

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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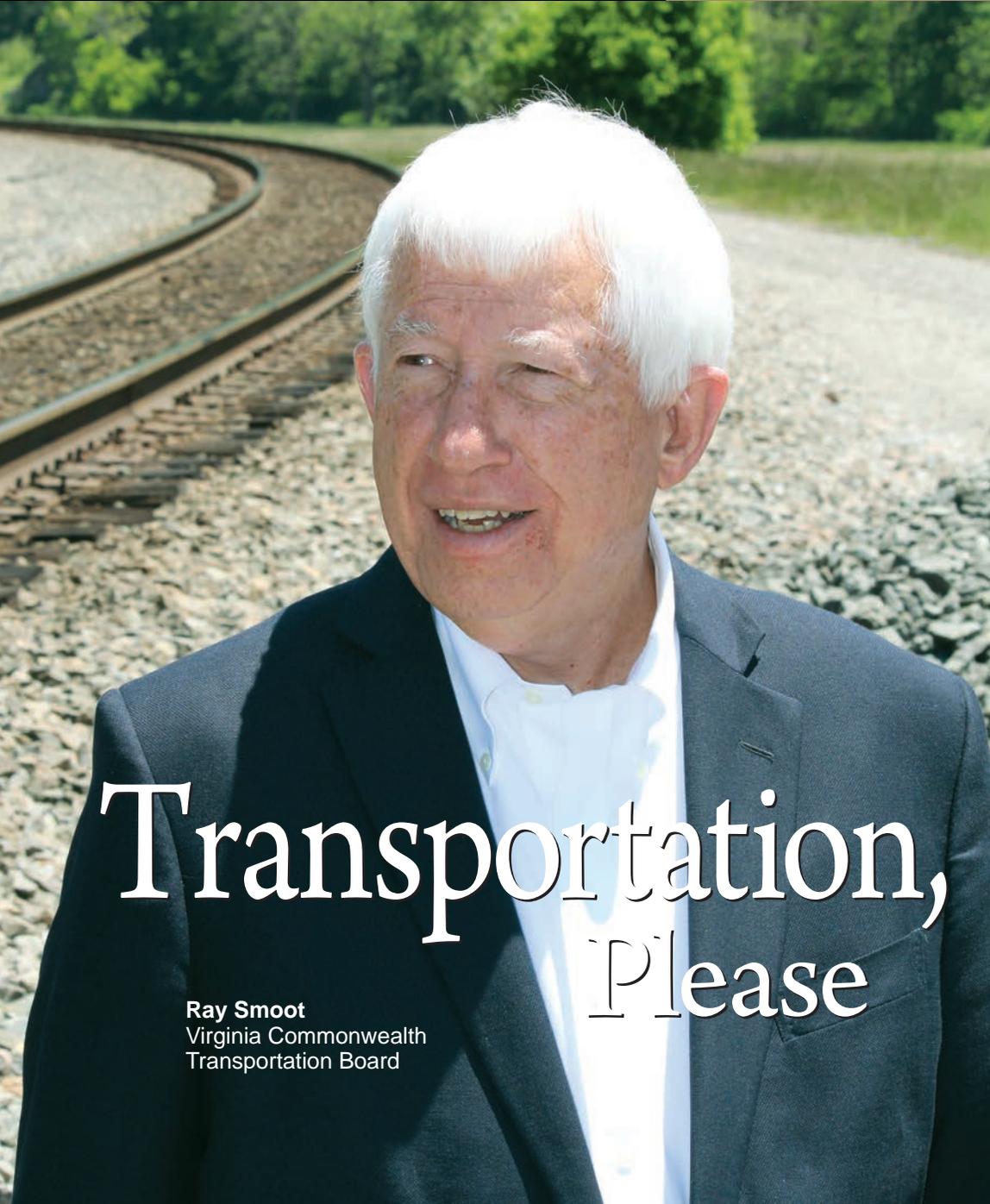
New River Valley  
Passenger Rail

Roanoke-Blacksburg  
Regional Airport

VDOT and I-81

Ernie Zulia's  
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Ray Smoot  
Virginia Commonwealth  
Transportation Board



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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

You could call this month's issue "Planes, Trains, Automobiles," – remember the Steve Martin-John Candy movie? So much of the future potential for this region's growth is intertwined with fixing transportation needs – upgrading an outdated Interstate 81, increased and expanded passenger rail service, and more/cheaper flights to and from Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. If it's too much of a hassle to get here or too expensive to do it, business prospects can always look elsewhere in this very competitive economic development world we live in. Improving transportation assets also draws the New River and Roanoke Valleys closer together, making commutes less arduous – expanding the talent pool as it were. Read our reports on – yes, Planes, Trains and Automobiles.

We are also pleased to welcome back our Small Business Took Kit column with a new contributor, Shannon Dominguez, the director of development for the Advancement Foundation and The Gauntlet administrator. We appreciate the insight from all of our columnists and hope readers do as well. With Governor Northam now lifting or about to lift all COVID-19 safety restrictions (with CDC guidance) it appears that in June we will be closer to "normal" than we have since March 2020. Some of the details still seem fuzzy and what authority business owners will still have to mandate mask wearing for example may not be clear – but we are in a better place no doubt. Happy reading.



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor



**Yhome Murphy**  
Traumatic Injury



from bad fall to  
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*"I live independently so staying strong and healthy is important to me. After I had a fall requiring surgery, LifeWorks Rehab gave me the care I needed to get back home fully recovered." – Yhome Murphy*



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COVER STORY PAGE 8

## All Aboard!

By Jennifer Poff Cooper



“That department... is ranked No. 8 in the country. — Page 34

Cover photography of Ray Smoot by Tom Field.



**A**s a child, I anxiously awaited summer's arrival. No homework, endless amounts of time at my friends' homes and no bedtime – what more could I wish for? But now as a mom to two growing boys, I know that summertime means the potential for summer slide and learning loss – especially after this past year.

Five organizations in our area formally partnered together to create the Youth Development Collaborative to address issues like summer slide, and so much more. This socially innovative approach allows the organizations to leverage their own individual strengths, while working together to become stronger. By investing in these organizations and more, Cox is building a better, brighter future for Roanoke.

**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS** and **WEST END CENTER** act as the two youth development hubs covering the eastern and western parts of the city. Both centers provide afterschool and summer activities for students to promote holistic development including character building, what it means to be good citizen, and tutoring. Specific programs include reading instruction, STEM activities, leadership training, wellness education, and meals and snacks.

**JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT** empowers young people to own their economic success. Teens focus on improving soft skills like interview techniques and first impressions. The youngest participants learn about their roles as citizens, consumers, and workers.

**FAMILY SERVICES OF THE ROANOKE VALLEY** transforms lives by healing trauma and restoring hope for families and individuals of all ages through mental health counseling, and life skills education. Their programming utilizes Social-Emotional Learning curricula that develops the child's whole-self.

**APPLE RIDGE FARM** grows the wellbeing of children and families through cultural and outdoor experiences. Members participate in engaging summer camp activities where they learn about environmental sustainability, urban agriculture and leadership skills.



*Margaret-Hunter Wade is director of public relations for Cox Virginia. In this role, she leads the state's media relations strategy and community engagement efforts.*

*Last year, Cox donated more than \$4.6 million dollars to local communities in Virginia. Learn more about Cox's efforts in the community at [CoxCharitiesVA.org](http://CoxCharitiesVA.org).*

# FRONT

P.O. Box 1041  
Salem, VA 24153  
(540) 389-9945  
www.vbFRONT.com

## Staff

Publisher / Creative Director	Tom Field tfield@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945
Editor	Gene Marrano news@vbFRONT.com
Advertising	Dan Dowdy (540) 797-7943 ddowdy@vbFRONT.com  ads@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945
Graphic Design	Nicholas Vaassen nvaassen@berryfield.com
Office Administration	Emily Field info@vbFRONT.com
Production	Berryfield, Inc. PO Box 1041 Salem, VA 24153 (540) 389-9945

## Departmental Contacts

Advertising	ads@vbFRONT.com
Subscriptions	info@vbFRONT.com
News / Releases	news@vbFRONT.com
Admin / Ops	info@vbFRONT.com

**(540) 389-9945**  
**vbFRONT.com**  
**morefront.blogspot.com**

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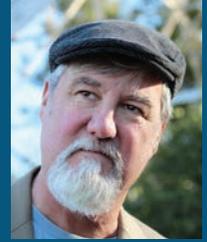
Valarie Angle



Beth Bell



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Gene Marrano



Michael Shelton

## 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**



**Shannon Dominguez**



**Frazier Hughes**



**Zack Jackson**



**Mike Leigh**



**Christine Liana**



**Dan Smith**



**Nicholas Vaassen**

“”

There is no 'do-over'  
with Uncle Sam. — Page 17



**Shon Aguero**  
Freedom First Credit Union /  
finance – credit unions



**Lisa Clause**  
Richfield Living /  
senior development



**Mike Dame**  
Carillon Clinic / healthcare



**Micah Fraim**  
Fraim & Cawley CPAs /  
finance - accounting



**Jeff Merritt**  
Cox Communications /  
technology



**Mary Ann L. Miller**  
Bank of Boletourt /  
finance – banking

“”

Problems  
usually start  
small...

— Page 16

Biographies and  
contact information  
on each contributor  
are provided on Page 56.

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Twitter: [@vbfront](https://twitter.com/vbfront)  
Blog: [morefront.blogspot.com](http://morefront.blogspot.com)



**Michael Waldvogel**  
Waldvogel Commercial Properties /  
commercial real estate

“”

We need to do  
something. — Page 26



# All Aboard!

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

**It's spent a lengthy time chugging along, but passenger rail service for the New River Valley is on the fast track now.**

Governor Ralph Northam announced at a May 5 press conference in Christiansburg that the Commonwealth has reached an agreement with Norfolk Southern Railway to extend passenger rail service to the New River Valley for the first time since 1979. Known as the Western Rail Initiative,

this agreement will increase intercity passenger rail service from Roanoke to the Northeast Corridor, according to a press release from the Governor's office.

"It's a great day for rail in the Commonwealth," Northam said. "Many people have been



part of this project.” The press conference included a myriad of government officials and volunteers who have been involved with the effort.

Virginia’s Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine said that this has been “a dream for 22 years.” In 2009, it picked up steam when Amtrak conducted ridership studies and identified the route between Lynchburg and Washington, D.C., as the most underserved. A \$17.5 million, three-year pilot plan was launched for the first Northeast Regional route.

Passenger rail arrived in Roanoke in October 2017. Ridership has exceeded expectations; estimates were that the station would see 40,000 riders a year and Roanoke boasted 56,000 in the first 12 months. It showed the most growth of any station in the state



# CLIMBED ABOARD LONG AGO



Tom Field

Ray Smoot

Ray Smoot is a transportation champ. For our region, our progress, our sustainability. He's currently a member of the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board (Salem District) and part of the advocacy group NRV Passenger Rail. Most folks know him from his position as CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation, now retired; but his connections extend to so many major players contributing to our economy, stepping off the platform from Virginia

Tech to board member, chair, and director roles with Carilion Clinic, RGC Resources. VCOM (Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine), Virginia Retirement System, and Union Bankshares. Smoot has been recognized by organizations as diverse as the Association of University Research Parks, Junior Achievement, Business Hall of Fame, and Multiple Sclerosis Society.

He's also the current Chair of the GO Virginia Regional Council covering the Roanoke, New River Valley, and Lynchburg markets.

Our FRONTcover shot was taken on the very rail the new passenger train service will likely use to establish the new "station" in Christiansburg (Route 603 crossing at North Fork and Den Hill Roads). It's not a Norfolk-Southern main line (that many people expected), but a route that runs through a most scenic Ellett Valley (roughly running between the Catawba / Ironto area to the north side of Christiansburg, south side of Blacksburg).

in 2019, and is consistently one of Amtrak's most profitable, said Valentine.

The new Norfolk Southern agreement includes both an increase of existing service and expansion of service. A second train is planned between Roanoke and D.C. in 2022, with both lines extending to the New River Valley in 2025.

Northam said the New River Valley line is expected to serve 80,000 new riders in the first year, and will pump \$2 billion annually into the region's economy.

James Squires, CEO of Norfolk Southern, said at the press conference that the railroad's responsibility to deliver freight drives the regional and national economy, and mixing freight and passenger trains is "complex business." The new deal includes \$257.2 million of state money earmarked for an array of infrastructure improvements and the acquisition of right-of-way and track.

Back on March 26 of this year Governor Northam signed legislation sponsored by patrons Delegate Chris Hurst (D-

“ ”

The return of passenger rail to the New River Valley, which will also provide an additional train each day through Roanoke, is a plus for our region in affording more transportation options and connectivity with the DC region and Northeast Corridor.

— Ray Smoot

"Frankly," Smoot says, "it's what Norfolk Southern was willing to give."

