

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

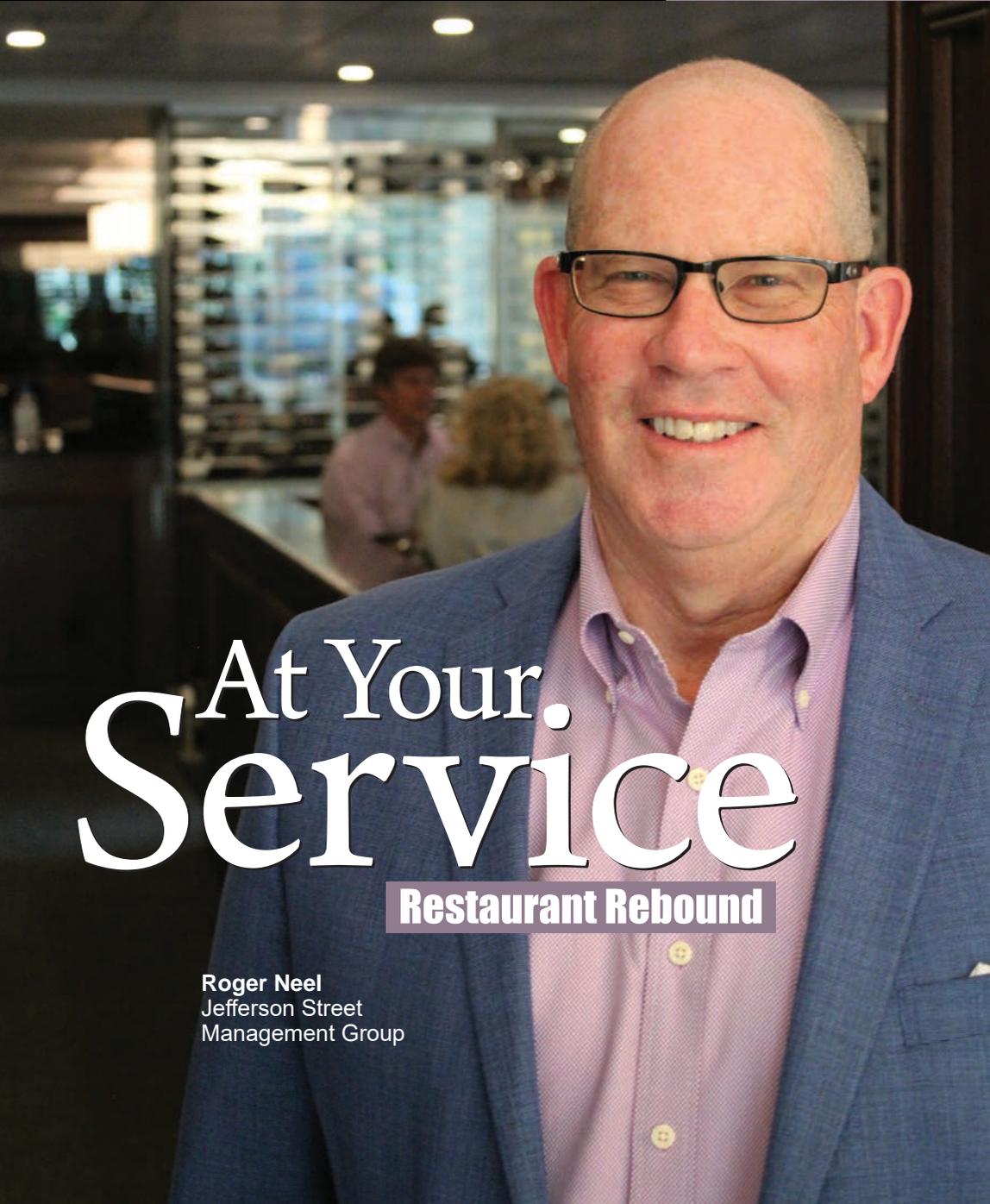
ISSUE 152
MAY 2021

Restaurant Roundup:
202 Social House, Billy's,
Martin's Downtown, PB's
Po Boys, The Farmhouse,
Village Grill, Farmburguesa,
Corned Beef & Co, Scratch
Biscuit, Frankie Rowland's

Restaurant Association

Doug Doughty on
Return of Baseball
in Salem and Pulaski

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Restaurant Rebound

Roger Neel
Jefferson Street
Management Group



Kayla Adams, *Private Banker & Treasury Management*

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

What a difference a year makes, even if we are not quite all the way back just yet. The scene is much livelier these days at local eateries, as COVID restrictions are dialed back and just as importantly, more vaccine shots go into arms. After a slipshod start and some confusion as to how to preregister via the Virginia Department of Health, by the time many in these parts had their shots completed by April, the process seemed to be a well-oiled machine for the most part at the local mass clinics. In this issue we check in on the state of the restaurant industry locally, including the cover story on a very familiar local restaurant group.

Two new bi-monthly columns debut – one is focused on the topic of “Innovation” and all that entails in the region. “Market Update” crunches the numbers and focuses on different aspects of local Real Estate issues. We also welcome a very well-known name in these parts, Doug Doughty, to the fold as a contributing writer, with a story on the return of baseball in Salem and Pulaski – under some different circumstances. Enjoy the start of summer at the ballpark or wherever, safely of course. We’re not quite out of the woods yet – and happy reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor



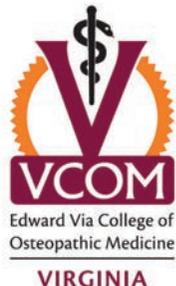
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Homegrown Hospitality

By Jennifer Poff Cooper



“”
Things are definitely
picking up. — Page 35

Cover photography of Roger Neel by Tom Field.



OPEN

The heartbeat of our community

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Virginia small businesses employed 1.6 million people, or 47.1% of the private workforce, in 2017. That was nearly half of our workforce. Unfortunately, the pandemic has had a seismic impact on our economy, and small businesses were hit extremely hard.

From the local coffee shop or brewery to the bookstore or bank, these businesses are the heartbeat of our community. That's why it's vital that we support them not just during May (which is small business month) or in November for Small Business Saturday, but all year long.

It makes me incredibly happy when I look around our Roanoke community and see restaurants starting to reopen and shops out making deliveries. Witnessing our small businesses adapt to our new normal makes me so proud to be a part of this community.

One of my personal favorite places to shop is **Crystal Spring Grocery**. Not only do they have delicious food, but their selection of regionally made goods make perfect gifts. Last fall when I attended their grand opening, I stocked up on much of my holiday shopping. And, if you ever have a question about beer or wine, just ask Devon Steiner. She gives great recommendations.

Another place I love supporting is **RND – Roasters Next Door**. There's nothing like walking in and getting an instant pick-me-up just from that amazing scent of freshly ground coffee beans. Plus, it's family run! Co-owners and co-founders Steffon and Quincey are brothers and I'm excited to see their positive impact in Roanoke continue to grow.

And, there's no better sign of the health of our small business community than the **CoLab**. For individuals testing the water for their own small business viability, the CoLab in Grandin is a fantastic place to begin. Gabriel Villarreal leads this important ecosystem in the Roanoke Valley and would be your best resource.

There are so many vibrant small businesses we can support here in Roanoke. While 2020 may be a year we all want to forget, it reminded us that we're a community. We're only going to get through this together and we need to support each other, our neighbors and our small businesses.

Cox Business has a local team in Roanoke who can offer you more information on any of our services -- including cloud solutions. Whether you're self-employed or 50,000 employees strong, we work tirelessly for you, so you can focus on **your** business and customers. If you'd like to learn more, just email me at Bethany.Sherman@cox.com.



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Advisory Board

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

2021 CONTRIBUTORS



Doug Doughty



Dan Dowdy



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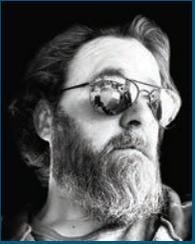
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“ ” I once asked for guidance... they told me to go get a book. — Page 19

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 52.

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Homegrown Hospitality

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

We found a way to push through. We're just excited to be open," says Roger Neel



Ted Polfelt, Roger Neel, and Jason Hurd at the new Frankie Rowland's in Salem

"I'm always interested in opportunities," said Roger Neel, President of Jefferson Street Management Group, the owner of multiple local restaurants (with partners like attorney Neal Keesee.)

The group has been successful with a variety of restaurants. The business model, said Page Moir, Director of Corporate Development, is good food and good service, with enough volume to make the pricing work. The group employed around 300 people prior to COVID, said Neel.

Neel, a graduate of Roanoke College, started in the restaurant business with a couple of fraternity brothers in Salem after college. He then partnered with local restaurant legend Al Pollard, who died in 2006.

Corned Beef & Co. was Neel's first endeavor, opening in the 1980s. Moir described that restaurant as "classic," and added that it has grown from a small footprint to covering half of a city block in Roanoke where over 1,000 people can fit, COVID-19 notwithstanding.



FRONT

Roger Neel,
JSMG President



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Corned Beef & Co, downtown Roanoke



Page Moir,
JSMG Director of
Corporate Development

The sports bar 419 West is also Neel's. "The outside patio area is huge for us there," said Moir. Both 419 and Corned Beef feature live music.

The high-end steakhouse Frankie Rowland's in downtown Roanoke is the pinnacle of Neel's restaurants. Moir puts it on par with a Ruth's Chris.

"It is one of a kind on this side of the state," he said. "The restaurant does a few things and does them very well."

Neel has partnered with attorney Neal Keese on other ventures. Billy's (downtown Roanoke) has a "diverse menu and fantastic staff," said Moir. Patrons can get bar food or a high-end meal there. 202 Social House is the "bright, shiny new place," said Moir. The duo also owns The Farmhouse in Christiansburg (see sidebar).

Moir joined the group after 33 years as a college basketball coach. He began as an assistant at his alma mater Virginia Tech, where he played under his father Charlie Moir, and



FRONT



Four Nineteen West, Roanoke County

TRADITION THRIVES IN THE 'BURGS AT THE FARMHOUSE: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Prom dinners. Family gatherings. Dinner theatres with friends. Holiday buffets. My wedding reception. I have experienced all of these – and more – at The Farmhouse in my hometown of Christiansburg.

“Restaurants are memory makers,” said Page Moir, Director of Corporate Development for Jefferson Street Management Group, which runs The Farmhouse.



Jennifer Cooper

The Farmhouse

From the 1960s through about 2000, said Moir, a Virginia Tech alum and also a former assistant basketball coach there, The Farmhouse was “the place to go.”

That certainly jibes with my recollections. “How early do we need to arrive to get a table at The Farmhouse?” was a frequent question on special occasions.

Unfortunately, the restaurant then went through a period under remote ownership where it fell out of favor and into disrepair.

But in 2015, Roger Neel and co-owner Neal Keese teamed up to bring it back to life.

They invested a “significant amount” in the facility, said Moir, adding all new kitchen equipment and the popular patio for outdoor dining and live music. Moir, with his Tech connections (he also played basketball there and father Charlie was a head coach for the Hokies), was instrumental in bringing in visiting teams to eat there. Locals also rediscovered the gem. The restaurant experienced a resurgence.

“Being closely related to the universities [Radford and Virginia Tech] drives trade,” said Neel, president of the restaurant group. That has created opportunities and also challenges. Neel said there is an increasingly competitive market in Blacksburg/Christiansburg, that the swelling student count means “more of everything” – including restaurants.

Still, pre-pandemic there would be 500-600 people at The Farmhouse on a Friday night before a Tech football game.

Then coronavirus hit. That Friday night number shrank to 150, and much of the fun patio vibe went away. “One-third to one-half of its business was in May – proms, Tech graduation – and December with holiday parties,” said Moir. Of course, that wasn’t the case in 2020.

But going forward, Neel said he hopes for “business as usual.”

“The Farmhouse has a simple menu done really well,” said Moir, adding that there’s a “sentimentality” which adds to its appeal.

Neel agreed, saying he wants to continue the historical value of the facility: “It’s a unique place.”

Our family will certainly be back. Recently during a small group icebreaker, my husband named The Farmhouse as his favorite area restaurant.

–Jennifer Poff Cooper



FRONT

Jason Hurd,
Frankie Rowland's
Salem General Manager

then spent 28 years heading the basketball program at Roanoke College.

He and Neel were friends, with Neel being a big supporter of his basketball team. When Moir decided it was time for a change – basketball is a “young man’s game” – Neel offered him a job. Moir brings to the table no restaurant experience - except eating, he laughs - but he could network, handle conflicts, and treat people right. Today he plays a managerial role at many of the restaurants.

