

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 155

AUGUST 2021

Gentry Locke: Cybersecurity

Woods Rogers:
Business Issues

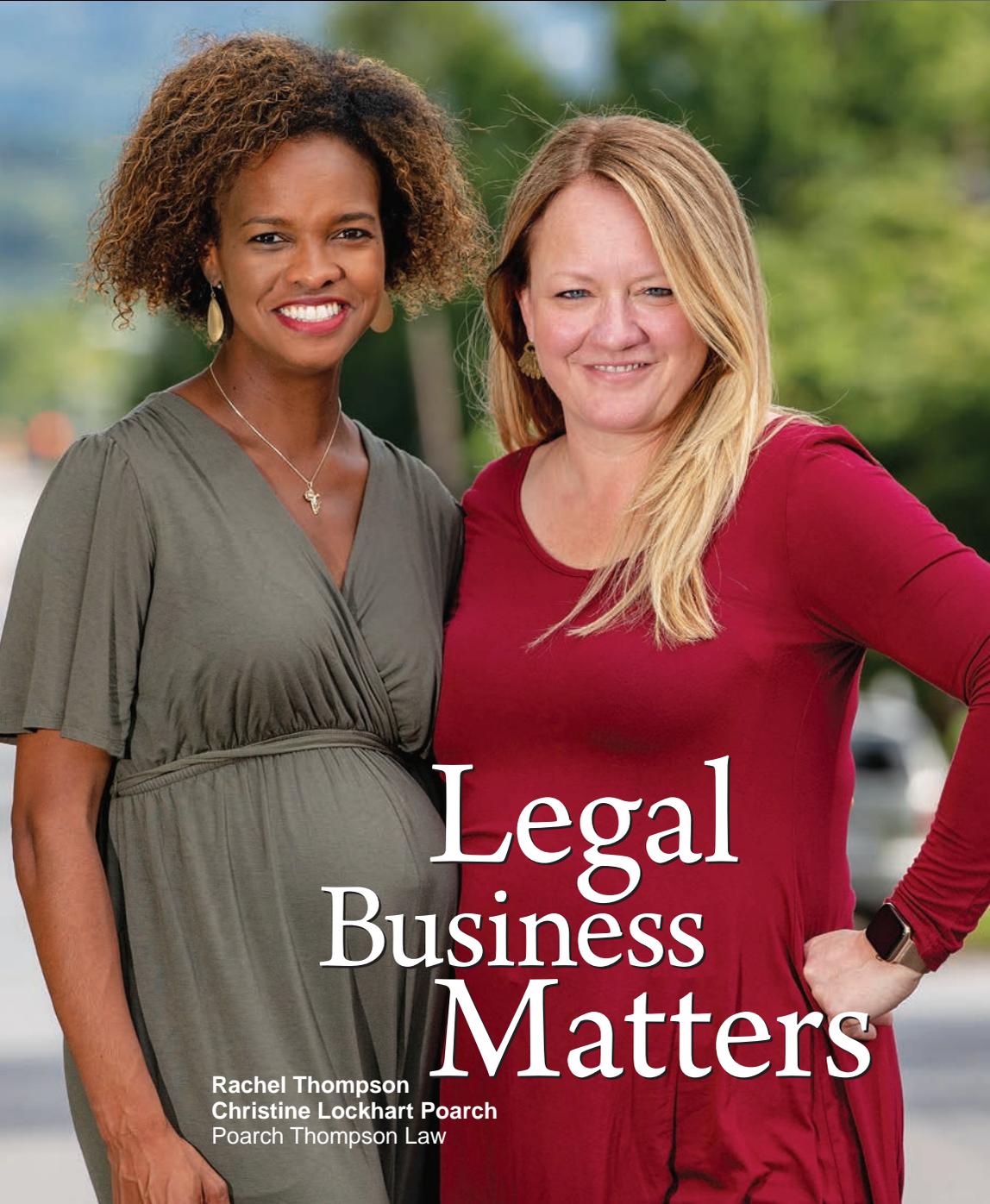
Poarch Thompson:
Immigration

Blacksburg Books

Feeding Southwest Virginia

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Legal Business Matters

Rachel Thompson
Christine Lockhart Poarch
Poarch Thompson Law



Jeremiah Clarke, *VP Private Banking & Treasury Services*

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

With the worst of the pandemic seemingly behind us – as long as the Delta variant and the still-unvaccinated don't drag us back to the darkest days of 2020 – the business community is coming to life. So is public demand for services, goods, travel etc. – to the point that material suppliers have been caught short and employees can't be hired or rehired fast enough in some cases. (Did folks not realize that pent-up demand would be through the roof when people started to feel good about going out again?) That's led to a sharp uptick in inflation, which the Fed promises us is short term. We shall see. In the meantime, enjoy this issue, where we put the spotlight on several legal firms and related issues of the day.

We also welcome a first-time contributor with a story about a career switcher - writer Shawn Nowlin, who sent us this backstory: "When he was eight and told his family that he wanted to be a successful writer one day, they signed Shawn up for a monthly writing club. That decision changed the trajectory of his life. Like most children in the 1990s, Shawn enjoyed playing video games, participating in sports and reading comic books. Unlike most children, he had a severe stuttering problem that took years to overcome. Life-changing events do not happen every day. Such an occasion occurred on January 12, 1999, when Shawn, ten at the time, got a chance to meet Baron Davis of the Charlotte Hornets. When asked how he went from a UCLA star to NBA lottery pick, Davis told Shawn that "hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard." To this day, Shawn lives by those ten words. Words we can all live by. Happy reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

“”
It's incredible how foreign nationals are driving the economic vitality of our region. — Page 18



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COMMUNITY SERVICE STORY PAGE 8

**Building better
businesses – and
“Beloved Communities”**

By Gene Marrano



“Sunshine makes us smarter, stronger, and happier. — Page 23

MISSION POSSIBLE: KEEPING THE STAR CITY CONNECTED

JEFF MERRITT | TECHNOLOGY ADVISOR, VALLEY BUSINESS FRONT

Internet connectivity is a complex issue with two very important, yet different components intertwined in the conversation: accessibility and affordability.

When it comes to accessibility, there are residents in the Valley today who still don't have access to internet service. The most economically sound approach to bringing broadband to these unserved areas is public-private partnerships.

Which is why Roanoke County recently selected Cox as its partner to bring high-speed internet to 300 homes that were previously unserved. Now, these families who never had access to high-speed internet have connectivity through the largest private broadband company in America.

The numbers speak for themselves. Building, operating, maintaining, and continuously upgrading a broadband network is costly.

In fact, we've invested more than \$16 billion in our nationwide fiber-based network over the last decade. And we're not stopping there. Technology is constantly evolving, and ongoing investments are essential. That's why we're investing an additional \$10 billion over the next five years to ensure every Cox customer – not just a chosen few – will have access to the better, stronger, faster broadband connection the future will demand.

On the other hand, sometimes affordability is a barrier for many families. Children in those families have limited learning opportunities and risk falling behind their peers.

That's not acceptable. So, we established a digital inclusion program, Connect2Compete.

This program offers a low-cost internet option to families with K-12 students who are eligible for government assistance. With no annual contract or fees, these families can get reliable broadband at home for only \$9.95 a month.

During the pandemic, when our community needed us the most, we didn't hesitate to make Connect2Compete free for new families. We didn't hesitate to commit \$60 million

to ensuring those families stay connected. And, we didn't hesitate to participate in the Emergency Broadband Benefit program or help school districts get students connected through utilizing CARES Act funding.

We've been a pillar in the Roanoke community for nearly 45 years and our commitment remains strong. The fact is no one business, government or nonprofit can bridge the digital divide alone. It's going to take all of us working together to keep the Star City connected. ★

“
No one business,
government,
or nonprofit
can bridge
the digital divide
alone.”



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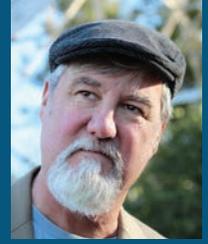
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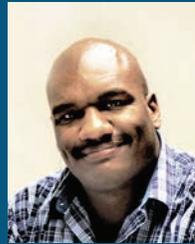
Tom Ashton



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Advisory Board

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

2021 CONTRIBUTORS



Aila Boyd



Bruce Bryan



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Frazier Hughes



Zack Jackson



Gene Marrano



Michael Shelton



Nicholas Vaassen

“”
Virginia legislature enacted the biggest overhaul of employment law in history.

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Carillon Clinic / healthcare

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How do we turn more people into... superfans?

— Page 22



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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 60.

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Michael Waldvogel
Waldvogel Commercial Properties /
commercial real estate

“”
Compliance doesn't need to be a burden.

— Page 28



Aakansha Harvey

Shannon Dominguez and Bonnie Chavez

Building better businesses - and “Beloved Communities”

By Gene Marrano

“We are only as strong as our most vulnerable,” says Bonnie Chavez about her consulting firm’s core philosophy.

Formerly employed by what she calls a Fortune 10 health care company, Bonnie Chavez took it as a sign when she lost her comfortable job in a takeover and downsizing: the New Mexico native, now living in Roanoke, wanted to help small businesses and non-profits thrive, by offering consulting and executive coaching services. Thus, Building Beloved Communities LLC (the name inspired by a phrase used by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a speech) was born. "BBC," which went through The Gauntlet business competition this spring in Vinton, also pledges to donate \$50,000 annually to local non-profits, both in the Roanoke area and in New Mexico, where she will also extend BBC's footprint.

Chavez enjoyed the philanthropical side of her previous life but felt that in the health care world she lived in, there were barriers to reaching "our most vulnerable population. I was so frustrated." The nice paycheck didn't soothe her feelings and she started writing a business plan for her consulting business. After being jettisoned from the corporate world, Building Beloved Communities was launched about three years ago. Finding the funds to help small businesses pay for a consultant was a first step.

BBC also strives to help women business owners overcome what she calls a patriarchy, where they "take what has been given," and don't negotiate for things like the higher salaries they deserve. "I want women to be empowered to make their own decisions about their careers, their education and their economic empowerment. To spend money the way she sees fit." When seeking help from a consultant on how to grow a business and polish your skills, Chavez has advice she had to employ herself while going through the Gauntlet, when BBC underwent some rebranding: "let go of your ego. [Learn] from your peers."

Marketing guidance and assistance on company operations (removing roadblocks – "the pain points" she says to growth) are at the core of what BBC does. Chavez says she is building her company one consulting contract at a time, although some federal PPE loans during the pandemic and grants have helped. Part of what she does as well is help small non-profits raise money by helping them tell their story. "Micro donations and collective impact," helped raise \$12,000 for Roanoke Hospitality House, a proposed shelter for out-of-town families that come to the area for medical treatment. Now BBC is working with Fleet Feet Roanoke and their own non-profit Project Forward initiative, which is currently raising more than \$200,000 to buy new athletic shoes for disadvantaged children in Roanoke City.

The next step for Chavez has included hiring her first employee: in late June, Shannon Dominguez, the former



I want women to be empowered to make their own decisions about their careers, their education and their economic empowerment.

– Bonnie Chavez



Aakansha Harvey

“”

[We] tend to be the thing that holds us back the most.

–Shannon Dominguez

Director of Development for the Advancement Foundation in Vinton – where Dominguez also helped run the 2020 Gauntlet competition – came aboard. With a number of consulting contracts in different states it was time to take that next step. Now the Director of Operations for Building Beloved Communities in Virginia, Dominguez says the Gauntlet experience allowed her to be “one on one with a lot of different small businesses – we had 140 entrepreneurs come through. That gave me the opportunity to see the different moving parts ... and to start helping these businesses take it to the next level.” Leveraging social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram is a good place to start for the smallest of companies she adds. And know who your target audience is – and where their eyeballs are.

The one common thread Dominguez saw among the Gauntlet’s small businesses she helped coach was, “self-limiting belief. [We] tend to be the thing that holds us back the most.” Sometimes business owners need someone to stand beside them she notes, assuring them they are on the right trajectory, something she will now do for BBC clients. “When we’re able to learn [about] specific gaps for our business, that can take it to the next level.” Putting it on paper, visualizing that next step “makes it a lot less scary. I’m super excited [about BBC].”

Says Bonnie Chavez: “we are only as strong as our most vulnerable. If someone is hungry, we are all hungry. If someone is facing injustice, we are all facing injustice. I’ve woven that into our business philosophy.” 

PROJECT FORWARDS STEPS UP WITH HELP FROM BBC



Blaine and Robin Lewis

Fleet Feet Roanoke's non-profit initiative called "Project Forward" has set an ambitious goal - to raise \$240,000 so the running gear store can supply new shoes and socks to as many as eight thousand economically disadvantaged children in the Roanoke City Public School system. Robin Lewis is the Fleet Feet Roanoke co-owner (with husband Blaine); she says a glut of new running shoes not moved last year due to the pandemic will be sold to Fleet Feet below cost for Project Forward. "We're fortunate to have been in business for 18 years. We have great relationships with our vendors." Every \$30 donation buys one pair. Those new shoes and socks will first be distributed at the city's back to school extravaganza on August 21, and any remaining as the school year commences. Building Beloved Communities helped organize the shoe drive says Lewis. Project Forward has raised money before for other worthy causes but notes Lewis, "we've never done anything of this size – never on this scale." See the Fleet Feet Roanoke Facebook for a link to the donation page.