Smoot recalls railroad history in the area, and you can tell this long-time-coming project has special significance to him. The New River Valley hasn't had passenger rail service for forty years, and once this connection is established, people can take the train for Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service, which includes Washington DC, Northern Virginia, Charlottesville, Lynchburg, and Roanoke. All the way to New England, ultimately.

There are a lot of remaining details coming down the track, such as the specific location of the platform station and the train arrival/departure schedules; but the recent announcements make it clear: it's coming. The State and the Railroad have hammered the virtual spike.

Longtime professional associate Larry Hincker pointed out how scenic this part of the train ride will be. That—it is. Even folks driving the twisting back roads between Roanoke and Virginia Tech have known that—ever since some figured out the secret back way to escape Hokie football traffic.

— Tom Field



Tom Field

Ray Smoot and Larry Hincker



Courtesy photo

Chris Hurst, Delegate

12) and State Senator John Edwards (D-21), to establish the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Authority. The Authority will be governed by a board consisting of members of each participating locality and institution of higher education. "It is a tool for cost sharing and economic development," said Northam.

In an interview then Hurst elaborated. The station and platform are local obligations, and the General Assembly had to create a regional authority where all localities could put in funds to build the platform and station in Montgomery County. "It needed enabling legislation," said Hurst.

Mike Barber,  
Christiansburg Mayor

Courtesy photo



According to Christiansburg Mayor Mike Barber, the NRV Metropolitan Planning Organization and the New River Valley Regional Commission initially identified 27 sites, nine of which were in Christiansburg. After evaluation, Christiansburg was recommended because of its central location in the New River Valley. Noted Barber, it is "an equidistant drive" from Floyd, Giles, Pulaski, and other outer reaches of the area and has a good road system.

At the May 5 press conference, Barber said, "The Town of Christiansburg is proud to have been selected as the site of the future passenger rail station. We believe this will meet many of the town's current goals and priorities in relation to transportation, connectivity, economic development, and promotion of regional tourism, not only in Christiansburg but in the entire New River Valley." The Commonwealth plans to partner with the members

of the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Authority to fund the construction of a station building, parking, and roadway access for the station.

Although possible sites included several favorite and popular locations, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation indicated that the New River Valley station will be targeted for the old Virginian Line and not on the Norfolk Southern Main line. With the most recent announcement, the probable platform/station site will be situated between New River Valley Mall and the Corning plant—a high traffic and popular interchange close to the Blacksburg line.

Some of the state funding now allocated for the NRV train project includes acquisition of right of ways on the Virginian Line from Norfolk Southern. Interference at the Aquatic Center site with the NS freight line and some of the extensive grading expected there was another drawback. Regardless of where it is built, at the early May press conference Hurst said, “we are literally putting the New River Valley on the map today.”

Currently, Roanoke serves as the southernmost terminus for the Northeast Regional, which provides passenger rail along the nation's Mid-Atlantic corridor north to Boston. Passenger service can be logically and efficiently extended from Roanoke to the New River Valley, according to the website for advocate group NRV Passenger Rail. The

“ ”

We believe this [passenger rail station] will meet many of the town's current goals and priorities.

— Mike Barber





Larry Hincker



The New River Valley has ample demographics, including more than 40,000 students at Virginia Tech and Radford University, to support passenger rail usage.

broad-based community initiative was formed in 2015 to gain funding for extending Amtrak's Northeast Regional Service to Christiansburg.

Spokesman Larry Hincker said that there is a "natural linkage" to the northeast, with traffic and commerce flowing that way from here, as well as the large percentage of out of state students, especially at Virginia Tech, coming from the northeast.

The New River Valley, with more than 180,000 residents, is the state's fastest growing region west of Richmond. NRV Passenger Rail says the New River Valley has ample demographics, including more than 40,000 students at Virginia Tech and Radford University, to support passenger rail usage.

#### **What specifically will passenger rail do for the New River Valley?**

Hurst said that history has shown access to rail decides "boom or bust, and passenger rail leads to boom." It would expand commerce and investments in the area he said, providing access to national and global market opportunities.

Senator John Edwards pointed out that the connection between the Roanoke and New River Valleys and northern Virginia, especially between Virginia Tech and its Innovation Campus in Arlington, would become "tighter and tighter."

A New River Valley Regional Commission study revealed the area could generate demand for 40,000 trips a year. A market survey estimates as much as a 5% increase in tourism travel. Every 10,000 visitors could generate about \$1.9 million annually.

Flexible transportation options attract tomorrow's highly skilled workforce, particularly millennials, who are increasingly moving to urban areas without cars and who demand mass transit, says NRV Passenger Rail's website.

Passenger rail is a safe, efficient, and eco-friendly mode of travel that reduces automobile traffic. "It will build capacity for people to move here, live here, work here," said Hurst.

Bringing the Roanoke and New River Valleys together is an important component. By growing a metro region there is the opportunity to make the Roanoke and New River Valleys "a force to be reckoned with," Hurst said. In Richmond, he explained, growing population centers get the attention.

Hurst added that "we desperately need to be thinking about alternatives to passenger vehicles." VDOT is spending \$1-2 billion on I-81 construction projects just to meet current demand. Adds Governor Northam, "we can't pave our way out of congestion."

Hincker noted that Virginia is being lauded for its progressive commitment to passenger rail. Bringing it to the New River Valley is one piece of larger initiatives that includes another bridge in northern Virginia dedicated for passenger trains only. That could increase the number of trains but is about a decade away.

At the May 5 press conference, Northam touted Virginia's financial pledge to make the additional rail service possible. It will create a vital connection between southwest Virginia and other parts of the Commonwealth he noted. "We're not finished," said Northam. "We want to take it all the way to Bristol."

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*Equal time: Delegate Chris Hurst (D-New River Valley) has a Republican challenger in November, who also weighs in on the NRV passenger train agreement:*

"The recent agreement with Norfolk Southern Railway to expand passenger service into the New River Valley is a win for our region and our community. Having personally worked alongside Executive Director Kevin Byrd on the NRVRC, I know firsthand the time and effort that he and his team put into drafting this legislation to establish passenger rail service in our area. It was NRVRC's work, complemented and supported by all the local governments and the New River Valley Passenger Rail Advocacy Group, that made this passenger service a reality. The passenger rail service will create new opportunities for us, bolster our economy, and make travel more accessible for our citizens."

~ Jason Ballard, candidate for the House of Delegates in the 12th District 

“ ”

[Passenger rail] will build capacity for people to move here, live here, work here.

— Chris Hurst

Jason Ballard, 12th District candidate

Submitted





# BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

**Executive Summary:**  
*Look at how that person is being managed as a root cause in many cases*

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

## “Employee” issues

Recently a friend of mine was fired from her job. There was no warning. There was no coaching from her manager beforehand. When she asked why she was being fired, the reason was obscure and non-specific.

I know from personal experience that she is an intelligent and hard-working professional, and she enjoyed this job at the start. But the culture soon became toxic and the relationship she had with her boss became sour. How does this happen?

Usually, it’s a management problem.

We have all seen situations when employees are fired. In some cases, there is clear cause due to rules violations or criminal behavior. In most cases, however, there is some type of performance or behavior issue and the root cause can be obscure.

In these situations, management usually does two things wrong. First, when problems first appear, there is little to no constructive coaching and feedback given. Problems usually start small and gradually fester and grow. Maybe negative discipline is handed out, but that’s not the same as providing coaching and feedback. The downward spiral begins.

Second, management often will quickly begin to judge the employee and situation. “The employee has a motivation problem.” “The employee doesn’t care and has a bad attitude.” It’s so much easier to point a finger at someone else than to objectively consider if the blame should be on management. Few leaders will take responsibility when an employee is fired.

Was the employee’s behavior a problem from the start? Then what happened in the selection process? Sounds like a bad fit.

Did the employee start out ok, then decline? What would cause a motivated and positive employee to become disengaged? If management doesn’t know the reason or didn’t ask the employee, then that’s a leadership problem again.

I once witnessed an employee ask her manager if she could change jobs because of some conflict in her current work area. The leader responded, “I’m paying you to do your current job, so go back and do it.” You can imagine how this impacted the employee’s engagement. Was that an employee problem or a management problem?

Whenever an organization decides to fire an employee, the leadership team should objectively look at culture, training, hiring, and management processes and ask, “How and why did this happen?” Firing an employee is an expensive and uncomfortable experience for all involved. When an organization examines the causes instead of defaulting to blaming the employee, then engagement, retention and performance will improve. 

## Asset management has become more complicated

Historically, asset management has been a stockbroker's realm. Focused exclusively on asset allocation, the broker would look for good investments. Then he/she would call you for approval to execute a transaction. You'd then be the proud owner of a new security.

If you've been paying attention recently, you've probably noticed this type of relationship is becoming obsolete. Sure, there are still some commissioned brokers handling client investments this way, but they're a dying breed.

Technology has given Joe Public a sense of empowerment. Have you heard of Robinhood? (the GameStop phenomena) This is just one of many companies that have come to the forefront offering apps for commission-free stock and ETF trades.

It's convenient and liberating to feel like you're the boss of your money. Even better when it seems you don't have to pay for it. Just pick up your phone to purchase the latest stock craze as you're driving the down the road. No middleman to compensate. What many don't realize is this investing approach can create unexpected problems. Ones you do pay for in the long-term.

Investing isn't only about picking stocks or mutual funds. There are many different types of investments. There are also varying account forms for buying and selling investments. Just like a bank CD isn't the only way to get guaranteed fixed interest rates, building wealth comes with many options. Understanding how different choices may affect how much money you keep is important.

### A new frontier

While asset allocation was yesterday's focus, today we need to also consider tax allocation, account allocation, fixed asset allocation, and variable asset allocation. The tax code is over 70,000 pages. There are over 2,800 stocks on the NYSE; over 8,000 mutual funds; over 7,600 Exchange Traded Funds. There are more than 4,500 FDIC-insured commercial banks in the US. With all this choice, smart decisions get more complicated.

Whether your goal is to get higher interest rates at a bank, or to determine if it's appropriate to sell your investments inside of your account, a qualified financial consultant can help. What's most important is that you find someone who can look at all aspects of your wealth. Neglect one area and you may find hard-earned money gone. There is no "do-over" with Uncle Sam, or bad investment decisions. Tread carefully. 



## FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

**Executive Summary:**  
*Technology has given Joe Public a sense of empowerment.*

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



Photos courtesy of VDOT

I81 Exit137-142

# Improving travel one mile at a time

By Christine Liana

**Motorists Can Expect to See Improvements from Botetourt County to the New River Valley (eventually) with VDOT's I-81 Corridor Improvement Program; travel around Tanglewood Mall will get easier as well.**

Commuters can soon expect to benefit from long-awaited improvements on I-81 in Roanoke County and Salem starting later this year. Work is already in process. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) held a design public hearing on February 9 for their widening project of 5.1 miles on Interstate 81 between exits 137 and 141, from two lanes to three lanes in both directions.

Back in December 2018, the Commonwealth Transportation Board approved this project, which is part of the I-81 Corridor

Improvement Program. Virginia's General Assembly funded the \$2 billion package of targeted improvements. VDOT chose Archer Western/Dewberry Engineers as the design-builder for the project, which is expected to begin next year, in spring 2022, and is scheduled for completion by year-end 2025.

## From Botetourt County to Christiansburg

VDOT's long-range improvement plans from Botetourt County to Christiansburg include:



Route 419 Construction

- Flashing and static chevron signs to warn motorists of “g” curves.
- Installation of additional traffic cameras.
- Completed supplementing the existing Safety Service Patrol with additional operators, vehicles, hours, and routes.
- Completion of the Towing and Recovery Incentive Program (TRIP) and the installation of additional digital message signs.

In December 2021, construction bids will be advertised to lengthen and improve the entrance and exit ramp extensions to/from the Troutville Safety Rest Area. The project will also increase available truck parking spaces in the rest area.

In addition to widening from two lanes to three lanes in both directions between exit 137 and exit 141, VDOT also plans to widen I-81 from exit 143 to 150 from two lanes to three lanes in both directions, which is now in the early design phase.

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I-81 Exit 137-142

Other improvements scheduled to begin in 2023 include:

- Extending the northbound acceleration lane at exit 162.
- Widening the northbound lanes from two lanes to three lanes from mile marker 116 to exit 128 in the New River Valley towards the work being done in the Roanoke Valley.

- Widening the northbound lanes from two lanes to three lanes from exit 128 to exit 137 in the Roanoke Valley.

Commuters between the Roanoke and New River Valleys should expect improved safety and reduced congestion from the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program says VDOT, with additional lanes, wider shoulders for disabled vehicles, more accessible areas for emergency vehicles, and better traffic flow.



Dave Covington

On I-81 southbound on Christiansburg Mountain, VDOT plans to widen to three lanes northbound from exits 118 to 128 and widen the shoulders. The design is expected to start in 2023, with completion in later years. As always funding is a lynchpin.