Neel, after 35 years in the business, can speak to the keys to success. Good people are first and foremost – everyone from the bartender to the chef to the managerial team. Holding on to these people in a high turnover business helps.

“They understand what we’re doing and push it through,” he said.

Another factor is the mere moderate change in the Roanoke restaurant landscape over time. Growth in



FRONT



The Farmhouse, Christiansburg

FULL CIRCLE

Ted Pofelt wears many hats – chef's hats, that is. He is the Corporate Chef for the Jefferson Street Management Group as well as a full-time Instructor at the Al Pollard Culinary Arts Program at Virginia Western Community College (VWCC).



Ted Pofelt and students

Natalee Waters

Pofelt was hired 16 years ago into the restaurant group by Roger Neel and his

then-business partner, the late Al Pollard, after attending Johnson & Wales University in Charlotte for his culinary training. When Pofelt took the position at VWCC, Neel did not want to lose him, so Pofelt stayed on as a practicing chef. "I solve problems wherever they are," said Pofelt.

He continued his education with certifications from the American Culinary Federation, a non-profit organization supporting culinary programs. Additionally, he has participated in their competitions, won awards, and was named Southeast Chef of the Year in 2016. He was also a semi-finalist for National Chef of the Year and has won more than 20 medals competing in ACF-sanctioned competitions across the country.

But it's about the culinary arts program that Pofelt sounds like a proud father. He is one of three full-time instructors to a diverse population of students, from "the kid right out of high school" to those coming back for a second career. Some chefs go through the "school of hard knocks" with on-the-job training, but he tells them that when they only work in one restaurant, they only learn one restaurant's menu. Culinary school, on the other hand, exposes them to a broad range of skills. "This business is dynamic," Pofelt said, and chefs need to be trained for it.

VWCC offers a one-year certificate, as well as two-year associate degrees in either culinary arts or baking and pastry. Sometimes students stay for all three. Of course, this has been a "weird year," said Pofelt. Everything ground to a halt in March of 2020 but by last July the culinary arts program was back face-to-face trying to catch students up. Now labs are face-to-face, and lectures are online.

"Students need hands-on experience," said Pofelt, emphasizing that they go through the same protocols such as temperature checks and masking that they would in a commercial restaurant. The culinary school in the Claude Moore Complex on Henry Street in Roanoke was renovated and expanded a couple of years ago and "is as nice as any culinary school I've ever seen."

The school was named after restaurateur Pollard, and there is also a scholarship in Pollard's name funded by an annual golf tournament. Pofelt loves the fact that he was hired by Pollard and now teaches at the school named after his mentor, wearing Pollard's name on his jacket. "It's funny the way the universe works."

—Jennifer Poff Cooper

the area is good, of course, but from Neel's perspective it is beneficial for his restaurants to get – and stay – ingrained.

"Location, location, location" has contributed to the restaurant group's success as well, said Neel, with a number of the restaurants in desired downtown areas. The main office maintains a social media presence. Occasionally they will market on mainstream media when there are special events, entertainment, or dining specials. Mostly, though, success is created by the quality of the restaurants themselves, said Neel.

The pandemic "hit us pretty hard"

The Jefferson Street Management Group was coming off of a great 2019 and early 2020 when the pandemic struck. In previous economic downturns, such as the Great Recession of 2008, Neel said he could ratchet back expenses and "anticipate it would pass."



202 Social House, downtown Roanoke

With the pandemic, restaurants lost total control. Government mandates shrank their business to out-of-restaurant service only. They lost April and May business, then another wave of restrictions was instituted in the normally busy months of November and December.

"It hit us pretty hard," said Neel. "Revenue was grossly impacted."

It was easier at the dinner houses because their business hours skew earlier. But the bars, 202 Social House and Corned Beef & Co., took bigger hits due to their normal late-night business being sidelined. Cutting off patrons alcohol at 10 p.m. was unpopular, especially for people from out of state, said Neel.

When the bars could serve alcohol until midnight, things picked up. Neel is also hoping the full-service facilities will be able to maintain their return to business.

He said that the government's Paycheck Protection



FRONT



Billy's, downtown Roanoke

Program (PPP) was absolutely imperative as the “bridge to get to the other side” of the pandemic, as was working with banks on lending. Also critical was their loyal customer base.

The main lesson from the pandemic? Arrange your finances to always be prepared, said Neel.

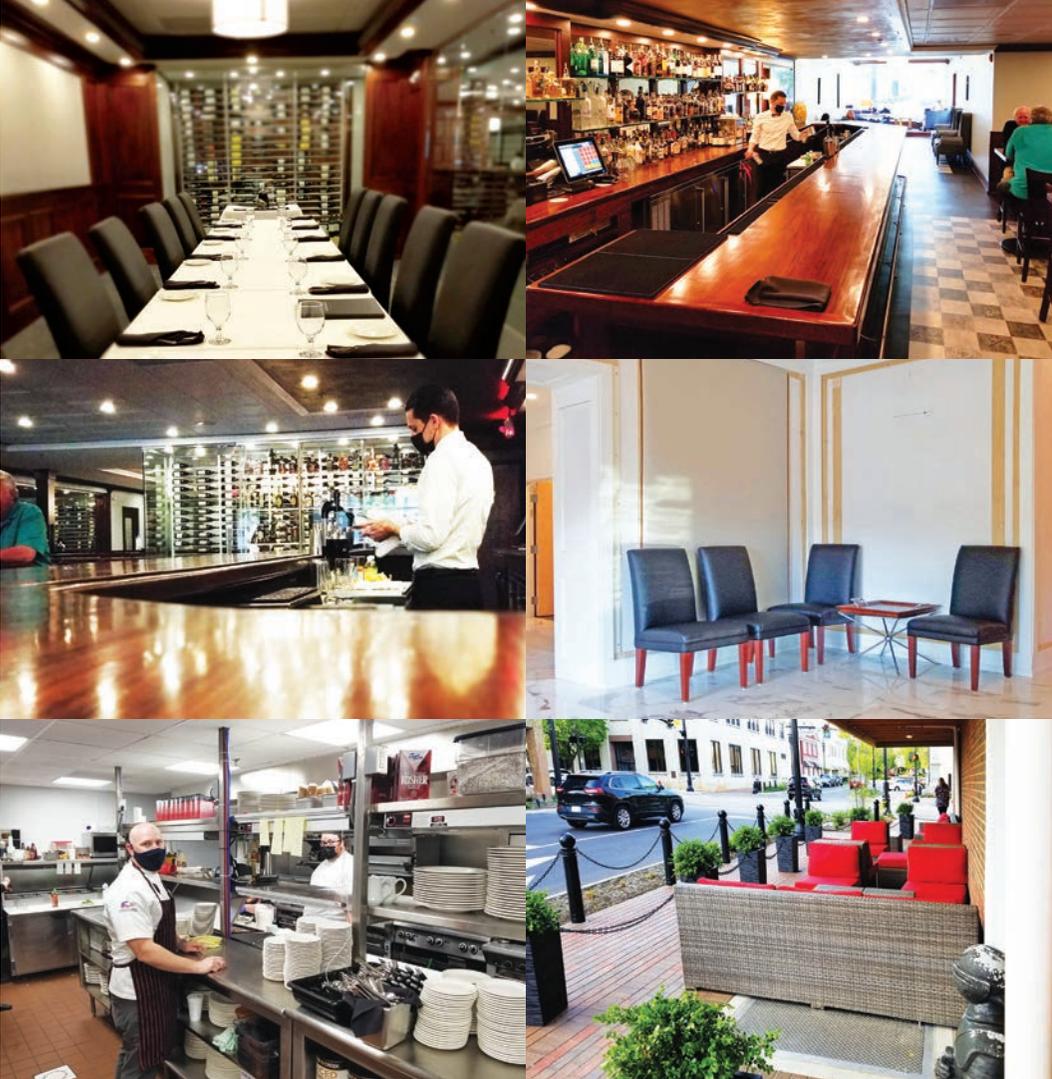
He predicts that certain pandemic trends will persist, such as “sales out the door” – delivery and pick-up. He also sees more counter service in the future of the restaurant business, a la the Chipotle quick-casual mode versus traditional fast food.

“People want to get better food, faster,” Neel said.

As for Neel’s future plans, he has just put the finishing touches on a new Frankie Rowland’s on Main Street in Salem. The restaurant is on the ground floor of a former theater building Neel bought about three years ago. He considered going with a different plan, but he kept coming back to the high-end Frankie Rowland’s



Frankie Rowland's, downtown Roanoke



concept because of interest from people in the area.

Floors two and three feature a boutique style hotel with 16 rooms, a whole new adventure for Neel.

"I had been intrigued for a long time with the idea," said Neel.

The hotel with its convenient downtown location is directed toward Roanoke College parents and alumni, as Neel had noticed a similar phenomenon in other college towns. Its smallness will help with the hotel learning curve.

As for other future plans, Neel demurs. He and Keese own some downtown Roanoke property with Benny Marconi's and may see where that goes.

For now, said Neel, "We found a way to push through. We're just excited to be open." 🍷

Scenes of the new Frankie Rowland's in downtown Salem

A giving nature gives way to sustainability for a group of restaurants in The Grandin Village

By Rob Ruthenberg

“We as a society need to have human interaction. Restaurants I think play a pretty big role in that” says Nathan Webster.



Nathan Webster

Nathan Webster is the owner of Village Grill, (as of 2009), Oak Tree Catering (Est. 2016), Scratch Biscuit Company (Est. 2017), and most recently PB's Po Boys (opened February of this year) all operating out of two buildings in the 1800 block of Memorial Avenue in Roanoke's Grandin Village.

A 2002 Elon University graduate with a degree in corporate communications with a minor business administration, Nathan Webster (now 40) didn't know the first thing about running a restaurant when he walked into the Village Grill to meet a friend for lunch and sensed that the place was in a state of decline. Before that time he had been in the real estate business doing appraisals and flipping properties. "It was a trial by error" says Webster. Looking back on it as a blessing, it compelled Webster to immerse himself in the industry and to figure it all out. "I had no outlet and nobody to talk to about it." This experience is what drives him to this

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day, making himself available to anyone looking for advice on how to start their own business. He remembers his own trials: "I once asked someone for guidance ... they told me to go get a book."

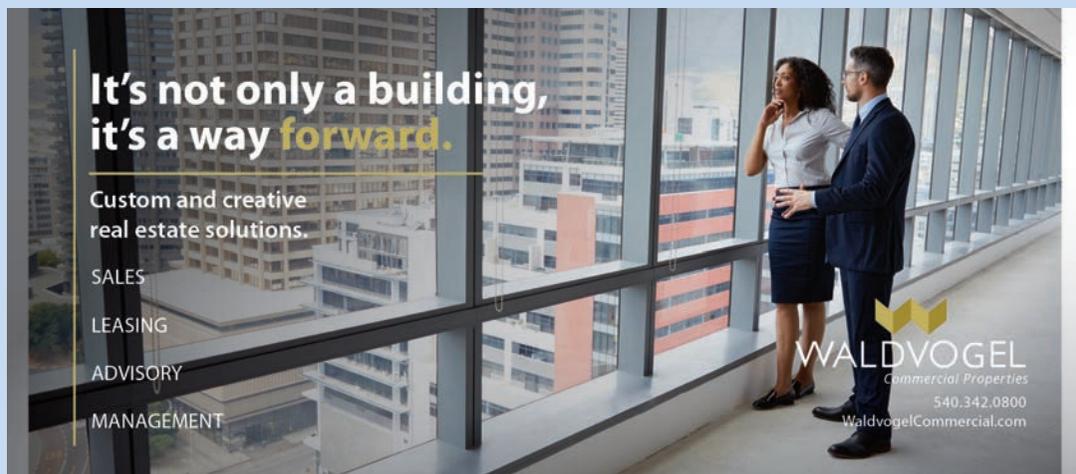
This "all ships rise" mentality has not only helped Webster in business, but it has allowed him to be a visible figure in the community that he serves. It's been a slow and steady process. The ownership of several food service outlets was not part of some big plan. Webster has this advice for those who want to be super ambitious by opening multiple locations in a short time; he says, "you've got to get that out of your mind, unless you have someone with a lot of money backing you in restaurants, build your brand before you expand." Another thing Webster finds important is the culture that has been created within his own work force, insisting that the people that run things day to day that are absolutely essential to his success. Another piece of advice is about, "being true to who you are - and upfront with what you expect"

Webster says it's important to create a real "vibe" and have pride in your work, and to help others to feel the same way. "You can have the best business plan in the world, but if you don't have a team of people to help you play that out, then it's just words on paper." Webster looks at his multiple operations as more than a "personal piggy bank" with a real passion for participation in a broader sense. "Every business to me has a responsibility to

reinvest in their community -because the community is supporting them by allowing them to stay open. Reinvesting in your community is reinvesting in the next generation. You can't just focus on what is good for you."