- Gene Marrano

Where the law and cybersecurity intersect

By Gene Marrano

Don't think of having an attorney in the mix when considering data privacy concerns for your business? Think again.

Christen Church, an attorney with the Gentry Locke office in Roanoke, says they often get involved with Data Privacy and Cybersecurity issues, depending on the nature of the business and the type of information that needs to be protected: “what obligations do the recipients of that data have to protect it, to treat it confidentially and to limit ... access to it?” I.e., Credit card information, financial or personal health details.

One issue – the United States has not approached data privacy on a national, “holistic basis,” meaning it can be an industry and state specific hodge-podge of guidelines, says Church. Most are familiar with HIPAA – the national

standard for health care information privacy, but notes Church, most states have their “own flavor” on adherence to that standard, and who can have access to that data. Ditto for financial information disclosure. That also means companies based in one state have to know the laws if they conduct business elsewhere. Privacy breaches and any liability would be based “on where the harm would be felt,” by the consumer, notes Church, who has a focus on health care business clients.

Attorneys become involved she says when a business is developing a data security plan and they want to know what their obligations are to keep that information safe and away from prying eyes. Development of an Incident Response Plan is in order, since even with the best of intentions, notes Church, the most security and top-flight training, “something could happen. We need to be prepared for that.” Collaborating with clients on reporting/legal obligations when there is a breach is another focus for Gentry Locke in the Data Privacy & Cybersecurity realm. Being prepared ahead of a security issue is the best way to go, adds Church. Making sure your IT vendors are not corrupted where there is a malware issue, that they can get you back online quickly and safely. “You want to have that relationship ahead of time.”

There is also cybersecurity insurance, which has “come a long way,” and Church says Gentry Locke will examine those policies for clients. “You really have to dig in to see what the coverage is. Kind of a wellness check ... to help prepare for an event.” In many cases the biggest



Submitted

Christen Church

financial outlay is not in the fines that may be paid out after a breach, “it’s the total cost of any follow-up investigation.” Some businesses notes Church have a cybersecurity rider on their policy – but it may not offer the full coverage they need to respond to a cyber-attack.

Beware, says Church: the hackers out there are a savvy bunch, looking for ways to make a quick buck when it comes to malware attacks and holding companies/local government agencies for ransomware. “Even with the best security and with constant training it only takes one click.” Declarations to not pay ransomware (typically in digital currency payments which cannot be traced) has to be balanced versus the cost of significant downtime while a work around is devised. “The more [those payments] happen the more it incentivizes the behavior.” Church will help business clients to draft policies and

procedures to help meet that company’s individual data security needs.

Any company linked to the internet should be considering cybersecurity to protect their own financial information and the data collected from clients/customers. “There is no company safe from this type of activity,” Church contends, “to unlock your system has value to [hackers]. These attackers recognize that.” It’s hard to say if a one-size-fits-all cybersecurity policy on the federal level – or even an international standard – is the answer, says Church, but “more coordination and guidance” among the existing standards would be a plus, especially in today’s global economy. What applies to each individual company from a compliance point that Gentry Locke or other law firms work with is often difficult to ascertain. “There’s not even a global recognition right now of the difficulties companies are facing.”



LEGAL BRIEFS

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

A rundown of some newer legal issues business operators may want to take note of.

"It's been a busy year," said Michael Gardner, a partner at the Roanoke law firm of Woods Rogers PLC, regarding legal issues that could impact the business community.

First on everyone's mind is COVID. Can employers require their employees to be vaccinated? The short answer is yes, but there are always caveats in law. "There are a lot of moving parts when it comes to COVID and employment," said Gardner.

Employers can require vaccinations for their employees but must make accommodations if disability (health conditions) or religious beliefs preclude the employee from receiving the vaccine. The religious beliefs must be "sincerely

held," said Gardner. Someone cannot have professed to be an atheist and then use the religious belief exemption to avoid vaccination.

The advantages of requiring COVID vaccines are twofold. First, it gets the workplace back to normal. In addition, it meets the OSHA general duty clause for having a safe workplace.

Still, most employers are not requiring the vaccine. One consideration is the tight labor market; employers must decide whether to fire a worker for noncompliance when they may have a difficult time filling the position.

However, some larger employers are starting to require vaccinations, so it will be interesting to see how it trickles down to our area, said Gardner. "It will be a question of whether the bigger dominoes fall," he added.

Another issue is what employers will do about drug screening since recreational marijuana became legal in Virginia as of July 1, even though it is still illegal on a federal level. Gardner said, "There is an odd friction between the two right now." He said the good news for employers is that Virginia's new law does not affect their ability to drug test or require a drug-free workforce. "It doesn't change much," Gardner said.

What has changed is that Virginia has added employment restrictions that prohibit employers from disciplining or terminating an employee for medical marijuana use (with a valid prescription). However, if an employee is in a safety-sensitive position or a position that requires a drug-free screen, such as working on some federal contracts,



Submitted

Michael Gardner

then the employer can make a change like moving the employee to a different position.

If a disability that requires the medical marijuana qualifies as an ADA disability, then the employer must accommodate the employee. Gardner said that in this case they would engage in a “very important process” called an interactive process where both sides endeavor to find a mutually agreeable solution. Often, Gardner said, the employer asks the employee what they suggest. “What is a reasonable accommodation turns on many things,” said Gardner, such as the size of the company.

One thing Gardner makes his clients aware of is that in some states (not Virginia), there are off duty conduct laws in which employers are limited in disciplining for employee conduct while employees are off duty if that conduct is otherwise legal.

Issues of discrimination in the workplace have also moved to the forefront. Gardner said that the #metoo sexual harassment movement was “eye opening” regarding gender issues in the workplace. “Employers were caught flat-footed,” he said.

Learning from that, Gardner has seen employers “get out front and be engaged” in the Black Lives Matter movement with efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). For example, bigger companies are saying that outside counsel needs a certain level of diversity in their ranks. Here, said Gardner, “federal requirements bleed into the private sector.”

LGBTQ+ rights are expanding. The classic work law in this arena is Title VII, which protects employees from discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, or sex. The question became, does sex mean just gender or also sexual identity? The Supreme Court ruled in 2020’s *Bostick v. Clayton County* that Title VII does apply to sexual identity and orientation, so it opens employers up to be sued for LGBTQ+ discrimination.

Gardner said it would not have been a surprise for that decision to go either way. The surprises were that the majority opinion was written by Neil Gorsuch, a business-friendly justice, and that the vote was not close (6-3).

Some big news that got buried in the pandemic year, Gardner said, was that the Virginia legislature enacted the biggest overhaul of employment law in history. Before in Virginia there were limited laws and not very good remedies, so claims were dealt with in federal court, which is more friendly to defendants.

Now more businesses will face jury trials, a less friendly environment that will result in costlier suits with more potential exposure for businesses in Virginia, Gardner said. This is an employee-favorable expansion of rights.

“This was a sea change for employment law in Virginia,” he said. Overall Gardner finds that, no matter the issue, employers have the best intentions: “They want to get it right.” 

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LEGAL BUSINESS

By Tom Ashton

Executive Summary:
What these changes may mean for your specific business or market.

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

New Laws of note as of July 1

Each year, July 1 marks the date when most new laws passed by the General Assembly take effect. This year is no exception. On July 1, 2021, there were several new laws in place that may be of interest to businesses operating in Virginia.

First, Virginia has legalized possession of a small amount – up to one ounce – of marijuana, although there remain tight restrictions on its production and consumption, and distribution or sale of marijuana is still illegal. It is no secret that the CBD market has expanded in Virginia over the past several years, which has opened up some new business opportunities for entrepreneurs. However, the General Assembly has signaled here that Virginia is cautiously testing the appetite for broader marijuana legalization, which would open up additional business opportunities in the future, also. More immediately, this new law may affect human resources practices at existing companies as pressure mounts on employers to accept limited marijuana possession and consumption as normal parts of an employee's life.

Also of interest to health care providers and their human resources departments is the General Assembly's expansion of Workmen's Compensation benefit eligibility to health care workers and first responders who become disabled or die due to COVID-19. Employers in this market should note that an eligibility exception exists for employees who fail to or refuse to become vaccinated. Continuing with the theme of human resources-related changes, lawmakers this year added disabled persons as a protected class from discrimination under the Virginia Human Rights Act.

Restaurant operators and patrons will be glad to know that the General Assembly has made permanent its temporary COVID-19-related allowance for alcoholic beverages to be sold "to-go" or to be delivered. Also, the law will now allow restaurant patrons to consume alcoholic beverages outside of a restaurant, as long as they are within a designated outdoor area.

Finally, lawmakers have demonstrated their commitment to keeping Virginia clean by passing two new laws. One increases the maximum permitted fines for littering and illegal trash dumping, and in some cases illegal dumpers may now even face jail time or be required to perform community service. The other pertains to the outdoor release of balloons, limiting the number that can be released and establishing a fine per balloon in excess of that limit, and may affect event coordinators and venues who employ balloons at various celebrations.

Some of these new laws simply enshrine temporary changes made during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and others mark changes that are entirely unrelated to the pandemic. As always, though, these new laws create the potential for both new opportunity and negative consequences for the unaware. Be sure to consult an attorney to determine what these changes may mean for your specific business or market. 

Put it in writing

My legs and arms are itching so bad. It's 2:33am in the morning. I awake in my sleep scratching myself like a dog with fleas and of course I was thinking about selling a house. I mean, how can I forget as the poison ivy is a friendly reminder of the tree wrapped in it that fell in my client's yard that I just helped move.

The same day I received an offer on my client's home, was the same day the tree with poison ivy fell in the backyard. We took the offer. The other realtor asked me if the tree would be removed, and my client had told me verbally that it would be taken care of and removed before closing. I know and trust this person well ... but what if? What if my client said yes but never removed the tree? Well, if it's not in writing and signed by both parties then they are not obligated to remove the tree. The buyer has to continue with closing on the property.

Want the swing set in the backyard? Put it in writing. Want to stay in your home you are selling a day or two after closing - put it in writing. Want the home inspector to inspect the detached garage too, put it in writing. Do you need to find a place to live before closing on the current home you are selling? Put it in writing. Want the flat screen in the living room, put it in writing. Want the storage shed in the yard, put it in writing. Want the house cleaned a certain way before closing, put it in writing. Want the wall in the backyard fixed - put it in writing.

You see if it's not in writing, neither buyer nor seller are obligated to fulfill the request. Most of the time and usually all of the time, it's the buyer making requests from the seller for their new property. It can cause a lot of pain, stress, or possibly become a deal gone bad.

The last thing you want to do if you are selling your home or buying one is to forget to put key elements of the sale in writing; if not you may just not have a sale, and may have to start all over after wasting your time, energy, and finances. 📄



REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:

Leave nothing to chance or word of mouth.

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Tool & Equipment Rentals



Christine Lockhart Poarch



Rachel Thompson

Compassionate Immigration and Adoption Representation

By Aila Boyd

“There are terrible stereotypes out there about who our clients are,” says Christine Poarch.

Poarch Thompson Law isn't your typical law firm. It's a niche immigration and adoption law practice that values justice and equality over billable hours. But on top of that, aside from the chief information officer, it's an all-female firm. Plus, one of its managing partners is a woman of color. Both of which are rarities in this region.

The firm was founded by Southwest Virginia native Christine Lockhart Poarch in 2003 when she was four months pregnant. Initially, the firm only dealt with immigration law. It expanded into international adoption work 15 years ago.

When she left the region in 1990 to go to college in Texas, Poarch said the Roanoke

Valley was largely homogenous. When she returned and started the firm, she was surprised to find that the region was much more diverse than it had been when she left it.

“The Roanoke Valley is incredibly diverse. It's not just the Latino population. There is an active and thriving Indian population. There is a strong foreign national component to our manufacturing and engineering sites,” she said. “It's incredible how foreign nationals are driving the economic vitality of our region.”

Today, Poarch co-manages the firm with Rachel Thompson, who joined in 2012. The two first met after a local judge connected

them. Thompson initially started out as an intern during her final year of law school.

"I knew I wanted to do immigration law, but didn't know what that would look like," she said. "After my first day of interning, I knew I was in the right place."

Thompson's interest in immigration law was initially impacted by the fact that both of her parents are immigrants. Her father moved from Jamaica to England, before settling in the United States at the age of 13. He met Thompson's mother when she was staying in the country on an H-1B visa from South Africa in order to study nursing. "I remember my mom becoming a naturalized citizen and thought the whole thing was cool," she said.

Currently, the firm has six attorneys and a sizable paralegal staff. Given the firm's size and the fact that it is dominated by women, the office culture looks drastically different from some of the region's larger firms. Work-life balance and the needs of working mothers influence the way the office is run.

"It's important for us to have an environment that supports mothers. We always take into account how you blend a professional life with mothering," Poarch said.

