot of house when the interest rate drops."

"It's hard to say," says Grewe. "I would hope that we're going to see increased inventory. Of course, with the election in November, who knows what's going to happen? I don't really see interest rates changing all that much, but again, if we get a change in administration, all bets are off."

"I think most importantly buyers really have to be well prepared," advises Nolen. "You don't have time in this market to hold off on your preapproval with the lender when you find the right property." 



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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Everyone likes the thought of extra space at the workplace just in case it's needed later on; but is it worth the added cost right now?

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
OpXSolutionsllc.com

Give me some space

For this issue focusing on real estate, I thought it might be a good time to address your "indoor real estate." All that square footage you are using (or not using effectively) in your business.

We all love our space. We need elbow room, closet space, storage space, conference rooms, break rooms, and waiting rooms. But have you ever considered what that space is costing you?

Commercial office and retail space leasing rates can vary considerably depending on location and purpose. A good median estimate is about \$20 per square foot per year. Now consider what you are doing with every square foot in your company. That extra office that is not being used? \$2,000/year. Each conference room? About \$5,000/year. All your filing cabinets and storage closets may be costing you hundreds more per year. Do you really need all that space?

Organizations waste thousands of dollars each year by not effectively utilizing their space. Sometimes a larger building is leased (or bought) for future growth that does not come about. Or maybe over the years, junk has accumulated that no one wants to toss.

Every square foot of your company's space should have a purpose. And that purpose should contribute to a process that helps your company make money. When space gets tight, instead of thinking "We need more space!" you should be thinking "we need less stuff!"

If space is tight, look at all the areas "stuff" is stored. Do you need to keep it? Is there a more efficient way to store it? Can inventory be reduced through more effective tracking and procurement processes? Then look at workstations and office spaces. Can desks and other furniture be smaller, or removed? Can files be digitized, and file cabinets removed? Can some of your employees work from home to further reduce your office space needs? If there is one thing we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that some organizations can still operate effectively with remote workers.

Even if you currently have adequate space for your needs, it is important to review your layout and compress your operations if you can. That extra space left over can be used for growth, or even sub-leased out for additional revenue.

Always think of your organization's space as an asset that when properly utilized will help you be more profitable. 

The real estate part

Wealth is defined as an abundance of valuable possessions or money. How much wealth you have is determined by subtracting liabilities from assets. This is also how you calculate your net worth. Have you thought about what that number is lately? It's probably different than it was before COVID-19 came on the scene.

The time we've spent in isolation during 2020 has caused most to do a lot of self-reflection. Too much for many of us to be comfortable with. Still, it's always a good idea to periodically assess where you're at and where you're going. Why not spend some of this navel-gazing time doing an in-depth evaluation of your finances?

You might be pleasantly surprised at what you discover.

Get creative to build wealth

I often find, when working with families and business owners to assess their net worth, that real estate is a significant portion of their wealth. Most, though, aren't leveraging this asset properly. That's because people don't think of real estate as an asset. Instead, they want to talk to about stock market investments and IRAs. That's a bad idea. Real estate can significantly contribute to your bottom line. But if you're not thinking of it as an asset, it can cost you dearly come tax time.

If you're looking for a creative way to preserve and build prosperity as part of your retirement strategy, consider real estate. A portfolio of rental properties is a great way to diversify your wealth while providing potential retirement income. Plus, the tax advantages with this type of holding can be considerable. If you're a high net worth individual seeking a great tax shelter for assets, this might be a smart investment to consider as part of the mix.

Here's something else to think about if you see retirement in your present or future. Health care insurance conflicts are creating unprecedented medical costs for retirees. Covering the rising costs of wellness is going to require more money and/or imaginative financial strategies.

Finding creative ways to manage your wealth is the new normal. Financial planning is no longer about old school rules. It's getting more important to engage a financial professional able to view investment and tax strategies simultaneously, with an eye toward uncovering inventive ways to preserve your wealth. Stay tuned next month for tips on how to reduce your health insurance costs next year. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

Don't forget real estate in figuring your net worth.

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



“All the world’s a stage” ...why not your home when for sale?

By Gene Marrano

With apologies to The Bard, home staging before letting potential buyers in the front door is a proven difference maker. That’s according to a long time Real Estate Staging pro.



““”

As a designer her role is to personalize a space, while home staging is about depersonalizing.

Hartwell Design Inc. has a three-room minimum. Staging to help sell a house – decluttering, cleaning, painting, new (borrowed/rented) furniture and accessories can make a difference she says. Renewals if still up for sale are at half price in her structure. Hartwell says most home staging companies charge by the month. Traditional, more classic furniture is the norm in these parts, as is less controversial or “racy” artwork – landscapes to hang on bare walls are big.

The demand for staging is maybe not in peak demand right now in this hot seller’s market, but still applies for some high-end properties says Hartwell. “9 times out of 10 the Realtor doesn’t even have the time to get the photos taken, much less have a house staged.” One theory she suggests about the lack of houses in local inventory now, which also helps to drive up sale prices: some are ready to sell but right now many don’t want strangers walking through their rooms if they still live there.

Hartwell used to have a showroom on Starkey Road in southwest Roanoke County but sold that property and works out of her home. However, she still has several warehouses of interior design pieces used during home staging. According to industry data lifted

Interior designer, former Realtor and ex-homebuilder (20 years licensed in each) Laurie Hartwell typically stages in the Luxury Real Estate market, but not exclusively. Her typical fee for one room is \$750 (per a quarter-3 months) and the real estate company often deals with that as the go-between. Even picking up the tab on higher end houses that must stand out to get their asking price. “I’ve been staging before they called it staging,” she chuckles. Hartwell says the time spent as a Realtor/Class A contractor was mostly about making her a better interior designer – and later on a more perceptive home stager.



from the Hartwell Design Inc. website:

- The typical home stager charges a consultation fee up to \$600, rising with the value of the home
- Staged homes it claims typically sell faster and for 6 to 17 percent more than homes vacant during the walk throughs. That's because a certain color, fabric, chair, throw rug, etc. being staged might allow them to envision what their home could look like.
- Expect to spend \$2000-\$6000 for a home staging, depending on square footage

"I will only stage a home if it's vacant [first]," says Hartwell, who doesn't declutter or move things around as an option. "I don't do that." She also says most Realtors know when a house should be staged, so they'll talk to clients. On her walk through while quoting, she offers other advice, maybe based on her time as a Realtor, suggesting for example new lighting or that they repaint a door because, "that color's awful. The Realtors are kind of afraid to tell them."

Hartwell says she has to take off her interior designer hat when home staging; as a designer her role is to "personalize," a





space while home staging is about “depersonalizing,” instead. Make the colors and the overall palette of the room appealing to as many potential buyers as well: “you can’t be too bold. I don’t do bright colors. It’s hard to offend somebody with a taupe or a grey or natural color.” Three rooms are usually enough to make an impression, unless it’s like some of the new model homes Hartwell has

staged – in that case every room is the norm.

You have about 10 seconds to win over someone’s heart on average when they come walk through your house says Hartwell, who claims it’s psychology to a large extent as well. “It’s an emotional purchase. The minute they walk in it either feels like home or it doesn’t. You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression.” 



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25 YEARS AND COUNTING

By Gene Marrano

Ted Puzio says the secret to Southern Trust Home Services' success starts with treating customers the way he would like to be treated.

You probably have seen Ted Puzio, who founded Southern Trust Home Services 25 years ago. Where? On those television commercials for his plumbing, heating, cooling and electrical contracting company, which always end when the New Jersey native gives the “okay” sign with his thumb and index finger – and smiles big for the camera. Southern Trust, based in southwest Roanoke County, became a full-service home repair and installation business partly out of frustration.

Other contractors weren't returning the favor after Puzio - a licensed electrician at the time, would give them referrals for their specialties in HVAC and plumbing. They started taking on electrical contracting

work instead of referring them back to Puzio, who had shifted to residential service after initially wiring new construction projects. Those “gentleman's agreements,” seem to be largely a thing of the past he laments.

So Puzio did his homework, went back to school several times to get the other licenses and certifications he needed – thus keeping all of that work in house. Now as the owner and president of Southern Trust Home Services he employs about 50 people and does those ubiquitous commercials. “[It all] just took off,” says Puzio.

2020 has been a different year for sure, but overall, it's been a good one for

Southern Trust, which has been hiring and has put more vehicles on the road. Drug and background checks makes hiring new employees his “number one challenge.” COVID-19 precautions include sanitizing wipe and sprays, facemasks and gloves for his employees (the latter only if the homeowner has been diagnosed with coronavirus.) “They wipe down everything they touch.”