Webster also sits on the board of The Humble Hustle, an organization run by Xavier Duckett that looks to empower black youth and connects diverse communities by creating innovative, inclusive spaces that look to inspire hope and promote giving. Through his connections with this and other nonprofits, Webster was able to use his resources to help those in need by providing meals for under privileged children during the pandemic. He most recently offered to give gift cards to families that were displaced in a million dollar-plus fire at the Pebble Creek Apartments in Roanoke County.

Overall, this philosophy of "good works" and contributions to the community was helpful in managing expectations by the public, regarding patron restrictions set forth when the pandemic started. As a result, his employees found themselves in a much less confrontational role while following the Governor's mandates. Webster's reputation gave him the credibility to be explain that these were not his rules, and the public was largely receptive as a result. No doubt that puts Nathan Webster in a favorable position as his and other eateries emerge from the pandemic restrictions. 



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BEST PRACTICES

By William R. Hall III

Executive Summary:
Most of our clients have asked, "what's next as it relates to the transition of 2020 to 2021?" (Our newest columnist weighs in).

William R. Hall III is Chief Executive Officer for Beacon Partners Consulting in southwest Roanoke County. Reach him at will.hall@partnerwithbeacon.com

What's next?

That's the question that I come across 20-25 times a day. 2021 brings a unique opportunity for so many small businesses. It's truly an opportunity to redefine yourself, redefine the way you do business and redefine how your business fits into today's culture.

I would like to share an example, of what I mean. Within the last 12 months, Walmart has launched a subscription-based service called Walmart+. The reason? Amazon. Unfortunately, with the pandemic, going to the store has looked a little different for everyone. Masks, limited shopping hours, the inability to get products, the "run on toilet paper" ... pain points we all remember and hope we don't have to deal with again. However even now, masks, social distancing and corporate responsibility are critical. This has changed the American consumer.

So how do you adapt your business? First, having a solid delivery plan for ecommerce is crucial. That may entail building out a better web presence, communicating to potential and current clients through social media or instant chat platforms, and having the ability to continue to serve clients with a remote process. Sounds complicated? It really isn't. It does require some additional processes and expenditures but in a "sink or swim" environment, it's important to execute correctly.

Second, you have to figure out a delivery system that makes the client feel comfortable. For restaurants it's become curb side pickup, Hollywood has gone to streaming at home on demand for new releases, Walmart+ institutes next day delivery included or 2-hours for a surcharge. The key is finding out how to continue serving your client in such a way that they feel safe. This may require logistical changes, redoing processes, looking at delivery channel(s) to reach clients and sometime even outsourcing certain areas of the business to continue profitability.

Lastly, don't forget your employees. Anytime organizational changes occur at different levels, often the most impacted people are your employees. You can combat that with great communication, special recognition and other perks like increasing an employee discount or some other perk that fits within your model. The key to remember above all else is successful businesses require great products or services, a consistent client base but often forgotten is the team to deliver, those are often taken for granted.

We are in a unique environment, with a dynamic landscape of uncharted territory. However, with uncharted territory comes opportunity. Those that execute correctly will have continued or increased success, those that don't may not find themselves so fortunate. No matter the case the one undisputable fact is that the landscape for business to client interaction has been changed for better or worse indefinitely. 

Watching the numbers

Around eight months ago, a friend of mine retired from the military after 25 years and moved his family to Roanoke. They planned to stay with the in-laws until they found the right house. With an above-average budget, and not too many “must haves” they expected to have a house under contract within a few weeks. Not long after they moved to Roanoke, they made an offer on a house, a generous offer above the listing price, but it was not accepted. The sellers accepted another offer and the house sold to a couple from out-of-state for \$75,000 over the asking price. They are continuing their search, but it’s heading toward a year now and my friends are still living with the in-laws.

Many have found themselves in a similar situation, living with friends or family or in a small apartment because the sellers’ market we’re in right now is unlike anything we’ve ever experienced. What is causing this hot market even in the middle of a pandemic? The low-interest rates have sent people into a buying frenzy, which creates a high demand and a low supply - and drives up prices. Bankrate.com reports that as of April 7, 2021, a 30-year fixed mortgage rate averages a 3.32% interest rate, while a 15-year fixed mortgage rate averages 2.56%. These interest rates put more people in the market to buy a house, and eventually the inventory of houses declines.

To give a better overall picture of the real estate market, we’ll take a look at the numbers. According to the Roanoke Valley Association of Realtors, Multiple Listing Service (MLS), in March 2021, there were 629 active listings in the Roanoke Valley, with 551 homes sold. The average price of a home sold was \$273,846. If we go back a year before that to March 2020, there were 1514 active listings, 499 sold, and an average sale price of \$241,699. That’s 885 fewer houses on the market this March than last March, and the prices of the houses are reflecting it. The average listing price for a home in March 2021, was \$463,696 and the average listing price for a home in March 2020, was \$383,423, an increase of \$80,273.

With numbers like that, it’s a great time to sell, but a tough time to buy. The question everyone asks me is when is it going to end? When will the market return to normal? That is something no one knows. Some call it a bubble similar to the housing bubble that burst in 2007, while others are more optimistic and think it will eventually level itself out. I’m on the optimistic side - but all we can do is keep watching the numbers. 

“Low interest rates have sent people into a buying frenzy, which creates a high demand and a low supply—and drives up prices.



HOUSING MARKET UPDATE

By Christopher Borba

Executive Summary:

A new column with a different perspective on the real estate market - by the numbers.

*Chris Borba, MBA
is a buyer's agent and
a real estate investor.
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Submitted photos

Jason Martin

Student of the trade makes good with Martin's Downtown

By Ian Price

Says restaurateur Jason Martin, "you have to be committed. It's every day."

"I've been a student of restaurants my whole life" said Jason Martin, now 46, the owner of Martin's Downtown Bar & Grill since it opened in 2005 and proprietor of the more recent upscale European cuisine and beer establishment "Sidecar" that is next door. The restaurants actually share a kitchen; part of the reason Martin started Sidecar was to expand the kitchen as Martin's business continued to grow.

Martin said he got into the restaurant game originally because he wanted to be a bartender. "[I] started managing, it was paying my bills and it's come easy to me over the years. What it really allows me to do

is stretch my creative muscles" As for refueling his creative tank: "my wife and I travel a lot and we're always looking for new ideas and inspiration." Martin said a trip to Spain in 2018 inspired the concept for Sidecar, which opened in February of 2020 just before the COVID-19 pandemic began and was closed for a while at its height.

"If I had my way, I'd probably have 10 different restaurants with 10 different concepts, that's how much I love it," Martin continued, "but I'm very fortunate to have the two restaurants that I have. They are polar opposites of each other, allowing me to be creative in different ways."

One of the most notable ways Martin gets to be creative with the menu at Martin's Downtown is a chalk board featured prominently along with the window lighting, focused on the "Burger of the month." Martin said he bounces ideas off the kitchen manager, to help come up with some noteworthy creations. "I've got a spreadsheet in the back with every burger we've ever done. And we repeat some of them every year—every October we do an Oktoberfest burger ... every March we do an Irish pub burger."

When asked what advice he would give to someone who is thinking about starting a restaurant now he said "don't! Run the other way - but people are doing it." Several new eateries have indeed opened in downtown Roanoke during the pandemic era. Added Martin in a more serious vein, "if you are going to do it you have to be committed. It's every day. You may be your own boss, but you have a lot of responsibility." Martin said he believes that's why a lot of eateries fail. "Everybody wants to own a restaurant, and there's people with enough money to do it. Then they get into it and it's more work than they bargained for."

Martin's on 1st Street in Roanoke is also known as a restaurant that—when there isn't a pandemic—has live music almost every night, with bands playing on a recently remodeled stage from Tuesday through Saturday. Jason Martin says that wasn't always the case. "I'd always had a passion for live music. We started off with local bands only on Friday nights, then we did so well with it we added Saturday. Next thing you know it snowballed."

He then started to bring in bands that other venues in town weren't able to. "I made relationships with booking agents all over the country and they'd send their up-and-coming bands through Roanoke to play while they were on their way somewhere for another gig." Martin said that's when the live music scene really boomed for them. "Love the local acts, love 'em all and we still book a ton of them. But we didn't have [all] the same bands that you could see down the street."

Martin got his start in the restaurant industry at 18-years-old. He worked at different places until he was able to open Martin's at age 30.

It's a family business. "My mother does the books; she was an accountant by trade. My brother's here—he's the first one in the building every morning. My dad's mister fix-it - despite retiring twice already."

The family isn't limited to biological connections. Anyone who goes to Martin's Downtown Bar & Grill regularly will notice how the same employees seem to stick around, helping to establish a deeper connection with regular customers during the lunch and dinner hours – even perhaps knowing their menu favorites. "We have a lot of long-term employees and we've been able to help them provide for their families," Jason Martin notes with pride. 





NO BAD HIRES

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:

Learning to be more methodical about the hiring process.

For more information and guidance on each of these steps, listen to our short podcasts at SalesHiringStraightTalk.com.

The 6 steps you need for a stronger hiring system

Think about your interviews, especially when hiring a salesperson. Have you ever hired someone you wish you hadn't? A candidate who wowed you in the interview but couldn't sell? You hired a likeable person, but they couldn't perform the job?

Two main things contribute to a poor hire: failure to know what hard-wired traits and abilities are needed for success in your position, and an inability to determine if the candidate actually possesses them. When hiring, what you are actually doing is renting job behaviors. Behaviors such as directing the actions of others, persuading prospects to buy, projecting warmth and friendliness to customers, solving unexpected problems, following rules and procedures, and performing routine tasks on a regular basis.

Hiring is often done solely on instinct and gut feel rather than supplementing it with data and information. That's why I'm suggesting a 6-step hiring system for stronger interviews and better hires.

Step 1: Phone interview or screen. Save time when hiring with a short (about 15 minutes) and focused phone interview to determine if you want to move forward with the candidate.

Step 2: Use pre-hire assessments. Get an early, objective first look at your candidate's abilities and traits. A good doctor with data from tests, x-rays, MRI's and CAT scans will make far better decisions than a great doctor operating on their own.

Step 3: The First Interview. Using your hiring experience and information from resumes, phone interviews and your assessment data, plan your questions and what you're looking for to have more meaningful conversations in your first interviews.

Step 4: The Second Interview. Even if you think you've found your new employee, don't hire too quickly and skip this step. Organize and prepare for a second interview. Address doubts, ask new questions you've thought of and confirm your first impression of the candidate.

Step 5: Background and Reference Checks. References are still a powerful, yet underused, information source in hiring. Either call references because you know Who, How and What to ask from them ... or outsource to a professional service.

Step 6: Make a Powerful Job Offer. Finish strong! Create a job offer that makes a candidate say YES! Create excitement about their decision, set expectations and lay the groundwork for the first days ahead. Good candidates can be scared away if you miss this step. 

Shaping the innovation economy

Our region, defined by the GO Virginia initiative as Region 2, includes the cities of Covington, Lynchburg, Radford, Roanoke, and Salem and the counties of Alleghany, Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Botetourt, Campbell, Craig, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and Roanoke, continues to emerge as a technology hub and engine for innovation-based economic development. Over the next year, this column will explore why innovation and entrepreneurial activity is so critical for long-term economic success.

The concept of innovation economics was first advanced by the economist Joseph Schumpeter in his 1942 book, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Schumpeter is credited with introducing the idea of an innovation economy. He argues that innovation and entrepreneurship are at the heart of economic growth. But it is only in recent years that an “innovation economy,” grounded in Schumpeter’s ideas, has become a mainstream concept.

Innovation economists advocate that what primarily drives economic growth in today’s knowledge-based economy is innovative capacity. The presence of creative knowledge workers, policies that encourage and support innovation and entrepreneurship, advanced industry clusters, research enterprises, collaborative firms, and support mechanisms such as accelerator programs, mentorship support, and access to new venture financing sources are all key ingredients for a vibrant innovation economy.