The past year has surprisingly been busy for both women. Despite travel bans related to COVID-19, the firm's business has remained steady. On a given day, there are between 75 to 100 people coming and going at the firm's Salem office. "We're so busy. The pandemic hasn't slowed people from needing immigration services," Thompson said.

Neither one of them sees the work of the firm slowing in the future. "I'm excited for the future of the firm. I don't see us

getting smaller anytime soon. I think all of the areas we have our hands in now will grow," Thompson said. "We have a niche where we are physically. We're the only firm of this size this side of Richmond."

Unlike many firms that handle immigration, Poarch Thompson Law works in all forms of immigration law, including employment, family and criminal. It is also involved in regional and national policy issues related to immigration such as the backlog in immigration courts and special immigration juvenile status.

While they both love the busy pace that is required to run a law firm, Poarch and Thompson are mostly motivated by the idea of justice.

"I want to fight to the core to get things right. When we finally do, it feels so good," Thompson said. An example of when she got a case right was when the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) interpreted Virginia law in a way that indicated the courts didn't have jurisdiction over a juvenile client of hers due to the client's age. The courts ruled in favor of USCIS several times. After multiple appeals, Thompson scored a win on behalf of her client. "We set a precedent. It makes me so happy for the kids and proud of the work that we do."

Poarch adds that she feels it is important to clear up misconceptions about immigration law. "This practice area is so misunderstood. There are terrible stereotypes out there about who our clients are. Those stereotypes are worth challenging," she said. "There is an immediate and amazing contribution that so many of our clients make to their communities." 



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Jeff Merritt

Stepping up and increasing connectivity

By Anne Sampson

Valley Business Front introduces Jeff Merritt, Vice President of Roanoke Operations with Cox Communications, as an advisory board member representing the technology/communications sector.

“Cox is the largest privately-owned communications company in the US,” Jeff Merritt says, describing the company’s origins in a Dayton, Ohio newspaper founded by James Cox in the 1880’s. “Expanding to radio, then television, then to communications, so it has evolved over time. Our product set is still evolving, although a lot of people still call us ‘Cox Cable.’”

With the growing need for broadband access exacerbated by COVID-19 lockdowns, and internet traffic doubling every two years, Jeff sees Cox stepping up to close the “digital divide” and increasing connectivity in creative ways. It’s part of the corporate culture, in a privately-owned company that embodies diversity, vision and community engagement.

Jeff describes pre-pandemic residential broadband as data “mostly flowing one way,” into the home. Remote work and learning necessitated by COVID-driven school and office closings meant that a lot more data flowed both into and out of the home at

a much greater volume. “We plan upgrades to our fiber network years in advance,” he said. “Even though we saw network usage shift from businesses to homes, we were pleased with the network performance.” Still, many students simply had no access from home. Some resorted to doing homework from the school parking lot, where they could connect.

“Cox launched ‘Connect2Compete’ in 2013, which offers broadband service for less than \$10 a month to families with students who qualify for programs such as the National Free Lunch,” says Jeff. “When the pandemic hit, we recognized a need in our community, and we partnered with Roanoke City Public Schools to offset some of the costs.” Cox also worked with local schools to ensure their internal networks could handle the extra load. They’re also major supporters of Boys & Girls Clubs of America (Jeff spent a couple of years as chairman of the local board), providing funding and internet service to Clubs ensuring students have access to places to spend time and do homework.

“Rural broadband is clearly a hot topic,” says Jeff, “not just here in Roanoke, but across the state. The Governor has made it his mission to ensure that people have the ability to connect if they want to, so we’ve partnered with Roanoke County to complete a lot of expansion. We’ve got another joint project in the works that will help us reach an additional 300 homes.” That may not sound like many until you consider the cost of bringing infrastructure to rural homes that may have miles between them.

Cox’s parent company, Cox Enterprises, is a global company with close to 50,000 employees and nearly \$20 billion in annual revenue. In addition to being the largest reseller of cars in the US, through their brands Auto Trader and Kelley Blue Book, they invest in clean technology, such as Rivian electric trucks, and green initiatives like Bright Farms, a farm collective that hydroponically grows leafy greens close to where they’re consumed. One of those farms is in Culpeper, Virginia.

After 21 years in sales and leadership with Cox, Jeff finds alignment between the company’s values and his own interests. He earned a Master’s Degree in Natural Resources and Global Sustainability from Virginia Tech in 2019, which gave him an opportunity to study water use in Cairo, Egypt in 2019 through an international residency.

“It was an eye-opening experience to be there,” he says. “I came home with a profound appreciation for the things we have access to in this country.”

Moving to Roanoke in 2015 from the Hampton area as empty-nesters, Jeff and his wife, Wendy, found themselves in an area that caters to their active lifestyles.

“We like a lot of outdoor activities, like hiking and fishing,” says Jeff. “Coming from the flat land at the shore, this is quite a difference. We love the trails around Carvins Cove. We do those more than anything else.”

They often take guests to Sharp Top at the Peaks of Otter, for a versatile shuttle/hike that accommodates all skill levels and pays off with a spectacular view.

“IN BRIEF”

NAME: Jeff Merritt

POSITION: Vice President of Roanoke Operations

COMPANY: Cox Communications

EDUCATION: Old Dominion University, 1996, Psychology; Virginia Tech, 2019, Masters, Natural Resources

FAVORITE HIKES: Carvins Cove, Sharp Top

FAMILY: wife, Wendy; children, Kaleigh, 24 and Reid, 22

PERSONAL PASSION: Natural resources and global sustainability

PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT: Think globally and act locally. Think of the impact you can have on the world and start by making a difference right here at home.

Jeff Merritt believes Cox is contributing to preserving experiences like Sharp Top, through initiatives like Cox Conserves Heroes. This program honors environmental volunteers who create, preserve, or enhance the shared outdoor spaces in our communities in partnership with The Trust for Public Land.

“What do we need to build between now and then to get us to the [next] generation?” he asks. “How do we contribute to the world’s goal of being both water and carbon neutral? We’re aggressively working toward that in Virginia, and we’re well on our way. We should be at zero waste to the landfill by 2024.”

“We’re making a big investment in the communities we serve and the products we offer, but we’re also looking at what impact we have on the world,” Jeff continues. “The current CEO of our parent company is a fourth-generation family member. It’s a multi-generational kind of thought. We’re not just thinking about the next year or two of profit but investing and finding avenues that will support the next generation.” 



TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

Executive Summary:
Turning more people into superfans on Instagram.

Zack Jackson is co-founder of The JPG Agency small business creative firm. Reach him at zack@thejpgagency.com.

The almighty Instagram algorithm explained (sorta)

A common question most everyone who's ever posted on Instagram has asked themselves ... Who the heck actually sees these posts? What sort of magical robot determines this? Well ... that robot (to an extent) was recently explained in more detail by Instagram head Adam Mosseri.

If you'd like to read the whole post, it's in the Instagram blog section, but I'll do my best to save you the time and give you the quickest summary possible. In fact, if I had to recap the post in just one sentence it would be this: "We promise our collection of algorithms strives to show you all the stuff you like the best. Trust us!" So, do you trust them? Me? Kinda.

I know that's a flimsy answer, but I'll explain. Do I think Instagram strives to show you the content it thinks you like the most? I do. It doesn't do them any good to inundate you with content you hate because quite frankly, you'd stop using them.

So, what does this mean for a business and reaching customers? The more a person interacts with your page, the more the algorithm thinks they like your content, and the more of your future content it will show them. This is why you seem to have a stable of superfans that like and comment on everything you post. They're locked in by the algorithm, and it shows them all your posts.

How do we turn more people into these superfans? That's the REAL challenge, and I believe the only legit way to do this is to go on offense. You need to take the time to target these customers and go to their page and interact with THEM. Social media is a two-way street, and when you start realizing this, more traffic flows in your direction as well.

Ever go to someone's page you haven't seen in your feed in a while and interact with their page for a couple posts? Well guess who ends up close to the top of your feed the next day? That person! Why? Because the algorithm knows you interacted with them before and figures you'd like to do it again.

So, try going on offense and interacting with some of your followers (or even the followers of your competitors). Like one of their posts, throw in a comment, or better yet ask them a QUESTION, because when they reply it carries even more weight with the algorithm.

Is this a simple thing to do? Absolutely. Is it a time saver? Absolutely not. But sometimes the best growth for your business takes some effort (but you already knew this). 

The science of sunshine: smarter, stronger, stoked

There's no escaping the blazing southern heat of Roanoke in August, but fortunately we have plenty of ways to cool off. From outdoor dining to lazy river floating to sunrise hikes, we Virginians know how to soak up the sun and relish summer's balmy heat. Good news for us...sunshine makes us smarter, stronger, and happier. Light is essential for a balanced life. It is key to biological homeostasis. Sunlight triggers the mood boosting hormone Serotonin, which helps us feel calm, focused, and positive.

Exposure to the ultraviolet-B radiation in the sun's rays causes a person's skin to create vitamin D, which contributes to homeostasis in the intestines, kidneys, and bones. It's active in many tissues and cells and controls an enormous number of genes, including some associated with cancers, autoimmune disease, and infection. Sunlight is vital for health.

Melatonin is a hormone produced by the pineal gland. It regulates sleep and lowers stress reactivity among other things. Being outside is by far the best way to help your body naturally regulate melatonin to ensure that your mood is balanced, and your circadian rhythm is on track. Moderate sunlight can decrease risk for certain types of cancers, treat several skin conditions, as well as support healing from rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, inflammatory bowel disease, and thyroiditis.

Sunlight might even help you maintain your body and your life. People who report spending 30 minutes or more outdoors between 8am and noon also report ease in weight management. In a Swedish study of 30,000 women, those who spent more time outdoors in the sun lived up to two years longer than those who did not.

A healthy dose of sunshine can benefit you at work. Moderate ultraviolet light exposure boosts brain power thanks to increased production of the neurotransmitter glutamate which increases memory and learning. Sunlight even improves our vision. Light stimulation helps improve retinal health, increases tear production, reduces ocular inflammation, and improves neurological health. When we don't get enough, we enter a state of mal-illumination, which is like malnutrition but occurs when we are light-deficient.

Allow your eyes, face, and skin to be exposed to mild to moderate sun daily for at least 30 minutes; protect skin during the hottest part of the day with loose, light clothing and a hat or umbrella; and take advantage of indirect sunlight by enjoying the outdoors in the shade and in the morning and afternoon when the sun is not so blazing.

So next time you're tempted to crank up the air conditioner and hibernate these summer days away, consider what an incredible impact a brief time in the sunshine can have on your mind, body, and mood. 🌞



WELLNESS

By Valarie Angle

Executive Summary:

*Here comes the sun.
It can be good for
your health-wise.*

Valarie Angle is the owner & director of The WellNest Roanoke, and is a holistic Life Coach. Contact her at Connect@TheWellNestRoanoke.com



Submitted

For the Love of Books

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Blacksburg attorney has a side hustle as bookstore owner.

A question popped up on the Everything Blacksburg Facebook page: What non-food business would you like to see in

Blacksburg? Bookstore was a favorite answer. So Laurie Kelly, who had always dreamed of opening a used bookstore,



Blacksburg Books

floated a trial balloon and “Facebook exploded,” she said. “People want to hold a book in their hands,” said Kelly. “There is [still] a place for books.”

That’s how Blacksburg Books was born. Opened in July, the store sells both new and used books, skewing more toward the used variety. Kelly said that used bookstores are coming back into style. Still, she wants people to be able to get what is new and hot. Thus the mix.

Kelly’s interest in books harkens back to her childhood. She grew up in a house with books and “my spark for books was ignited in college,” where she was an English literature major.

As Kelly accumulated books during adulthood, she considered opening a used bookstore, but she knew that she couldn’t support her family with only that income. So, she will keep her day job as an attorney and has hired a bookstore manager.



Located in the former Alligator Alley space at 401 South Main Street, the store is at the far end of downtown. That wasn't ideal, but the spot was available—plus coming nearby is the huge Midtown development, complete with a parking garage (there is already free parking in Clay Court behind the store).

Kelly lives and works in Blacksburg, so it was important to her to locate the store

there. "I have the opportunity and ability to give this to the community, so they can have this thing they've been missing."

The space is small, so Kelly is making every inch count. Her husband built the bookshelves, some of which are on casters so that they can be moved for author signings and events. Former fitting rooms were reconfigured into a children's reading nook.

There is no kitchen, but Kelly offers packaged food and drink, mostly from local sources. She already has agreements with Chocolate Spike, Brugh Coffee, and Pervida Water.

The market response has been phenomenal she says. People have donated enough books that Kelly had to place them in a storage unit. Two people bought gift certificates prior to the store's opening. Others have inquired about sponsoring a shelf.

Kelly emphasizes that her business plan was "not just thrown together." She sought input and advice from experts, including other independent booksellers, and feels the keys to success will be building relationships with customers, staying attuned to what they want. "We've put a lot of thought into the product mix that will resonate with the community."

Blacksburg Books sells other items people expect to see in bookstores, such as puzzles, bookmarks, book lights, and greeting cards. Free gift wrap is available. Kelly is also open to artisans who want to place items, such as jewelry and notecards, at the store on consignment.