Puzio says Southern Trust has been “very fortunate with its growth ... and overall market domination,” despite the odds in its 25th anniversary year. Southern Trust went 100 percent residential a decade ago, getting out of the new construction side of the contracting business. A luxury bathroom fixture dealership was added as well.

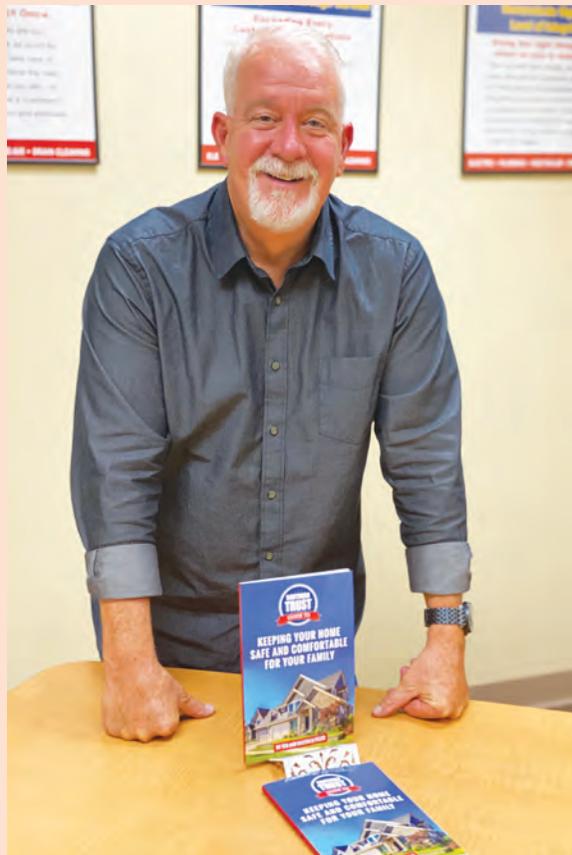
The secret to his success? Good employees and good management. Treating customers the way he would like to be treated was number one. The best warranties and guarantees as well. Being available when customers need to hear from Southern Trust. “I learned a lot from people over the years. What I liked and worked well I incorporated. What didn’t work well for other contractors, I did the complete opposite.”

Yes, people ask him to give the OK sign in public, which he calls “comical.” They ask how he makes his teeth sparkle – an effect added by the commercial production people. “I tell them it’s another set of dentures – I don’t have them in today,” he chuckles. Puzio is not sure how much those TV ads help, inferring that a “pretty good brand, a pretty good reputation,” are probably better reasons why Southern Trust Home Services is thriving after 25 years. “Word of mouth is the biggest [factor].” Being efficient with the billable hours for the customer – no on-the-clock stops at Starbucks or unnecessary trips to supply warehouses.

As for advice to others thinking about starting their own business: “be prepared to work 7 days a week. You better have a loving, patient [spouse/partner].” That draws a big laugh as he pays homage to his wife. Feel free to contact him at the

office or via e-mail for tips, adds Puzio. He recently talked to a woman who wants to start a pet grooming business. At the home office on Starkey Road there are pictures of Puzio as a one-man operation with his Dodge Dakota pickup and his very young sons – now in their 30’s. Then-Advance Auto executive Garnett Smith even donated a used company van to Puzio, impressed with his work and seeing how that pickup truck wasn’t big enough. One cheap Earl Scheib paint job later, “that’s how we got started.”

What does a solid, updated HVAC system mean to a homeowner? “If the house is maintained, and it’s [often] as simple as the homeowner changing out filters, that will add longevity to the heating and air system.” If the electrical circuit breaker box feels too hot “something needs attention.” His crews can come out and do a thermal scan to check for hot spots. Sound advice it seems – and who isn’t going to trust a guy with that smile as he gives the OK sign on television? 





WELLNESS

By Ally Bowersock

Executive Summary:

As the pandemic persists, small businesses are struggling to forecast next steps. The one consistency throughout has been the mutual support among other small businesses in the same predicament.

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

Ways to keep your small business healthy

If you're a small business owner who is looking for new business amidst all the chaos, here are a few tactics we have employed with some success.

Gift card giveaways: Invest in however many gift cards from a local business of your choosing and select a day in the future to promote the giveaway. The key, we have found with our business and others who have reciprocated this offer, is to plan in advance for this opportunity to help drive business on otherwise slow days. For example, if you are traditionally slow on Tuesdays, pick a gift card giveaway one week out and then make an event on social media promoting the event. We've found this is very effective for our restaurant friends as people are planning meals for the week and can ensure supporting your business if they know in advance you are offering a promotion on a particular day.

Reciprocal benefit: once you select a gift card winner or winners, post about their win on your social media channels and tag the business to whom the gift card belongs. Your customers "win" by earning a bonus prize or prizes in the form of gift cards, and the gift card business wins by gaining exposure to your customer base- likely many new customers therein.

Social media "takeover": Once you find a small business to support, identify a day when you will provide content to share on their channels. Advertise at least a few days in advance that the "takeover" will occur so that current followers of the business being taken over will know what's happening and why. Takeover days are great for promoting a cause or fundraiser or to highlight something significant happening with the business providing content. Make sure you identify any hashtags unique to the business providing content so that you engage their followers on your page.

Referral reciprocity: Use business cards or any promotional card you may have to give to your customers on behalf of the business you are supporting. This is very effective for businesses who have synergy within their industries, like for us supporting local bike shops because we don't sell bikes, but we encourage our walkers and runners to cross-train with cycling. Our referral cards include a one-time-use coupon so there is extra incentive to visit with the referral card. One key piece here is to write the name of the business dispensing the cards on the referral card itself so that you can see where new business is generated.

If you're interested in partnering with RunAbout Sports Roanoke on any of these ideas, please let us know: runaboutroanoke@gmail.com. Thanks for supporting local! 

Battalion takes on opioid crisis

In September 2018 a group of concerned professionals launched the Roanoke Valley Collective Response—a collaborative organization to address the opioid crisis in our community. RVCR’s mission is to “re-chart the course and consequences of substance use disorder.” Its goal is not just prevention, but making sure there are ample opportunities to healthy and sustainable living by those affected by addiction.

RVCR includes members in law enforcement, medical services, healthcare, education, local and state government, the faith and business communities, and individuals. Roanoke’s Bradley Free Clinic is the “backbone” of the initiative, and the steering committee includes Kimberly Horn (Virginia Tech / Fralin Biomedical Research Institute); Janine Underwood (Bradley Free Clinic); Christine Baldwin (HOPE Initiative); Jimmy Chapman (Roanoke County Police); Lee Clark (Rescue Mission); Nancy Hans (Prevention Council); Cheri Hartman (Carilion Clinic); Robert Natt (Radford University); Amy Pierce; and Karen Pillis (Family Service).

“The magnitude of the opioid and addiction problem is unlike anything our community has experienced in recent history,” says Kimberly Horn, a scientist and professor and chair of RVCR. “Now with COVID-19, it requires a response unlike any we have ever tried. Until now, we did not have a clear unified plan to help us build the best possible prevention and recovery community, together. The Roanoke Valley Collective Response to the Opioid and Addiction Crisis (RVCR) now has nearly 300 stakeholders from all walks of life. Its first major goal was to develop a Blueprint to Action to map out evidence-based strategies for prevention, treatment, crisis response, recovery, and child and family support. The new Blueprint presents 22 evidence-based, community-driven recommendations addressing our addiction crisis. Released in September, the Blueprint represents a shared future and common vision, showing what is possible to achieve when we work together.”

RVCR’s blueprint, mission, goals, and additional information are available at rvcollectiveresponse.org. 

GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:
Roanoke Valley Collective Response to the Opioid and Addiction Crisis has a blueprint to prevent abuse, treat, and respond.



www.cfwesternva.org

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Katie Gehrt

THE ARTS... MUST GO ON

By Tom Field

Valley Business FRONT introduces Katie Gehrt, an advisory board member representing the arts.

Ask Katie Gehrt about her professional experience timeline, and you hear a repeated phrase: she loved it. All of it.

From her theatre groups in school, to her marcom gigs at Virginia Tech, to her integrated marketing communications

graduate program at WVU, to her two corporate positions (marketing an animal feed producer in Kentucky and working at the award-winning design firm, NewCity, in Blacksburg) before joining the Moss Arts Center at Virginia Tech just this past year, in September 2019.

"I loved it," Gehrt says again, this time referencing her job just prior to taking the MAC position as marketing director. "I wasn't looking [for a job], but a friend of mine saw the posting and encouraged me to apply. I love the arts... the galleries, the theatre, the performances... and when I met with the incredible team at the Moss Arts Center—that sealed the deal."

But then... (and you probably know what's coming)... merely one quarter after signing on with MAC, the worst possible fate hit the arts, cultural, and entertainment industry and venues: COVID-19.