The good news for our region is that many of these key elements are present here:

- Virginia Tech is a leading R1 classified research university
- The Fralin Biomedical Research Institute is a growing biomedical research enterprise
- Liberty University’s Center for Engineering Research & Education provides labs for researching chemical and materials, electromagnetic compatibility, 3D prototyping, calibration testing, and non-destructive testing
- RAMP provides acceleration and mentorship services to technology startups
- The VTC Innovation and Seed Funds, along with Commonwealth Angels provide capital access in Region 2 for startups
- Regional industry clusters include advanced manufacturing, health and life science, IT and software development and autonomous systems.

Schumpeter’s views seem prophetic today. Tech-based companies dominate the list of the ten largest companies in the world as ranked by market capitalization. They include Apple (#1), Microsoft (#3), Amazon (#4), Alphabet (#5), Facebook (#6), Tencent (#7), Tesla (#8) and Alibaba (#9). As recently as 2008, only Microsoft made this list.

With the right vision, leadership, and support for innovation and entrepreneurship, Region 2 could be the home of the next Tesla or Amazon. We have most of the right ecosystem elements to make this happen with proper focus and commitment. 



INNOVATION

By Greg Feldmann

Executive Summary:

A new occasional column focused around one word – innovation.

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



All photos: Gene Marrano

Farmburguesa

Check your ego, map it out, listen

By Gene Marrano

From helping out with dad's food truck and selling candy in grade school, the journey to Farmburguesa for one entrepreneurial couple.

She grew up in Bedford County; he's from Columbia with a detour to Elizabeth, New Jersey before winding up here. Both their families were involved with owning small businesses, so they cut their teeth early on being self-starters and entrepreneurs. Now they make some of the best burgers in town at two Farmburguesa restaurants, first in Vinton (soon to be expanding) and then in Roanoke's Grandin Village. Kat Pascal (31) and husband Jimmy Delgado (35) have two boys, now 8 and 9. They have made their business a family affair with relatives involved as well. Farmburguesa wasn't the first venture they

got into. "We started as soon as we started our relationship [over a decade ago]," says Pascal. Spotless America was the commercial-only cleaning and landscaping business they created (the latter eventually fell by the wayside – a decision made despite having sunk about \$20,000 into equipment) while both were working for banks. Not to mention Pascal was about 8 months pregnant. "We saw that we needed a third income," Delgado recalls. A nighttime business offering janitorial services made sense. Spotless Roanoke became Spotless America after they started picking up clients outside

of the valley. About ten employees work for them right now after some downsizing - it was too difficult to hold on to larger crews reliably for any length of time. "It was a lot of work," says Pascal. That meant letting go of some clients as well. Delgado says these are the tough business decisions owners have to make at times: "you might lose a little bit of money now, but a lot of money down the road [without a course correction]." When the money isn't there and its not making sense adds Pascal, "absolutely pivot. Let go of your pride [and] move forward." Not burning bridges, ending business relationships on a good note - like letting some of their janitorial clients go after downsizing - is the best way to move forward notes Pascal.

After year of prospecting, the couple landed their first cleaning contract in 2012. "We didn't give up," Delgado notes. Others soon followed by word of mouth. They also learned the value of follow up calls - even if that was three years later after an existing contract a prospect with had with another cleaning service didn't expire until then. Pascal's outbound sales calls experience with banks paid off there. Part of the motivation was also that they were just trading her salary for day care - a problem many can identify with. Still the decision to become a full-time business owner took time; that happened 6-7 years ago for both of them.

Growing up in Columbia, Delgado watched his grandmother and great uncle operate a restaurant. His grandmother managed it and he was "always there." He got a taste of commerce by taking candy to school and selling it to other students. Then in 6th grade he started getting up early, making hamburgers and selling those. He liked watching the cash register at the restaurant (fried chicken was a specialty) fill up with cash.

Pascal's father "has done everything in the book," and launched a food truck before Kat reached her early teens. She helped with the menu and was forward-facing to the public. "I fell in love with his optimistic view of the world and business." She wasn't shy to offer ideas on course corrections or something new they could try - skills that came in handy last year. Pascal always "loved to work," and had her parents blessing when she started down that path early.

THE LATINAS NETWORK: "AN ORGANIC NETWORK OF PEOPLE."



Kat Pascal's advice: map out your plans for starting or growing a business. "Put it on paper. Do the market research and the customer discovery. Talk to people that have done the same thing you're talking about." Check your pride and ego at the door when having to make tough decisions on how to move forward. Find out if people really want your product. Don't create an awesome plan, "and then go to market with no customers." Always look at your numbers - and anticipate delays for construction/remodeling, equipment arrival, etc. "Are you ready to overcome all of the obstacles and hurdles that are coming your way?" Can you deal with a hundred "no's" before getting to one yes? Find a circle of people that want to see and help you exceed with your plan.

Pascal is now putting that acquired perspective to good use as co-founder of the Latinas Network, launched late last year. The network is there to support local Latina women whether they are in a career already or like Pascal are ready to step out on their own. There are 170+ members now in the Roanoke and New River Valleys; monthly get-togethers with guest speakers at the Vinton War Memorial and online programs have helped grow that number. An online regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce she helped found three years ago (with 1500 members now), *Nuestro Comercial Latino*, is also aligned with Chambers in Richmond and DC.

That move eventually led to the Latinas Network, helping Latina women find the resources they need. It's also to help overcome a level of distrust and any language barriers. Pascal's handful of co-founders (Iliana Sepulveda, Shannon Dominguez, Angie Hernandez and Jonathan "JoJo" Friday) all have "different skill sets," and all share in developing the support system. "We love to collaborate and share resources. It's become a really great thing." (see the *Latinas Network Facebook page for more details.*)



Meeting Jimmy Delgado helped spark what she calls an “entrepreneurial lifestyle. He has wonderful ideas.” Delgado had been in the restaurant business even as a student at Patrick Henry High School. After purchasing a tiny eatery space on South Pollard Street in Vinton (800 square feet) they mulled on what to sell before landing on hamburgers as the central selling point. Now the Vinton restaurant is expanding and will soon offer outdoor seating. Then they found a location in Grandin Village for Farmburguesa 2. They thought it would work, “but you really don’t know the outcome until you open.”

It meant more employees, more equipment and “a much bigger investment,” says Pascal. Like a \$24,000 programmable hamburger grill that basically needs little hands-on assistance, freeing up line cooks for other tasks, turning orders around more quickly. “A leap of faith,” she notes. The wheels are always turning; Farmburguesa started

opening earlier for breakfast in December.

After watching other restaurants lay off staff when the pandemic shut everything down last March, Farmburguesa pivoted – there’s that word again - to in-house deliveries of their locally sourced, farm-to-table gourmet burgers and other menu items to keep people working. “We always keep our employees top of mind. They are super loyal to us and they work their tails off,” says Pascal. Loyal customers were “willing to work with us,” even offering suggestions and critiques as they worked out the kinks while turning servers into delivery drivers. “[Its about] being transparent with customers. We learned to let go of our ego a long time ago.” (The City of Roanoke recently awarded Pascal and Delgado with the Neighborhood Unsung Hero Award for their efforts to feed frontline workers and community members in need during the height of the pandemic shutdown) 

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STYLE NOTES

By Doug Kidd

Executive Summary:
Let your wardrobe reflect the current season.

Business dress for the warmer months

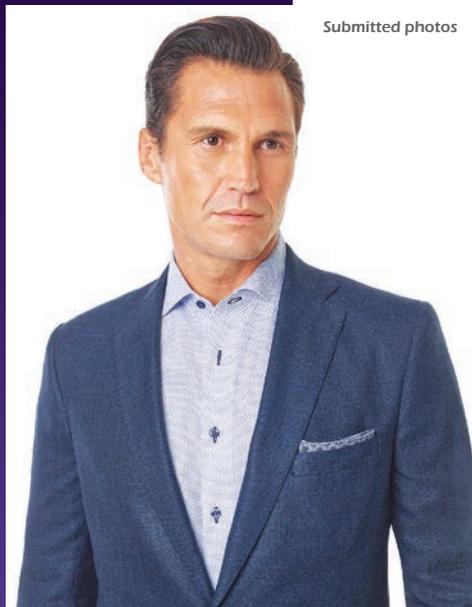
As COVID begins to dissipate, and the warmer summer months are around the corner, how do these multiple changing climates affect what should one wear to work? One thing is for sure, the business environment is more complex than ever. Will today present a video conference? Will I be client facing? What will the senior partners be wearing? What will my peers be wearing? These are very valid questions that might be surging through your mind.

From a clothier's perspective, one thing to consider is the climate when dressing for the season. Although many folks have concentrated on "year-round" clothing when building a wardrobe, spring and summer offer an opportunity to wear seasonal fabrics and colors that are cooler, more comfortable, and offer the effect of spring and summer sensibilities. Silk, cotton, linen, and new technical fibers in the industry allow men and women alike to take advantage of looks that typically aren't worn in the cooler months. It's one of the advantages of living in a four-season area of the country. Let your wardrobe reflect the temperature around you.

Don't forget to allow your shoes to also complement the lighter looks in your outfits! Shoes define the outfit, and make sure they are kept in top notch condition – they are often that the first part of an ensemble that catches the eye! 📷

Doug Kidd is with Tom James Company. He is an image consultant and clothier. Reach him at d.kidd@tomjames.com

Submitted photos



Creative local food solutions

Are you looking for a one-stop resource for local food decisions and providers? LEAP can help you find the best food providers in the Roanoke and Southwest Virginia region. Whether your goal is to buy from nearby family farmers, eat healthier on a budget, or start your entrepreneurial venture in our professional kitchen, LEAP can help.

The Local Environmental Agriculture Project Inc. (LEAP) is a Roanoke-based 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Its mission is to nurture healthy communities and resilient local food systems. LEAP connects local farmers, food producers, culinary entrepreneurs and community members to create a relished experience by all.

Fill up on farm-fresh food

Visit the Farmers Markets in Grandin Village and the West End, and all around Roanoke at the LEAP Mobile Market. You'll meet the people who grew or raised your meal and taste the difference that "picked-today" or "raised with care" makes. Or, you can support your local farmer with the convenience of a weekly pick-up of fresh, seasonal food by registering for Farm Share.

Get cooking at the LEAP Kitchen

Located in Roanoke's West End neighborhood, The LEAP Kitchen is a certified commercial kitchen space designed to incubate new and growing small food businesses (caterers, bakers, jam makers, and more). Learn about both the creative and the business side of the trade through the exciting on-site community programming.

A strong local food economy depends on you!

You can help by shopping at our markets, donating to LEAP, or buying a LEAP Market Gift Certificate for a friend. For more information, visit www.leapforlocalfood.org 

“LEAP can help you buy from nearby family farmers, eat healthier, or start your new entrepreneurial venture.



GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:

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Dennis Deacon Photography

Minds Blown Media >

When we first wrote about Carolan Deacon in these pages her production company was known simply as Carolan Deacon Consulting. She worked with producers all over the county on ad projects and wrote songs she shopped to artists, commercial producers and TV shows. Deacon still does that, but last year she joined forces with Ian Kyle, a videographer and now the Director of Photography after they launched Minds Blown Media. Deacon describes it as a full-service boutique agency serving mid-sized to small businesses in the U.S. who want to grow their sales through “high impact and the use of image.” One current project for a client entails “changing the narrative on what it’s like to be in the construction industry.” Visual storytelling she calls it, offering services like drone video, video editing, postproduction, directing and script writing. As well as some business coaching under the same umbrella. “It goes hand in hand,” says Deacon, who will also help create client websites. Treks to the Orlando area and to Los Angeles help uncover potential clients.

Now the Botetourt County resident has a partner for what she calls “sonic branding,”



with production/scriptwriting/voiceovers and songwriting. And as Carolan Deacon Music, she writes songs in a variety of genres that are offered for commercials, TV shows and artists. Sync licensing, she calls it. One of her tunes is up for consideration on the show Lucifer. “Dark and gritty,” she calls it. The secret? “It’s really about proximity and who you know now, above having a great song.” Alas, Deacon is considering a move to Florida. “I can get more work down there. Proximity matters.” (see mindsblownmedia.com for more)



Mack Trucks welcomes Congressmen, Supervisors >

What do members of Congress do during a recess in DC? They often head back to their districts and make the rounds, touring businesses and these days, even COVID vaccine mass clinics. In early April, 6th District Republican Congressman Ben Cline and his 9th District GOP counterpart Morgan Griffith toured the Mack Trucks manufacturing plant in western Roanoke County, where

the new medium duty Mack delivery trucks (in three models) have been rolling off a production line since last summer. Griffith noted that as part of the Volvo North America family, technology upgrades to the new line can happen after research and development at the much larger Volvo Trucks plant down the road in Dublin. Accompanying Cline and Griffith on the Mack tour were Roanoke County Supervisors Phil North and Martha Hooker, who got behind the wheel of a Mack medium duty series truck for a photo opp. The Mack plant is in Hooker's home Catawba district.