### Infrastructure and Economy

A vibrant economy often depends on reliable highway infrastructure, making it more reliable and safer for commuters and the delivery of goods via truck. "The I-81 Corridor is a key economic artery of western Virginia," says Dave Covington, I-81 Program Delivery Director. "Necessary improvements to Interstate 81 and our multi-modal transportation system, that are now a reality as a result of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program, will enhance the reliability of the interstate to ensure that people and goods

can move more freely. A reliable interstate system increases efficiency, which promotes economic productivity gains within the region."

Drivers who are familiar with the stretch of I-81 from mile markers 165-169 through Buchanan know the hazards of the "s" curves, which have had many crashes over the years. A partial solution by VDOT was applying high-friction surface treatments to reduce slick surfaces. However, it's not only the roadway that presents a challenge for drivers, but motorists who allow distractions such as their cell phones to interfere with their attention to the road, with potentially deadly consequences. Virginia's new hands-free law should help there.

### **Two VDOT projects are also taking shape in the Route 419/Electric Road corridor near Tanglewood**

A third lane along southbound Route 419/Electric Road to help alleviate heavy traffic congestion approaching the southbound Route 220 exit ramp across from Tanglewood Mall as part of the "Reimagine 419" Roanoke County economic development project is already underway.

Sidewalks and bike lanes will be added, along with crosswalks at upgraded signals to ease bike and pedestrian travel. Improvements also include combining the bus stops along southbound Route 419 into one major stop with a public bus shelter in front of Copper Croft Apartments.

This \$6.5 million project is expected to reduce congestion and provide increased safety for pedestrians and bicyclists along

Route 419 in front of Tanglewood Mall between the Route 220 Expressway ramp and Ogden Road. Work began last summer and is planned to finish later this year.

"The impact of nearly \$50 million in transportation improvements in the 419 corridor is significant and will drive future economic development opportunities," says Jill Loope, Director of Economic Development for Roanoke County. "These investments support the implementation of the 419 Town Center Plan and are literally paving the way for future commercial and residential growth."

The second project under design and development involves reconstructing the Route 419 and Route 220 Expressway interchange as a diverging diamond interchange (DDI) – there's a similar interchange at Valley View Mall and at Virginia Tech's Southgate entrance - and modifying signals along the Route 419 corridor. The intersections at Ogden Road, Elm View Road, and South Peak Boulevard will be tweaked to reduce signal phases and improve efficiency and safety along the Route 419 corridor. (Similar efforts to improve traffic flow along US 220 South towards Boones Mill and on to North Carolina are also in the works.)

A VDOT public hearing is expected to be held this summer for this \$17.5 million interchange project, with construction tentatively scheduled to begin in summer 2024.

"Leveraging state and federal resources is critical to funding infrastructure improvements in the County and we are grateful for these partnerships in implementing the County's vision," says Loope. For more information on the I-81 Improvement Program, visit: [improve81.org/default.asp](https://improve81.org/default.asp) 





FiftyCentLove Photographie

# MINDFUL BUSINESS

By Beth Bell

**Executive Summary:**  
*A shout out to Salem Parks and Rec. and the city's impact in the valley.*

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

## Salem Parks and Recreation: a grand slam for economic development

Most of us have all heard that Roanoke is the Mountain Bike Capital of the East and our greenways and blueways are all the rage to attract tourists and those looking to relocate; but can we talk about the economic impact of "Virginia's Championship City" for a moment? I received a call last week from a friend who works for a Roanoke County hotel. She asked me what was going on that weekend because all the hotels were booked up. The first place I looked was [salemchampionships.com](http://salemchampionships.com) to see who was coming to town that weekend.

When you think of your local Parks and Recreation department, you probably think of playgrounds, youth sports, community centers and community events. Your first thought is probably not about economic development and tourism. Salem Parks and Recreation has been creating their special recipe for success for 26 years.

The work of John Shaner's 26-person team (plus 300 part time) was likely taken for granted until 2020, when the world and travel came to a halt. When the first tournament of 2020 arrived in July, area restaurateurs who thought they were going to have to go out of business, called Shaner to express gratitude for what his team does to connect them to customers. Salem's sports marketing efforts generate 10-14 Million dollars per year at the Moyer Complex alone. In addition to revenues generated by thousands of hotel nights, dining at restaurants, airfare, rental cars, area grocery stores, and tax revenues.

In 2021, Salem was also able to snag a few tournaments away from much larger cities who were not open due to Covid-19 restrictions. Director of Tourism, Carey Harvey-cutter, was instrumental in landing the NCAA Division III men's volleyball tournament in Salem, which brought 12 teams to the valley and booked 1500 hotel nights.

The economic impact of Salem's sports tourism is so great to the area that they are investing \$12.4 million to renovate the Moyer Sports Complex in 2022-23. That includes adding ADA accessibility, field upgrades, new signage, covered spectator areas, a playground and pickleball courts along the Roanoke River Greenway.

It truly shows the magic that can happen when you challenge the status quo and think outside of the box. No other Parks and Recreation organization in the country does what Salem does. Sports marketing and tournaments are usually hosted by the visitors bureau (CVBs) or sports commissions, who outsource most tasks to vendors. The Salem team offers a turnkey solution is often sought after to speak to CVBs and sports commissions as an example of efficiency, profitability and success. 

## What does it take for a client to buy?

Late last year something happened in my business' sales cycle and it got me thinking. To support another organization, I placed a call to a friend of mine whom I had known for about a dozen years. In the course of the conversation about this other topic, he asked me about marketing and advertising. He wondered how we help clients and what we do. Before long, we were into an actual sales process.

I didn't call to talk with him about my company, but for his company the time was right, and the need was evident. His company was situated for a fast decision and a fresh start in the new calendar year. While I cannot recall the exact number of meetings we had, or the length of time it took this prospective client to decide to work with us, I know it went fast.

Sometimes situations like that happen, but that doesn't present the whole picture.

### Decide Not to Rush It

In consulting with companies one of the things we evaluate is how clients buy and when they buy. It's a popular topic about which many papers and books have been written. The interesting thing about this particular new client was the peculiar circumstances. On one hand you could make the case it was a two-week sales cycle, and that closed deal was brilliantly accomplished. You could also argue it took over a dozen years and that more direct and clear communication at various points over the past decade could have led to a much quicker close.

In some ways both perspectives are right.

It probably took years for this friend to realize my firm was substantial, able to help his company, and when he needed us, we were right there and prepared to help. Conversely, my December call unrelated to his marketing needs jolted a conversation he may well have recently been thinking about having.

The lesson is related to the value of mixing the long-term regimented and ongoing marketing approach with the keen eye for current and open opportunities. It fits into one of the primary pieces of advice for others in business. Keep your head down grinding while lifting your eyes looking for opportunities. 📌

“Keep your head down...  
while lifting your eyes.”



## A LITTLE INSIGHT

By Bruce C. Bryan

**Executive Summary:**  
*There is value in mixing  
long-term with current  
opportunities.*

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



# ***Airport climbing out of pandemic slump***

**By Aila Boyd**

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**The road to recovery and growth again at Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport could be a slow one.**

There's no doubt that one of the industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic has been the travel industry. The Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport wasn't immune to the impacts of the once-in-a-lifetime global health emergency.

Up until the middle of March 2020, the airport was experiencing a growth rate of 9% compared to 2019, which was its best year in 19 years. Passenger growth came to an abrupt halt in the latter part of the month when the pandemic ramped

up and stay-at-home orders went into place.

"We saw traffic fall by as much as 97%," Bradley Boettcher, director of marketing and air service development, remembers. Capacity at the height of the pandemic was cut by 40%, including a decision by American Airlines to cut its service to LaGuardia Airport in New York.

The airport, which is governed by a seven-member commission, was dealt another blow when its executive director (Tim



Bradshaw) was abruptly placed on administrative leave and then resigned late last year. A search for his successor could take until this summer and an outside firm is helping with the search for candidates.

Despite how difficult 2020 was, Boettcher stresses that the airport now has cause for celebration. Slowly but surely, passengers have started using the airport again. Currently, the number of passengers is up to 75% of 2019 figures and capacity is only down by 20% compared to 2019.

However, it will likely take another 18 months to two years for a full recovery

to occur. The timeline, he says, is largely dependent on when some of the area's largest employers lift their travel bans. To accelerate a return to normal, airport staff is actively reaching out to area chambers of commerce, the Roanoke Regional Partnership and various stakeholders throughout the community.

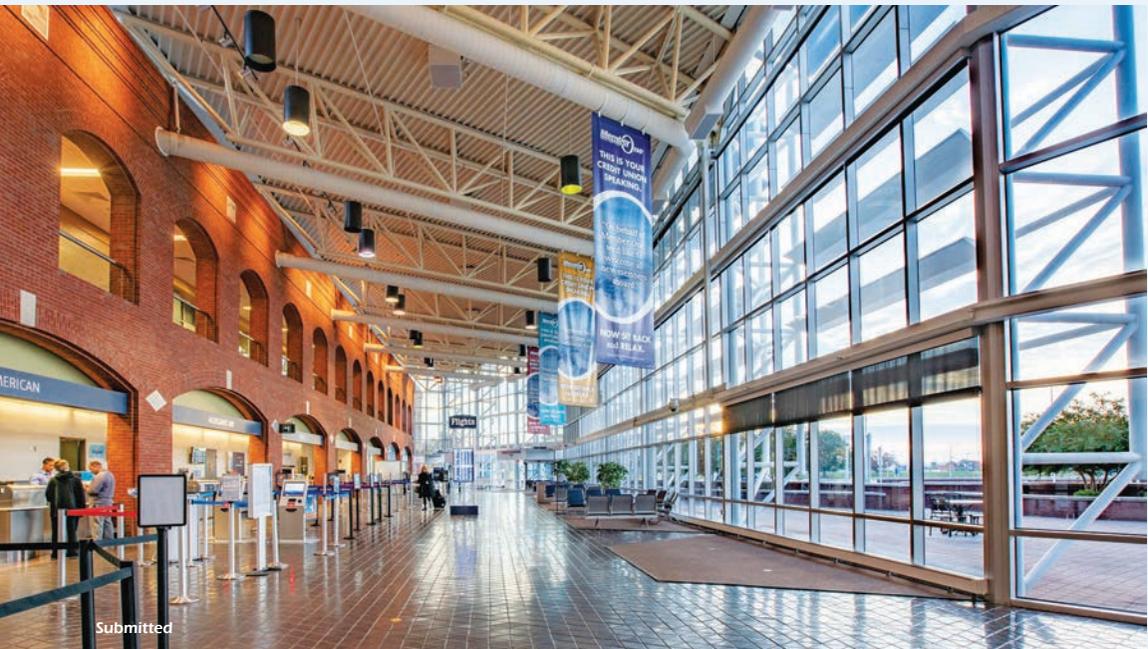
As for where it fits in the economic development location, "air service is absolutely critical, particularly for a large number of employers here in this region. It's part of our story every time we meet with a new client," says John Hull, executive director for the Regional Partnership. "[We]

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talk about destination flights. If we had direct connections to the West Coast or other parts of the country, that could be absolutely critical in moving things forward.”

Having more flights “with a minimal number of connections back to the home country,” is another critical factor when trying to attract foreign investment in the region, adds Hull. As is having fewer connections to domestic home office cities when looking to lure US-based companies to expand here. “They absolutely ask that question.”

Ray Smoot, chairman for GO Virginia Region 2, revived an old debate on a Zoom webinar

hosted by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce in May: “Roanoke is not where it needs to be and despite efforts to address this, we have not made significant progress. That’s going to require the business community [and] government to get involved to address that. Whether Roanoke and Lynchburg need to come together and have a central airport is something that others can debate, but we need to do something.”

For better or worse, the pandemic has served as a sort of reset for the airport. As it goes about building back its capacity, it is also looking to add new routes and carriers. Perhaps the best thing to come out of the



last year has been the significant drop in ticket costs at the airport. Boettcher explains that airlines have been so desperate to fill seats that they have cut their prices to the point in which they are now on par with most other airports in the region. "We've been trying to achieve lower prices ever since I got here five years ago. Now, people don't have an incentive to drive out of market to access lower airfare. The change has really helped stimulate our leisure traffic," he says.

Historically, business travel accounted for 60% of passengers. Compared to 2019, leisure travel this year has grown by 30%. He hopes that the increase in leisure travel can be used as leverage with the four commercial airlines that use the airport to advocate for lower rates once there isn't as much of a push to fill seats.

Another positive change to occur at the airport over the past year has been the addition of a new rental car facility, which moved car rentals out of the counters and to a consolidated facility. When the new facility opened last September, Boettcher says, it reduced a lot of confusion for those who are flying in from out of town.

Additionally, the replacement of the airport's 35-year-old parking lot will commence next spring.