Gehrt had to get in gear. A whole new and different gear. She had to move in directions no one would ever predict or expect for a marketing director, much less a brand new one... even one with experience.

"It's really concerning when you're a venue focused on presenting live performances and exhibitions and suddenly not being able to offer those experiences in person. We had to scramble," Gehrt says, and everything turned on a dime to one constant activity: "Rethinking!"

"We've tried a variety of things," she explains, "and we're seeing a lot of success." Gehrt cites forming a "Moss HomeStage Series" was instrumental. She describes the presentations as not pre-recorded, and not just livestreaming a performance. "It's surprisingly intimate and so enjoyable for audiences." She recalls one artist where MAC sent equipment to her home in advance, she plays and sings with such perfection it feels like studio quality... "but then you hear a real pause; and you see her dog walk up."

Not only are people responding positively to HomeStage, but Gehrt says MAC has learned so much through the pandemic safety measures, that they intend to carry on with some of the new approaches.

"IN BRIEF"

NAME: Katie Gehrt

POSITION: Director of Marketing and Communication

COMPANY: Moss Arts Center at Virginia Tech

EDUCATION: Virginia Tech—degrees in Psychology, Graphic Design; West Virginia University—Master's degree in Integrated Marketing Communications

BACKGROUND: Birthplace: Richmond; Worked in marketing/communications at VT (Student Affairs and College of Architecture and Urban Studies); corporate positions at Alltech, Lexington, KY and NewCity, Blacksburg; Joined Moss Arts Center in September 2019.

PERSONAL: Married: Brian

INTERESTS: Horse riding; outdoors—kayaking; traveling; painting; the arts

MAC also conducts virtual tours and Zoom-type artist interviews. When asked if she or the staff benchmarked and watched how other venues were responding to the shutdowns, Gehrt said they certainly looked and kept informed, "but we really had to move forward and try to have the best plan." MAC just forged ahead with strategies and processes, and Gehrt reports they have and are working. She looks forward to returning to onsite experiences, but says they'll use the new methods they might not have tried, as well as some hybrid models for the gallery and performances.

The Moss Arts Center at Virginia Tech houses gallery spaces with rotating exhibitions, a world-class theatre presenting a diverse selection of performances, the "Cube" (a four-story lab that uses new visual and audio technologies and serves the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology), and conducts educational programming, artist engagement, workshops, and panel discussions.

MAC is truly a cultural experience stimulating the creative senses. Katie Gehrt gets to tell all about it, promote it, and get others to celebrate it... whether on site—or off.

[For more information on all experiences and engagements, visit: artscenter.vt.edu] 



Full production mode in western Roanoke County at Valley Tech Park >

Mack Trucks formally started off production at its Roanoke County plant of the MD-Series medium duty trucks in early September. Later in the month during a virtual kickoff Mack release some photos of the facility and the production line, where **Antonio Servidoni** (also pictured outside the plant) is director of Roanoke Valley Operations. Mack Trucks, a division of Volvo North America, would not divulge how many Class 6 and 7 trucks it plans to roll off the line in Roanoke County for competitive reasons.



Submitted photos

"We have been working in this facility for more than a year," said Servidoni, "and the whole team has been brave to stay on during the pandemic, without stopping this plant for one single day, just to be ready." Mack Trucks Vice President **Jonathan Randall** called the plant "a great central location, already within our manufacturing footprint along the I-81 corridor. Our suppliers are already coming through there, so it made a lot of sense."



Former longtime barbershop reemerges with new owners and new look >

In 1970 a former cabin behind the Coffee Pot restaurant on Brambleton Avenue became a barbershop where **Jim and Jerri Lane** served the community as barbers/stylists. When the recent pandemic mandate closed shops in March, the Lane family decided retirement was a good option. Recently however and thus, closed the cabin doors. Shortly thereafter friends and co-workers in management at the Sport Clips franchise, **Deanna Brunelle** and **DeAnna Phillips Munsey** jumped at an opportunity to remodel and reopen this "diamond in the rough." After a soft opening in late summer they held a ribbon cutting last month with Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea Sr. among those taking part. About that cabin: the new owners were told it was one of with five or six identical cabins that were rented by the Coffee Pot to travelers and musical acts until 1970 – when the Lanes started their 50-year run. "We jumped," said DeAnna Munsey about the chance to own their own haircutting business, "we were not really prepared with COVID to start a business, but we've been very blessed – great friends, great people that did some different work here in the shop [about 350 square feet total]. They made everything look great and got us ready."





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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
*Are your resources limited
or just smaller?*

Let'em laugh

You have a few trucks in your contracting business? Wow. You run a single restaurant off the outskirts of town? Swell. You just signed a five-thousand dollar contract with a local business? That's nice. You hired your fifth employee...part timer? Okay.

None of those responses included exclamation marks, if you didn't notice. But small business owners often hear the underwhelming reaction. Most small business owners don't care, though. They're not concerned if the measure of success for a retail operation is WalMart. They're not jostled in the slightest if a new tech startup only gets angel investors if the promised return begins at \$50 million.

The small business marketplace is served by men and women who do what they do right now, in the moment, with a product or service for a customer, using the resources they have. Some of those resources, are rather incredible or even on the verge of ridiculous, when compared to big business.

Some small businesses operate with decades' old equipment. Some small businesses engage manual production rather than automated. Some small businesses—as we learned this year—adjust and implement difficult measures just to survive, while the big business right next door to them are allowed to operate with negligible changes.

In the Guy Ritchie film *The Gentlemen* (2019), when thugs burst in Rosalind Pearson's office, she picks up a small, gold two-barrel derringer. The bad guys laugh at the "paperweight" pointed at them, until the first one advances toward her. We hear a pop that's not much different than the sound an electric stapler makes. Thug number one feels the tiny red blood spot in the center of his forehead, and falls dead backwards. Followed by thug number two.

In the right hand, with smallish, limited resources, you can still accomplish exactly what you want to accomplish.

I see this happen all the time.
And it makes a better story. 🎬



Want a job? Launching a career? You may have to log on first

Ah, the job or – more euphemistically perhaps – the career fair. The in-person meet and greet, a sort of more professional version of speed dating perhaps. The noisy ballroom, applicants snatching up free T-shirts and other assorted swag, nibbling chocolate cookies from the refreshment table, waiting in line for a few minutes with the HR gatekeeper from the companies on their must-visit list. For many right now, that’s so 2019. Or pre-March 2020. Nostalgic even.

With COVID still surging across the US, many companies have turned to virtual career fairs as a hiring strategy. For example, The ExelARATION Center, a software development company based out of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center in Blacksburg (with other related offices and a training center in Arlington) went virtual during Virginia Tech’s Career Fair in September. My son (a senior in the aerospace engineering program at Tech) said he missed pressing the flesh live, but NextUp Solutions (and ExelARATION Center) CEO Steve Cooper thinks virtual career/job fairs are here to stay: fewer distractions for both the interviewers and the candidates and the flexibility of meeting people who may not be in town at that moment. “In a virtual environment it really is just two people talking together one on one with zero distractions. You can really get a lot of intense questions going on ... in both directions.”

Case in point, ExelARATION, which hires 15-20 Virginia Tech students as paid part time interns every semester, was able to interview VT students (with backgrounds in engineering, math, etc.) that were back in their native India, with classes this semester online due to pandemic safety precautions. Also says Cooper – students can “line up” virtually in more than one queue and can jump into an interview when the first available slot opens up. “Once you make that contact the tension dissipates and you have a great conversation.”

Cooper is also proud to point out that Vault (an online career advice firm) has rated ExelARATION #3 nationwide for Tech & Engineering internships. Those hires help provide remote software development and support to clients in the federal, commercial, and non-profit sector.

Live in-person career fairs will return to some extent once the COVID all-clear is given; we all probably

continued on Page 37



Submitted photo

Steve Cooper NextUp-ExelARATION Center CEO



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
The virtual job fair could become the norm—at least for the near future.



Robin Weeks



Kim Whiter

GUEST COMMENTARY

By Robin Weeks and Kimberly Whiter

Executive Summary: *November is National Caregiver Month. Two women business owners you've read about recently in the FRONT say there is help out there for people in those roles.*

Family Caregivers: Facing the Tough Balancing Act of Caring and Working

Ellen goes into work and her phone rings; her Mother has had a fall and is in the ER. She drops everything and rushes to the hospital. This is the beginning of a balancing act between caregiving and work.

AARP estimates the cost of workplace interruptions due to caregiver responsibilities is \$6.6 billion annually. Currently there are 53 million, one in five or 73% of US employees providing unpaid care to a child, spouse, friend, parent or grandparent. That is a 21% increase from 2015 and the number is climbing as our population ages rapidly, expected to tip the scales in 2030 with those over 65 years outnumbering those under 18 years old for the first time in history.