Roanoke County photos



Submitted

Jerry Smith

The restaurant rescue business

By Gene Marrano

Putting a lifelong passion and a background in analytics to good use.

The Roanoke Regional Restaurant Association isn't a trade group but a consulting firm with offices in Blacksburg and Roanoke – and the brainchild of Jerry Smith, who works with a small handful of eateries at one time, locally and elsewhere (including Denver recently), on makeovers and improved business plans. "We go in and help restaurants that are struggling with whatever they might have

a need for." It's done on a contract basis says Smith, who has an MBA in business analytics and worked in the industry while in college. He left a related 7-year corporate stint in northern Virginia to start his own firm.

Chef T – Torrece Gregoire – has been executive chef at Radford University's Dalton Dining Hall, the chef for The Black Hen & Bar Blue

in Blacksburg (known for fine food) and a former contestant on the “Hell’s Kitchen” TV show. Her own restaurant in St. Paul (Wise County) fell prey to the pandemic. Now she’s also working as a consultant/partner with Smith on projects. He was a fan of the show and says he can walk into a place and start to sense right away what needs to change. “But I’m nice when I critique people,” unlike he says the Gordon Ramsay approach.

In Blacksburg Smith recently worked with the Centro Taco Bar on a business model as it embarked on a major expansion (which includes more outdoor seating), “helping them to grow responsibly and reasonably, not too much at one time.” He’s also consulting with the Black Hen on becoming more cost effective, and with the Bull & Bones restaurant/brewpub in Christiansburg, owned by the same group that operates the Black Hen.

Survival for many eateries these days means developing a “strict plan of action,” and adhering to it as everyone starts to emerge from the tighter pandemic restrictions. Action plans that might normally look at the next 6 months are being constructed for 30 days at a time he notes. Food supply prices have varied wildly due to production issues associated with the pandemic – a case of chicken for example says Smith has recently doubled in price (production plants like Tyson were hit hard by COVID) – “while beef is down to pennies on the dollar.”

Some of the takeout models like Uber Eats and DoorDash don’t really work for many he contends, as they eat away at profit margins. “They’re losing money,” in some cases says

Smith, who urges clients NOT to sign contracts, and to let those delivery companies make up the difference. He says many eateries “don’t know they can do that. We turn the tables.”

Some establishments without significant savings didn’t make it through the past year. Smith urges client to put aside at least \$5000 every month and not touch it if they can. “A lot of restaurants are hanging on by a thin thread. The federal government helped with PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) ... but it may not happen again. Think smart.”

The outlook from DRI: Downtown Roanoke Incorporated Marketing and Communications Coordinator Jamie Clark says, “things are definitely picking up,” in regard to what DRI is hearing from local restaurant operators, especially on the weekends, “[they] are nearly back to normal.” Several promotions to lure diners back to downtown eateries are planned says Clark. Day time weekday traffic has still been a struggle for some, with many office workers still remote as of mid-April. “Obviously, we’re concerned that it might be permanent [for some]. We’re keeping an eye on it.”

Several venues have indeed launched during the pandemic; that’s encouraging notes Clark: “Its probably close to a normal level of businesses that have opened up.” With downtown Roanoke restaurants and small retail shops learning how to pivot over the past year as needed to stay afloat, “some of that has proven successful, curbside pickup and takeout [for example] – a lot of the businesses will probably keep those practices in place.” 

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Dan Mirolfi

ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
We have so many good choices for dining out locally; even people in the business know it.

Where do you want to eat?

In the interest of our coverage on restaurants this month, on top of the fact I like to eat and enjoy exploring our local culinary offerings and restaurateur ventures, I am yielding my space for my usual commentary. This list below is more interesting. I also like doing this, because you are currently in the REVIEW section of the magazine—a place where we publish reviews and opinions and all things subjective.

With that in mind, I called up a few restaurant owner/operators to ask them one question. I thought it could be revealing or entertaining to get THEIR referrals! After all, we're all in this together; and though many confessed they are so busy they hardly get to visit others in their own industry (and practically every single one of them were reluctant to name only one favorite) it's refreshing to see the love. The love of dining and the ones who give us that experience.

"Other than YOUR OWN restaurant, what is one of YOUR favorite local restaurants?"



"Bloom! And when we're with the kids, Village Grill."

Hunter Johnson
LUCKY / Roanoke



"Mac & Bob's... and also Montano's."
Renee "Butch" Craft
The Roanoker Restaurant / Roanoke



"The Bad Apple (Pembroke)... Lefty's and Blacksburg Tavern (Blacksburg)"
Shaena Muldoon
The Palisades Restaurant / Eggleston



"Alexander's! And I love Nawab."
Diane Elliott
Local Roots / Roanoke



"An overwhelming favorite... is BreadCraft."
Bridget Meagher
Alexander's / Roanoke



"Our staff really enjoys Blacksburg Tavern."
Cody Thompson
Zepoli's / Blacksburg

Down on the market

I met Carolan Deacon at Mill Mountain Coffee in downtown Roanoke. She's a friend, we were in a play together (Miracle on 34th Street, Attic Productions 2019) and a creative marketing/songwriter person. Valley Business FRONT has written about her before and there's an update in this issue on her company. Had an Americano and a scone. VBF Publisher Tom Field wandered in to distribute copies and said hi (a total coincidence).

When Carolan and I split I stopped into the Deschutes tap room and Market Street and had one. Enjoyed the John Denver playlist on Pandora they had playing. (Yes, I admit it). But before I did that, I bought 12 oz. of Ethiopian coffee beans from Ben at the Farmer's Market and his White Wagon Coffee Roasters company. In his "spare time," Ben is an OR Nurse at LewisGale, where I'm sure the staff appreciates coffee.

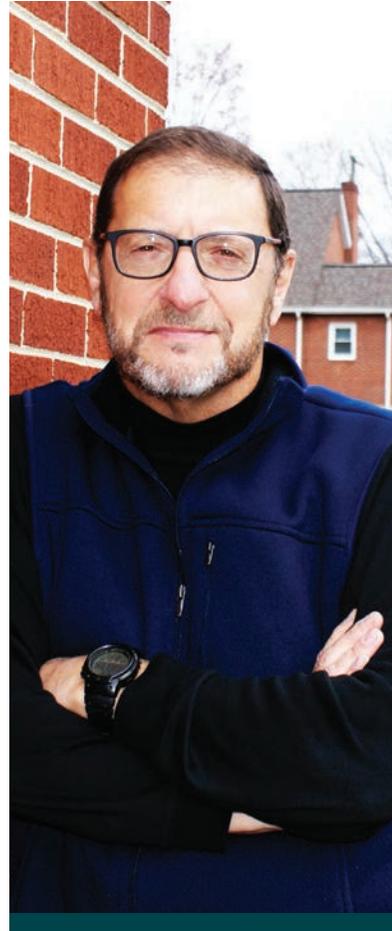
Then these hand painted tiles in colorful homemade frames caught my attention. Artist Rod Hemmings is an English Chap living in Buchanan. There's a piece of fabric (from a family heirloom dress) baked into the tile and he painted over that to give it some texture. I liked the story, so I bought the \$25 mounted tile; the handmade frame in the burnt orange was nice also. F&R Arts he calls it.

Before running back to the car, where my two-hour free parking had just expired, a sign outside On the Rise Bakery listed Tomato Cheddar soup on what was still a chilly early afternoon. Bought a pint; didn't know until I got home they had tossed in two small rolls. Bonus and great for dipping.

So, what's the point you say? It was just me realizing that I don't get to downtown Roanoke enough to enjoy the City Market and other amenities, although I'm no stranger to downtown – and I know how to sniff out free parking. I had a couple of great hours; it was sunny on the Market and pumped about 50 dollars back into the economy to mostly local small businesses. Imagine if more of us did that, or a little more often, what it would mean to these shop owners ... especially in these times.



White Wagon Coffee



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

*We (I) need to do
this more often.
Shop and eat local.*



GUEST COMMENTARY

By **Stephanie Rogol**

Executive Summary: *Stephanie Rogol operates several eateries in Botetourt County and the New River Valley, including Tizzone, the Town Center Tap House and Sharkey's. She first wrote about the pandemic's impact for us last June.*

Stephanie Rogol grew up in New York, has lived in VA since 1990, went to graduate school at Virginia Tech for Philosophy and then became a restaurateur.

Lessons learned from a restaurateur

It has been a little over a year since the pandemic began and what a year it has been. Owning restaurants has given me a bird's eye view of some of the challenges we all have faced. From the start, the greatest concern has been for the well being of our staff, our guests, and our communities. It wasn't just their physical well being and all the challenges associated with making sure everyone's health wasn't jeopardized, but there was the emotional well being and financial well being that needed to always be considered. It was challenging - but in many ways it brought us all closer together.

From the business perspective as challenging as it has been, it also gave us the time to focus on making things better. We used the downtime to upgrade our kitchen hood systems, make the repairs that were needed and hard to do when you are open all the time. We upgraded our POS systems, added online ordering and introduced delivery at a few of our restaurants. With a smaller staff we also needed to become more efficient, and everyone worked together to make that happen. Sometimes you need a little disruption to make changes you otherwise probably would not have made. One of our staff members commented recently to me that Covid has been "a blessing" in that it gave us challenges we otherwise would never have had - and we learn from our challenges. She is a very wise woman.

One thing I have come to realize so deeply is that human beings need to interact with others. They need to be able to go to a safe place to make friends, talk to people, socialize with others. We've tried to accomplish it as best we can while maintaining social distancing and everyone wearing masks. It's challenging to do that ... facial expressions add a lot to an interaction, but it will all be over soon, and my hope is that the appreciation of others, and the caring of each other will always continue. I deeply appreciate our staff, our guests and our communities for coming together and working together to get through this challenge together. I am so glad to live in Southwest Virginia. 

“ Sometimes you need a little disruption to make changes you otherwise probably would not have made.



Jerk House

FRONTReviews >

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

Quick hits on a couple of eateries

For months since some time last year when I run on the Roanoke River Greenway in the southeast part of the city, I would pass by the new **Jerk House** across 13th Street. (Not the "Jerk Store" – that's a George Costanza-Seinfeld reference). Finally stopped in for an order of jerk chicken recently, served on top of rice with a side of cabbage. Generous portions, sweet and tangy jerk sauce, really good. It's a non-descript former convenience store, but worth the visit. They also specialize in cheesesteaks; will have to try that soon. One of the few places in that area where residents can stop in for meal or takeout; the Jerk House also carries more standard fare like hamburgers, hot dogs, wings, fries etc. as well.



Gene Marrano photos

El Mezcal

And in southwest Roanoke County, **El Mezcal Mexican Grill** has opened its doors where El Viejo used to be. Before that it was a Cajun joint and way back a Ground Round. I enjoyed my Burrito Fajita and my son liked his chori pollo tropical (grilled chicken breast topped with chorizo sausage, pineapple and cheese dip, with a side of rice and warm tortillas.) What's not to like? For fans of the Mexican food genre, it's worth the visit, although the jumbo house margaritas seemed a bit pricy. Wonder if they have a happy hour. The menu is extensive; lots of choices – you can build your own burritos and create your

—Gene Marrano

The reviewer: **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT and an award-winning news reporter.



Courtesy photo



Senior living community goes greener >

The Warm Hearth Village (WHV) Resident Green Committee in Blacksburg, coordinated by Lyn Day, has initiated several efforts for a greener campus. Last year the WHV staff and residents participated in a plastic film recycling initiative sponsored by Trex, a manufacturer of wood-alternative decking, railings and other outdoor items made from recycled materials. Once 500 pounds of plastic (about 40,500 plastic bags), were collected in a six-month period, the Village would qualify to receive a high-performance composite bench, which was delivered last November. This resident-led committee has been awarded a second bench. The Committee has also installed junk mail receptacles near the mailboxes and are soliciting bids for a third party to provide single stream recycling. Several members clear invasive species the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The AEP eScore Program reviews energy efficiency in residences and provides a report for either WHV maintenance or the homeowner to correct. WHV staff has also arranged for residents to leave electronics to be taken for recycling.