Kelly was advised to curate the used book collection, taking care that what she puts out is of quality. Customers who want to trade in books will receive credit toward more used books.

Blacksburg Books' target market is people who live in town year-round. Visitors and students are welcome, of course, but Kelly doesn't want the bookstore to be a "seasonal thing."

For marketing, the store is using social media and has joined Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., and Main Street Connect. Kelly is also partnering with other local businesses like real estate agencies, by putting baskets of children's books in their waiting rooms.

"It's win-win," she said, in that the bookstore gets exposure and children are entertained while parents conduct business.

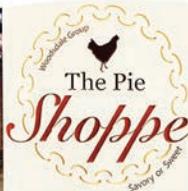
Laurie Kelly is trying not to get too hung up on details. A bookseller at Scuppernong Books in Greensboro advised her that, at the end of the day, people are there for the books. She paraphrased him, saying, "People love books and that's what it's about." 📖

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FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
Tax law isn't just about the numbers. It's about interpretation and creative application.

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

Use compliance to save money

It's amazing to me how many people throw money away because they don't know what can be depreciated or expensed. This is especially true with rental properties. In fact, I just saved a client \$58,000 on his tax return by applying some tax law advantages. Compliance doesn't need to be a burden. It can be a great way to keep more of your money.

When I talk about compliance, I'm referring mostly to tax law, but there are lots of other business applications. Thinking of selling your business one day? Expect to be audited? Need to justify net worth? Smart bookkeeping plays a role in all of these situations.

You owe depreciation whether you take it or not

Did you know the IRS requires you to recapture depreciation when you sell a property? If you're not applying annual depreciation on your returns, that's your problem. The tax man doesn't care if you forgot or didn't know you were supposed to. They still want that money.

A client recently approached me to help with "simple tax return." It included a rental property sale. He didn't know he had to pay back depreciation as capital gains. He figured since he hadn't done annual depreciation, he didn't owe it to the IRS. He was wrong.

We reworked the numbers. His initial tax debt turned into a refund, saving him almost \$3,500. As we go back to amend his returns to reflect depreciation over the past five years, it's going to mean an extra \$7,200 in his pocket. In fact, fines and late fees would have probably cost him a lot more.

Tips for tax relief with rental real estate

Most people don't think of the many ways they can be offsetting income on rentals because they don't understand tax law. It's not just there to tell you what you have to pay. Tax law also provides a lot of opportunities to reduce what you owe. Of course, to keep that money in your pocket, you need to understand how it works.

Your maintenance expenses are deductible. Appliances, upgrades such as a new roof, tools, trailers, vehicles, and storage units are all expenses you can write off. You need decent records to do so. It also helps to have an advisor who knows what's allowed.

Tax law isn't just about the numbers. It's about interpretation and creative application. With properties seeing significant appreciation, it pays to get some help if you don't know what's allowed with the latest changes in the tax law. 

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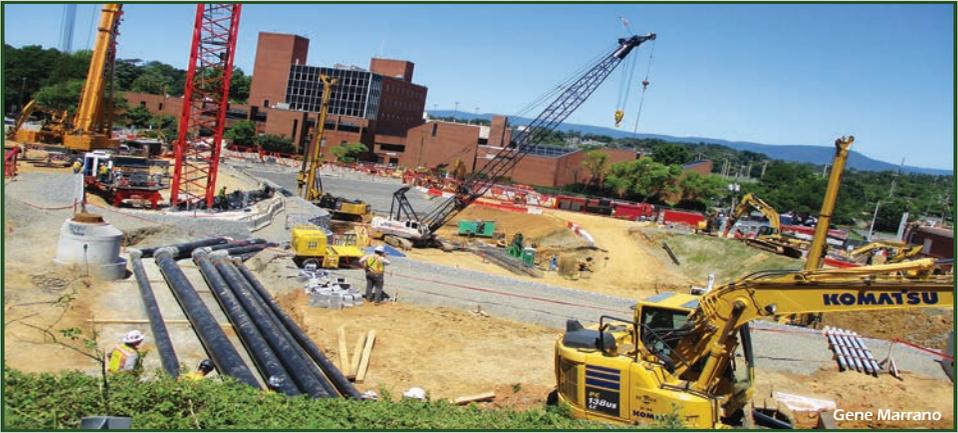




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Carilion Clinic tower construction begins >

A two-acre construction project that also required rerouting utility and city water lines is gathering momentum - and many can see evidence of that by just looking at the Roanoke skyline. The Carilion Clinic project was first announced more than two years ago. The second tallest man-made structure in Roanoke besides the Wells Fargo Tower right now isn't another downtown building - it's the 240-foot-tall crane at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, where work on a new hospital tower is getting underway in earnest after a delay last year due to the pandemic. Marty Misicko is Carilion's Vice President for Facilities and Construction on the expanded emergency department planned: "it will be relocated and reorganized. The ambulances will come behind the [new] tower instead of where the patients are coming in. The existing emergency department will tie into it."

Misicko says plans to build a new behavioral health building and a parking garage across from the hospital on South Jefferson Street as part of the project is on hold for now pending a financial assessment. The \$400 million, 500,000 square foot addition that also includes more patient beds and a cardiovascular institute has gained momentum with the crane now assembled and ready to go. "We're very excited," says Misicko, "it's going to make such a difference in this area and really be a beacon for cardiovascular care. We have an incredible staff and we're bringing more in as this comes online."

The general contractor for the project is Robins and Morton from Birmingham.



Branch Builds is their local partner. There are some challenges with the two-acre footprint for the new Carilion tower says Josh Farr, an onsite superintendent. "The [Mill] mountain falls towards the jobsite. A lot of blasting and hammering [of bedrock]. The existing utilities that run through the jobsite is probably another major constraint we have. There's a very integral plan that we have to reroute these facilities around the site."

The Crystal Spring water pump station had to be moved, and the old pump station building is coming down well. Sam Burnette is with the Nashville architectural firm ESA, responsible for the design: "the challenge is taking this extremely important two-acre parcel and add this phenomenal tower - and keep the existing ambulance and services operational during the addition." That will also entail the installation of some temporary elevators to reach the emergency department. The project completion date is set for January 2025.



Caroline Moore

Virginia Transformer celebrates half century in Roanoke >

Some may not think of Roanoke as a hub for manufacturing companies but one major employer in the city celebrated a half century here recently - from humble beginnings with a workforce of just 30 on board. "Virginia Transformer Day" in the City of Roanoke was celebrated on June 23 - recognizing 50 years in the valley for Virginia Transformer Corporation, the largest U.S.-based manufacturer of its kind. City Council member Joe Cobb read the Proclamation: "you saw the potential in Roanoke and every time you ... see the potential in yourselves and in Roanoke we are better able to see and experience the potential in ourselves."

Virginia Transformer now employs 500 people at its northeast Roanoke plant (just off Gus Nicks Boulevard) near Vinton and 1500 in North America. Longtime CEO Prabhat Jain says the estimated economic impact locally is 100 million dollars annually. Industrial size power transformers are the primary product. "Virginia Transformer was born here and grew up and now we have a national footprint,

providing transformers to secure out national [power] grid. We have established a leadership position in our industry, and we have a long life ahead of us."

Jain also said the company is "bursting at the seams" – growing at a 15 percent clip every year - and he asked the city to help create more on-street parking so it can add employees. Prabhat Jain told an audience that included many production workers that the company is starting both an employee assistance program and a college scholarship fund for the children of employees - saying education is of utmost importance to getting ahead in life.





A LITTLE INSIGHT

By Bruce C. Bryan

Executive Summary:
By all accounts Zoom calls are going to remain a part of the business day.

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

Gotten used to Zoom meetings?

For years companies ran WebEx, Teams, and other video conference meetings, but it wasn't until 2020 that we all started playing in that arena on a regular (read: daily, or even hourly) basis. That shift was startling to many and became routine to most in business over the past year or so. People dreaded Zoom calls, appreciated Zoom calls, and the phrase "Zoom Fatigue" even became a thing – like Athlete's Foot, Tennis Elbow, or a crick in your neck.

As often as I was planted in front of my computer screen, it was natural my mind would start to wander. During the set up for my Zoom calls and during a few double checking tests, I realized that what we see on our screen isn't what others are witnessing on theirs. Your images are backwards to you, but look right to the rest of the people on the call.

The Lessons⁴All of Us

Recently I was featured on a PBS television show and it included a few segments with a group of people on Zoom calls – including me. It was odd to look at myself on Zoom from the viewers' perspectives and not from my own. I noticed a few things:

- No one really likes how they look on Zoom.
- People can tell when you are paying attention or doing something else.
- Laptops give less flattering angles than desktops.
- We all look better than we think we do ... so relax.
- How you help or support someone is way more important than how you look.

Beyond all of that, consider this shift in thinking: authentic and passionate care for others and what is happening with them in their situations is evident whether it is in real life, on the telephone, or on Zoom. No matter how the client looks on Zoom, trust me, there is more going on in their lives behind that camera. Keep that in mind as you work through your agenda and crowded day. It's a good reminder that just like Zoom calls are now a part of the average office workday, paying attention to what others are seeing and going through is critical to business success. 📺

“”
People can tell when you are paying attention or doing something else.

When you can't afford an attorney



Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley provides free legal services for low income people. The organization “does not handle every request for assistance” but it reviews applications and never charges a fee for its services. Practice areas include consumer law, employment law, family law for victims of domestic violence, housing law, public benefits, and a few other select areas. It does not assist with criminal, traffic, personal injury, malpractice, property damage, or cases where a private lawyer would take the case and obtain a fee from the other side for recovery. LAS/RV serves eligible clients residing in Roanoke, Salem, Botetourt, Franklin, Craig, Alleghany, Rockbridge, Lexington, Covington, Bath, and Bedford.

Staff includes attorneys David Beidler (director); Emily Faye Jewett; Tonia Drewery; Elizabeth Barbour; Mona Raza; Henry Woodward; Zachary Brown; Kristi Murray; Jarryd Smith; paralegal Austin Bouffard; development director Laura Rawlings; and legal secretaries Eva Huffman, Gail Anderson Baxter; and office administrator Jan Keister.

The board includes officers Roy Creasy (president); John Eure (vice president); Jan Keister (treasurer); and Eva Huffman (secretary); attorneys Rena Berry, Francis Casola, Roy Creasy, Richard Derrico, Lenden Eakin, John Eure, Ross Hart, Mary Beth Nash, Amanda Shaw, Victor Skaff, III, Lori Thompson; and client representatives William Drewery, Judith Jackson, and Jamice Rudd.

One way to support LAS/RV is through its Annual Giving Campaign, which runs from July 2021 through June 2022. A “Jaunt for Justice 5k” event in conjunction with Roanoke Valley Paralegal Association will be held Saturday, October 2 at Tinker Creek Greenway in Roanoke’s Fallen Park. More information is available at www.lasrv.org. 

GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:
Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley provides free legal services for low income people.



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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
Companies hire outside candidates or promote from within; but the better strategy is up for debate.

Inside, outside, best side

If your company needs to create or fill a mid to top-level position, where does it find the candidates? The two basic and obvious sources are either from within its own employee pool or elsewhere. Inside or outside. One would hope, that if the company or organization has been around awhile and is sustainable, the formula and best option have been discovered. We have plenty examples of successful companies that have established a formidable reputation of “rewarding its own” and promoting from within. But there are just as many companies that almost always go to other outside sources. And even with the ones that go outside, then you have the split between hiring someone with direct industry knowledge (if not poaching from a competitor) versus hiring someone completely outside of your own industry.

No one likes placing a bad hire. Everyone loses—and if the position is mission-critical or C-level, having someone come in for just a short period only to leave without producing much or contributing to the business, that problematic appointment can really hurt the company.

Locally, we’ve seen CEO appointments that seem somewhat surprising. In one case, a major retail operation hired someone who was also in retail, but a completely different industry with dissimilar market demographics and dynamics. And we’ve had some recent transitions (in college leadership, for example) that can only be described as demotivating. College presidents coming in with all the pomp and circumstance, only to exit after just one year or so. When we ask about these failed assignments the typical response is that the person was simply “not a good fit.”

There is a sentiment among some in management that it’s not worth the “trouble” to hire from within. A recent report from Harvard Business Review does warn that internal job applicants who are rejected end up quitting. On the flip side, management often believes internal hires are less costly, saving the company money because there is less training needed and the salary bump can be lower than what would be offered to the “new hire.”

Companies that promote from within at least at some level do tend to rack up a better record of retention. Employees tend to stay at places where they believe they will be promoted. But whether you place most of your positions from inside or outside, of course it makes sense to base the decision on what’s in the best interest of the company, right?

The thing management must keep in mind, though, is that the company is also the employees... so what’s in your employees’ best interest must be factored. If those parameters are at odds, you have a whole other challenge on your hands.