Family Caregivers spend on average 20+ hours a week of their time providing caregiving tasks. Sixty-one percent of caregivers are women, 39% are men and are often part of the "Sandwich Generation," juggling caregiving needs both for growing children and aging loved ones. Caregivers are typically working, as the majority are either in Generation X or the Millennial generation, making up the bulk of our workforce.

Caregivers are frequently stressed and often let their own health suffer. Many times, they are financially compromised due to the overwhelming costs of long-term care or in-home care needs, spending on average \$6000-\$7000 per year out of their own pockets, many dipping into savings and retirement.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the stresses, strains and lives of caregivers. Choices about care facilities or home care have become more difficult. Caregivers need help and support in many forms. So how can they be supported in a meaningful way?

Time. As we see with Ellen, time is precious. As she faces care decisions for her mother, she will be navigating a terrain of professionals, appointments, resources and services. A service that can help with her decision-making and resources can give Ellen the ability to claim back much-needed time.

Money. Ellen may face financial obstacles as her mother enters rehabilitative care. Her choices may be caring for her mother within her own home, aging her mother in place, or the possibility of a care facility. These costs are usually more than anyone has prepared for.

Emotional support. Caregivers have a range of mixed emotions. There may be feelings of guilt when they can't

be there for their loved ones because of the demands of their career. Finding someone who has been through the Family Caregiving journey can be a huge support.

Elder Care Solutions and My Pivotal Point wrap family caregivers in the support they need. My Pivotal Point provides educational support to companies and supports caregivers by finding the answers to their questions, brainstorming solutions, and providing personal caregiving coaching so caregivers feel more confident and less isolated about their new role. Elder Care Solutions supports caregivers by presenting all their viable options for paying for long-term care needs and helping them navigate the terrain of financial professionals associated with elder care decisions. Together, we help family caregivers, like Ellen, with holistic, meaningful support so they're not carrying their care responsibilities alone.

Caregiving is a tough job, which is one reason in the month of November we remember the people who lovingly provide care to millions of elderly and chronically ill loved ones. The theme for the 2020 Family Caregiver month is "Caregiving Around the Clock." Check out the National Alliance for Caregiving for ways to celebrate National Family Caregiver Month in November. 

Robin Weeks is Owner for MyPivotalPoint, where she uses her training as a caregiving consultant to provide caregivers with answers, resources, problem-solving, and support as they take on caregiving responsibilities. www.mypivotalpoint.com

Kimberly Whiter is CEO and Cofounder for Elder Care Solutions, a Roanoke-based remote company focused on helping caregivers across the U.S. face the financial challenges of long-term care needs. www.eldercaresolutionsinc.com

“Elder Care Solutions and My Pivotal Point wrap family caregivers in the support they need.”

Marrano / There's something

from Page 35

crave more face to face, human interaction at this point. But as for the virtual meet-and-greet – why not retain that component as an option? Let's truly make the promise of the

Internet work to the extent that it can be an asset. Predicts Steve Cooper: "companies that are mature now in terms of their recruiting practices are going to switch over to this virtually easily. The workforce is already used to Zoom now, working in a virtual environment and collaborating that way." 

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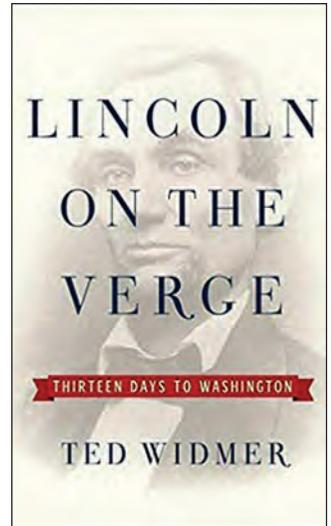


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FRONTReviews >

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A momentous journey

Whistle stop train campaigns are nothing new for Presidents of the United States or candidates – heck, Joe Biden embarked on one last month. None may have been one more impactful than that taken by newly elected Abraham Lincoln on February 11, 1861, as he was about to turn 52 years old. *Lincoln on the Verge: Thirteen Days To Washington* (Simon & Schuster; 2020) describes Lincoln's often grueling 1900 mile trek to Washington DC for his early March first inauguration, via a circuitous northern route that kept him out of Southern slaveholding states already planning to secede after his election. Ironically at the same time Lincoln was heading towards DC, Jefferson Davis, soon to be named President of the Confederate States of America, was speeding south to Montgomery, Alabama for his own swearing in.

Lincoln's whistle stop tour help solidify support for the United States of America concept from Northern States – although large adoring crowds came close to crushing him at times. Even when visibly fatigued, the 16th president often summoned up the strength to deliver impactful speeches. Author Ted Widmer vividly describes the assassination plots that were rumored - indeed Lincoln took an earlier train than was advertised in the newspapers from Baltimore to Washington to avoid what was considered a credible plot involving enraged Southern sympathizers. Well worth the read, *Lincoln On The Verge* is

also about true leadership and communicating effectively to build a consensus – one that helped keep the country together as it fought its own bloody Civil War.

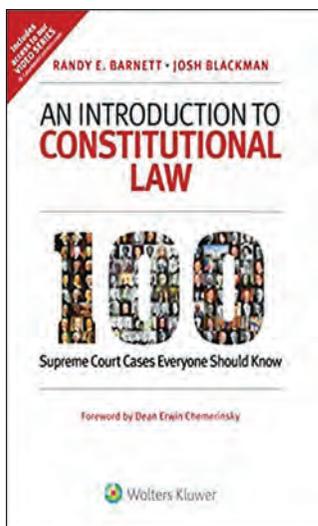
—Gene Marrano

Supreme is not all-knowing

Fascinating—and timely—here's an academic book with a reader-friendly format most will appreciate. *An Introduction to Constitutional Law: 100 Supreme Court Cases Everyone Should Know* (Wolters Kluwer: 2019) co-authored by Georgetown University law professor and senior Cato Institute fellow Randy Barnett and South Texas College law professor Josh Blackman presents landmark cases, categorized by subject area. I read the book and watched a program on the content, but you can also get the book in multimedia form, which includes videos that accompany the case reviews. How cool.

What stands out is something I think most of us know, but often fail to realize the impact: Applying the law is no black and white matter. In fact, you might be surprised how many decisions you read seem to not only conflict with your personal view, but they could even defy logic, reason, or even the very US Constitution they are supposed to respect.

It's nice (and rather scholarly of you) to be familiar with the 100 cases included in this study. But I'd be excited if more of us knew a handful of the rulings that truly impact



our society in ways that affect our way of life—and how we are able (allowed?) to interact with our fellow citizens and the governmental system overseeing it all.

Here's a challenge: Read it just to see with which decisions you disagree. See how many were unanimous and how many were split. This, my friends, is why the judges placed in our Supreme Court of the United States (for a lifetime, if they're willing) are so critical. Do you like how they are appointed? Are you comfortable with the term? How about nine of them... good number?

Maybe you don't need to know all 100 cases. But you should know why SCOTUS matters and how it impacts your life.

—Tom Field

Delivering in the clutch

Clutch Smoked Meats on Luck Avenue in Roanoke features a cozy indoor dining experience – they call it a “comfortably upscale interior,” and some outdoor seating for those more cautious these days. They also deliver to Big Lick Brewing, which is where I tried a house smoked Cajun Turkey sandwich on multigrain bread with pepper jack cheese, avocado sprouts and vine ripened tomatoes. A friend of mine liked the Lox-and-Bagelwich sandwich with smoked Atlantic Salmon. Sides include roasted brussels sprouts (flavored with ham and delicious) and the pimento mac & cheese, which I also enjoyed. Clutch sandwiches

are a bit on the pricey side perhaps but when you're in the mood for something other than the typical franchise sub shop give it a try. On a subsequent visit to Clutch itself the chic modern décor impressed (in a former auto repair shop shared with the Owl Lofts – hence the name clutch) the Cuban Press (several types of pork and cheese in a panini-like casing) and the Caesar salad were also winners.

—Gene Marrano

Records rule, man

When is five years considered “vintage”? When it's The Vintage Vault: a record shop in downtown Roanoke (at Crafteria; 16 W Church Ave, Roanoke) that opened in 2015. This hangout has a cool “underground” vibe and also goes by a longer moniker: The Vintage Vault Records & Pop Culture Collectibles.” Vinyl records—particularly retro albums, both popular (best-seller-must-haves-at-the-time) and the rare and eclectic titles (bands you may or may not recall, depending on how you rolled back then or the stories you've heard)—are the main bag here in this boutique shop. You've got to take a spin here. So you can take a spin when you get back to your Chevy van... or your pad, man. Groovy.