Props from residents to WHV management >

Residents of the Founders Forest independent living community at Warm Hearth Village in Blacksburg recently thanked employees for their leadership, protection, and excellent response to the challenges presented by the pandemic. The Founders Forest Resident



Council presented President & CEO, Brad Dalton with a special certificate at their March meeting. "The certificate enumerates several general examples of actions for which we are especially thankful," said Les Myers, President of the Founders Forest Resident Council. "I was especially struck by the early recognition of the pandemic's seriousness and the timely preparations and protocols."



All under one roof >

The first building of Virginia Tech's Global Business and Analytics Complex at Virginia Tech has broken ground. Construction has begun at the corner of West Campus Drive and Perry Street for the Data and Decision Sciences Building, one of four that will comprise the complex frequently referred to

as GBAC. The 115,000 square-foot Data and Decision Sciences Building will house faculty and classes from multiple colleges, including the College of Engineering, the College of Science, and the Pamplin College of Business. When completed it will bring together under one roof computer science, engineering, and data-related disciplines. The state's capital budget allocates \$69 million toward construction.

Jeff Center finally celebrates new artwork >

A year ago, local artist Betty Branch donated an original sculpture to Jefferson Center as the organization entered its 20th performance season in Shaftman Performance Hall. Then the installation and subsequent unveiling was derailed by the pandemic. Now, Branch's work, positioned outside the entrance to its flagship auditorium, "A Perfect Balance" is the artist's representation of restoration, preservation, and a return to human interaction. "As a student of the former Jefferson High School, I wanted to create a beautiful sculpture that would honor the place of learning once so meaningful to me and that would honor the dispirit entities that make up the Jefferson Center today," said Branch before the formal unveiling in late March. "Some twenty non-profit organizations and small businesses are housed in today's Jefferson Center; one could say, that is a feat of perfect balance." Branch maintains a downtown Roanoke studio on Warehouse row and other public works can be found at the Taubman Museum of Art and at the South (Roanoke) County library.

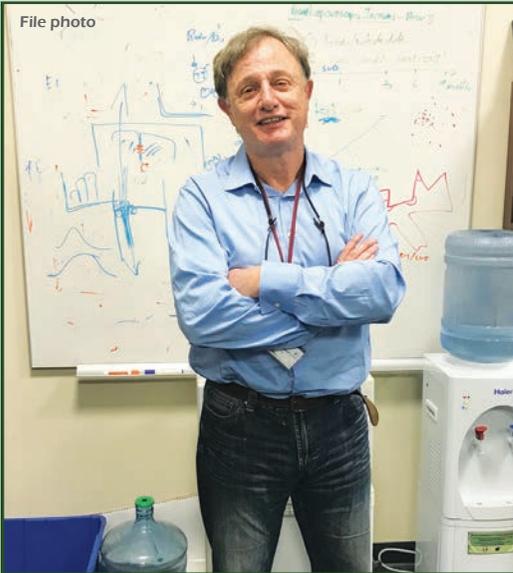


Submitted



RGC protest >

A small group of protestors demonstrated outside the Roanoke Gas Company headquarters in mid-March, claiming the natural gas provider was passing along the cost of its investment in the embattled Mountain Valley Pipeline (which they also want halted) unfairly to its end user customers. Many lower income customers cannot afford that, as some protestors complained. Roanoke Gas said in a news release that same day those allegations are "patently false and misleading," also deeming it "misinformation and mischaracterizations" about RGC, the MVP and state and federal regulatory agencies.



RAMP welcomes first ever focused Health & Life Sciences cohort >

Startups that develop fabrics to filter viral matter like SARS-CoV-2 - and therapeutic peptides from cow milk - are among the four startup companies invited to RAMP's Spring 2021 cohort focused on health and life sciences. RAMP, the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program based in Roanoke, is now providing expert mentoring and other resources in an intensive 12-week program. "We are impressed by these entrepreneurs' talent, research, creativity and drive, and are eager to support them as they work to bring their ideas

to market," said RAMP director Dr. Mary Miller. Tiny Cargo is a spinoff from the lab of Dr. Rob Gourdie (pictured) in the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC in Roanoke, and has developed patented protocols to isolate and purify exosomes from cow milk, which can then be used to deliver a therapeutic for reducing radiation injury. Based in Charlottesville, HAVA, Inc., has developed a cost-effective process to filter particulate and viral matter. Jeeva Informatics (Vienna, VA) seeks to accelerate human-centric clinical research with software that decreases timelines for participant recruitment by 58 percent. KinergyCare, currently based in McLean with plans to move to Roanoke, has designed a platform to better track and manage patients across acute, ambulatory and home care settings, expertly guiding a non-clinical community health worker at every step in delivering care coaching and coordination, enabling a cost effective and scalable solution. The virtual platform for this spring's RAMP cohort allowed for a wider range of participants to be considered.



Governor checks out hands-on courses >

On a swing through southwest Virginia to promote the further reopening of schools to more on-campus learning, Governor Ralph Northam made a stop at Salem High School in mid-March. Northam met with a senior English class and also stopped in the auto shop, the culinary arts student kitchen and the robotics program room. Salem High School also launched a cosmetology program in a new space this year where students learn how to cut hair, do manicures etc.



LewisGale to expand in NRV >

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery, a part of LewisGale Regional Health System, will invest \$15.9 million to enhance its surgery department in Blacksburg. The surgery department will add 7,500 square-feet of new space adjacent to the existing surgery department, including two new, state-of-the-art operating rooms (ORs), a 15-bed Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU), a sterile storage room, and support space. 4,800 square-feet of existing surgery department space will also be renovated. The new expansion of surgical services totals nearly \$35 million in capital improvements including a planned cardiac cath lab, advanced medical equipment, new patient safety, and quality improvement efforts since 2019. Stated Alan Fabian, chief executive officer, "this expansion is critical in helping us to continue delivering on our commitment as the premier surgical specialty hospital, as well as being recognized as the healthcare provider and the employer of choice in the New River Valley." The project is scheduled to begin early next year.



Roanoke County

New Mexican eatery opens in Southwest Roanoke County >

Co-owner Daniel Sanchez mentioned that opening a restaurant during the pandemic worried him a little but seeing the activity at Tanglewood as part of the 419 Town Center Plan gave him the confidence to open El Mezcal, on Electric Road/Route 419 (formerly El Viejo)) in Mid-March. Roanoke County economic development officials were on hand to welcome Sanchez to the soon-to-be-reimagined corridor, expected to attract a critical mass of retail and residential growth in the coming years.



Gene Marrano

Number 5 for Restoration Housing >

Restoration Housing has kicked off the historic rehabilitation of their fifth home in Roanoke, a circa 1899 two-story house in the recently designated historic district of Belmont in Southeast Roanoke on Dale Avenue. Before acquiring the home last winter, the property had been vacant for several years and had suffered from an exposed hole in the roof, leaving it in a heavily deteriorated state with rotten floor systems on both the first and second story in the rear of the house (they had to be stabilized). Several grants will help Isabel Thornton's non-profit recoup the extensive renovation costs; this will be their first property to be rented as single-family home. Roanoke Vice Mayor Trish White-Boyd was on hand for a ceremonial ribbon cutting at the renovation launch in mid-March: "there's very little housing right now in the city. For them to take on a project like this, to bring some affordable housing into a neighborhood like this is just amazing. I can't thank them enough."



VT

Kudos for Marr >

Linsey Marr, the Charles P. Lunsford Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, has been recognized with the Ut Prosim Scholar Award – Virginia Tech's top honor for faculty – for her research and efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and educate the public on safety protocols. The university's Board of Visitors established the Ut Prosim Scholar Award in 2016. The widely quoted Marr (she also testified at a recent Congressional hearing on aerosol transmission of viruses) and her team will receive \$250,000 in funding over five years for operational support of research at Virginia Tech in the College of Engineering. Marr holds a B.S. in engineering science from Harvard College and a Ph.D. in civil and environmental engineering from the University of California at Berkeley. At Virginia Tech, she leads the Applied Interdisciplinary Research in Air (AIR2) laboratory and teaches courses on air pollution and environmental engineering.



Submitted

From COVID downtime hobby to a business >

What started as a pandemic hobby has turned into a new all-natural candle business in Riner. Geoffrey Brown grew up in a home where there was no shortage of candles, and while looking at the chemicals added in a lot of mainstream products, he decided there was a more natural way to do it. Brown started FWM Candles in part after he learned what the large candle manufacturers were using to make their products: "a bunch of additives and chemicals and stuff that's not necessarily good for you while you're burning it." Brown says his candles are 100-percent soy wax, all-natural wood-wick candles made with 100-percent pure essential oils, giving some of them aromatherapy benefits as well. See the FWM Candles Facebook page for a link to more information.



Sounds like cool job >

Nelson County's Devils Backbone Brewing Company has appointed a Chief Hiking Officer: Kristen Musselman, an outdoor guide and trainer passionate about hiking, wellness and wilderness survival, will be paid \$20,000 to hike the trails of the East Coast, capture content, and stop for some off-trail beers along the way. After prepping for her hike at her family's home in Virginia and getting vaccinated,

Musselman hits the trail for six months – trekking near and on the Appalachian Trail and in state and national parks. She will also visit the best overlook in each state, as voted on by fans of the AT. These overlooks have been illustrated and are now featured on Savor the View packs of Vienna Lager.



Gene Marrano

Carilion celebrates vaccine milestone >

On the last day in March, between vaccinating their own employees and what's been distributed from their stock at mass clinics, Carilion Clinic reached the 100,000 shot COVID vaccination milestone. 98-year-old Jeanne Rutherford received that landmark dose at the Berglund Center, courtesy of Dr Thomas Kerkering. Rutherford received an ovation at the Berglund Center from clinic workers and those waiting for shots, when it was announced she had received dose number 100,000 from Carilion, which has coordinated its mass clinics with help from the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Army National Guard, which has been lending logistical support since January. 6th District Congressman Ben Cline was on hand for the occasion: "it's a community effort ... vaccinating as many people as possible who want to be vaccinated so that we can get this economy moving again, get our kids back in school – and get things back to the way they were." Meanwhile the Commonwealth has now moved through Phase 1A through 1C and is now on to Phase 2 – general population vaccinations. Preregister if you haven't done so already on the VDH website.



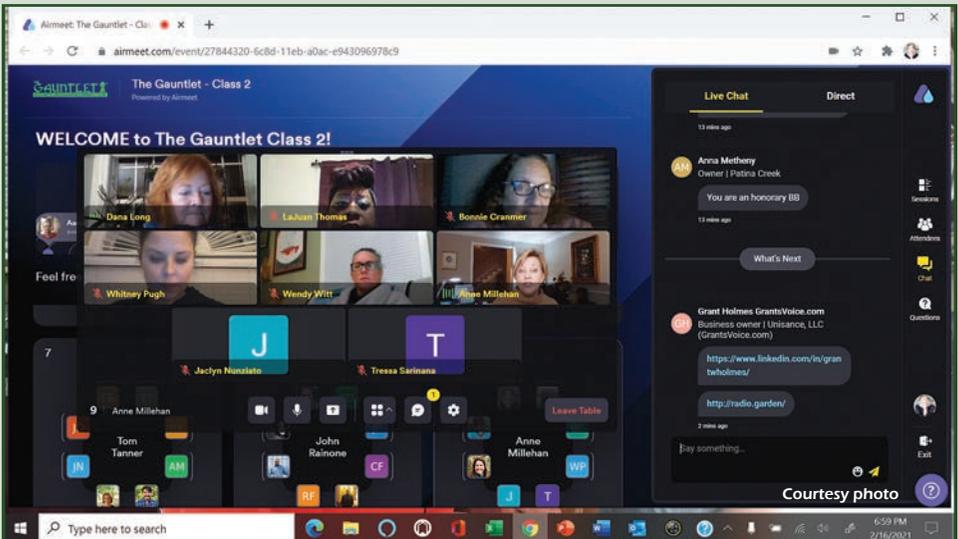
Roanoke County



Roanoke County

High end auto shop opens in new location >

Old Virginia Outpost has cut the ribbon on its new automotive customization facility on McConnell Road in Roanoke County. The new company location features a design studio where the client can visualize their vehicle modifications on screen to aid in the decision-making process. Old Virginia Outpost caters to the Jeep, Truck, Performance, Overlanding and Restoration clientele. (Overlanding is essentially customizing a 4WD vehicle to be capable of off-roading and camping in, while also remaining an everyday vehicle). Owner Jeff Sluss says, "we were fortunate to be able to develop a great client base, before closing in Salem, and re-creating ourselves here in Roanoke." Sluss is a Christiansburg native, and long-time Salem resident. Well known as the "Voice of the Salem Spartans" on Friday football nights, his passion has always been automobiles. His background is in engineering, as well as experience working with NASCAR teams at all levels.