Future expansions will be dependent upon the airport's master plan that is currently being worked on. Once a new executive director is installed, which will likely be around July 1, he or she will provide feedback on the plan before sending it to the Federal Aviation Administration.



Bradley Boettcher

As the airport continues to climb out of its pandemic slump, Boettcher says that it is now more important than ever to fly local.

"You get the air service that you use. Air service isn't aspirational. You can't say that you'll use it if it's given to you. You have to use what you have to get leverage with carriers in order to add more," Brad Boettcher he stresses. "If you want a flight to Boston out of Roanoke, flying out of Charlotte or Raleigh doesn't help you get one, but flying out of Roanoke and connecting over another city that is already being served is how you get nonstop service. We're a small airport to begin with, so every passenger that comes through here counts." 

*Note: VBF Editor Gene Marrano contributed to this story*

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## Escalate your way into your new home

If the house you are looking to purchase is in a great neighborhood, priced well, in decent condition, be prepared to enter a possible bidding war against other buyers. This can happen even without a housing shortage - like a recent listing of mine with multiple offers.

Most buyers will not spend over a certain amount for a number of reasons. Why? Here are a few; either because they are not approved by their bank to do so, do not want to have a house that is not worth what they paid for, or because they are thrifty. Some are okay overpaying no matter what, to get the house they want.

What can you do if you are okay with paying over the asking price, up against other buyers, but only want to spend so much? Have your realtor throw in an Escalation Clause to help you be the top bidder - but not go over the amount you want to spend.

This is what part of how it reads: "If seller receives one or more bona fide written offers to purchase the property prior to acceptance of this contract, then the purchase price shall be increased by five hundred dollars (\$500.00) over the highest bona fide offer, net of concessions, received by seller, not to exceed x dollar amount." It guarantees that you are not going over your limit of what you want to spend on the house and win the bid.

My clients will ask me "how do we prove they had another offer and are telling the truth?" Great question. Well, part of the clause also reads "Listing firm shall provide selling firm with a copy of the highest bona fide purchase offer." This protects you and makes sure the other agent and the seller are telling the truth.

Keep this in mind, with the shortage of homes right now I am seeing clients offer anywhere from \$15k-\$50k or more over asking price, paying their own closing costs and get this... not get the house because they were outbid! Unbelievable? No, it's happening all across the country.

There is another part to this conversation as well. Will you pay the difference in cash if the house doesn't appraise for your offer amount? Sorry to throw that curveball at you but there is another clause for that we can discuss later.

The good news is that if you want to spend more, all you have to do it just Escalate It! 

“ ”  
It's happening all across the country.

## REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

**Executive Summary:**  
*How high will you go on the offer to purchase your next home?*

*Frazier Hughes is with Keller Williams Realty. Reach him at [frazierhughes@gmail.com](mailto:frazierhughes@gmail.com)*

## The Gauntlet program pushes the envelope

The Advancement Foundation is a nonprofit whose mission is advancing people's lives. One program under The Advancement Foundation's umbrella is The Gauntlet, a 10-week business program and competition that guides local entrepreneurs through business development, marketing, customer discovery etc. It features weekly classes and tasks, as well as mentorship with local business people and leaders. I was lucky enough to direct The Gauntlet this year.

The Gauntlet often spurs entrepreneurs to consider how their past experiences play into new business endeavors. One lesson I learned during the 7th round of The Gauntlet: the importance of pushing through fear, or the "terror barrier," by surrounding yourself with the right people. Each year we push the envelope with new and exciting projects for our entrepreneurs. Directing innovative work can be scary; I have tread through self-doubt and had to fight that worry whispering in my ear more than a few times. With people around me that are demonstrating drive and success, I have been able to walk a more strategic path by working with others through encouragement and shared solutions. Teamwork truly does make the dreamwork.

Hear from some of the 7th Annual Gauntlet Participants:

Since Elder Care Solutions was already operating, I entered The Gauntlet hoping to focus on a plan for growth. While that did happen, so did so much more! When conducting market research, I realized the need to re-brand our work to better fit within our desired markets. The Gauntlet instilled the importance of being open to new directions. Plans are great, but openness and flexibility are essential if you want to be the leader that can snatch up innovative opportunities when you see them!

*-Kimberly Whiter, CEO of Elder Care Solutions*

"The Gauntlet allowed me to get a crash course in learning the numerous moving parts of business operations while networking with some outstanding local entrepreneurs. Through The Gauntlet my business partner and I were able to get connected to a phenomenal mentor who has helped turn a great idea into a great business. Excited about where we will go from here!"

*-Daniel Brooks, Clinical Sports Director at Motivate the Game*

The Gauntlet was an incredible experience. I highly encourage anyone interested in starting a business, has a new business, or needs to revamp their business to join this incredible and supportive network. The support I was given helped me solidify my business and motivate me to keep going. It was an absolute joy to participate in this program.

*-Bonnie Chavez, CEO of Building Beloved Communities* 



## SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

**By Shannon Dominguez**

**Executive Summary:**  
*Our small business column returns with a new contributor, who also helps run The Gauntlet program.*

*Shannon Dominguez is Director of Business Development for The Advancement Foundation. Contact her at [shannon@theadvancementfoundation.org](mailto:shannon@theadvancementfoundation.org)*



## TECH WHISPERER

By Zack Jackson

### Executive Summary:

*First decide which platforms work best for your specific business goals.*

*Zack Jackson is co-founder of The JPG Agency small business creative firm. Reach him at [zack@thejpgagency.com](mailto:zack@thejpgagency.com).*

## Don't be everywhere

Social media can be an exhausting landscape. Facebook. Instagram. Twitter. LinkedIn. Pinterest. Oh wait ... and now there's Tik Tok. And Clubhouse. And Instagram has launched Reelz. And Twitter has something called Spaces. And what about my Facebook and Instagram Stories? Oh, and my YouTube. And IGTV. And should I be on Facebook Live?

AHHHHH!!!!

Feels like too much, doesn't it? Well there's a reason for that ... it IS too much. No rational human with an actual life (let alone a business owner with a hundred different duties on their plate) can possibly do all of these things. So how the heck do we do all of these things?

I have great news for you ... we don't.

WHAAAT??? You're telling me I don't need to have my business on every single social media platform?

Yup. That's exactly what I'm saying.

Sure ... every one of those things I mentioned CAN serve a purpose for a business, but that doesn't mean it serves a purpose for YOUR business. Furthermore, unless you have an entire staff dedicated to producing and sharing content on every single social media platform, you're simply never going to have the time to do all of them properly.

And that's OK.

To me ... the single most important social media strategy is to first decide which platforms work best for your specific business goals. You don't have to be on ALL of them. You just have to be on the ones that you feel you're able to maintain an interesting and engaging voice for your brand. That's what will yield you the highest return on the investment of your time and energy.

You won't get punished by your customer base for not having a Twitter page, but you will get punished by your customer base for having a BAD Twitter page. I don't know about you, but if I am checking out a business, and I see that their last post was 11 months ago and it simply said, "Happy 4th of July," I'm immediately less interested in what they're offering.

Don't let that happen to your business. Take an honest look at every social media platform you are on and what kind of content you're producing. If it's not where you think it should be, then consider trimming the number of sources.

If having just one or two social media platforms for your business is all you can handle, then put all your focus into those. It is far more beneficial to do a great job at a handful of things vs. spreading yourself too thin and doing an average job (or below average job) at a lot of things. 

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## Doing good; raising funds for school >

For a 20th year Faith Christian School students, faculty and staff donated about 2000 volunteer hours in late April at two locations - painting, mulching and cleaning up. **Shelly Whitaker** was a project manager at Mill Mountain Zoo, where lower school students were doing their part during the annual "Project Faith," event: "We've partnered with over 50 organizations in the Roanoke Valley over the last 20 years." More than 400 took part in Project Faith this year; upper school students did much the same at **HopeTree Family Services** in Salem. Project Faith was also a school fundraiser and was expected to yield around \$160,000. Before the annual community outreach/life lesson event, students at the southwest Roanoke County private school write and send letters to family friends and local businesses, asking for sponsorships. (All photos courtesy Faith Christian School)





All photos courtesy LewisGale/HCA

## Health Care system expands cancer services >

LewisGale Regional Health System has partnered with Sarah Cannon, the Cancer Institute of HCA Healthcare, to expand its comprehensive cancer services in Southwestern Virginia. The LewisGale Medical Center and LewisGale Hospital Pulaski campuses will now carry the Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute name and patients treated for cancer will have access to more advanced and evidence-based care — from screenings, diagnostics, and surgery, to radiation, chemotherapy, and novel clinical trials – eliminating the need to travel far from home. **Lance Jones** is market president of the health system. “the communities we serve know us as a health system where patients have access to the latest treatments and technology.”

“Today’s announcement marks a major milestone in LewisGale’s commitment to caring for, and improving, the overall health of individuals who live in Southwest Virginia,” said **Brian Gross, MD**, who serves on the Cancer Governance Team and as chief of surgery. LewisGale Regional Health System’s oncology services are now known as Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute program. This will include new “Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute” signage on the cancer center facades, new internal signage at all four hospital facilities where cancer care services are provided, and cobranded logos on cancer-related marketing initiatives and communication. Who was Sarah Cannon? She was the television and radio personality, known worldwide for her Grand Ole Opry character “Minnie Pearl.” After receiving treatment for breast cancer in Nashville, Minnie Pearl (also a star on the 60’s TV show *Hee Haw*, offered the use of her given name to promote cancer research and patient education.





Courtesy photo

Hollins production of Chicago

# Defining theater in the Star City

By Dan Smith

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**Ernie Zulia, who recently retired from Hollins' Theatre Department, has been the driving force behind an impressive theater community in Roanoke for many years.**

It is anything but coincidental that the dramatic improvement of live theater in the Roanoke Valley during the past 45 or so years corresponds directly with Ernie Zulia's first stage performance here in 1976.



Dan Smith

Ernie Zulia: "That theatre is part of a community and at the center of what I believe in. Theatre should have an impact on the life of a community."

He was a young performer, just out of college and got a job working at Mill Mountain Theatre – then actually on top of Mill Mountain - during its last season before burning to the ground. He became one of four performers to act on the mountain, at the Grandin Theatre (where MMT moved after the fire) and at its permanent home at Center in the Square.

It was the beginning of Zulia's contributions to the breadth and depth of live theater in the Star City, beginning at Mill Mountain and continuing to Chicago, then back home to Hollins University where he developed a nationally respected theatre arts department. Zulia, 67, retired as artistic director and chair of the Hollins University Theatre Department at the end of the 2021 Spring semester.

That department at the small liberal arts university is ranked No. 8 in the country and has worked closely with what had been a fractured theater community. (Included are community playhouses



Dan Smith

Mill Mountain Theatre Artistic Director Ginger Poole: "Ernie has been instrumental in shaping artists, being a conduit to connect arts organizations and nurturing live arts in our community for many years."

like Showtimers and Attic Productions, where many in the Hollins program have been on stage or directed plays.)

Mill Mountain Theatre Creative Director Ginger Poole remembers, "Ernie is one of the first people I met when I came to Roanoke as an actor. It was my first show and he waited until it was over and came

backstage and introduced himself. It was very Ernie from the get-go." Poole says Zulia has been, "instrumental in shaping artists, being a conduit to connect arts organizations and nurturing live arts in our community for many years. Many will continue to learn and benefit from his stamp on Hollins University and Mill Mountain Theatre."

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Dan Smith

Ernie Zulia and Todd Ristau at rehearsal: Dynamic Duo of Hollins: "I don't think most of us can calculate the importance of his contributions to our lives, our culture, our education, our entertainment, our thriving arts community."

His long-time Hollins partner is Todd Ristau, who heads the graduate playwriting program: "I don't think most of us can calculate the importance of his contributions to our lives, our culture, our education, our entertainment, our thriving arts community, and even the future of performing arts in Roanoke. My favorite sound is Ernie Zulia saying, 'what a good idea!' That sound means that magic will soon be happening."

Retired Hollins President Nancy Gray, a theater major in college and enthusiast of the first rank, says, "Ernie is a gifted leader with exceptional creative talent who envisions theatre as a way to build community, which he did with extraordinary effectiveness at Hollins. His work ranged from adapting and producing Hollins graduates' work ... making the written word come alive in new ways and staging beloved plays and musicals in fresh and innovative ways.

"Not only did the theatre program garner national recognition for excellence during his tenure, but the lasting impact of the program on the Hollins and greater Roanoke communities will persist for a long time to come."