The reviewers: **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT; **Tom Field** is the owner and founder of Valley Business FRONT and is a creative director, publisher, writer, and marketer.



Submitted photo

All you need is Love (signs) >

There's more LOVE in the region – one of the newest LOVEwork signs in the Commonwealth was recently unveiled at **Natural Bridge State Park** outside the visitor's center. A grant from the Virginia Tourism Corporation helped pay for the sign. Local artist **Mark Cline** designed and created the LOVE letters for the Natural Bridge version. There are now more than 200 LOVE signs statewide.



Facebook photos



Major facelift completed >

The **Hotel Roanoke** has completed a multimillion-dollar renovation of its **Pine Room** restaurant - along with creation of a new Lobby Bar nearby. The project also includes more seating outdoors. The Pine Room Kitchen is no longer in the basement, which meant customer orders had to be transported upstairs to be served. The Lobby Bar work included restoration of ceiling to the night sky mural that was present there until the late 1930's. Hotel General Manager **Brian Wells** says the pandemic partial shutdown did allow the work to go on with less disruption to guests. "That's probably the one silver lining in this; we were able to do heavy construction at a time where that side of the hotel could be left vacant."



Restoration Housing campaign >

A non-profit launched in 2014 and dedicated to rehabbing substandard older housing in Roanoke - turning those properties into affordable multi-family housing - has created and posted a series of videos designed to create awareness for its mission. They are also a fundraising tool with an annual in-person event canceled due to COVID-19. Produced by ex-Roanoker **Alex Jones** and his DNA Vision company, the story of **Restoration Housing** is told through by staff, tenants and supporters of the program. They can be viewed on the Restoration Housing website, Facebook and Twitter. "Many of Roanoke's neighborhoods have been systematically devalued, leaving behind substandard housing conditions and communities struggling with blight and vacancy," says executive director Isabel Thornton. "Through this virtual campaign, we hope to connect with a wider audience in ways we wouldn't otherwise be able to do and give an emotional story to what community support can do for our organization."

Using a variety of federal and state grants, historic tax credits after construction - along with private and corporate donations - Restoration Housing has purchased and renovated a half dozen properties to date, all residential except for the former Villa Heights mansion in northwest Roanoke, now home to several small non-profits. Thornton studied urban planning in college and says she has a "passion for Roanoke," as a native. Southeast Roanoke City, which she says has a 17 percent vacant occupancy, is a focus now. Thornton also hopes other developers and private potential homeowners will be inspired to follow suit and renovate other substandard properties.

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



Another Kroger to open a fuel center >

Kroger will soon open a fuel center at its Tanglewood location on Electric Road in Roanoke County, joining a growing number of Kroger locations now offering customers a chance to fuel up as they also shop for groceries.

Women In Philanthropy Hosts Virtual Grant Awards Party >

The **Women In Philanthropy** (WIP) group celebrated 11 years of giving back to the community recently by announcing via Zoom "impact grant awards" for 2020. Three local nonprofits received a total of \$40,000. The Henry County Food Pantry received \$17,000 to install an HVAC system in a climate-controlled warehouse space, to protect the shelf-stable food supply. Boys & Girls Clubs of the Blue Ridge Inc. received \$13,000 for its Power Hour program that supports Club members with homework help, tutoring, and other high yield learning activities. (Pictured) **April Haynes**, Community Foundation on the left and **Joanie Petty**, Boys & Girls Club. Safetynet, Inc. received \$10,000 to provide emergency financial assistance to residents of Martinsville and Henry County who have urgent, legitimate needs that cannot be met through other public and private sources.

To date, Women in Philanthropy has awarded \$373,000 to local nonprofit organizations.



April Haynes, Regional Vice President, said, "the impact these ladies are making is amazing and I'm so thankful for their passion to make the community a better place for all." Women In Philanthropy started in 2009 and is an initiative of the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia, based in Roanoke.



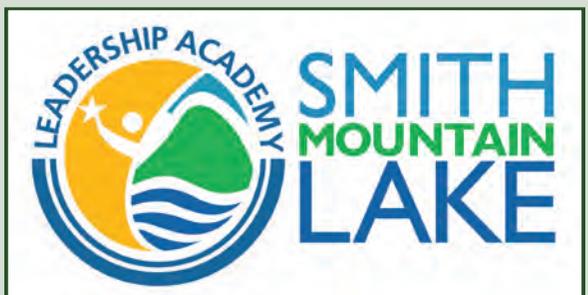
Local favorite hangout reopens >

Barrel Chest, the mega-craft beer and wine warehouse on Electric Road in southwest Roanoke County, has recently resumed its sit-down service where patrons can sample adult beverages – some brewed onsite – in person at socially distanced tables. No bellying up to the bar itself to sit at this point, however. Since the COVID pandemic began Barrel Chest had been takeout shopping only until reopening with limited weekend hours as a gathering spot.

SML leadership training >

The **Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce** has launched the Smith Mountain Lake Leadership Academy, a 12-month program “designed to educate emerging leaders and help shape the future of Smith Mountain Lake.” The Academy will offer participants the opportunity to meet and learn from prominent local business leaders in a variety of business sectors. Over the course of 12 months, the program will grant participants (tuition is \$750, maximum ten participants in each class) access to influential businesses and organizations in the Smith Mountain Lake area and three surrounding counties.

“The Chamber is excited to present this forum to activate, connect and inspire emerging community leaders,” says **Christopher Finley**, executive director. Finley, who has taught for the past 16 years as a part-time adjunct professor in Radford University’s School of Communication, plans to utilize his background in higher education to develop a curriculum that will focus on themes including economic development, education, government, tourism, healthcare and real estate.





Submitted photo

Virginia Western says Get REAL >

Virginia Western Community College has been awarded a 5-year, \$1.8-million grant from the U.S. Department of Education Title III Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) to develop and support educational pathways; designed to help underserved adult learners graduate and then achieve successful employment. Get REAL (Refocus Education on Adult Learners), will reach out to and support adult learners, especially those from low-income circumstances.

"Now, more than ever, adult learners need our support as they seek the education and hands-on training they need to build a career and improve their families' lives," said Dr. Robert H. Sandel, President of Virginia Western. Get REAL aims to improve enrollment, especially for adult and underrepresented learners; improve student outcomes and improve labor market outcomes for Career and Technical Education (CTE) program graduates.

Griffith tours PPE plant in Floyd >

9th District Congressman **Morgan Griffith** (R-Salem) visited the **Hollingsworth & Vose** manufacturing facility in Floyd County early last month, where he viewed production of filtration media used in the making of N95 masks, mask respirators, surgical hoods and ventilators. "They are one of the important partners in the federal government's effort to combat COVID-19," said Griffith; "over 200 constituents are here making filter media for the N95 mask and other medical applications needed to keep our nation safe." For months now Hollingsworth & Vose has added staff and adjusted schedules to optimize the amount of product manufactured



in response to the global health crisis. (pictured): **Vince Hatcher** (at left), director of Southeast operations, Congressman Griffith and **Donnie Sutphin**, site operations manager, discuss maintenance operations for critical process machines.



Submitted photos



Franklin County looking to lure more bikers >

If you don't think of Franklin County as a haven for mountain and cross-country biking - and racing – that was one motivation for the **Waid Park Sprint Enduro** and **Virginia Short Track Cross Country (XC) Championship** race last month. Franklin County Parks and Recreation Director **Paul Chapman** also says Franklin County has plenty of backroads and gravel paths for those road or hybrid bikers. "Franklin County hasn't always been in the front of people's minds when they think about places to go ride their bike; this race will help reintroduce those folks to Franklin County. [It's] a great place to ride."



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SENIOR FRONT



Gring

Anna Gring has been named Executive Director of Woodland Hills Community in Roanoke, a Retirement Unlimited, Inc. (RUI) Community. Gring has over ten years' experience in the senior living industry.



Fitzmaurice

Tom Fitzmaurice has been named Vice President of Sales for Retirement Unlimited, Inc. (RUI), a Roanoke based, Virginia family-owned and operated senior living community management company.

Fitzmaurice has over thirteen years of senior living experience in sales and marketing support.

LEGAL FRONT



Mumm

Gentry Locke, with offices locally in Roanoke and Lynchburg, is pleased to announce the arrival of **Jean D. Mumm** as a partner in the firm's commercial real estate practice. She arrives with more than 30 years of experience in commercial real estate, business, and finance transactions. Most recently, Mumm served as corporate counsel for a leading global real estate investment and management firm, where she managed complex corporate real estate transactions across the U.S. In this

role, she prepared documents related to closings, financings, acquisitions, and dispositions.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Smith

Ken Smith, Virginia Tech's vice provost for academic resource management, has been selected to serve as the first chief operating officer of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus. In his new role, Smith will work closely with inaugural Vice President and Executive Director Lance Collins to launch the Innovation Campus in Alexandria and develop it as the epicenter of Virginia Tech's long-standing and growing footprint in the greater Washington, D.C., metro area.