Gauntlet wraps up this month >

The Advancement Foundation's latest Gauntlet Business Program & Competition wraps up this month with the awarding of cash and in-kind services for all of the small business startups that went through the mentoring program. It has spread far beyond its Vinton roots, aided in part by the hybrid approach necessitated when the pandemic made in-person sessions impossible last year.

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

FINANCIAL FRONT



Braswell

Kimberley V. Braswell, Chief Talent Officer at Member One Federal Credit Union, has been inducted as President of the Roanoke Valley Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Braswell has been a member of Roanoke Valley SHRM since 2009. Roanoke Valley SHRM is a state-sponsored affiliate of the national Society for Human Resource Management – a resource group for human resource professionals. Braswell will serve the 200+ members of Roanoke Valley SHRM through a two-year term as President.

Sanford Holshouser Economic Development, LLC (SHEDC), a consulting firm, has

announced a new partner, **John J. Smolak**, of Roanoke. Smolak has spent the last 45 years in economic and community development, in various capacities, both in the private and public sector. Most recently, he was with AEP (Appalachian Power) for 25 years.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Phillips

Gala North America in Dublin announces that **John Phillips** has assumed the position of Vice President, after resigning as president of the Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council last month. Gala makes scented candles and other home décor products. While with the RBTC, now part of the Verge alliance, Phillips was credited with increasing

RBTC membership and developing regional internship/apprentice programs for aspiring software developers.



Navis

Davis H. Elliot Company, Inc. (Elliot), a full-service electrical contractor based in Roanoke, has announced the promotion of **Scott Navis** to Chief Financial Officer. “Scott has been instrumental in improving our service to internal and external customers, as well as the utilization of some great new technology,” remarked David Haskins, President & CEO. Navis joined Elliot in July of 2006 as Controller before moving into the position of Vice President – Finance.

OpX Solutions has welcomed **Dianne Ward** to their team as a Lean and Leadership Associate. Ward brings



Ward



Neal

over 20 years of experience leading teams in the manufacturing, distribution, information technology, and insurance sectors. **Bryan Neal** has also come aboard as Director, Client Solutions. He joins OpX Solutions with over 25 years of business experience in various sales careers throughout the Southeastern United States that include the telecommunications, manufacturing, health insurance, broadcasting, and waste management industries.

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DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Price

Salem-based R.L. Price Construction has promoted **Ben Price** to Project manager. "Ben has been with us for many years and through hard work and attention to his craft has grown into a valued member of our team," said President Robert L. Price. R.L. Price was founded in 1990 as a family-owned organization. Ben Price has been with the firm, founded by his father and grandfather, for eight years.

WELLNESS FRONT

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery recently welcomed board-certified urologist **Mazen Hasan, MD, FACS, FEBU**, to its team of specialists

Have a career announcement?

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



Hasan

servicing the New River Valley. Dr. Hasan specializes in diagnosing and treating most urological conditions including urinary stones, enlarged prostate, bladder tumors, and prostate cancer.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Lisa M. Lee, associate vice president for research and innovation in the Division of Scholarly Integrity and Research Compliance and faculty member in the Department of Population Health



Lee

Sciences in the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, has been appointed to the Education Board of the American Public Health Association (APHA). Her term began March 2021. Lee is a public health expert specializing in infectious disease epidemiology and public health ethics. Since March 2020, Lee has been quoted more than 1,800 times by broadcast, print, and online news outlets from more than 35 countries on COVID-19 related topics.



Jones

Tombo Jones has been appointed director of the Virginia Tech Mid-Atlantic Aviation Partnership (MAAP) after two years as the partnership's associate director. Since 2019, Jones has managed the day-to-day operations of the FAA-designated drone test site and overseen a staff that has tripled in size over the last five years. He succeeds Mark Blanks, who has directed MAAP since July 2016 and is moving to a position with Alphabet subsidiary Wing.

Virginia Tech Dining



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Jadrnicek

Services and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has named **Shawn Jadrnicek** manager for Homefield Farm. The position oversees the student-run, six-acre organic operation eight miles west of the Blacksburg campus that is jointly funded by Dining Services and the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Prior to joining the university, Jadrnicek ran Wild Hope Farm, in Chester, South Carolina. He has also served as a horticulture agent for the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service and as manager of the university's student organic farm. Jadrnicek will also be teaching two courses in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences. He is the author, along with his wife Stephanie, of "The Bio-Integrated Farm," released by Chelsea Green Publishing in 2016.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

Wayne Strickland will retire in June as



Strickland

Executive Director of the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission after 42 years. He joined the Regional Commission, then the Fifth District Planning District Commission, in 1979 as a Regional Planner. In 1981, he was promoted to the Chief of Land Use and Environmental Planning and in 1987 became Executive Director of the Regional Commission where he has served

until his retirement this year.

The Botetourt County Department of Fire & EMS has appointed **I. Ray Sloan** as District Fire Chief for Buchanan. Sloan, a long-time part of the fire and EMS system in Botetourt, had previously served with the Buchanan department for over 17 years. More recently, he had been serving as Chaplain for the Department of Fire & EMS since 2016.

Former House of Delegates member **J. Brandon Bell** of Roanoke (President, Brandon Bell Financial Partners) has been appointed to the Board of Trustees of the

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TACORRITOS

Virginia Retirement System by Governor Ralph Northam.

Madge E. Ellis, MD, FACS of Salem, President, Salem Surgical Associates has been appointed to the State Board of Medicine



Rayne

Lisa Rayne has been promoted to Finance Director in Montgomery County. Since November 2020, she had served as the Interim Financial

Services Director. Before joining Montgomery County in 2014, Rayne held the position of Controller at Virginia Tech Services, Inc. Graduating from Virginia Tech in 1991 with a degree in accounting, She has over 29 years accounting and finance experience and is a Certified Public Accountant.



Sexton

Cody Sexton is the new Assistant Town

Manager in Vinton. He was previously the assistant to the County Administrator in Botetourt County.

The Town of Rocky Mount has selected **Robert Wood** as its next town manager. Wood is the former

city administrator of West Lake Hills, Texas and replaces James Ervins, who has retired after 14 years in the position. Wood started his new role on May 1.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

Got A News Tip?

A Response To One Of Our Articles?

A Suggestion On What We Could Cover?

Send your note to: news@vbFRONT.com

2021 SEASON LINEUP

so far....

5/14 Metallica Tribute: Battery

5/15 Jamey Johnson

5/28 Eagles Tribute: EagleMania

5/29 Kip Moore

6/5 Aaron Lewis

6/11 Van Halen Tribute: Completely Unchained

6/12 Ashley McBryde

6/18 Michael Ray

6/19 The Cadillac Three

6/25 Fleetwood Mac Tribute: Rumours

6/36 Blues Traveler/JJ Grey & Mofro

7/9 Steely Dan Tribute: The Royal Scam

7/17 Jackyl

7/23 AC/DC Tribute: Shoot to Thrill

7/30 Colt Ford

8/8 Lee Brice

8/13 Absolute Queen

8/20 Marshall Tucker Band

9/9 Blackberry Smoke

9/18 Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

9/24 Prince Tribute: Dean Ford & the Beautiful Ones

10/8 Pink Floyd Tribute: Us and Floyd



Tickets on sale now at DrPepperPark.com!



CONTRIBUTORS

Shon Agüero 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.

Christopher Borba, MBA is a buyer's agent for the Riener Realty Team at Lichtenstein Rowan and a real estate investor. The Reiner Realty Team did over \$15 million in real estate transactions last year and is one of the top real estate teams in the Roanoke Valley. [chris@myroanokehome.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.

Doug Doughty is retired after spending 45 years at the Roanoke Times. After graduation from UVA in 1974, he was hired as a hockey beat reporter by the Roanoke Times. Many of his early assignments involved covering the Salem Pirates Class A baseball team when he witnessed — and later wrote about — the death of Alfredo Edmead in a collision with one of his Pirates teammates. Doughty later became the UVA beat reporter, covering football, golf, lacrosse and a host of other sports, including the Cavaliers baseball team when it won the NCAA championship with one of his sons on the team. Doug Doughty is also a member of the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame. [doughtysports@aol.com]

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]

Greg Feldmann serves as CEO of Verge, a collaborative strategic alliance established to grow the region's innovation economy, technology and life sciences sectors, and the supporting professional communities. Reach him at [gfeldmann@valleysinnovation.org]

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]

William Hall is the Chief Executive Officer of Beacon Partners Consulting. They specialize in Human Resources, Operational Efficiency and Brand & Marketing. A graduate of Roanoke College, Will has several years experience working in the consulting field with small business owners. When not consulting you can find him at a local pickup game playing basketball.

Doug Kidd has 25 years in the business as a professional image consultant and clothier. He's with Tom James Company, a service that comes to clients in the privacy of their home or office.

Jennifer Leake is an expert in employee assessments and their use to better select, engage and lead employees. Jennifer has over 20 years of assessment experience and is certified in multiple assessments, including Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement tools.

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.

Ian Price is a radio and print journalist in Roanoke who looks at things through a Millennial's eye. The Radford University communications major is also a pretty good DJ and trivia host, so say. [IanPrice23@gmail.com]

Stephanie Rogol grew up in New York, has lived in VA since 1990, went to graduate school at Virginia Tech for Philosophy and then became a restaurateur.

Rob Ruthenberg grew up most of his life in Roanoke Virginia. He has been a TV, radio personality, live event producer, writer and comedian for almost 30 years. [robruthenberg1@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.



In previous economic downturns... he could ratchet back... with the pandemic, restaurants lost total control. — Page 14

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Another tenant for Tanglewood Mall

Another new tenant for Tanglewood Mall in southwest Roanoke County: Roanoke-based BKT Uniforms and Mathis Nursing Uniforms will be located in 8,000 sq. ft. near the Belk first floor entrance to the Mall. BKT Uniforms and Mathis Nursing Uniforms offers hundreds of brands serving the medical, industrial, public safety and hospitality industries. The company provides services to over 450 agencies in three states. John Abernathy, President of Blackwater Resources, which owns Tanglewood Mall, says the 30-year-old company, "is a well-established Roanoke business, and we're excited to have them come to Tanglewood. Many of their customers travel a great distance to Roanoke to shop due to their large inventory and unique offerings." Upgrades announced so far for the 419 Town Center Corridor include several new outparcel buildings that will house restaurants and dental office on the mall property and Electric Road/Route 419 improvements already underway.

Carilion Children's outpatient services will open in the former JC Penney department store this summer – forecasted to see 1000-1500 visits daily.

First grants from new fundraising initiative

The Project Outside fundraiser project from the Roanoke Outside Foundation (an arm of the Roanoke Regional Partnership) has issued grants totaling \$100,000 to help fund trail construction and maintenance for area parks and recreation departments - and to support outreach initiatives aimed at getting more people outdoors. Roanoke Parks and Recreation will receive \$15,000 to make greenway repairs. The long-range goal is to make Project Outside a sustainable fundraising initiative. 14 projects selected from 23 applications are sharing the initial grant. Pete Eshelman is director of the Roanoke Outside Foundation, which initiated the Project Outside fundraising campaign. He says the repairs and maintenance requests funded may

have taken much longer to be completed otherwise. Greenway repairs, trail work and support for local outdoor-focused companies impacted by the pandemic were among the first round of Project Outside grantees. "The fund continues to grow," says Eshelman, "what we're going to do is reach out to businesses that we've yet to engage and try to get them on board in a sustaining manner as well."

Funding for MontCo broadband expansion

Montgomery County has been awarded a Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) grant to improve broadband infrastructure, in a partnership with Gigabeam. Montgomery County is adding \$140,763 and Gigabeam \$140,763 to the \$919,569 VATI grant to extend the local broadband network. Gigabeam, based in southwest Virginia, has also pledged to match \$206,540 as in-kind matching funds for labor and equipment use, design, and fiber connections/routers. The extended broadband network will bring fixed

wireless broadband access to 1,292 serviceable units, including 44 businesses in Allegheny Springs, Elliston, Lafayette, and Shawsville. Construction will begin this summer, with anticipated completion by the summer of 2022

More Moe's

Moe's Southwest Grill plans to open a location in the former Zaxby's building on West Main Street in Salem. A grand opening is planned by June. The Salem location would be only the third Moe's in Virginia to have a drive-thru window.