Competing for the coveted remote worker pool

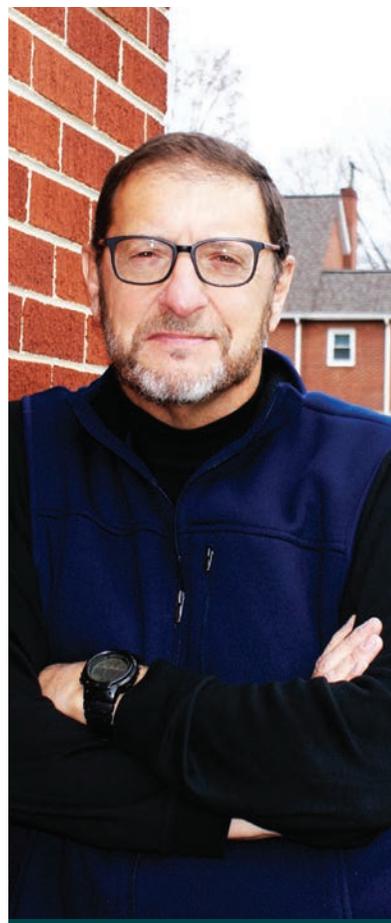
Historically talent has moved to the larger cities, but the pandemic has accelerated a trend already underway - remote working. Someone who helped launch a program in Tulsa, Oklahoma that sought to create a "thriving remote ecosystem," offered his advice in a session hosted about a month ago by Get 2 Know Noke, an arm of the Roanoke Regional Partnership. The executive director of Tulsa Remote is Aaron Bolzle. The Tulsa native (his last name is pronounced Belz-Lee) did what many young people do in smaller urban areas - he left home, went to college in the big city (Boston in this case), interned in New York City and spent a decade on the West Coast.

Then he came home and launched Tulsa Remote, which offers free desk space, exclusive perks and events for remote workers - part of that "thriving eco-system" that also includes a welcoming community: "the opportunity is really to create more economic mobility for individuals, and then provide the ecosystem that encourages them to stay. Nobody wants to feel stuck."

Those working remotely away from the corporate headquarter city need to be supported by a program that includes the opportunity to meetup with others working remotely - perhaps with free desk space initially - even a cash incentive like the one offered by Tulsa Remote says Bolzle. "How do we provide that ecosystem that allows them to feel supported and nourished, so they ultimately continue to flourish?"

Bolzle also created Next Here, a consulting firm helping cities prepare for the remote worker movement. "You take these incredible individuals from all over the country, with diverse backgrounds and put them together. Collaboration and innovation collisions are bound to happen. There have been companies and startups that have been born out of simply having these individuals in the same pond, simply interacting with each other." Speaking of that pond - and being a big fish in a smaller one: "in Tulsa you can come in and immediately get connected and lend your skills to that initiative in a way that you potentially couldn't in other [much larger] communities. That can be an extremely attractive draw for individuals."

Bolzle came back to his hometown of Tulsa after living in high-cost San Francisco for a decade. The Roanoke Regional Partnership webinar was funded by a GO Virginia grant. Food for thought? Are we doing enough in this region to attract the remote worker who may enjoy the quality of life and less hectic pace here? No doubt other regions with similar amenities and attractive lifestyles are having the same types of conversations. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

Are we doing enough in this region to attract talented remote workers?



GUEST COMMENTARY

By Rep. Ben Cline

Executive Summary:
6th District Republican U.S. Congressman Ben Cline says Congress must do even more to help small businesses recover.

Putting partisanship aside and work to find realistic solutions

The past year and a half has been difficult for all Americans as we fight the COVID-19 pandemic. From being asked not to gather in large groups, eat out at restaurants, or attend entertainment venues, folks have made great sacrifices to combat COVID-19. I am also keenly aware of the economic consequences these sacrifices had on our communities.

In an effort to help folks through the pandemic, Congress took several immediate steps to provide aid to those in need. Chief among these actions was the passage of the CARES Act, which I was proud to support. This legislation provided aid to individuals through Emergency Relief Checks and also aid to businesses through forgivable loan programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program. In addition, the CARES Act provided funding to hospitals, community health centers, and other providers.

While many individuals have begun to recover from the economic side-effects of the government-mandated shutdowns, unfortunately, the business community continues to struggle for a variety of reasons. Congress must do more to help small businesses in a way that does not hinder their growth as we re-open our economy.

For example, in 2019, I introduced and had signed into law the Small Business Reorganization Act, which simplified the process for entrepreneurs to use bankruptcy as a means of reorganization instead of closing. Under this bill, businesses with less than \$2.7 million of debt could file for bankruptcy in a timelier and more cost-effective manner. While in bankruptcy reorganization, a small business can negotiate with creditors while keeping the doors open, employees on payroll, and suppliers and vendors paid.

In 2020, a provision in the CARES Act raised the \$2.7 million threshold in my initial bill to \$7.5 million. While this provision was set to expire on March 27, 2021, Judiciary Chairman Nadler and I introduced the COVID-19 Bankruptcy Relief Extension Act, which extended this provision, and thus the \$7.5 million threshold, for an additional year. I was pleased that on March 27, President Biden signed this bill into law, meaning significantly more businesses struggling from the pandemic can take advantage of this bill and utilize this valuable lifeline.

Having this legislation signed into law is a great example of how both parties can put partisanship aside and work to find realistic solutions to benefit the American people. Since being sworn in, one of my top priorities has been working to promote policies that support the business community. Whether it's cutting bureaucratic red tape and regulations, easing the tax burden for small business owners, or advocating for trade deals that allow American industry to thrive, I will continue to pursue legislative initiatives that will help entrepreneurs flourish and ensure the long-term success of the U.S. economy. 

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“New laws create the potential for both new opportunity and negative consequences for the unaware. — Page 16

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FRONTReviews >

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

Early Dylan, exposed

From his folkie roots in native Minnesota and then in Greenwich Village – where he became a folk music phenomenon – to being booed for playing electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965. To encountering The Beatles and Johnny Cash – they later teamed up on Dylan's countrified *Nashville Skyline* album – and then working with Robbie Robertson and The Band. All told in granular detail by Englishman Clinton Heylin in *The Double Life of Bob Dylan: A Restless, Hungry Feeling* (1941-1966). The Little, Brown and Company (2021) tome is for the true Dylan fan, told in painstaking detail.

Early on Dylan mused on being more of a beat poet than a musician, but the songs and lyrics just kept pouring out of him. Robert Zimmerman (nee Bob Dylan) from Hibbing, Minnesota did not react well and withdrew after he “blew up” and became famous, when hangers-on and women started throwing themselves at him. Although he did take advantage of the latter, leading to an eventual breakup with his true love, Suze Rotolo – the subject of a handful of pensive Dylan tunes after they split.

There were dalliances with folksinger Joan Baez, who was also acting to protect him. Some critics and fans turned away after he focused less on writing so-called “protest songs.” Heylin clarifies or corrects recollections from Dylan himself or from those who knew him in those early days,

“”
Staying silent during critical moments can result in missed opportunities.

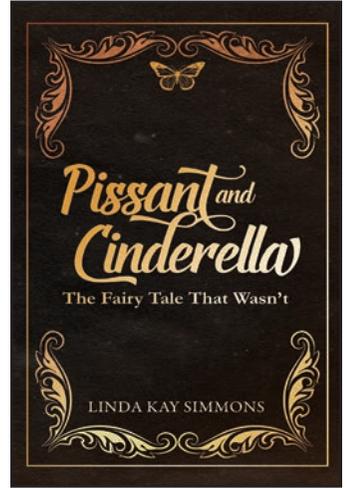
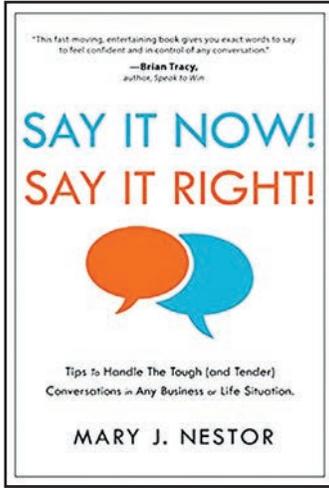
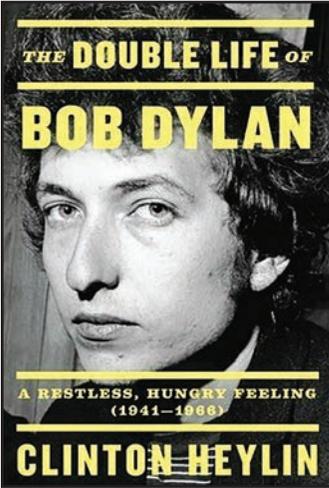
a product of his own detailed fact-checking. Its not the first time he has written about Bob Dylan – whom he suggests was not averse to telling a fib here and there. (Must be something about Minnesota musicians? Prince was guilty of the same practice.) Again, dyed in the wool Dylan fans may enjoy the trip down that early Memory Lane, for one of the most influential singer-songwriters of the 20th century.

—Gene Marrano

Timing, delivery, and motive

The time has come to put away the PJs, wear real pants and relearn the art of navigating workplace relationships with three-dimensional people. Cue Mary J. Nestor's profoundly well-timed book, *SAY IT NOW! SAY IT RIGHT! How to Handle Tough or Tender Conversations* (Panama Press; 2021), the perfect crash-course in courageous, effective communication, with tips, scripts and real-life- inspired scenarios that teach readers how to tackle awkward office interactions.

Silence isn't always golden. In fact, staying silent during critical moments can result in missed opportunities, broken relationships or disastrous decisions, asserts Nestor, a business consultant and award-winning speaker. This book provides a straightforward look at the problem people and organizations face by not practicing the art of authentic communication.



Nestor begins by revealing her own early experience with taking a risk and speaking out in a difficult situation. She uses her personal journey plus her background in human resources to inform three main principles of effective communication: timing, delivery and motive, and shares compelling stories that illustrate how to put all three principles into practice in a variety of realistic scenarios. When we use our voices to communicate in healthy, constructive ways, we can empower ourselves and others, reduce stress, solve problems, and strengthen our relationships with co-workers, managers, customers and anyone in our orbit.

“With the pandemic, people have been isolated, working from home, and have formed new habits,” Nestor adds. “When the world opens up and people go back to working in offices or working with others in close situations, it will be more important than ever to be able to handle the stresses caused by readjusting to working in close proximity and handling difficult situations and conversations.”

—Sheila Williams

A Hard, Important Read

Moneta-based novelist Linda Kay Simmons is back with her fourth—and most important—book, *Pissant and Cinderella*, a work that confronts one of

the most hidden problems in our society.

The book is based on the experiences of people Simmons knew in the past and it takes on forced incest, sexual predators, and sexual abuse within a family. Simmons is a thoughtful, careful, literate writer whose prose is pitch-perfect for this direct assault on forbidden topics. She is unflinching in her treatment of the family whose level of dysfunction is epic.

Her previous books (*Lamb on a Tombstone*, *Lightening Shall Strick* and *Cahas Mountain*) are Southern gothic personified with a touch of otherworldliness, just enough to create a new level of fascination with her work. Simmons is a retired airline hostess who has settled into a full-time writing gig and she sets her books in the places she knows: Smith Mountain Lake, Franklin County, and Roanoke—the homes she grew up in.

Her books to this point have been good reads, appreciated by a lot of people. *Pissant and Cinderella* accelerates her obvious ambition with an important work, one that deserves a large audience.

—Dan Smith

The reviewers: **Gene Marrano** is a veteran news reporter and editor of FRONT.; **Sheila Williams** is a publicist with Ascot Media Group in Friendswood, TX.; **Dan Smith** is a freelance journalist and author in Roanoke.

Lionberger Construction sponsors the Mill Mountain Star >

The Kiwanis Club of Roanoke had a brainstorm for its annual Pancake and Auction Day fundraiser in May - it would auction off the Mill Mountain Star. Actually, just the sponsorship rights for a year, with proceeds going to support Kiwanis community programs. Lionberger Construction had the winning bid and in mid-July, when a plaque noting their sponsorship was unveiled at the base of the Star. Sam Lionberger III is the company CEO: "to have the Lionberger name associated with the Star is very special to us. With our history in the Roanoke Valley and certainly the iconic thing that that the Star has become, we're very excited to partnering with Kiwanis and the City [of Roanoke]." Lionberger said they won the bidding "cheap" at \$1250; he hopes to see a higher amount when the Mill Mountain Star sponsorship is auctioned off again by Kiwanis next year. "My grandfather [the company founder] would be very proud. It's neat."



Mike McEvoy, President of the Roanoke Kiwanis Club, on the new wrinkle introduced at this year's Pancake and Auction Day in May: "we added it to the list, it's obviously an honorary thing, you don't get to actually own the Star, but you get to have your name on the plaque for a year. We're hoping to make it an annual tradition." The money raised by the Star sponsorship and from other auction items goes back to local non-profits supported by the Kiwanis Club of Roanoke, and to college scholarships they award every spring to high school seniors.



Reelin' in the fans >

The Royal Scam, a Steely Dan tribute band, played Dr Pepper Park on July 9. Acclaimed as the best Steely Dan cover band by reviewers, the sixty-year-old lead singer defied his age as he danced through the crowd (a majority around his age) that was comprised of obvious enthusiasts of the fused rock-jazz-R&B pop studio band with prolific hits in the 70s.