NON-PROFIT FRONT



Kitts

Anna Kitts joined the SARA Roanoke team in August as the Director of Clinical Services. She comes to SARA (which offers support services to survivors of sexual violence) with a B.A. in Psychology and a Master of Social Work.

Virginia Children's Theatre's Board of Directors has announced the addition of three new members, **Amy Anguiano**, **Thomas Bass**, and Virginia Children's Theatre (VCT) student **Olivia Goodman**, for the 2020-2021 Board of Directors. It's the first time in VCT history (formerly Roanoke Children's Theatre) that a youth board member has been selected. Goodman

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is a student at Patrick Henry High School.



Thoenke

Josh Thoenke has been appointed as Executive Director for Apple Ridge Farm in Copper Hill. He most recently served as CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Virginia. Apple Ridge Farm offers summer retreat opportunities for underprivileged youths in the Roanoke Valley.

FINANCIAL FRONT



Oshoniyi

Dominion Risk Advisors (DRA) an insurance

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broker headquartered in downtown Roanoke announces that **Toye Oshoniyi** has joined the firm as a Risk Advisor. In that role he consults with commercial clients by identifying their risks and determining risk management solutions. Oshoniyi, a one-time semi pro soccer player with the Roanoke Wrath, joins Dominion Risk Advisors with 20 years of client solutions experience. Now working in 18 states, DRA was founded in 2010 to service the risk management and insurance needs of clients in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

Steven Sandy of Vinton, the Director of Planning and

Community Development for Franklin County, has been appointed the Virginia's Broadband Advisory Council by Governor Ralph Northam.

WELLNESS FRONT



Strickland

Fincastle-based Universal Health Corporation has added a new physician assistant. **Kathleen Strickland, PA-C**, to the senior living medical staffing provider's team of health care professionals. Strickland will use her experience as a hospitalist to assist a newly acquired center

in Roanoke. U-Health currently assists at twelve facilities across the region.

LOCAL BUSINESS FRONT



Markham

5Points Creative (5PC) announces the addition of account manager **C.W. Markham**, who will develop key client relationships by assessing clients' business goals, developing various market strategies, and building media proposals. He also serves as a liaison between clients and



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other departments at 5PC. Markham brings nearly 30 years of experience in program management and team leadership to the Roanoke-based full-service marketing and advertising agency.



Barba

Parker Design Group announces the addition of Land Surveyor, **Chris Barba**. He brings extensive surveying knowledge and decades of experience customizing land use solutions for a wide variety of

clients. Barba will lead commercial project development and serve as a liaison to the PDG Engineering Team.

Denny Slagle, who retired as executive vice president of Volvo



Slagle

Group and president of Mack Trucks in 2018, joins electric vehicle startup Trova Commercial Vehicles in Pulaski as a senior adviser. TrovaCV launched this summer to provide commercial

vehicle manufacturers with customized engineering, design and manufacturing expertise for fully electric commercial vehicles while also developing its own new electric vehicle. Slagle will join the company's newly formed advisory board, which will include industry leaders with a variety of expertise and proven experience.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

“ ” I spend a lot of time walking. — Page 13

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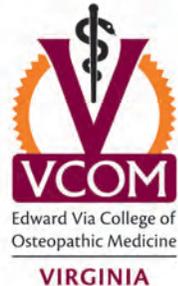


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CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjpp91@gmail.com]

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

with friends and cheering on his beloved Florida Gators.

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

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

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

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

Nanette Levin is a senior correspondent for FRONT business journal and the Wordsmith of Roanoke. When she's not creating marketing copy for owners of B2B and B2C professional services firms or ghostwriting & editing books for non-fiction authors, she's trying to get control of her talented, always happy, but easily distracted mutt Morrie on the agility field. [Nanette@WordsmithofRoanoke.com]

Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR

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

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

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

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

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

Michael Shelton is a Registered Financial

Consultant, tax specialist, and owner of 360 Wealth Consultants. His firm specializes in providing retirement planning and wealth preservation strategies for business owners and astute individuals. What really has the locals excited, though, is his groundbreaking, proprietary software, designed to streamline accounting and wealth planning for business owners of medical practices, real estate properties, and construction industry businesses. [michael@discover360Financial.com]

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

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

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

Kimberly Whiter is CEO and Cofounder for Elder Care Solutions, a Roanoke-based remote company focused on helping caregivers across the U.S. face the financial challenges of long-term care needs. [kimberly@eldercareolutionsinc.com]

“ ”
Every square foot of your company's space should have a purpose. — Page 18

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Good news for Tanglewood Mall?

As initial work gets underway on Electric Road-Route 419 near Tanglewood Mall, part of the "Reimagine" plan, Roanoke County Supervisor Paul Mahoney hints at good news for the mall property itself: "though we don't know the identity of the [parties] it appears as if Tanglewood Mall has filed site plans for several outparcels. Maybe we're starting to see some positive steps that come from the 419 plan." Mahoney made his comments at a Board of Supervisors meeting in late September.

5Points Creative lands another big account

5Points Creative has been named the agency of record for Universal Health Corporation. 5PC is providing strategic marketing support, public relations, and website guidance along with other services. 5PC has assisted U-Health in publicizing their arrival in southern Virginia with new staffing announcements in Roanoke, Danville, and Martinsville.

Local community colleges earn Horseshoe Award

New River Community College recently received the "Gerald L. Bailes Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative Award" from the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education (VFCCCE) to increase high school

and college completion. The Gerald L. Bailes Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative (RVHI) Award, named for the former late governor, aims to reduce the number of rural residents without a high school diploma from 1 in 5 to 1 in 10, and to increase the number of rural residents with an associate degree, diploma, or certificate from 26 percent to 52 percent. Dabney S Lancaster Community College was also among the 13 community colleges to receive the Horseshoe Awards.

Tech moves up in rankings

Virginia Tech has risen seven spots in U.S. News & World Report's ranking of Most Innovative Schools, from 42nd in 2020 to 35th in 2021. In U.S. News & World Report's other rankings, Virginia Tech held steady at 74th among Best National Universities. For Top Public Schools, it stands at 29th in the 2021 rankings. VT ranked 38th for Best Undergraduate Business, 13th for Best Undergraduate Engineering - Doctorate, 44th for Undergraduate Research/Creative Projects, 45th for Best Colleges for Veterans - National Universities, and 31st for Best Undergraduate Computer Science.

RAMP funding

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA)

has awarded federal funding to promote entrepreneurship, startup creation, innovation, and commercialization in Martinsville and in Roanoke, including \$982,443 for the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP) program in downtown Roanoke, to support scalable startups in technology and health/life sciences. The financial boost will allow RAMP to host two cohorts of 5-6 startups instead of one every year, and to provide pre and post cohort support services. Dr. Mary Guy Miller, RAMP's Director, said, "this grant will give us the runway we need to build additional capacity and support the entrepreneurial community at every stage of their development." Only 52 EDA Build to Scale grants were awarded in the current cycle, "which validates the importance of having an organization like the RBTC/VIC Strategic Alliance, focused on strengthening and growing our region's innovation economy by leveraging this type of federal EDA grant support," said Greg Feldmann, CEO of an alliance that now includes RAMP, the Valleys Innovation Council and the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council.

GO Virginia Region 2 steps up as well

The GO Virginia Board has approved three new Region 2 projects aimed at growing the regional economy, approving a total of \$906,872 in

state funds, leveraging \$429,600 in non-state funds as well. The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council will work with NextUp Solutions to strengthen the pipeline of talent to meet the Emerging Technologies and IT industry cluster's needs. The program will assist college students in the IT and software development fields by providing funding for 57 semester-long or summer paid internships. The Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance will collaborate with municipalities in Region 2 with the goal of attracting industry to the Lynchburg region. And the New River Valley Business Continuity Team (New River Health District) will develop a Business Continuity Team to provide access to technical resources needed for business owners to operate in the COVID-19 environment, instilling confidence in consumers and employees.

Pinnacle grows in Roanoke region

Tennessee-based Pinnacle Financial Partners has grown its deposits in the Roanoke MSA to more than \$752.3 million as of June 30. That's according to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, making Pinnacle No. 3 in the deposit market share rankings, up from No. 4 in 2019. "I credit our associates for the terrific growth we've seen here in the last three years, as well as Pinnacle's intentional investment in our people and presence

in Virginia,” said David Allen, Pinnacle’s regional president in Western Virginia. “Our team is packed with locals who know what the people and businesses of the Valley need.”