Zulia was at Mill Mountain Theatre for eight years before landing at Hollins. His resume includes:

- Starcropolis, a gathering on top of Mill Mountain several years ago featuring a collection of new plays centered on Roanoke's iconic neon star. The project involved more than 100 playwrights, directors, actors, dancers, circus performers and designers.
- The Pilgrim Project celebrated the creation of the stage adaptation of Hollins grad Annie Dillard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. He also regularly celebrated Hollins' literary legacy with a series of presentations for large audiences of writers like Natasha Trethewey, Margaret Wise Brown, Lee Smith and Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey.
- The stage adaptation of American Poet Laureate Trethewey's Belloccq's Ophelia, which was honored by the Kennedy Center.
- Production of The Wendy Wasserstein Symposium, involving five Virginia universities and featuring guest artists Jane Alexander and William Ivy Long.
- The adaptation of Robert Fulghum's "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," which had over 3,000 productions around the world.

The sequel, "Uh-Oh, Here Comes Christmas," had hundreds of productions.

- The collaboration with Broadway composer/lyricist Stephen Schwartz on multiple occasions, including with the American premiere of "Children of Eden," which he also directed.

With all his national success, especially in Chicago, Roanoke was where he wanted to be. Hollins gave him that chance. "I went into the job thinking I could synthesize all I had done for 25 years," he says now. "That [live] theater is part of a community is at the center of what I believe in. Theater should have an impact on the life of a community. I had ties with Mill Mountain Theatre as its former associate artistic director - and that easily blended." Hollins University and Mill Mountain Theatre still collaborate on projects like Overnight Sensations and the annual student-driven Festival of New Works.

When Ginger Poole joined MMT as its artistic director, Zulia noted that "she came from a theatre community not unlike Roanoke's [from] in a small city, [where] you can feel the impact of your work."

Hollins University became what Zulia calls "the ignition point" for Roanoke's theatrical maturity. Starcropolis was, "all of that coming together, all the community theatres, Hollins, the high schools, all the jobs. It was why "I chose to leave Chicago, even though I was on a track for success. There was something about Roanoke's potential and richness that meant more to me. For the long term, Chicago was not me."

Hollins was the perfect fit for the Akron, Ohio native. "Normally theater is budget driven but in an academic setting we are allowed to take the kinds of risks we only dream about, without worrying about where the money's coming from."

And he had Nancy Gray in his corner. "She understood from the beginning what a theater department could do"

for the university. I went to Nancy and said, "I think we can make theater to Hollins what football is to Virginia Tech. We began building something that had never even been thought about before."

Then came Todd Ristau, who like Zulia migrated to Hollins from Mill Mountain Theatre. "When I met Todd, I went to our provost and said, 'we have a jewel in our midst.' I asked Todd if he was interested in starting a graduate program in playwriting at Hollins and he almost wept." In Zulia's third year at Hollins, the Playwright's Lab was instituted and writers from across America flocked to Hollins as students and teachers, churning out plays like Meredith Levy's much-honored "Decision Height."

Hollins' productions like the memorable Chicago, starring two Roanoke actresses, Anna Holland and Emma Sala, who attended Hollins, became defining moments. "People are enthusiastic about any place where there is an exciting energy," says Zulia. "People we brought in were blown away."

In the near future Zulia has "a lot of writing I want to finish, projects I want to develop. Some may be with Hollins. I'll be involved to some degree, maybe as a guest artist occasionally." He wants to work again with Stephen Schwartz, developing a musical revue of Schwartz's works.

Wendy-Marie Martin, who received her MFA from the theatre department at Hollins (and has been back for Overnight Sensations and the Festival of New Works), succeeds Zulia. "There wouldn't be a better fit if you turned over every rock in the country," says Zulia.

Nancy Gray emphasizes that "Ernie is an extraordinary person: charismatic, thoughtful, and who truly cares about others. While he will be deeply missed at Hollins, he will be an ongoing gift to the greater Roanoke community."

Ginger Poole writes in an email, "Ernie, I know you will be in the wings for the next act. Enjoy this much deserved time, my friend." 



## WELLNESS

By Valarie Angle

**Executive Summary:**

*Don't give the way you breathe much thought? Maybe you should.*

*Valarie Angle is the owner & director of The WellNest Roanoke, and is a holistic Life Coach. Contact her at [Connect@TheWellNestRoanoke.com](mailto:Connect@TheWellNestRoanoke.com)*

## How does breath impact success?

Do you ever catch yourself sitting at your computer and realize that you are holding your breath? Or walked around the office feeling tight and anxious until you took in a deep breath, exhaled, and suddenly felt lighter?

Focusing on the timing and pace of breath has a positive effect on our bodies and our minds. Brain regions associated with emotion, attention, and body awareness are activated when we pay attention to our breath, according to the Journal of Neurophysiology. Consciously inhaling and exhaling according to a set rhythm can focus attention and regulate the nervous system. Slowing our breath reduces a sense of fear and anxiety, providing a convenient and simple exercise to explore while mitigating stress at work or home.

Not only is timing and pace of breath important, but the type of breath matters, too. Breathing through your mouth and chest is associated with the body's emergency response activation—fight or flight. It activates the sympathetic nervous system, diverting blood and resources away from the brain and digestive system and toward the musculoskeletal system. Resting respiratory mode involves breathing through the nose into the diaphragm, allowing the body to activate the parasympathetic nervous system in order to relax. Nasal breathing allows you to think more critically and creatively.

A more intentional practice, alternate nostril breathing, has therapeutic effects including lowering stress, heart rate, and blood pressure; improving cardiovascular function and respiratory endurance; and even improving physiological endurance. Simply press your finger against one nostril while breathing slowly and deeply in through the other, then switch sides to exhale and repeat, alternating which side you use to inhale each time.

Some experts, such as Wim Hof (a Dutch "extreme athlete" known for his ability to withstand freezing temperatures), challenge us further to expand our repertoire of the pacing and rhythms of breathwork well beyond our typical level of comfort for superior benefits. Practitioners of Wim Hof and other specialized breathwork methods express incredible testimonials of both physical and mental accomplishment.

Think about timing, pace, and type of breath as you go about your day, at home or at the office, and begin to notice how slowing the breath, breathing more deeply into the diaphragm, and engaging in nasal breathing influences your mood, emotion, and productivity. This is a simple practice that you can engage anytime, anywhere, with no equipment to boost your performance, mood, and confidence. 🧘

## Dignified digs

Restoration Housing, a nonprofit we reported on recently, takes something old and neglected and makes it useful again. The community-based organization serves as a “developer” with a particular eye for historic preservation. The projects are done for the benefit of low-income communities.

As its website states, “at the core of everything Restoration Housing does is the belief that all people, regardless of circumstance, deserve to live in strong, healthy communities and dignified housing.”

The projects are also viewed as reinvestments in our historic built environment.

Restoration was founded in 2014. The current staff includes Isabel Thornton, executive director; Maribeth Mills, development coordinator; Pam Kirchner, facilities coordinator; and Katherine Zaragoza, administrative coordinator. Current board members include David Allen (Pinnacle Financial Partners); John Cornthwait (Firefli); Richard Hedley (Brown Edwards); Shirley Holland (Carilion Clinic); Alison Jorgensen (Council of Community Services); Nathan Kerr (Scott Insurance); Walton Rutherford (investor); Lucas Thornton (Hist:Re Partners); and Carol Tuning (Disability Rights and Resource Center).

Completely projects are converted to rental property for low-income and disadvantage individuals.

Donations support the mission, and Restoration Housing has also established shopping and saving collaborations with businesses as well as an annual fundraising event. Details are available at [restorationhousing.org](http://restorationhousing.org) 

“All people, regardless of circumstance, deserve to live in strong, healthy communities and dignified housing.”

## GOOD WORK

**Executive Summary:**  
*Restoration Housing provides a positive upgrade to building development in our communities that looks good and serves.*



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Dan Mirolli

## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:**  
*Establishing some  
order is more necessary  
than optional.*

## Microsystems: a big deal

I'm taking the items out of the grocery store bag, placing them on the kitchen island countertop. I squish up the bags and step back out towards the truck for the next load. Hanging on the wall by the door connecting our garage with the washroom is a long, thin bag with pretty little flowers printed all over it. The tube-shape bag has openings at the top and the bottom, served by drawstrings and an elastic-like closure. I stuff the empty bags I have in my hand through the top. If I wanted a grocery store bag, I simply extract one from the bottom. Yes, like strung together sausage links, it's an environmentally-friendly little system for those disposable bags, not to mention an easy step to include in the routine of putting your groceries away.

It's a microsystem.

The bag reminds me: How many microsystems do I have? I'm aware of something else. I understand retirees better. As I get older, I like having even more order in my life; and depending on these little microsystems is not such a bad thing. This is why, I think, the retired guys I know have those fantastic garages, with everything in specific places, and where they know where to find everything from the often-used to the most random thingamajig. They're mastering the microsystem. Sixty years of looking for that damn socket wrench, they've finally embraced the joy of knowing not only where the wrench is, but the 5/8-inch standard or 16mm metric socket, as well.

'Twasn't long ago, I'm sure I secretly mocked the practice. Having that much order in your life means you're probably a dweeby, nerdy, anal-retentive type. God forbid I set something down in the wrong place. The opposite of the freewheeling, spontaneous, carefree sprit I would likely adore.

And then something happened. I became a parent. (Ok, so it has been awhile.) With more responsibility comes the need for more order. The scissors went from wherever they happened to be left last—to the room most likely to have other things that go with scissors, like tape—to the area or cabinet where we keep most office supplies—to a drawer with those items—to a divider in the drawer where cutting implements are separated from adhesive products, which are separated from note pads, separated from writing instruments, etc., etc.

This year, April 8 to be precise, I became a grandparent. Little micro-human Evie Taylor Ohl doesn't know about all my microsystems, but she's cares a great deal about them. When it's time for feeding or a diaper change or a strapping-in to her stroller or car seat—oh yes, she cares.

I'm sure I'll continue refining my microsystems. You can laugh at my little flowery disposable bag dispenser. But when you go look for the bottle warmer and it's not where you thought it was...

What's that you're hearing from Papa? Call it macro-laughter. 

## Broadband *is* infrastructure

You can't drive on it, take a train ride on or fly from it, but as the mantra heard especially loud over the past year in the pandemic world goes, high speed broadband internet access via fiber optic or wireless technology is infrastructure. It allows people to work or learn from home more seamlessly and is an asset needed in some of the more remote parts of the region to compete with other parts of the country where broadband is firmly established.

President Joe Biden, US Senator Mark Warner and State Senator John Edwards are among the many stating that "Broadband is infrastructure." Edwards (D-Roanoke) sponsored a bill earlier this year that would bring a broadband expansion pilot program to more of the unserved. "It's just as important as roads or electricity or rural electrification was [to a past generation]. Businesses will not come without broadband; our students cannot do their homework [remotely] without broadband. Telemedicine is not possible without broadband in many cases." Edwards also noted that for some private providers providing that last mile "is not cost effective in non-metropolitan rural areas."

That scenario led to creation of the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority, which celebrated its fifth anniversary in late April and now has installed more than 100 miles of fiber optics to carry high speed internet. The Edwards bill would allow the RVBA to receive public sector grants, bypassing relationships with private providers that may see the Authority as a competitor for that last mile connection. "Without broadband we cannot have the kind of infrastructure we need," said Edwards at a Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce legislative roundup in April. State and federal funding to expand broadband is in the works or has been proposed in major spending bills.

Bill Hunter, Director of Communications and Information Technology for Roanoke County, says the RVBA open-access fiber initiative was the "first step," in the 2016 comprehensive plan under the heading of Connect Roanoke County to the World. Then citizens started calling when they saw other localities getting grants to expand their broadband networks. A survey revealed that about 30 percent of the county was unserved or under-served – with low speed or no internet. "We've been kind of working from there."

That included issuing RFP's, seeking providers in a public-private partnership. Salem-based BTX was one of those private providers helping to fill that gap. CARES act funding has helped when other grant applications didn't materialize. More than 300 new county addresses will see high speed internet arrive over the next year says Hunter. Some in the more rural Catawba area of western Roanoke County now have it when they "never" thought they would he notes. Floyd-based Mountain Net is using the RVBA trunk line to provide its high-speed internet says Hunter. "The best part about RVBA is, it's open access fiber. Any provider can use that." 📺



## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

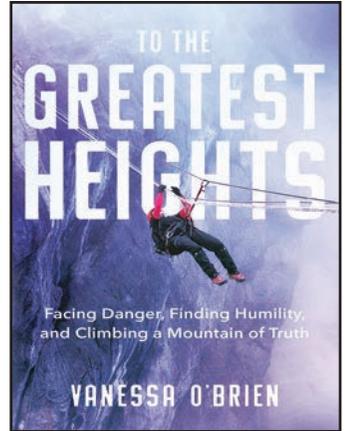
By Gene Marrano

### Executive Summary:

*What will the regional broadband infrastructure superhighway look like in another five years – and what might the economic impact be?*

## FRONTReviews >

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



### *Climb every mountain*

I've always had a thing for memoirs about summiting Mount Everest and the world's highest peaks. I used to read them regularly before I would go back to Colorado (my home for eight years) to tackle another "14er" (14,000 feet high-plus) with a friend. Several were about the ill-fated 1996 Everest expeditions that left a number of people dead (Hollins University alumna Charlotte Fox lived to tell and write about that disaster.) It's dangerous even under the best of conditions. This new one, *To The Greatest Heights: Facing Danger, Finding Humility and Climbing a Mountain of Truth* (Emily Bestler Books/Simon & Schuster, 2021) by American-British mountaineer Vanessa O'Brien, goes a step further. An apparently very successful career in the finance world left her with a pile of money it seems when things went sideways in 2008, and she set her sights on another goal: climbing the 7 Summits, the highest peak on each continent.