CVBC expanding its reach >

The Central Virginia Business Coalition, a Lynchburg-based organization that promotes the business community in the area with networking, events, seminars and other support is making inroads into the Roanoke Valley. The CVBC, formerly called the Retail Merchants Association (before it outgrew a retail-only focus) was on hand at the Elder Care Solutions ribbon cutting in Vinton. The rebranding happened 3 years ago; the Retail Merchants Association had been around since 1906. Heather Alto is the executive director: "we do a lot of things that are similar to a Chamber [of Commerce] like networking and marketing, but we are different in that our goal is sustainability." The CVBC stays away from the weightier issues like workforce and economic development issues: "I want businesses to remain open." You can't do enough networking says Alto: "you need to make time to do that. And marketing. Having your name out there and being branded is important." Dianne Erb joined the Central Virginia Business Coalition in July 2018 as the Director of Special Events; she was formerly the Executive Director for Bedford Main Street. (Alto, at left, is pictured with Erb)

130+ members joined last year during the height of the pandemic notes Alto, seeking any help they could get in order to remain open. Word has gotten out over the year about support the CVBC can offer to small businesses, which has started to attract Roanoke Valley merchants. Alto was also a mentor at the most recent version of The Gauntlet business competition in Vinton. That also helped grow the number of members in the valley to over thirty. "We may



Caroline Moore

do a Roanoke branch [in the future]. The CVBC annual membership fee is \$125; Alto says they offer a discount to those that are also members of a local Chamber. Evidence of the CVBC's move in the Roanoke area: an event called "Career Connections 2021" scheduled for August 5 at the Build Smart Institute, focusing on trade skills and expanding the workforce. (see cvabc.org for more information)

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Like a candidate in The Candy Store >

It's campaign season and the once and would-be future Governor of Virginia – Terry McAuliffe – paid a visit in early July to The Candy Store at Center in the Square, where the Democrat tried some of the sweets on hand and then had words of praise for the American Rescue Plan Act, passed in the early days of the Biden Administration. ARPA offered additional assistance to small businesses in the latter days of the pandemic. "They'll be the first to tell you," McAuliffe said of The Candy Store owners, "they would not have survived if we didn't have Joe Biden and the American Rescue Plan." McAuliffe said all told seven million Virginians received some benefit from ARPA. Said co-owner Robert Jaeger: "we primarily used the money to pay rent, payroll, insurance and we invested some in inventory. It bridged the gap. We couldn't have [survived] without it." McAuliffe faces off against Republican candidate for Governor Glenn Youngkin in November.



Mast marks one year in Roanoke >

Its opening was delayed by a few months in 2020, but then Mast General Store on South Jefferson Street opened and soldiered on through the pandemic. At a celebration of its one-year anniversary in Roanoke in June, Vice-Mayor Trish White-Boyd said she was bullish about the future: "I encourage everyone to invite a friend downtown to explore all of the

wonderful things we have – Mast General, all of the wonderful restaurants; there's a lot to see and do downtown."



White-Boyd also commended the North Carolina-based retailer for donating a portion of its sales to non-profits in the Roanoke Valley. Company president Lisa Cooper also spoke at the at first-year anniversary event for the downtown store. "We weren't getting any money from anywhere [last year]. We had to figure out how to pay bills. We had to let everybody go home for a few months. [But] we are here to stay." Cooper took over the family-owned North Carolina-based retail company from her parents. The Roanoke opening in 2020 was delayed by a few months until the "stay at home" mandate was lifted by the Commonwealth.



Lights out, turn around >

For the Fourth of July / Independence Day holiday weekend, people once again visited firework celebrations—including this one in Shawsville on Saturday night (July 3rd); where local band Fuzzy Logic performed at Old Town Fields until sunset, then folks turned their chairs around to watch fireworks shot off on the nearby hill.



Day of Action >

United Way of Roanoke Valley's "Day of Action" that saw volunteers install free food pantries at several locations the week before continued in late June with bird houses being put up at South Roanoke Nursing Home, where residents can see them from their windows. The Day of Action volunteers also installed bird houses at Richfield Living near Salem. Brooke Gill is an investor relations specialist with United Way: "we got volunteers together to support our senior communities. Our worldwide [United Way] challenge is to provide enrichment for our senior communities where they are – either in their homes or in great facilities like this." Lauren Warren is the marketing director at South Roanoke: "the residents love watching birds. It's something that they find a lot of joy in. It's been really hard with a lot of people cooped up over the past year. It's been really wonderful to have some volunteers come out and do this for the residents."



Richfield expanding again >

Richfield Living has cut the ribbon on The Health Center-Salem Campus. Cherie Grisso is the Richfield Living CEO: "we are so proud to achieve a major objective of our Vision 2020 Strategic Plan in opening The Health Center, [which] offers a unique home-like setting. Changing from the former institutional care to a residential care setting is paramount in Richfield transition to person-centered living in which every long-term resident is dignified with privacy and more choice in their daily living routines." This was the second ribbon cutting for a new facility opening at Richfield in less than a month.



Elder Care hangs out a shingle >

You've read about Roanoke-based Elder Care Solutions here and may have seen the occasional column by CEO Kimberly Whiter as well. Now as part of an almost \$12,000 award package as a Platinum finalist at the 2021 Gauntlet competition, Elder Care Solutions has cut the ribbon on free office space at The Hive business incubator in Vinton, also operated by the Advancement Foundation. Elder Care Solutions builds plans for aging family members. Whiter (pictured at center) and members of her Elder Care team did the honors in late June. "I went into the [Gauntlet] experience looking to develop a growth plan ... I did not anticipate the changes I would end up making. I ended up hiring two people, brought on a new service and went through a rebranding. I ended up doing quite a lot." Now for at least the next six months Whiter has free office space outside of her home.

Salem Rotary Club honors >

In June the Rotary Club of Salem awarded 47 individuals as Paul Harris Fellows. Club President Elect Tom Bowers read the narratives of each individual, while Club President Jeff Howard presented the certificates. President Nominee Jane Johnson bestowed the special pins.



The Paul Harris recognition held once a year at the end of the Rotary year is named for Paul Harris, who founded Rotary with three business colleagues in Chicago in 1905. The Paul Harris Fellow Foundation was established in his honor in 1957 to express appreciation for a contribution of \$1,000 to the humanitarian and educational programs of the Rotary Foundation. The funds provide educational opportunities and food, potable water, health care, immunizations and shelter for millions of people. 2020 Salem Police Officer of the Year David Goodman also received a Paul Harris Fellow " for the many ways he has creatively and professionally handled himself during the pandemic and times of uncertainty." Pictured: (l-r) Wife Whitney Goodman, Salem Police Officer of the Year David Goodman, Rotary Club of Salem Club President Tom Bowers, Daughters Jasiyah Goodman and Daviah Goodman



5 Points Creative makes new home official >

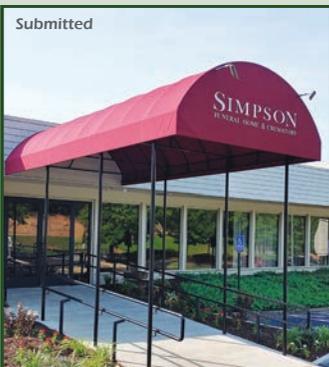
The day Governor Northam basically shut down the state in March 2020 when the COVID pandemic struck, Bruce C. Bryan opened the doors on his rebranded communications and marketing firm, 5 Points Creative, in Roanoke. Last month in a refurbished former residential home on Walnut Avenue they finally cut the ribbon. Formerly B2C Enterprises, 5 Points Creative now has a regional and even national client roster. Bryan (who writes a column for Valley Business FRONT) is also board president for the non-profit Spot on Kirk, which will start offering live music again at the Kirk Avenue club in September. "We survived the pandemic, and we feel like we are on the other side now," said Bryan, "and we helped our clients make it. I think it was the diversity of services that we offer that helped us weather the storm. It was absolutely challenging for our clients – but also for us."



New space for CTS allows room for growth >

Clarkston Technology Solutions held a ribbon cutting last month for their new office space in a historic building in downtown Roanoke. The renovated 60+ year old former auto repair shop-turned one time plasma donation center will allow the business to grow – from around 30 employees now to as many as 100. Jeff Graffeo is the managing partner: “the big vision for having the [new] technology center is collaboration, being able to have folks together that are working on projects, it’s very important to have that closeness – the ability to innovate and collaborate together.”

Clarkston Technology Solutions is a management and IT solutions firm and mainly works with consumer products and life sciences companies. They are a branch of Clarkston Consulting, which is based in Durham, North Carolina. Joe Cobb, a Roanoke City Councilman, spoke about the positives of remodeling historic buildings: “when we repurpose an old building, we not only honor its historical value as part of the city, we see it’s potential.” CTS first opened its doors in 2018 in the city market area, but they moved to their new office on 5th Street Southwest recently. The building is now named for Graffeo, a longtime employee and key cog in the firm’s growth.



Simpson Funeral Home adds new location >

Simpson Funeral Home & Crematory has opened the doors at a new location on Electric Road in southwest Roanoke County. They have a long-established location on Peters Creek Road (opened in 1997) elsewhere in the Valley. Owner Allen Simpson says, “we’ve watched more and more of the people that have called on us for services [come] from the south side of town and realized there was an opportunity over here. We found this building and were able to do something that was really unique, something I feel will be well received.” That means more flexible spaces, allowing for traditional funerals, memorial services, even receptions for family and friends. “A space that can be formal – and informal as well,” says Simpson.



Montgomery County Chamber

Upgrade for CRC >

A ribbon cutting in mid-July for the newly renovated Moss building at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center included a preview of the Game Changer Café, lunch and a tour of select suites. Blacksburg Mayor Leslie Hager-Smith, members of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce board, other key leaders and community members gathered for the event.



Roanoke County

Vistar expansion >

Vistar Eye Center has begun construction on its latest Roanoke office, after a groundbreaking ceremony to kick off the project in mid-July. The state-of-the-art, 26,355 square-foot facility will be located at 6125 Airport Road and is tentatively slated to open in 2022. Roanoke-based RL Price Construction is carrying out the construction project. "Multiple convenient locations throughout Southwestern Virginia ensures that our patients never have to leave the region to access the best vision care available to them," said Vistar's Dr. Timothy R. Byrnes.

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

FINANCIAL FRONT



Harwin

Farm Credit of the Virginias recently announced that **Scott Harwin** has joined the Roanoke branch office as a loan officer. For the last two years, Harwin served as a Loan Officer for the USDA Farm Service Agency. Additionally, he has been serving as the Market Manager of the Botetourt Farmer's Market in Daleville since 2019.



Lima

Kristina H. Lima has been promoted to Assistant Branch

Manager – Retail Banking Officer at the Bank of Botetourt's Daleville Town Center office. Lima has been with the Bank for more than seven years and graduated from Radford University with a degree in Business and Spanish, in which she continues to be fluent. She is a member of the Virginia Bankers Association Emerging Bank Leaders.



Harwin

Freedom First Credit Union announces the addition of **Shatenita Horton** as Senior Vice President Retail Banking. Horton has been in the financial services industry for over 25 years and recently moved to Roanoke from Columbia, Missouri. She most recently was Vice President of Bank Security and a Fraud Investigative Officer.

LEGAL FRONT



Thompson

Spilman Thomas & Battle (Spilman) has announced that partner **Lori D. Thompson** recently received the President's Lifetime Achievement Award as a commendation for her dedication to community service. In 2003, the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation founded the President's Volunteer Service Award program. The Roanoke Bar Association became a Certifying Organization for the program in 2006, and Thompson has received a President's Volunteer Service Award every year since. For the past 15 years, Thompson has organized the Roanoke Law Foundation's "Santa at the Station" event, which is a free

holiday party for families living in homeless shelters in the Roanoke Valley.

WELLNESS FRONT

Vistar Eye Center has welcomed **Bryan A. Strelow, M.D.** as a surgical specialist. The Roanoke native is the son of Dr. Scott Strelow - also a part of the Vistar Eye Center team. After receiving a BS in Biology at Elon University in 2012, Dr. Bryan Strelow completed his Master of Arts from Duke University Divinity School in addition to a Doctor of Medicine from the University of North Carolina in 2016.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Roanoke College has appointed **Teresa Ramey** as the College's new vice president of community, diversity and inclusion. In the newly created position, Ramey will lead and build on the College's efforts to

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Ramey

“create an educational environment that is socially aware and culturally inclusive, that celebrates diversity, that strives for equity and that is free from discrimination.” Ramey will join the College on August 2 as a member of Cabinet, reporting to President Michael C. Maxey. Ramey most recently served as vice president for regional and community programs at Francis Marion University in Florence, South Carolina, where she led diversity and inclusion efforts through programming, presentations, training and leadership development.

Kimberly D. Clark-Shaw has been named the director of the Black Cultural Center at Virginia Tech. Clark-Shaw has more than 15 years to a career in

Have a career announcement?

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Clark-Shaw

higher education in academic affairs, enrollment management, and student affairs. Prior to Virginia Tech, Clark-Shaw worked within the University of Maryland system, serving as the retention director at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and in advising services at Salisbury University. As director of the Black Cultural Center at Tech she reports to the Office for Inclusion and Diversity.