More COVID relief for small businesses

Rebuild Virginia, a 70-million-dollar economic recovery fund launched in August, is expanding its eligibility criteria to allow more small businesses to apply. Businesses that have already received CARES Act funding and supply chain partners of other businesses impacted by the pandemic are now eligible for grants of up to \$10,000 with certain restrictions.

Mill Mountain Theatre makes it official for 2020 – no more live productions

“This decision was not easy for us, but it was made out of genuine care for the wellness of our patrons, staff, artists, and students,” said producing artistic director Ginger Poole, who was

still hoping to stage the Christmas show Holiday Inn. “A few months ago, we were optimistic that fall and winter were far enough away to safely proceed with our late 2020 programming. However, as Broadway announced that their stages would remain dark through the end of the year, we thoughtfully considered if and how we could safely continue. Our decision to cancel, along with every other decision we have made since March, has been informed by guidelines from the Commonwealth of Virginia, CDC, and from theater industry unions.”

Bucking the trend

Recent reports showed signaled a slight decline nationwide in public and private university undergraduate enrollments (2.5 percent nationally, 3.2 percent statewide), but Virginia Tech’s undergraduate enrollment stood at 30,016 as of Fall Census 2020 (September 21. 21), up from 29,300, or a 2.4 percent increase, from a year ago. That 30,000 enrollment

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milestone was one VT president Timothy Sands had set for 2023, putting the current enrollment tally 3 years ahead of that target.

Opera Roanoke: And, Still, We Sing

The aptly named 45th season for Opera Roanoke begins with digital version of its season opening performance on December 13th, Gustav Mahler’s Das Lied von der Erde (The Song of the Earth.) Opera Roanoke plans an in-person recital on March 18th, “The Couple That Sings Together” - featuring husband and wife duo, retired US Army chorus member, Kerry Wilkerson, bass-baritone, and Danielle

Talamantes, a Metropolitan Opera soprano and Virginia Tech grad. The company’s first fully digital produced opera next April is a twin bill with two comic operas, Pergolesi’s La Serva Padrona (The Servant Turned Mistress) and Menotti’s The Telephone. in summer 2021, Opera Roanoke – fingers crossed - will present Giuseppe Verdi’s Requiem in an outdoor concert setting, with four nationally recognized soloists, a full orchestra, and a double chorus of eighty voices.

No State of the Town this year in Vinton

The annual State of the Town Address originally scheduled for Wednesday, December 9 in Vinton



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has been postponed due to COVID-19 safety concerns. A new tentative date has been set on Thursday, April 8, 2021. "The [Vinton Area Chamber of Commerce] and Town staff look forward to hosting the event in 2021, when hopefully the COVID-19 concerns have been fully resolved," said acting Vinton Town Manager Richard "Pete" Peters in early October.

Better preparing students for college and career

The state Board of Education has recognized Roanoke County Public Schools and 14 other Virginia school divisions as "School Divisions of Innovation" for designing and implementing alternatives to traditional instructional practices and school structures. The goal is to improve student learning and promote college and career readiness, and good citizenship. Roanoke County is among the first districts to earn a designation authorized by the 2017 General Assembly. RCPS calls it deeper learning, which, "represents the skills that graduates need to become Opportunity Ready," says Dr. Ken Nicely, superintendent of Roanoke County Public Schools.

Roanoke County firm partners with growth in mind

Roanoke County-based KlariVis, which markets a proprietary data analytics software platform for bankers, has entered into a strategic alliance

with the Engage Partners Group to accelerate expansion in the Northeast. EngagePartners consults with community financial institutions. Andy Witherbee, CEO and founder of Engage Partners will work with the KlariVis sales team to introduce banks to the data analytics platform. Kim Snyder, CEO and founder, of KlariVis, said, "Andy too is a former community banker and understands from first-hand experience how transformational the KlariVis solution is to enable community financial institutions to make more strategic and profitable decisions."

Kudos for hospital, free standing emergency room

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem, and the stand alone Cave Spring ER, has received the Chest Pain Center v6 (version 6) Accreditation for Primary PCI (angioplasty) with Resuscitation, signifying that the hospital and the freestanding ER have proven "exceptional competency" in treating patients with heart attack symptoms. LewisGale Medical Center met all requirements, which included a robust target temperature management program for post-cardiac arrest treatment and creating a multidisciplinary resuscitation committee. "By participating in the accreditation program, our staff benefits from the enhanced internal communication, collaboration, and team-building aspects that are vital components

of this process," said Steven Pasternak, MD, Chief of Staff and ER Medical Director at LewisGale Medical Center.

Passing the ... axe?

Blue Ridge Axe Throwing, which debuted last year in an attempt to cash in on one of the latest unique "sports" fads, has sold that business to its landlords at Safeside Tactical in Roanoke. Dawn and Rob Erdman launched the business in September 2019, when Dawn Erdman likened it to "millennial bowling."

Always look on the bright side

Dr. Pepper Park at The Bridges was able to operate this year - albeit with a delay to the season start - even as other live music venues across the country shut down. Waynette Anderson, President and Owner of Dr Pepper Park is also finding some positivity looking forward, in the midst of the pandemic. "So many national acts moved their tours to 2021 and then some into 2022. That makes routing and booking opportunities more plentiful for a venue our size, and a market our size."

Infrastructure funding for Franklin County Business Park

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration has awarded a \$4.7 million grant to Franklin County, targeted to improving the

roadway infrastructure within the Summit View Business Park off US 220. These funds will be used to construct the internal roadway infrastructure within the business park to support current and future businesses. Total costs to connect the north and south regions of the park - still under development - is estimated to cost almost \$14 million. Franklin County has also received funding from the Virginia Department of Transportation's Smart Scale program and has applied for VDOT Revenue Sharing dollars to construct the roadway. The connector road will serve the three tenants already announced within Summit View Business Park (Traditional Medicinals, ValleyStar Credit Union, and Stik-Pak Solutions) and new businesses in the future. "With the help of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Franklin County will continue its long-term pursuit of a brighter future for all its citizens and businesses", commented Franklin County Board of Supervisors Chairman Leland Mitchell.

RVBA board grows

The Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority has expanded its board membership by two seats. Keith Perry, Senior Vice President & CIO of Carilion Clinic and Dr. Scott Midkiff, Vice President of IT & CIO of Virginia Tech will join Jay Taliaferro of the City of Salem, Bob Cowell of the City of Roanoke, Gary Larrowe of Botetourt County, Dan



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O'Donnell of Roanoke County, and Michael McEvoy, Executive Director of The Western Virginia Water Authority to serve as the newly expanded governance body for the RVBA. "These newest members of our leadership team have proven to be high-value contributors to our organization. They recognized the value of RVBA's strategic planning and infrastructure investment early on, kept up to date on our progress, and supported our efforts where-ever they could," Board Chairman Mike McEvoy said. To date the RVBA has installed around 100 miles of a high-speed internet fiber optic trunk line in the valley.

Big money for community college serving Botetourt, Alleghany

TAP, in partnership with Dabney S. Lancaster Community College, has been awarded a \$1,337,918 grant from the Department of Labor to launch Appalachian CareerForge, to fund programming that will support unemployed workers in seeking job training. The grant will be used for programing that will support unemployed workers seeking job training in three high-

demand career areas in the region: Certified Nurse Aide, Phlebotomy and Truck Driving (Commercial Driver's License - Class A).

Stay outside longer

Leaders with the town of Blacksburg are allowing businesses to keep their dining outdoors through the winter months. While the town usually shuts down outdoor dining at the end of November, officials are working to set up a grant program to help businesses to pay for things like heaters and tents, so they can be creative in how they keep their operations going.

UWRV Board additions

United Way of Roanoke Valley announces new additions to the 2020-21 Board of Directors. Paul Droubay, Vice President of Total Rewards, Western Governors University, is now serving as board and executive committee chair, succeeding Kerry Edmunds, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Hollins University. New board members include Daniel Brooks, MSW, LCSW-E/Good Counsel, LLC, Michael Burnette/Franklin County

Economic Development, Juliet J. Lowery/Community Volunteer/Higher Education Professional, Kameron V. Melton/Woods Rogers PLC and DeShea Witcher/Roava Digital Marketing Corp. "In this challenging environment with burgeoning needs across the Roanoke Valley, our work together to elevate the underserved and disadvantaged is even more critical and important," says Droubay.

Record streak will be snapped

A decade-long streak of tourism revenue and job growth in Virginia's Blue Ridge will be snapped this year due to the impact of COVID-19, but 2019 saw a record \$920 million in direct travel expenditures. That represented a 3 percent increase over 2018 says Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge president Landon Howard. The local tourism industry also accounted for almost 8200 jobs last year. "The trajectory was really looking good as we approached 2021-22 to [top] a billion dollars, which is what we were hoping for, then we got hit by the pandemic," he notes. "It's going to take a while for us to

recover that number." One good sign - the Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge website traffic is almost back to normal - Howard says with the Fall colors leaf-peeping season and other outdoor amenities many people are ready to come back.