O'Brien actually "warmed up" on Everest before scaling the more dangerous K2, in 2017 becoming the first American/British woman to do so, and in a record span of time she summited all 7 peaks. For good measure she went to both the South and North Poles to complete the "Explorers Grand Slam." O'Brien also went to the lowest point on Earth underwater reached by humans, landing her in the Guinness Book of World Records for a high-low elevation record. Undaunted by setbacks, dedicated to physical training – and salty to boot – O'Brien also ends many chapters of *To The Greatest Heights* with a revelation

about how those challenges related to everyday life – and dynamics in the business world. A brisk, pulse-pounding read (did I mention salty?) well worth the time if true tales of adventuring is in your wheelhouse.

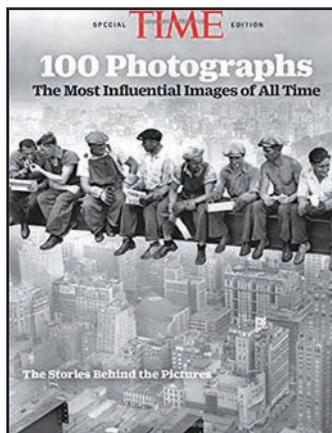
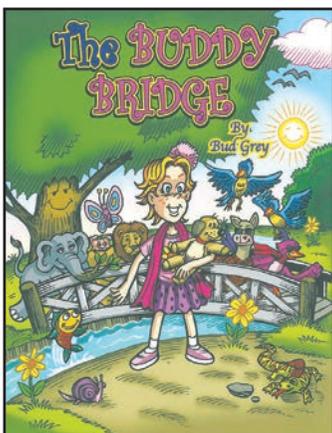
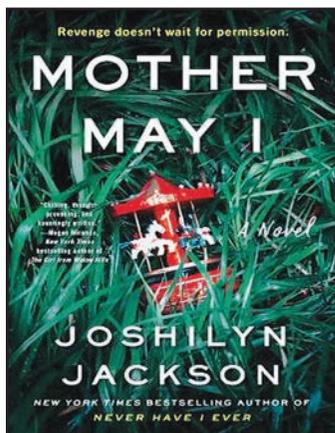
—Gene Marrano

### *Lures you in*

Joshilyn Jackson's *Mother May I* (William Morrow, 2021) grabs you from the beginning and doesn't let go. The book opens as Bree Cabbat thinks she sees a "witch" outside her bedroom window. Bree is a Georgia socialite who grew up poor and married into money. She and her lawyer husband, Trey, have three children: two teenage girls and a surprise baby boy. While at a private school function, Bree turns her back for a moment and baby Robert is kidnapped by the "witch," that then makes demands of Bree in order for her to get Robert back. When there are unexpected results, Bree finds herself in a legal mess, still without her baby, and doubting everything she thinks she knows about Trey.

Will Robert be found safely? What is the connection between Trey and the witch? Twists keep the reader turning the pages as the tension rarely wanes. There are even two climactic moments in the book. Jackson segues seamlessly between past and present narratives to flesh out the story of how one bad decision can have haunting, far-reaching consequences.

There are multiple layers in this novel, including issues of #MeToo, social class, and revenge. The fact that Bree identifies



with the witch—as an impoverished outsider and as a mother—makes for an interesting angle.

The only downsides: the motherly desperation passages become repetitive, and the epilogue is predictable.

Still, Jackson nails it with this thriller, her second suspense novel in a line of more traditional women's literary fiction. She is a hidden gem in southern fiction.

—Jennifer Poff Cooper

## Gift for grandchild

Bud Grey, the wellness director at Carilion Wellness, had to get creative during COVID to stay in touch with his 2 1/2-year-old granddaughter, Cece, who lived with her parents in the UK before moving to San Diego in the summer of 2021. Unable to visit Cece, Bud came up with the idea to surprise her (and the rest of his family, including his wife) by authoring his first children's book called *The Buddy Bridge*. It depicts Cece as Princess Double C (PdbC) who goes on an adventure to visit her grandparents with the help of her animal friends.

Bud says, "Reading has always been important to me. My wife was a librarian, and my daughter, Cece's mother, also loves to read. With so much out of my control with the pandemic and the distance between us, this at least was something I could control, and frankly convey my love for her. My hope is she holds onto it as she grows up and thinks of her grandfather."

As a grandfather who wrote a book for his first grandchild, I can certainly identify. Giving kids something of yourself, something intimate is enormously valuable to both you and the child and Bud got this one right.

—Dan Smith

## Impactful, indeed

The coffee table book/magazine *100 Photographs: The Most Influential Images of All Time* (TIME; reissue 2020) is a fascinating little treasure. The editors call it a "groundbreaking exploration of the 100 photographs that shaped the human experience," and one could hardly argue with that. I enjoy the format, how the three main categories were compiled, the image library, and the explanation of how the photographs were selected. One could write essays on every entry (sadly, a majority of them are incredibly tragic); but one of my favorites is the iconic "lunch atop skyscraper" (also the cover), accompanied by a nice surprise as the last picture in the book—the photographer himself, also standing precariously on a beam. You can get in on the action (without the book) and see the project at [TIME.com/100photos](https://www.time.com/100photos).

—Tom Field

The reviewers: **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT; **Jennifer Poff Cooper** is a senior correspondent for FRONT; **Dan Smith** is a former editor of FRONT; **Tom Field** is publisher of FRONT.

## Akers signing off >

**Diane Akers**, President of the **Blacksburg Partnership**, will retire from her role after almost 19 years at the helm in June. As its first director, and later as president, Akers helped launch the public private economic development group in 2002. It was founded as a partnership between the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, and the local business community. Akers developed major signature gatherings like Fork and Cork, Brew Do for beer lovers, the Virginia Cheese Fest, Blacksburg Restaurant Week, and the Blacksburg Partnership Collaborative for the Arts.

During her tenure, the Blacksburg Partnership has grown from 22 member organizations to more than 70. The Partnership also organized and continues to lead the NRV Passenger Rail Initiative seeking to return passenger rail service to the New River Valley (see related story elsewhere). Akers says, "I am so proud of all we have accomplished as an organization and all that we have done together to further the economy and quality of life in Blacksburg and the region." Prior to working with the Blacksburg Partnership Akers ran her own consulting firm, ComBiz Solutions in Roanoke, and worked for the City of Roanoke, including as Acting Assistant City Manager, Director of Economic Development and Budget Administrator.



## Bank of Fincastle heads towards possible merger >

**The Bank of Fincastle** reported an unaudited quarterly net income of \$345,680 for the first quarter of 2021, with assets of \$272.1 million and total liabilities of \$241.4 million. "As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our daily lives, we are nonetheless encouraged to see local economic activity returning to more normal levels and improvement in our financial performance." Regarding the announced merger with **First National Corporation**, Scott Steele says, "I am pleased to share that things have been progressing on schedule and we are planning a special meeting of the shareholders in mid-June whereby shareholders will have an opportunity to vote for the merger." Pictured L-R: the Executive Management Team; Peter Sackett, Vice President and Chief Credit Officer; Mike Jasper, Chief Financial Officer; Scott Steele, President and CEO; Sandra Craft, Vice President of Commercial Banking.



## It's more than a beer for Virginia Tech >

**Fightin' Hokies Lager** "represents years of inspiration, dedication, research, and a sustainable partnership with Hardywood Park Craft Brewery," according to VT. Three Virginia Tech faculty members, Brian Wiersema; Herbert Bruce, assistant professor of practice for undergraduate education and a master brewer; and Sean O'Keefe, professor of food science and technology; joined forces with Hardywood in Richmond to finalize their recipe, package, and distribute the beer. The Munich-style Fightin' Hokies lager is available in bottles at Hardywood brewery locations and at stores and restaurants in Virginia. Later this summer and early fall, the lager will also be available in cans and draft.

## Roanoke region looking to thrive in future years >

The **Roanoke Regional Partnership** has launched Thrive 2027, what it calls "a collaborative strategic planning process designed to engage stakeholders, business leaders and citizens in the region's economic development five-year plan." Looking to welcome more people into the tent, Thrive 2027 includes the formation of a "culturally and economically diverse advisory committee," that will be engaged throughout the project. In the mix says the Partnership: gathering perspectives on business climate, diversification, talent, entrepreneurship, innovation, outdoor industry, small business and other factors that influence economic development.

"We look at [the strategic plan] every 5 years," says John Hull, executive director for the Roanoke Regional Partnership. The last such effort in 2017 led to talent and business attraction initiatives like the Woodhaven property (and a new regional industrial authority) near I-81 that hopes to land a major business, and a new industrial shell building at the Greenfield Center in Botetourt County. "We're in the mode of looking for needs to address [and] a strategic direction to make our regional more competitive," adds Hull, a long time Partnership employee who assumed his new position after the retirement of Beth Doughty in December.





Ian Price

## Haley Toyota re-ups for 2021 >

**Haley Toyota** has extended its field naming rights with the **Salem Red Sox** for the season that started in early May at Salem Memorial Ballpark. The return to pro baseball in Salem took place more than 600 days since the last game in 2019 – the 2020 minor league season was wiped out by the pandemic. Haley Toyota General Manager **Chuck Baker** said at the naming rights unveiling that it was more than just about baseball: “I think there’s a lot of pent-up demand. People want to get out in the sun. Sports brings people together and that’s what we need right now. We need to bring people together and have some fun at the ballgame.” There is no more Carolina League - under a minor league reorganization/ contraction, the Salem Red Sox now compete in the Low-A East League as a Boston affiliate.



Submitted

## Growing dental network arrives in the NRV >

**Aspen Dental** has officially opened its doors in Christiansburg, the 13th Aspen Dental practice in Virginia. Another location in southwest Roanoke County on the Tanglewood Mall property is under construction. The Christiansburg location at 2710 Market St. is led by Dr. Robert Banks. The Aspen Dental network now includes more than 890 offices in 43 states, owned and operated by independent practice owners and dentists.

## New organization to support local eateries in BoCo >

**Shop Botetourt** has been launched as way to support and publicize restaurants and small retail shops in Botetourt County, fueled mainly by a social media presence that includes Facebook and Instagram. **Brandy Underwood**, who also owns Cupcakes & Canines on Route 220 in Daleville (treats for both dogs and their humans) is a driving force behind Shop Botetourt, which also helped launch the first Restaurant Week in the county last month. "As small business owners we wanted to do something to help our community, just reminding people that we're still open. (Most if not all COVID restrictions have now been lifted by Governor Northam.) "We're sharing things about other small businesses, specials, the hours open, that kind of thing. As more people get vaccinated, we hope they'll feel more comfortable coming out."



Submitted

## Trust grant means new mobility for Angels of Assisi >

**Angels of Assisi** in Roanoke now has a new mobile veterinary clinic that will help the animal care and adoption center to expand outreach to rural communities in rural Southwest Virginia and parts of West Virginia to improve access to care. The funding for the new Mobile Veterinary Clinic came from the Kathy W Coldewey Revocable Trust. Coldewey spent much of her last year getting her affairs in order so her two main wishes could be honored, according to an Angels release: establishing mobile spay/neuter and health clinics in the rural south and buying body armor for K-9 police dogs, a passion spawned by her love of the Live PD TV show. "We hope to expand our mobile veterinary clinics and be able to offer more services," says Dayna Reynolds, Director of Communications, Angels of Assisi, "Many of the communities where we hold our mobile clinics do not have access to veterinary care or affordable spay/neuter services." Angels of Assisi is currently building a new shelter in downtown Roanoke as well.



## Member One building new service center in Roanoke >

Construction is ongoing for **Member One Federal Credit Union's** new 6,511 square foot Member Service Center, to be located on the lower lot of the Administrative Campus in downtown Roanoke. Member One says it will represent a new service model for Member One, bringing together a variety of functions in one central. When completed, members will have access to retail branch amenities as well as a Real Estate Center for real estate lending and a Business Services Center for small business needs. "Moving all member services to the new 'lower campus' will drastically improve traffic flow, increase access, and allow us to build and grow our member relationships in a much more approachable environment," explained Jean Hopstetter, Senior Executive Vice President for Member One.

The existing Main Office retail facility will remain on the upper part of the campus but be repurposed into a new state-of-the-art Training Center for Member One's 300+ employees. A new Human Resources Center and recruiting hub will also be created; the entire upper campus will be accessible to employees only, gated and closed off to outside traffic. Lionberger Construction and the architectural firm Interactive Design Group are collaborating on the building project, with an anticipated opening in early 2022.