Virginia Tech Director of Athletics Whit Babcock has hired **John Dooley** as special assistant to



Dooley

the director of athletics. Dooley served as CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation from 2012-21 and has extensive background in fundraising and development. Dooley will work with Babcock and the Hokie Club as well as Tech coaches and staff as a resource to support the \$400 million Reach for Excellence campaign launched in April 2021.

Becky Brackin has been selected as the next associate vice president of University Relations at Radford University. She was



Brackin

formerly director of communications and marketing at Angelo State University (ASU) in San Angelo, Texas. Brackin joined ASU as its first director of community relations and quickly became a key member of the communication leadership team, also earned a Bachelor of Business Administration from ASU in 1985.

The American Culinary Federation has selected Virginia Western's **Ted Polfelt**, CEC, CCA, AAC, to be a member of the ACF Culinary Team





Polfelt

USA 2024. After three rounds of tryouts, Polfelt was chosen to compete with the team at the 2022 Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg, Germany, and at the 2024 IKA Culinary Olympics in Stuttgart, Germany. "I'm truly honored, humbled, and excited on being part of this team. An opportunity to represent my country, the American Culinary Federation, Virginia Western, and my community is immeasurable," Polfelt said. "We have a lot of work to do, but we can't wait to get started!" Polfelt teaches in the culinary arts program at Virginia Western Community College and is also a chef for the Jefferson Street Management Group of restaurants that includes 419 West

and Frankie Rowland's. Polfelt and the team will of chefs from around the country will start practicing their entries together this month.

Several new board members have joined the Roanoke Higher Education Authority Board. Governor Northam has appointed **Katherin Elam** to a four-year term and reappointed Dr. Elda Stanco Downey to a second four-year term. Higher Education Center member school Mary Baldwin University has appointed Dr. Deb Greubel and Radford University has appointed Dr. Carolyn Lepre. The Speaker of the House, Eileen Filler-Corn, has appointed Delegates Chris Hurst and Sam Rasoul.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT

5 Points Creative in Roanoke announces the addition of **Kym Davis-Ricketts** as Creative Lead.



Ricketts

Ricketts has an extensive background in advertising, marketing, and design, and has provided creative direction and design for regional retailers, educational institutions, healthcare, and the defense industry. Davis-Ricketts is a graduate of Roanoke College, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts, with concentrations in photography and graphic design. Her work has been recognized by a number of regional and national organizations, including a National Gold Addy Award presented by the AAF.

Ingevity Corporation has named **Johnetta Greene**, formerly with the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, as its first chief equity, inclusion and diversity officer (CEIDO). In this



Greene

new role, Greene will be responsible for shaping and elevating the company's equity, inclusion and diversity strategy, awareness and advocacy efforts. South Carolina-based Ingevity has a facility in Covington. Prior to joining Ingevity, Greene served as diversity equity inclusion team lead at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. Ingevity manufactures specialty chemicals and engineered polymers and high-performance activated carbon at 25 locations worldwide and employs approximately 1,750 people. Ingevity's Covington plant manufactures activated carbon products used in automotive evaporative emissions systems, food and beverage and industrial purification applications. About two hundred employees



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work at the facility, which began production in 1934.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Moir

Governor Ralph Northam recently appointed two Virginia Tech alumni to his administration in the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.



Hertz

Brad Copenhaver, a 2012 graduate in applied economic management and political science, was named the commissioner of VDACS. He replaces Jewel Bronaugh, who was recently confirmed as deputy secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture and is also a Virginia Tech alumna. **Heidi Hertz**, a 2004 graduate

in human nutrition, foods, and exercise, was appointed deputy secretary of agriculture and forestry. Both graduated from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and are active members of the college's alumni organization.



Meadows

Montgomery County Administrator, **Craig Meadows** has been

elected to lead the Virginia Local Government Association (VLGMA). He was elected by the membership during its annual conference in Virginia Beach on June 18; his tenure as president runs through June 30, 2022. Meadows, a member of the Association since 2009, has previously served in various officer roles in the Association. Before becoming an officer, he served as a member of the Association's Executive Committee.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*



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BRCC establishes research institute

Roanoke-based Blue Ridge Cancer Care has established The Research Institute at Blue Ridge Cancer Care, calling it “the next step in the advancement of the longstanding clinical research program.” Through their collaboration with The US Oncology Network and independent sponsors, The Research Institute at Blue Ridge Cancer Care is providing cancer patients access to the latest therapies and treatment options in their community. By conducting all phases of oncology clinical research trials, The Research Institute offers more options for cancer patients to participate in clinical trials locally. “We’re proud to establish The Research Institute and offer our patients another level of groundbreaking treatment options through clinical trials,” said BRCC Practice President David Buck, M.D. “This expanded access allows us to provide patients with the most advanced cancer treatments available.”

Kiwanis Club, local financial institutions step up for students

As it has for 75 years-plus, the Kiwanis Club of Roanoke has awarded financial assistance to college bound seniors from eight area high schools in Roanoke and Bedford. American National Bank and Pinnacle Financial Partners provided support. The scholarship winners are Kiersten

Reilly, Lily Bishop, and Joshua Campos, graduates of Northside High School; Catherine Thacker, graduate of Cave Spring High School; and Uyen Tran and Sarah Hall, graduates of William Fleming High School. The Scholarship Committee reviewed 33 applications to determine the most qualified students.

Goodwill Industries makes changes

Richmond Vincent, Jr., President & CEO for Goodwill Industries of the Valleys since April, has announced new departments and changes designed to create an updated organizational structure. The new model has four business segment Chiefs, each reporting directly to Vincent. “I am excited about the changes to the organizational structure at Goodwill Industries of the Valleys,” said Vincent, Jr. “These changes create the right structure to build our business segments over the long term and increase our ability for successful mission integration at our Goodwill.

Jackson Green, who most recently led Finance, Compliance, and IT, is now also responsible for Finance, Compliance, IT, Real Estate & Facilities, and Business Analytics. Lori Baker-Lloyd, who most recently led Human Resources as Vice President, transitions to a new role as Chief Advancement Officer with responsibilities over Business & Community

Engagement, Marketing & Communications, and Philanthropy. Mary Ann Gilmer, who most recently led Mission Services as Vice President, transitions to a new role as Chief Strategy & People Officer with responsibilities over Mission Services, Organizational Development (Human Resources and Learning & Development), and Strategy. Mindy Boyd, who led Donated Goods and Business Services as Vice President, transitions to a new role as Chief Operations Officer with responsibilities over Donated Goods & Retail, Business Services, and Logistics & Transportation.

Up, Up and Away at ROA

Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport saw a 27% increase in May 2021 traffic versus April 2021. May 2021 saw 41,350 passengers fly via ROA compared to 32,398 in April 2021, an increase of 8,952 passengers. The airport’s increase of 8,952 passengers from April to March equates to 288 more passengers flying each day. Leisure travel continues to rebound. The airport saw an increase in May 2021 traffic of 547% on a year-over-year basis; however, when compared to May 2019, traffic decreased 36%. May 2021 saw 41,350 passengers fly via ROA compared to 65,026 in May 2019, a decrease of 23,676 passengers from pre-pandemic traffic levels. “Passengers are more comfortable with the measures taken by

the airports and airlines to ensure their safety,” stated David Jeavons, interim executive director of the Roanoke Regional Airport Commission.

Patrick County snags new manufacturer

Canadian-based Prolam, LLC, a manufacturer of hardwood floors for commercial trucks and dry van trailers, will invest \$12.8 million in Patrick County to establish its first U.S. manufacturing operation in the former Ten Oaks satellite facility on Dobyns Road. The project will create 58 jobs and add 50 percent to the company’s total manufacturing capacity. Prolam has also committing to source at least 65 percent of its timber from the Commonwealth’s hardwood resources, supporting regional loggers and forestland owners through the purchase of more than \$20.5 million in Virginia-grown hardwoods over the next three years. “This project is a great win for Virginia’s hardwood loggers and forestland owners,” said Governor Ralph Northam in making that announcement.

Welcome back, Xaloy

Xaloy, a manufacturer of plastic processing components for injection and extrusion machinery, is moving its barrel manufacturing operation from Ohio back to Virginia and will reopen its former facility in Pulaski County. The company will invest \$1.75 million in its

100,000-square-foot site in the Town of Pulaski to produce bi-metallic barrels for a wide range of applications. Virginia competed against Ohio for the project, which will retain seven jobs and create 35 new jobs. In 2016, Xaloy closed its Pulaski plant and moved the majority of the facility's manufacturing and positions to Ohio. The company will also rehire a number of former employees familiar with Xaloy's specific machinery.

Keep Virginia Beautiful awards annual 30 in 30 Green Grants

Clean Valley Council in Roanoke will receive a grant award of \$1000 for

its ongoing Litter Prevention project. Their mission is to encourage environmental stewardship and educate communities on environmental issues. Clean Valley Council will use their grant funds to run litter cleanup events; the Council holds two scheduled cleanups a year, in the spring and fall. Every year, government, non-profit, civic and service organizations in Virginia are invited to apply for 30 in 30 Green Grants. Grants ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 are awarded to organizations working to tackle an environmental concern in their community regarding Litter Prevention, Recycling, Cigarette Litter Prevention, or Com-

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munity Beautification. Since 2011, Keep Virginia Beautiful has provided \$254,500 for 320 different environmental programs and projects across the Commonwealth.

Legal yes, but ...

Beginning July 1st, possession of marijuana for recreational use

became legal in Virginia - but users cannot purchase it anywhere. They have to grow their own - and only 4 plants per household. The problem says Debbie Custer with The Hemp Mill in Vinton - you can't buy seeds anywhere legally at this point in Virginia. "You can order them online, but it is illegal. People are doing it. The opportunity to be

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8/13 Queen Tribute: Absolute Queen

8/20 The Marshall Tucker Band

9/9 Blackberry Smoke

9/10 Tom Petty Tribute: The Wildflowers



8/28 The Roanoke Wing Fest

9/16 Tesla

9/18 Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

10/8 Pink Floyd Tribute: Us and Floyd

10/15 38 Special



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able to purchase plants and seeds throughout the state of Virginia would be a very nice thing.” If you do grow marijuana adds Custer, your neighbors must not be able to see those plants from their yard. As of now no retail cannabis outlets will open in Virginia until 2024; some want to shorten that timeline by tweaking the General Assembly legislation that passed in 2020.

Relief help for MiLB?

Many businesses were helped with relief funds during the pandemic but at least one industry perhaps was overlooked. Democratic U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine along with representatives from other states have introduced bipartisan bill to create a 550-million-dollar federal grant program for minor league baseball teams - which were forced to cancel their 2020 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virginia has nine minor league franchises, including the Salem Red Sox, Pulaski River Turtles (nee Yankees) and Lynchburg Hillcats. Mark Warner compares it to other Covid relief funds: “it’s similar to the shuttered venues program, allowing each [minor league] team to get up to 45 percent of their revenues, to frankly bridge them through until [2022]. In a statement Senator Kaine seconded the notion, stating that, “baseball is not only America’s favorite pastime, bringing friends and families together; it’s also a critical economic engine for the

Commonwealth.” Kaine noted that many of these teams are in smaller communities and are not owned by wealthy Major League teams. (The Salem Red Sox are an outlier, part of the Fenway Sports Group that also operates the parent Boston Red Sox.) The Salem Sox 2021 season was shortened by a month due to pandemic precautions.

Bullish on post-Covid travel

With vaccinations rates increasing and coronavirus cases in the region plummeting, regional tourism officials are hoping that will lead to a visitor boom and the return of business travelers. In late June at Hotel Roanoke, Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge President Landon Howard told members of the organization’s Board of Directors leisure travel has generated recent tourism revenue, while they wait for business travel to the region for conferences and other events to regain momentum. “We see a Spring bloom turning into a Summer boom. I love that line.” Hotel Roanoke General Manager Brian Wells told the Board says they have invested close to \$500,000 in new technology, which allows the hotel to host groups that want to hold in-person and virtual hybrid meetings at the same time.

Props for Mack Trucks marketing

The launch campaign for Mack Trucks’ all-new Mack MD Series of

medium-duty trucks has won a 2020 platinum MarCom Award, the highest award level in the product launch category, from the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals (AMCP). Mack partnered with their agency, The Office of Experience (OX), to create the campaign centered on small business owners who were looking to grow their businesses. “We’re proud of the excellent collaboration between our team and OX to develop a comprehensive campaign focused on how the all-new Mack MD Series would help small businesses address their unique business needs and support their growth plans,” said John Walsh, Mack Trucks vice president of marketing. The multimedia campaign included print ads, graphics, digital ads, signage for the Work Truck Show, a video, social media posts and wraps for trucks. The campaign generated 23.6 million impressions. The Mack MD Series (2 models) went into full production in September 2020 and is assembled at the Mack Roanoke Valley Operations (RVO) facility in western Roanoke County.