Back online

Beamers 25 in downtown Roanoke's West Station is open again after being on hiatus for months due to the pandemic. Beamers used the down time to change their menu a bit: there's still specialty burgers; they are no longer doing pizza but will now offer milkshakes. "We'll still have the same draft beer, unique, and we're going to be rotating that," says manager Joel Franks. Hours will vary as they take baby steps towards a full reopening says Franks.

Long time family favorite another victim of the coronavirus

Country Cookin closed all of its locations in mid-October after almost four decades of serving family-style meals. Some outlets like the one Brambleton Avenue never reopened after the COVID-19 shutdown. In an online post Country

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Cookin management wrote, "we are grateful to the many friends, guests, and wonderful employees who have been part of our Country Cookin family over the past four decades. We pray for health, safety, and a prosperous 2021 for all."

Fed money for Appalachia

The federally funded Appalachian Regional Commission has awarded nearly 4 million dollars to communities in southwest and southside Virginia, to address

issues like broadband access, local infrastructure, boosting economies - and fighting substance abuse disorders.

The New River Valley Regional Commission gets almost \$33,000 thousand dollars to help boost tourism and job growth by cultivating natural assets around the New River. Meanwhile \$1,494,000 goes to the New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Area Consortium Board in Radford to tackle substance-use disorder by coordinating the healthcare sector and the

economic development/workforce sector to build a "recovery ecosystem".

No Dawgs hockey in 2020-21

Phase 3 pandemic safety restrictions that would limit the number of fans who could be admitted to the Berglund Center to see Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs hockey – the delayed Southern Professional Hockey League season is not expected to begin until sometime in December – forced the Dawgs to pull the plug and sit out the

season. The franchise, entering what would have been its fifth year, averaged more than 3000 paid for the past few seasons and would have lost too much money by playing with those attendance limits says team president Mickey Gray. But he declares, "this ensures that we're going to be able to come back in the 2021-22 season. Mark my words ... we're going to drop the puck in October 2021."

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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WHICH VIDEO CONFERENCING APP SHOULD I USE?

Special FRONTreport

In late October, District 3 of the American Advertising Federation hosted a review of some of the more popular video conferencing application platforms. The good news? Our reviewers were power users, not just tech heads. And, because our micro-market here involves the advertising industry, our analysis came from professionals who care a great deal about quality presentation, audio and video technologies, and what serves best for audience engagement.

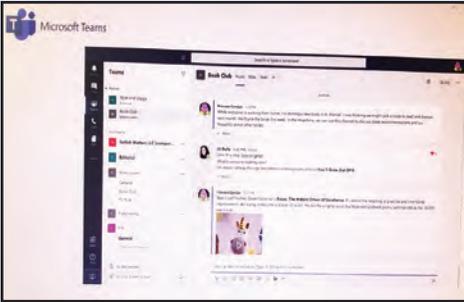
They use 'em. They know 'em.

The first part of the presentation brought up a few apps, and hit the basic pros and cons. The second part of the presentation shared ideas about how to engage audiences, sponsors, and ways to improve participation (especially with creative ideas). Although this

second part is the most important thing to consider, nothing happens if we don't first know how to use the app or prevent crashes or event snafus. Therefore, this report covers the platform review component.

There are dozens of conferencing apps that are popular; but in reality, hundreds of actual available apps. Our presenters here, reviewed five that primarily serve the conference/meeting purpose, and three that primarily serve events.

AAF Roanoke promoted the event in our local market; the review was facilitated by Amanda Dehart (AAF club services) and the panel included Larry Brantley (AAF Council of Governors vice chair); Tina Tsang (AAF Dallas, Ad2 national vice chair); and Tom Woody (AAF D9 governor).



Here are some findings from the panel:

For conferences and meetings

Zoom

PROS

- Screen sharing from mobile, desktop, tablet devices
- HD video and audio
- Private and group chats
- Free tier for people to try out
- Only organizer needs an account
- Allows the most participants of any app discusses in a free and basic plan; up to 100 people can join a single call
- Allows you to schedule meetings ahead of time
- Fun, interchangeable backgrounds
- “Waiting Room” feature
- Whiteboard feature for interactive discussions

CONS

- Must subscribe to premium plans for additional services
- Group call that you start can only last 40 minutes for the free plan
- Security issues (“Zoom-bombing”)
- Webcam vulnerability
- Need to manually ensure privacy
- No toll-free dial-in numbers for the US or UK

WebEx

PROS

- Free plan available
- Minimal voice and video lag
- 25 simultaneous video feeds
- HD picture
- Screen sharing
- At least up to 100 participants
- Whiteboard

CONS

- “Call Me” plan has additional cost
- Onle one presenter per license
- Reports of problems setting up, both with meetings and the app itself
- Can be challenging for users who aren’t as tech-literate (hidden features)
- Extra fees—price plans are not as flexible

MS Teams

PROS

- Tightly integrated with other MS Office apps
- Easy file storage and sharing
- 24/7 support via phone and web
- Can accommodate up to 300 users
- Supports voicemail on Android and iOS
- External participants allowed
- Highly customizable
- Included with Office 364 business accounts

CONS

- Can be complicated for new users
- May need to subscribe to get needed services
- Only convenient to use in a Microsoft-centric environment
- Compartmentalized design gives an air of formality and rule-following that may inhibit open dialogue
- No meeting recordings under free version

Google Meet

PROS

- Simplistic design
- Integrates with Google calendar
- Integrates with G-Suite

CONS

- Lacks sophisticated features



Slack

PROS

- Team collaboration tool that takes it out of emails
- Clean, user interface that separates channels by topics
- Can quickly jump on a call to get feedback 1:1
- Add in video conferencing apps of your choice (Zoom, MS Teams, etc.)
- Has a discount program for nonprofits

CONS

- In-app call and video call options are still limiting
- Free version is only for 1:1 conversations
- Standard and Plus plans can have up to 15 participants and screen sharing

For events

Facebook Live

PROS

- Increase brand awareness with bigger audience
- More brand engagement
- Cost savings
- Cuts down time
- Video sticks around to be repurposes

CONS

- Technical issues will happen
- Anything can happen
- Could have low engagement if there's no prep
- Censorship and controversy

Hopin

PROS

- Cost barrier is low (\$99 for up to 100)

- Easy to create
- Registration / Ticket Sales on platform
- Integrated areas for sponsors
- Networking features

CONS

- Onboarding learning curve
- Do It Yourself site build
- 7% Fee of tickets sold on platform
- SaaS does not allow for customization
- Production / Streaming on host
- Lack of live, personal support unless upgraded

Swapcard

PROS

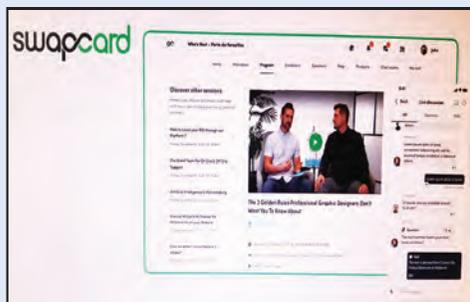
- Web-based, no barrier for use
- App option
- Integration with some registration companies
- Live polls and chat
- Event agenda
- Integrated areas for sponsors
- Networking features
- User profiles

CONS

- Onboarding learning curve
- Do It Yourself site build
- Freemium Solution
- Cost per attendee
- SaaS does not allow for customization
- Production / Streaming on host

Key Takeaways

Larry Brantley said the most important consideration is to evaluate what fits your team. Tom Woody said he has reviewed around 300 platforms, and solutions may not be free, but they don't have to be expensive. Some apps are more customizable than



others (and SaaS platforms are templated). All panelists said your event will only be as good as you promote it; and Tina Tsang was called out for using Facebook Live in an exceptional manner for an AAF program that doubled both the expected engagement and fundraising from previous on-site events. Oh, and do try to use some kind of registration process (particularly for open and public meetings) so you're less likely to get Zoom-bombed.

NOTE: Zoom was selected for THIS session with 45 attendees (still the most popular and has skyrocketed to 200 million users). Other platforms include: Capital Reach, Samaaro, vFairs, Bizzabo, Social 27, On24, aventri, Online Event Pro, Adobe Connect, eventPower, Digitell, Spotme, cvent, and Intrado. In a recent program by RBTC, our regional technology council, introducing the current cohort members of RAMP (accelerator program) Airmeet was a good choice for merging live presenters with their on screen presentations. 



Jill Graybill
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