## Bring food to the underserved >

**Feeding Southwest Virginia** has launched The Mobile Marketplace, with help of a grant from Feeding America. The Mobile Marketplace is designed to provide accessibility to underserved demographic groups and rural locations, offering SNAP-eligible groceries for purchase. Based on data analysis, the areas that will benefit most from this service are Alleghany, Bland, Craig, Carroll, Pittsylvania, Wythe, and Wise.



Feeding SWVA's Mobile Market Program will consist of two trucks, each stocked with product from a grocery partners (which include Food Lion and Kroger), supplemented with purchased food. "We are always creating innovative programs based on relevancy and on the communities we serve" says Pamela Irvine, President and CEO of Feeding Southwest Virginia, "the Mobile Marketplace will diversify food streams and allow people with SNAP benefits to purchase fresh food, and nonperishable groceries."



Gene Marrano

## Tech graduate commencements >

Loosened COVID safety restrictions and good weather meant 6000 or so **Virginia Tech** graduates including members of the 2020 class that saw their commencement go virtual last spring due to the pandemic were back on campus in mid-May for the 2021 ceremonies. The School of Engineering (pictured) split its commencement into three separate sections, with around 500 new Hokie alumni at each ceremony. Each graduate was allowed to invite four guests.

## First distillery in Roanoke since 1909 >

Not since 1909 has a distillery produced spirits within Roanoke city limits but that will change with the launch of **Brady's Distillery**. It was founded by brothers, Brian, Andy and Tim Brady, Roanoke natives and established business owners/entrepreneurs. Brian says, "the idea for a distillery came to us roughly 10 years ago while visiting a distillery in Virginia. We were completely enamored by the craft. We had all been beer brewers for years, but this was a whole new level." The Brady brothers will offer a line of curated spirits including blended bourbons and whiskeys, rum, gin, vodkas and brandy. A Brady's Distillery Tasting Room is coming soon to downtown Roanoke (location to be announced.) The production facility is located just off Orange Avenue - coincidentally just a street over from the last distillery to produce in Roanoke city over a century ago.



Courtesy



## A second standalone ER for LewisGale >

**LewisGale Regional Health System** held a groundbreaking ceremony in late April to mark the beginning of construction at 1423 West Ruritan Road in northeast Roanoke County, to make room for a new freestanding emergency room, the second of its kind in the valley. Lance Jones is the market president for the health system: "we continue to see the growth across the country as the population ages and folks continue to experience medical conditions." For conditions like stroke and heart attack, Jones said, "[the standalone ER concept, not attached to a hospital] has proven to be far more efficient." The first one locally in southwest Roanoke County near Tanglewood Mall opened several years ago.

The new LewisGale Medical Center Blue Hills ER, targeted for a January 2022 opening, will be a nearly 10,000-square-foot freestanding emergency room staffed with board-certified emergency room physicians and nurses. Steven Pasternak, MD, is the emergency department medical director for LewisGale: "having access to unparalleled medical care at a facility nearby 24 hours a day, seven days a week will save lives and enhance patient recovery."



## Chamber honors women of achievement >

The **Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce** recently held its eighth annual Women's Leadership Conference virtually with over 120 attendees. The 2021 theme was "A Year for Recovery & Discovery," recognizing the challenges over the last 14 months, finding the positives and looking at how to move forward. The virtual program also hosted a breakout session for young women ages 12-17, where participants could examine careers and make decisions about their future.

The 2021 Women's Leadership Awards recipients were Community Builder Award: Lateffa Smith – Community Housing Partners; Emerging Leader Award: Tessa Wright – First Bank & Trust Company; Spirit Award: Rhonda Whaling – LewisGale Hospital Montgomery; Woman Business Leader of the Year: Nanci Hardwick – Meld Manufacturing Corporation (pictured) and 2021 Woman of the Year: Noelle Bissell, MD – New River Health District (a familiar figure and voice for the New River Valley during the pandemic and vaccine rollout.) Henry Bass, Board Chair of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, says, "we encourage and support female leaders in our business, non-profits, civic and government leadership, who make decisions affecting our business community."

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

## FINANCIAL FRONT



Routt

Member One Federal Credit Union has promoted **David Routt** to Vice President of Real Estate Lending. A Member One employee for over nine years, Routt brings more than 15 years of experience and knowledge in the mortgage industry and loan origination to the position. He is also a member of the Roanoke Valley Association of Realtors Education Committee.



Bird

Elder Care Solutions, a woman-owned and



Chavez

operated Roanoke-based business helping families address key challenges of long-term care, has welcomed **Jeff Bird, M.S., CASP**, as Senior Living Advisor, and **Bonnie Chavez, M.B.A.**, as new members of its Advisory Council. Bird joins the Elder Care Solutions team as Senior Living Advisor, with more than eighteen years of experience as executive director, geriatric care consultant, and comptroller. Chavez brings strategic focus in community-centered business solutions for small businesses and nonprofits of all sizes. "Elder Care Solutions is focused on challenges most families face when supporting an aging loved one who requires care for a long time," says CEO Kimberly Whiter, profiled previously in Valley Business Front and

an occasional VBF columnist.

## WELLNESS FRONT



Black

Bradley Free Clinic Pharmacist **James Black** was recently named an Outstanding Preceptor by Virginia Commonwealth University. A preceptor is a teacher in a clinical setting; during experiential education, student pharmacists are taught by experienced pharmacist preceptors. The Outstanding Preceptor Award recognizes preceptors who have demonstrated excellence in educating students on rotations. "We are very proud of James and this exceptional recognition for his work," said Bradley Free Clinic Executive Director Janine Underwood. In addition

to supervising staff and volunteers, Black manages the pharmacy department and acts as advocate for eligible patients.



Iannello

Long time entrepreneur **Victor Iannello, Sc.D.**, has joined Roanoke-based Chorda Pharma as its CEO. Iannello has started several technology companies in the Roanoke region, including Synchrony Inc., acquired by Dresser-Rand in 2013 and now part of Johnson Controls. He also previously served as Chairman of the Carilion Medical Center Board of Directors, Co-Chairman of Valleys Innovation Council (now The Verge), and President of the Roanoke Regional Partnership. Chorda Pharma is an early-stage pharmaceuticals company that is

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## EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Hinton

Hollins University President **Mary Dana Hinton** has been elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, an organization established in 1780 by the nation's founders "to honor exceptionally accomplished individuals and engage them in advancing the public good." Says David Oxtoby, president of the Academy, "we are honoring the excellence of these individuals, celebrating what they have achieved so far, and imagining what they will continue to accomplish." Hinton is among the seven elected in the Educational and Academic Leadership section.

Other notable Academy members selected this year include Oprah Winfrey and Sanjay Gupta (CNN) – the roster dates back to Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamilton.



Williams

Hollins University has announced the appointment of **Nakeshia N. Williams, Ph.D.**, as vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion. She will help ensure that Hollins provides an inclusive experience for all of the students and employees the university serves. Williams comes to Hollins from North

Carolina A&T State University, where she was an associate professor in the educator preparation department in the College of Education. During her tenure, she taught diversity courses to undergraduate and graduate students



Wimbush

The Roanoke County School Board has named **Lori Wimbush** as the director of equity and engagement. The new position was created as part of an ongoing effort "to cultivate an inclusive learning culture and respectful climate."

Wimbush has been serving as the co-chairperson of the county school district's equity committee for the past year. Wimbush first joined Roanoke County Public Schools as the assistant principal at Northside Middle School in 2004. In 2016, she was named the principal of Hidden Valley High School. Before joining Roanoke County, Wimbush served as a teacher in Henry County and Roanoke City.



McLary

Hollins University has announced the appointment of **Laura**



**A. McLary, Ph.D.**, as provost, effective July 1. She will serve as Hollins' chief academic officer. McLary comes to Hollins from the University of Portland in Oregon, where she first joined the faculty in 1999. In 2016 McLary became academic associate dean for the university's College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), where she worked on issues ranging from strategic priorities and budgeting to communication and personnel. "Laura is a creative and proactive problem-solver who leads with compassion and courage," Hollins President Mary Dana Hinton said.



**Henao-Guerrero**

**Natalia Henao-Guerrero** has been appointed head of the Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences in the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary

Medicine at Virginia Tech. A member of the Virginia Tech faculty since 2007, Guerrero is a tenured associate professor of anesthesiology. She assumes the role after having served as interim department head since 2017, and formerly as associate department head.



**Moir**

The new head basketball coach at North Cross School is a familiar face: former Roanoke College men's basketball coach **Page Moir** has been hired for its boys basketball program. Moir won 428 games in 27 seasons at Roanoke College and finished up with the most men's basketball wins of any coach in Old Dominion Athletic Conference history. Featured in our profile story on Jefferson Street Management last month, and its string of local

restaurants, Moir says he will continue to work for that organization as well. "Dustin Fonder, one of my best players [at Roanoke College] played at North Cross," says Moir, "they've always had a strong athletic program. I always said if that job became open, I would love to talk to somebody about it – and it did."

## SENIOR FRONT



**Nelson**

Friendship senior living and rehabilitation has announced new admissions team members for both Friendship Health and Rehab Center (FHRC), located on Hershberger Road, and Salem Terrace at Harrogate. **Liz Nelson** has been named the new director of hospital and community relations for FHRC. A registered nurse,



**Whitaker**

Nelson has over 15 years of healthcare experience, having served in both hospital and senior living settings. At Salem Terrace of Harrogate, where Friendship serves as the managing partner, **Jessica Whitaker** has been named director of marketing and admissions. Whitaker has ten years of marketing experience, has been in the healthcare industry for three years.



**Duran-Ballen**

Richfield Living has announced the selection of **Esteban Duran-Ballen** as the new Chief Operating



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Officer. A graduate of James Madison University with a bachelor's degree in Healthcare Administration and a master's degree in Business Administration from Virginia Tech, Duran-Ballen joined the team in January. "In order to achieve Richfield's strategic plan, we were looking to strengthen our operations and financial acumen in the executive team," said Cherie Grisso, Chief Executive Officer. Duran-Ballen has twelve years' experience in operational leadership. The new hire comes as Richfield also prepared to cut the ribbon on

its new Town Center, The Villas, and Lake Retreat apartments on the Salem campus late last month.

### MUNICIPAL FRONT



Grier

**Clarence G. Grier** has been named Deputy City Manager for the City of Roanoke. Following the retirement of Deputy City Manager Sherman Stovall,

Grier assumes the responsibility of managing and directing City departments, public safety agencies, and programs, based on general direction and policy of the City Manager and City Council. Since 2015, Grier had served Guilford County, N.C. as Deputy County Manager, where he supervised nine departments.

The Radford Chamber Board of Directors has announced **Dan McKinney** as its new executive director. McKinney has served on the Radford Chamber Board for nearly 10 years, including both the



McKinney

Treasurer and President roles. His background is in business management and marketing, along with sales and customer service experience. McKinney is also a Radford University graduate with a Business Administration degree.

*Compiled by  
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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Shon Aguero** is the executive vice president and chief banking officer for Freedom First Credit Union. A graduate of Oklahoma State University, Walden University, SW Graduate School of Banking, Cox School of Business - SMU, and New York Institute of Finance, he moved here from Southwest and Midwest US, and lives in Roanoke with his wife and two children.

**Valarie Angle** is the owner & director of The WellNest Roanoke, downtown Roanoke's holistic hub where dozens of wellness practitioners serve the community through services, classes, and special events. Valarie earned an Educational Specialist graduate degree from Virginia Tech; a master's in liberal studies from Hollins University; and undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Central Florida. She and her partner, Jonathan, are passionate about growing a wellness-focused community. Contact her at [connect@thewellnestroanoke.com]

**Beth Bell** is the president of FemCity Roanoke, a 300-member business networking community for women. [Roanoke@femcity.com]

**Aila Boyd** serves as the editor of "The Fincastle Herald" and "The Vinton Messenger" and coordinates social media for the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce. She holds an MFA in writing from Lindenwood University.