COVID takes a bite out of downtown lunch business

One piece of fallout from the height of the COVID shutdown in 2020 - downtown Roanoke employees sent home to work virtually. Roanoke City Councilman Joe Cobb spoke about that at a Council meeting in

July: “a lot of people are not working downtown because they’re working remotely – and they’re likely not to return to onsite work. That’s really had a profound impact on lunch business. Weekend business has been really strong, but lunch business has been way down.” Cobb also said then he was working with Downtown Roanoke Inc. on a workforce study on just how the pandemic has impacted downtown eateries that rely on that lunchtime traffic. At least one eatery that has closed recently pointed to less workers downtown, and companies not renewing their office space.

Solar takes a LEAP forward

LEAP - the Local Energy Alliance Program - has launched a new initiative called Solarize Virginia in Roanoke, Salem and Blacksburg. Katie VanLangen is the Program Manager: “It reduces the cost and complexity of going solar by connecting participants with vetted installers, discounted pricing and [other] resources. Through August 30 local residents can also sign up for a free “solar satellite assessment,” a view of their home from outer space to make sure they are a good candidate for solar panel installation. VanLangen says prices are coming down due to economies of scale. The actual return on investment may take a decade or more says VanLangen, however, “folks are saving over a hundred dollars a month sometimes on their electric bill.

People will see it's not only cost savings – but also saving the environment.”

Funds for high-tech startups

Governor Northam's office has announced that 34 small technology-focused businesses in Virginia will split \$3.4 million from the Commonwealth Commercialization Fund. Those grants will be used to help commercialize research in an array of sectors. BEAM Diagnostics in Roanoke (A Fralin Biomedical Research Institute spin-off) and Li Industries in Blacksburg have both received \$100,000 grants.

More money for Broadband

Governor Ralph Northam announced plans last month to allocate \$700 million in federal funds to create broadband internet access to all areas of Virginia that do not now have it — mainly rural areas of the state. The money would come from American Rescue Plan funds heading to Virginia. Northam made the announcement in southwest Virginia, where broadband access is often limited. “Whether it be for virtual learning or telehealth or business opportunities, or just quality of life it is very, very important that we have universal broadband in Virginia,”

said Northam, speaking at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon. The goal is statewide broadband access by 2024. The General Assembly was expected to approve the funding at a special session early this month. Meanwhile the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority said it would seek state funding from a \$49 million pool of money set aside for broadband grants, after first convening a meeting last month of potential “last mile” internet providers and other potential investors.

Using ARPA to boost the region

50 million dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act funds earmarked for Virginia could be headed towards boosting tourism in the Commonwealth, if the General Assembly gives the go-ahead at a special session this month. If approved the Virginia Tourism Corporation will set up a recovery program and disperse much of that \$50 million to 114 destination marketing programs. Catherine Fox is the Vice President of Public Affairs and Destination Development for Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge: “it's really about marketing ... not just through us but also marketing the region [and] statewide, which

is going to put us in a more competitive situation as we look at other states doing something similar.” Some of money will be used for digital marketing campaigns to regional cities like Charlotte.

Those funds would also allow the VTC to further market Virginia's Blue Ridge as the ideal weekend getaway - or for corporate meetings. Weekend visitation has picked up nicely, but Fox says business traffic post-pandemic may not be back in full force until next year. “Right now, hybrid is still an option; it's still inviting to bring people here to be in person [but] also offer the hybrid [virtual] piece.” During that same announcement Governor Northam also proposed a \$250 million investment in the Rebuild VA economic recovery fund and another \$53 million for the Industrial Revitalization Fund and the Virginia Main Street program.

Local companies join VALET program

The Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) has announced the acceptance of 12 companies into its two-year Virginia Leaders in Export Trade (VALET) program. The VALET program assists companies in the Commonwealth that are committed to

international exporting as a growth strategy. To date, 378 Virginia companies have been accepted to participate in the VALET program. Among the 12 newest in the program are several from this region: Butler Parachute Systems, Inc. (City of Roanoke), ESS Technologies, Inc. and MELD Manufacturing Corporation (both Montgomery County)

CNBC names Virginia the best state in the country to do business in

Virginia is America's top state for business in 2021, according to a ranking released by CNBC. The ranking states, “Virginia's greatest strength has been its ability to nurture and retain talent.” Governor Northam reacted to the ranking when it was announced last month: “it is a testament to Virginia's workers, our education system, our commitment to diversity and our strong business climate. And we're continuing to invest in people.” CNBC adds that, “Virginia public schools perform well in terms of test scores, and a world-class higher education system is reliably funded.” Virginia is the first state to post back-to-back victories in the cable TV business channel's annual ranking.

Compiled by
Gene Marrano

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Submitted

Tackling food insecurity from the other side of the problem now

By Shawn Nowlin

It's "all about making a difference in the community," says new FSWVA Chief Strategy Officer, Allison McGee.

One of the best compliments that a company can give an employee is to remind them that they are a great addition to the team. Recently, Feeding Southwest Virginia (FSWVA) hired its new Chief Strategy Officer, Allison McGee. In her official capacity, McGee will be accountable for facilitating, formulating and communicating FSWVA's future goals and strategic initiatives. She is also very familiar with the Salem-based food bank.

McGee's position came about when FSWVA transitioned into diverse strategies to focus on food and health, direct service to individuals and selling low-cost better food options to SNAP recipients and customers. Feeding Southwest Virginia President and CEO Pamela Irvine is responsible for the

overall function of FSWVA, including financial, physical and regulatory well-being. Said Irvine on McGee's hiring, "We are glad to have Allison on board as our Chief Program and Strategy Officer. At Kroger Mid-Atlantic she was a FSWVA board member, a corporate funding partner and a good friend to multiple food banks."

McGee's upbringing significantly shaped the way that she sees the world today. Born and raised in Chesterfield County just outside of Richmond, she graduated from Virginia Tech. McGee says that her passion for giving back to the less fortunate began when she was a mentor in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. Her career began with Cox Communications as a production manager for seven years.

From there, she worked at Kroger, holding a variety of management positions over 14 years, including Corporate Affairs Manager. She was responsible for media, community and government relations for the Mid-Atlantic Division, covering 112 retail stores in five states. By supporting Kroger's Zero Hunger/Zero Waste Initiative, McGee was able to help distribute over \$1 million annually to support hunger relief efforts in the Mid-Atlantic Division. Additionally, McGee's community relations work afforded her the opportunity to collaborate with dozens of partners, including Feeding America food banks.

"Thanks to the work with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, I had the opportunity to mentor an elementary school child for years who had many issues, including food insecurity. The

reality hit me when I brought lunch to her one day and she ate everything in a matter of seconds," McGee said. "She shared that it was the first bite of food she had eaten since lunchtime the day before. My heart instantly broke for her, and the realization hit that hunger is a real issue right here in our community. Nobody should have to worry about where their next meal is coming from, especially a child."

Far too many families, unfortunately, still face food insecurity today. The Roanoke Valley is part of Feeding Southwest Virginia's 26-county, nine-city service region. In addition to being a \$34 million food distribution business on a nonprofit budget, Feeding Southwest Virginia is also a first responder in any disaster. "There are plenty of volunteer opportunities available. Individuals or teams can help at the food bank with

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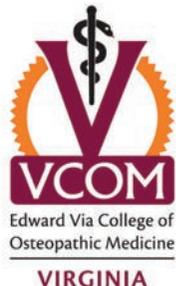


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Shawn Nowlin is an award-winning writer, photographer and content creator. In addition to the Roanoke Tribune, his byline has also appeared in ColorsVA Magazine and

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We always take into account how you blend a professional life with mothering. — Page 19

product sorting and senior box kitting, or in the community with children’s programs and our Mobile Marketplace program,” McGee said.

Added Irvine, “It takes a community to feed a community. We have many opportunities for people to get involved in the fight against hunger either at our Salem Distribution Center, Abingdon Distribution Center or our Community Solutions Center [on Melrose Avenue] in Roanoke. We are always grateful to those individuals and groups that help us on a regular basis. We could not feed as many people without their help.”

Being able to make a difference in the community is what McGee enjoys most about her new position. Some of her favorite professional accomplishments are related to the work that she has led over the years. It warms McGee’s heart every time someone tells her how Feeding Southwest Virginia positively impacted their lives. “We are now focusing on improving the quality of health through healthcare partnerships. Three new programs were developed over the last year to encourage healthy food options, especially to those areas of FSWVA [coverage] that lack adequate access to fresh food and grocery items. We offer a Food Farmacy program in Roanoke City and our Client Choice Healthy Pantry Program.” McGee said. “We are also partnering with Ballad Health to connect food insecure



Submitted

individuals with other services beyond food pantries. ”

McGee’s frequent interactions with the community and her colleagues are constant reminders that she made the right career choice. “I’m truly honored to be a part of the Feeding Southwest Virginia team – a passionate group that gives selflessly every day to serve our communities,” she said. 



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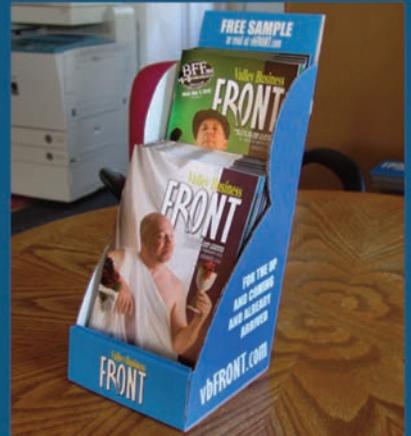
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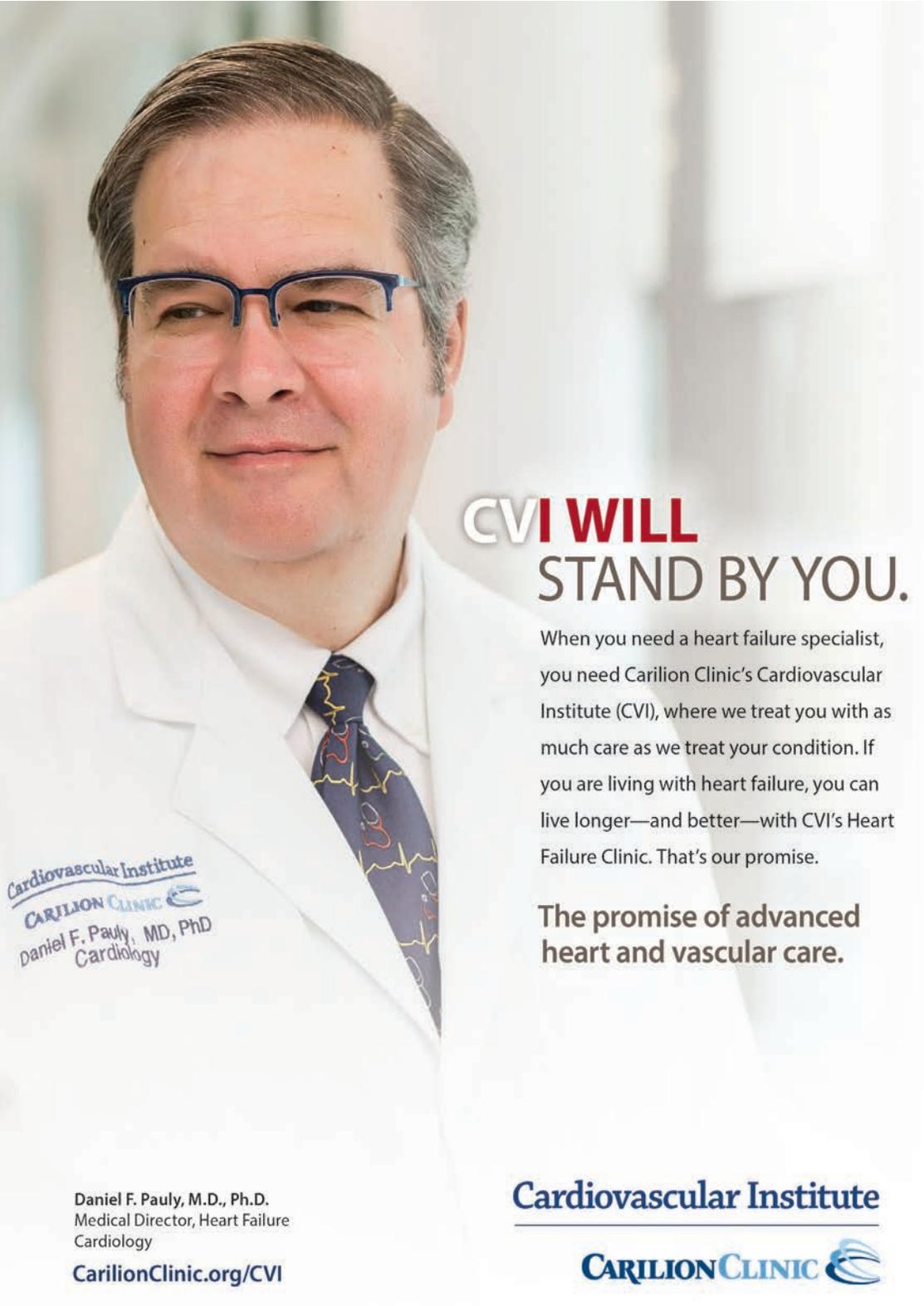
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