**Bruce C. Bryan** is proprietor of the award-winning advertising and marketing agency, 5Points Creative, located in downtown Roanoke. [bruce@5PointsCreative.com]

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

**Jennifer Poff Cooper** is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of

the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjp91@gmail.com]

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

**Shannon Dominguez** is Director of Business Development for The Advancement Foundation in Vinton and helps run The Gauntlet Business competition. Shannon has a diverse background in planning, finances, human resources, IT and marketing, and has played a leadership role in business development for two law firms. [shannon@theadvancementfoundation.org]

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

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

**Micah Fraim** is a top-referred Certified Public Accountant and business finance strategist who is well-connected in the regional business community and nationally recognized. Publisher of The Little Big Small Business Book, he also publishes a blog at www.

fraimcpa.com/blog and is frequently interviewed as a business financial expert in national media channels. [micahfraim@fraimcpa.com]

**Frazier Hughes** was recruited by the CEO of Keller Williams Realty after being named 2017 salesman of the year at Berglund Luxury of Roanoke. He also hosts The Roanoke Real Estate Podcast, is Dale Carnegie Trained, a former radio personality, and is a Social Media Influencer. [frazierhughescom@gmail.com]

**Zack Jackson** is the host of the K92 Mornin' Thang radio show on WXLK and co-founder of The JPG Agency, a freelance marketing and creative consulting department for small businesses. He can be reached at [zack@thejpgagency.com]

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

**Christine Liana** is owner-consultant of The Job Coach, LLC, in which she helps those entering the workforce with resumes, interviewing skills, and the essential soft skills of effective communication, professional image, leadership, and executive etiquette. Her 30+ year business career includes banking, insurance/finance, and local government, in which she has worked with a broad range of clients, associates, and management. Christine earned a Certificate in Management from Darden Graduate School of Business. [e-writing@protonmail.com]

**Gene Marrano** is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. He recently won best feature award from the Virginia Association of Broadcasters for his Dopesick interview with Beth Macy. He also now hosts and co-produces "Business Matters" on Blue Ridge PBS. [gmarrano@cox.net]

**Mary Ann L. Miller** is vice president of business banking and community

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

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

**Dan Smith** is the former and inaugural editor of FRONT magazine and an award-winning veteran journalist, now freelancing. [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

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

**Michael Waldvogel** is the president and chief executive officer of Waldvogel Commercial Properties, founding it in 2004. With three decades of commercial real estate experience, he was also the founding principal of Waldvogel, Poe & Cronk, a business development director for the Better Business Bureau, and executive director of the Downtown Business League. He is active in a number of business, professional, trade, and service organizations, and is an outdoor enthusiast and runner.

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### *CFNRV gives*

The Community Foundation of the New River Valley (CFNRV) is launching their first giving venture, The 1994 Society. The CFNRV was founded in 1994 by a small group of volunteers looking for a way to support their community for generations. "Their dedication and ingenuity in those early days laid the groundwork for the foundation's current grant and scholarship programs, and for the regional partnerships that support early education, food access, health, nonprofit leadership, and more," says Ashley Ege, Director of Communications & Outreach.

### *NRV Housing Study*

The New River Valley Regional Commission recently completed a two-year housing study that includes the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski, and the City of Radford. The study incorporated regional and local data and input from 10 focus groups and over 1,100 online survey responses. The goal: develop seven regional housing strategies for each locality. The Commission partnered with the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech, Housing Forward Virginia, and czb, LLC to provide housing market data collection, analysis training, and strategy development. Says Cassidy Jones, NRV

Homebuilder Association Board member, "we also recognize the significant need for more diverse housing types at a broader range of price points, and we are eager to partner with our localities to find the right solution to alleviate this issue in our area."

### *Roanoke apartment complex has new owners*

Blackfin Real Estate Investors, LLC have purchased the Villages at Garst Creek, a 504-unit apartment community in Roanoke for \$23,250,000. Built in 1974, the property was rehabbed and placed back in service in 2007 under the Section 42 Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. "This was a unique opportunity for Blackfin to diversify into a new market, and simultaneously add scale to our growing LIHTC portfolio," stated Blackfin Co-Founder and Managing Partner Andrew Buchanan, who along with Doug Root founded Arlington-based Blackfin in August 2016. Since that time, they have acquired a portfolio of over 6,000 units in markets from Boston to the Carolinas.

### *Petco steps up for local shelter*

The Regional Center for Animal Care and Protection in Roanoke has received a \$20,000 grant investment from the newly named Petco Love to support their work for animals in the Roanoke Valley, including Botetourt

County, City of Roanoke, Roanoke County, and the Town of Vinton.

Founded in 1999 as the Petco Foundation, it has distributed nearly \$300 million invested to date for adoption and other lifesaving efforts. "[This] investment in the Regional Center for Animal Care and Protection - and hundreds of other organizations is part of our commitment to create a future in which no pet is unnecessary euthanized," said Susanne Kogut, President of Petco Love.

### *VFM expanding*

Virginia Furniture Market will build a 120,000+ square foot distribution center at its Virginia Market Place Commercial Center in Franklin County, at the intersection of Route 220 and Wirtz Road. This new facility will serve as VFM's regional distribution center and as the corporate headquarters. "This new facility will support our efforts to provide customers with an exceptional experience," states owner Joel Shepherd, "not only in our stores, but through pick up, delivery and every way in which we serve our customers." Virginia Furniture Market operates eight brick and mortar stores in Southwest and Central Virginia.

### *The business of college sports*

Virginia Tech has launched a \$400 million fundraising campaign to

bolster its sports amenities - and to heighten the university's profile nationwide. School president Tim Sands said it's also about staying competitive in the Atlantic Coast Conference. That includes more money for football coach's salaries, recruiting efforts and student-athlete scholarships, increasing Hokie Club membership and sports facility improvements like a Cassell Coliseum overall. The new, "Reach for Excellence" is part of the broader Boundless Impact \$1.5 billion dollar Campaign for Virginia Tech. "It's important for our students, our community and the university's vision for the future that we continue to support the success and strengthen our performance and impact in every arena. Athletics plays a special role in creating the unique Virginia Tech experience we enjoy," Sands said at the late April public phase launch of the campaign.

### *RVBA celebrates milestone*

On April 26, the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority (RVBA) celebrated its 5th anniversary. The RVBA serves and supports businesses, government, education, healthcare, and other private internet service provider companies across the region. In five years of operation RVBA has never lost a customer. The non-traditional internet service provider has grown to operate more than 100 miles

of “open access” communications infrastructure that serves the City of Salem, the City of Roanoke, Roanoke County, and Botetourt County. The network footprint is now more than double the size of what was originally envisioned for the first six years of operation according to the RVBA. Said President and CEO Frank Smith in noting the 5-year milestone: “now that we have this infrastructure, we’re better positioned to take advantage of new opportunities: Smart City applications, telehealth potential, residential deployment through last mile provider partnerships and more. We’re talking to a variety of partners

and exploring new ways to leverage what we’ve built to unlock many new opportunities going forward.”

*LICE families feel the pinch from job losses during pandemic*

More than 2400 hundred people from the region served by United Way of Roanoke Valley responded to a survey taken in February that measured the pandemic’s impact on ALICE families - “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.” Results show ALICE families are more concerned about providing enough food for the household, physical and mental

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health issues, finding affordable childcare and job loss (with ensuing debt) than are more affluent households. President and CEO Abby Hamilton with United Way on action items taken from the survey: “how do we make sure as United Way invests [in the community] in this coming year that

we direct to what families are telling us they actually need?” Hamilton says they also asked what types of services those ALICE families wanted most often over the past year, noting that many respondents said they had sought mental health counseling to deal with the stress of job loss, teaching children at home, fears of the

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coronavirus, etc.

Around 30 United Way partner organizations helped distribute the ALICE Survey. Partners ranged from local governments and social service agencies to private groups like the Latinas Network that distributed survey versions in Spanish. Now it's time to turn the survey results into action items says Hamilton: "when we organized these 30 partners that were going to help us ... it also came with a commitment from these same organizations to do something about it." See the full ALICE survey results on the United Way of Roanoke Valley website.

---

#### *Balance WellSpace branches out*

Balance WellSpace, an integrative medical practice located in Roanoke, recently announced the addition of a comprehensive Neuropathy treatment. It takes "a whole-body approach," says Balance WellSpace, addressing not just the symptoms, but the cause of nerve damage as well. "We want to offer those who suffer from Neuropathy real and tangible results," says Dr. Jennifer Walker D.C., owner of Balance WellSpace. "We take a three-pronged approach to Neuropathy treatment by increasing blood flow to damaged nerves, rehabilitating the damaged nerves, and addressing nutrition to reduce inflammation." Also new: the addition of Vitamindrip® to medical services offerings, an IV

(intravenous) nutritional therapy that Balance WellSpace says is used to maintain adequate hydration and replenish fluid loss, replace essential vitamins, and reduce symptoms of illness and chronic disease.

---

#### *New medical procedure option in NRV*

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery is now offering a minimally invasive, laparoscopic surgical technique to treat acid reflux. The surgery involves placing an FDA-approved, quarter-sized flexible band of magnetic titanium beads around the lower esophagus just above the stomach, connected by titanium wires, which open to allow food and liquid to pass through when swallowing. The band then closes to prevent stomach contents from moving up to cause acid reflux. Using a robot, the procedure is completed laparoscopically through five small incisions. Once the outpatient procedure is completed, patients are able to resume a normal diet that same night according to LewisGale.

---

#### *Hall of Fame company in The 'Burg*

The Space Technology Hall of Fame says it recognizes "the life-changing technologies" emerging from global space programs, honoring scientists, engineers, and innovators, and communicates to the public the importance of these technologies as a return on investment in

space exploration." Now Emissshield Inc., located in the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center in Blacksburg, will accept the award and join the Hall at the 36th Space Symposium, to be held in August in Colorado Springs. Emissshield manufactures high-emissivity coatings for use in commercial and industrial applications.

The technology behind the coating was invented at NASA's Ames Research Center in the early 1990s as a protective coating for use on spacecraft and was originally licensed to Emissshield Inc. in 1996. 80-plus technologies to date have been inducted into the 33-year-old Hall of Fame.

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#### *Business Federation pleased with COVID restrictions easing ... but*

Governor Ralph Northam announced in mid-May that due to improvements in statewide health metrics, more restrictions would be lifted. Effective May 15, the universal indoor mask mandate was repealed as a result of new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Effective May 28, Virginia planned to ease all distancing and capacity restrictions. State Director for NFIB (National Federation of Independent Business) Nicole Riley, said, "we applaud Governor Northam for taking this step to accelerate Virginia's economic recovery. Small businesses are excited to know Virginia will be opening up fully sooner rather than later." However, Riley also

said, "what isn't clear to businesses is will they still be held liable to the permanent workplace safety regulations the State imposed on them to combat the exposure and spread of the coronavirus?"

---

#### *New Economic Development Strategy ready for review*

The Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC) has issued a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document under a 30-day public review period through June 13. It may be accessed on the Regional Commission's website at [rvarc.org/CEDS](http://rvarc.org/CEDS). "The regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process has brought together local government representatives, regional economic development organizations, and business representatives to assess important economic goals for the region," says Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission Executive Director Wayne Strickland, who retires this month.

Additions to the 2021 CEDS Annual Update updated demographics; housing studies for the Alleghany Highlands, Botetourt County, and the RVARC region and a set of regional priorities. On the RVARC wish list: expand broadband access across the greater region, additional flights and runway capacity at Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, Wood Haven Technology Park

development and related transportation network improvements

*VWCC selected for Virtual Innovation Boot Camp*

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) have selected 12 finalist teams – including one from Virginia Western Community College - to advance to the final round of the Community College Innovation Challenge this month. The competition

“seeks to strengthen entrepreneurial thinking among community college students by challenging them to develop STEM-based solutions to real-world problems,” according to the AACC/NSF. Teams consist of two to four students and a faculty or administrator team mentor. Finalists attend a Virtual Innovation Boot Camp in June and will interact with entrepreneurs and experts in business planning, stakeholder engagement, strategic communication, and marketplace dynamics.

VWCC’s Community Coral Project is supporting coral growth through 3D printing of porous structures made of PLA, a plastic substitute made from fermented plant starch.

*Progress on redevelopment in Vinton*

The Roanoke County Board of Supervisors has passed a resolution supporting the historic Gish Mill Redevelopment Project on Gus Nicks Blvd in Vinton, across from the Billy Byrd apartments. Jill Loope

is Director of Economic Development for Roanoke County: “the proposed uses for the property include a locally-sourced season market, a full-service restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating and 7 [lodging rental spaces].” A refurbished Gish Mill would also house a 1200 square foot event space and generate up to 42 new jobs, with an annual estimated tax revenue of \$165,000 for the Town of Vinton.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano*

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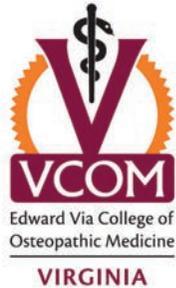


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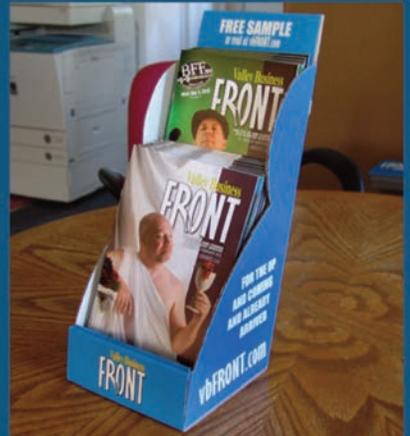
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