New GO VA funding

The GO Virginia Board has approved funding for a new Region 2 project, a total of \$99,360 in state funds, leveraging \$55,000 in non-state sources to assist with economic diversification. The new project, targeted for Biotech Lab Space Development at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, will support Roanoke and Blacksburg's life and health sciences



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ecosystem “with much-needed flexible laboratory space,” says a VT official. The impact could ultimately lead to 800-1,000 new jobs created in the life sciences industry in Region 2 and foster and growth of the biotech industry.

SML Ambassadors

Twelve members of the Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce have been selected to serve as ambassadors for the organization for 2021. “Ambassadors are critical to the operations of the Chamber,” said Erin Stanley, SMLRCC Member Relations and Events Director. “In addition to helping to

organize networking events, ribbon cuttings and other events, ambassadors assist with membership retention, welcome new businesses, oversee a group of members, and maintain a visible presence at community and Chamber functions.” This year’s Ambassador Council; Chairperson Gina Kennett, MemberOne FCU; Tim Bird, Gilbert, Bird, Sharpes & Robinson Attorneys; Jessica Bohn Bishop, KEEPin’ Up with J Bohn; Mishelle Brosinski, Envisions Flooring & Interiors; Crystal Knuttgen, The Conner Group; Angela Newman, Movement Mortgage; Sandra Ober, Laker Media; Xan Pilgram, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Smith

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Mountain Lake Real Estate; Jeremy Smith, Smith Home Inspections; Tommie Jo Walker, Smith Mountain Eagle; Annette Stamus, LeisureMedia360 and Teresa Wood, Carter Bank & Trust.

Another major tenant for Botetourt Center

Munters Group AB,

a Sweden-based manufacturer of energy-efficient and “sustainable climate solutions for mission-critical processes” will build a state-of-the-art facility in Botetourt Center at Greenfield to replace its Buena Vista plant. The company will invest \$36 million and plans to retain approximately 200 workers in the new location. The 365,000 sq. ft. facility will house

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manufacturing, research and development, and sales of data center cooling systems and high-temperature industrial process systems. "A move to the Roanoke region will allow for the expansion that is needed for the Data Center business in the U.S." said Michael Gantert, president Data Centers at Munters, also noting access to a larger labor pool in the Roanoke Valley. "A new facility will meet the company's growth and Botetourt County will have another international manufacturer to add to our roster of foreign direct investment," said Dr. Mac Scothorn, chairman of the Botetourt County Board of Supervisors. Italy-based Eldor Corporation opened its automotive parts plant at the Botetourt Center several years ago. The Roanoke Regional Partnership projects an annual economic impact of \$93.5 million in the Roanoke region from the project, estimated to be completed sometime next year.

That's the spirit(s)

Pulaski County's first legal distillery has opened its doors on Valley Center Drive in Fairlawn inside the county's business incubation center. J.H. Bards Spirit Company will be open on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Tastings can be scheduled Monday through Thursday. On Facebook they describe their Virginia Straight Bourbon as "our first bourbon, small batch, two barrels. At 84 proof, our straight bourbon whiskey is warm

and mellow with just the right amount of bite and barrel spice. You'll find it robust, smooth ... and approachable."

The train is coming

Governor Northam has signed a bill establishing the New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Authority - and the state has put aside \$85 million for that project. The law establishes the ability to create and maintain passenger rail in the New River Valley. HB 1893 allows regional localities to enter into revenue-sharing agreements and to create a governing board consisting of members from those localities, and institutions of higher learning. Negotiations are ongoing between VDOT and Norfolk Southern to finalize plans to bring a passenger rail line into Christiansburg, Virginia. 12th district Delegate Chris Hurst introduced the bill: "this measure will bring new economic opportunities to the region, make traveling easier for residents and students, help reduce congestion on I-81, increase tourism, and allow the NRV to become a new transportation hub for rail travel."

But Hurst said it's probably at least two years away before the planned station in Christiansburg would see an Amtrak train coming from Roanoke and beyond. Hurst also says if people are "willing to talk about" the funds needed, he would like to see a separate commuter rail line that reaches all major population centers in the NRV. "I think it would

be transformational to do that linkage that is so important right now between the Roanoke and New River Valleys," says Hurst; "we have to figure out a way where Christiansburg Mountain isn't as much of a divider between the two valleys as possible." Adds Amtrak CEO Bill Flynn, "if Congress provides the funding proposed in [President Joe Biden's American Jobs Plan] Amtrak would be able to bring the NEC [Northeast Corridor, which includes the Roanoke station] to a state of good repair and improve trip times. [It] would also expand Amtrak to underserved communities across the nation."

More space for high-tech medical manufacturing

Briar Oaks Investments VII, LLC., has purchased the former Johnson & Johnson Spectacle Lens Group development on 30+ acres adjacent to I-581, one mile from Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. The new development, dubbed "Blue Ridge Commerce Park" includes the existing 146,852 SF the high-tech medical grade manufacturing, office and warehouse facility, which is expandable to 250,000 SF. The remaining acreage is targeted for future office and/or R & D facilities. Roanoke-based Briar Oaks Investments has identified this property as "an excellent opportunity to address the growing demand for quality space to serve the technology, educational and life health sciences industry throughout the Blue Ridge Region," accord-

ing to the Poe & Cronk Real Estate Group, which handled the \$6.2 million sale.

Beales expanding

Beale's Brewery in Bedford has announced plans to expand seating into the next-door building where antique store Dirt Road Treasures resides. The craft brewer says the expansion will cut down on wait times and allow them to host large gatherings inside, like rehearsal dinners or birthday parties in the future. Beale's drew national attention (including on Reddit) recently when it named a beer for a manager who had been cussed out online for insisting that patrons wear a face covering. "This beer was inspired by the troll who emailed us 'your manager is bitch' (also the beer's name) after he was refused service for refusing to wear a mask. We thank him for giving us an opportunity to stand behind BC and the countless other service industry workers who come to work every day with unfailing optimism," reads a Beale's Facebook post.

Holistic help in the Highlands

The Western Virginia Workforce Development Board was awarded \$300,000 by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to develop and enhance the recovery ecosystem for individuals affected by substance abuse in the Counties of Allegheny and Craig and the City of Covington. Project

Recovery will provide participants with one on-one counseling and support, comprehensive assessments to determine needs, training and skill development, and employment placement.

Radford welcomes manufacturer

Raleigh-based Oransi, an air purification company, will invest \$5.6 million to establish its first manufacturing facility in the Plymouth Building on Corporate Drive in the City of Radford. The operation will focus on developing and

manufacturing the company's air purifiers for consumers, businesses, and professionals in the health, dental, and medical fields. Virginia competed with North Carolina for the project, which is forecasted to create more than 101 new jobs. "Oransi is very pleased to establish its first manufacturing facility in the City of Radford to develop and manufacture our best-in-class air purifiers," said Peter Mann, founder and CEO of Oransi. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership worked with the City of Radford and Onward New River Valley

to secure the project. Governor Ralph Northam approved a \$50,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund to assist Radford.

More trains for SW VA Part 2

The Commonwealth has also finalized a \$3.7 billion rail plan targeted to expand and improve freight and passenger rail service across the Commonwealth - including southwestern Virginia. our part of the state. It starts with construction of a second rail bridge across the

Potomac River, linking all of Virginia's lines with Washington and the Northeast Corridor. At a signing ceremony Governor Northam said this region would benefit, although construction could take up to ten years. "It will create the potential to expand rail service to more parts of our Commonwealth, including rail to Christiansburg and Blacksburg."

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

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Salem Sox

WHAT TO EXPECT IN BASEBALL 2021

By Doug Dougherty

The (sort of) post-COVID local baseball world will look a lot different as the season gets underway.

Southwest Virginia baseball fans would be surprised to hear that realignment of the Carolina League had nothing to do with COVID-19. The 2020 schedule was postponed by the coronavirus but plans already were in place, part of a plan by Major League Baseball to shrink and realign the minor league development system.

"We're in what's now referred to as the Low A East League," said Allen Lawrence, general manager of the Boston Red Sox affiliate in Salem. "It's kind of a combination of the old Carolina League and the old South Atlantic League."

At the time of an April 5 interview, Lawrence's impression was that there will be 12 teams split into three divisions—north, central and south—with the season beginning May 11. "There's going to be limited travel between the three divisions," he noted. "We're primarily

playing teams in the north." That would be Lynchburg, Fredericksburg and Delmarva.

Salem previously had played a High-A schedule, a notch above what the Red Sox will be playing this year, but it will be difficult to tell the difference. "Some people have looked at it as a demotion when we moved from High-A to Low-A," Lawrence said in an interview at his Salem Memorial Ballpark office. "That couldn't be further from the case. "Yes, we went down a level, but in terms of the players and the talent we'll see come through here, look at the great players we've had come through here already that are playing in the big leagues."

After all notes Lawrence, "they also played at Low-A. We're just a [different] rung on the ladder - now we're the first rung instead of the second rung. In many cases with some of the great names we've had come through

here, they've actually spent more time in Low-A than they have in High-A. When they get to High-A, the progression to the big leagues actually speeds up a little bit. We might see them a little bit longer than we did before." In essence Greenville, TN (now Advanced-A) and Salem flipped their stations in the Boston Red Sox system.

COVID restrictions will limit interaction between the fans and players. At least at the beginning, players won't be able to sign autographs at field level and mingle with the players. but that could change. Until then, the field will be a "bubble," all its own.

"2020 was a tough year," Lawrence said. "No question about it we've been pushing forward the whole time; we were optimistic all of last year that we were going to play baseball. We never stopped prepping for 2020. We got the news only a couple of hours before it was released to the world. We didn't have any inside information that somebody else had access to. We were pushing along the whole time. We had a lot of events at the ballpark. We had a lot of great support from the community, and we certainly tried to give back in terms of front-line workers and raising money for local non-profits. That's how we stayed busy."

Word that the 2020 season was going to be cancelled didn't come till July 30. The Red Sox office had found out March 12 that the season was going to be delayed and thought that Salem's first homestand might be pushed back. "When it became clear that we wouldn't be playing in April, we were like, 'OK, let's get ready for May,'" Lawrence said.

Submitted photo



Allen Lawrence

"Then, we were certain we'd be playing July 4th. That was the rumor going around minor league baseball." So much for that.

As the major leagues got under way, preparations for the Carolina League season have not been overlooked. There will be a 120-game schedule for Low A East teams including the Salem Red Sox, featuring 60 home games. As of the first week in April, Lawrence was looking at a state-mandated 30 percent capacity limit, amounting to 1,900 people at Salem Memorial Ballpark, including an uncertain number of season-ticket holders. "Right now, we're trying to place our season ticket-holders and anybody with a ticket plan before we open it up to anyone else," he said in an April 5 interview.

"Everybody is going to be seated in pods of between one and eight depending on how

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many pods you have in your package and what the case might be. Those pods will be spaced out at least six feet apart and, as of now, everyone in the ballpark will be required to wear a mask. That's a major-league baseball rule. That's not our rule. I'm not looking forward to policing that, but right now, it is necessary for us to play baseball. Wearing a mask beats the heck out of the alternative, which is not playing baseball."

As far as amenities go, Lawrence also points out that the Red Sox home schedule does not conflict with the Salem Fair, which

historically presented conflicts, mostly with parking. "That has been challenging, to say the least," noted Lawrence. Carolina League franchises have been accustomed to 140 games, including 70 as home. "I think, with all that being said, these 60 games that we have scheduled for this year is probably the best schedule that I can remember in my 20 years," Lawrence said. "We're not playing in April, when it can be cold. We're trading out some cold April days for some warmer days in September because the season is going to be extended three weeks."

At least they hope so. 



Courtesy photo

BIG CHANGES DOWN THE ROAD IN PULASKI AS WELL

Approximately 50 miles down the road from Salem is historic Calfee Park in Pulaski, home to a longtime Class A farm team that most recently was affiliated with the New York Yankees in the Appalachian League. There, a new business model of sorts is in the works for the 2021 season. Like in Salem, Pulaski did not field a team in 2020 due to the pandemic.

A new name has followed a change in affiliation for Pulaski, now known as the Pulaski River Turtles in a clear reference to the New River that meanders through southwestern Virginia.

There will be an Appalachian League again this summer; however, it will now be an amateur circuit comprised of collegiate players taking the field at a 3,200-seat stadium that has been rated No. 1 at its level by Ballpark Digest and Best of Ballparks. Major League Baseball shed about 40 minor league teams and folded several circuits (like the Carolina League) after 2020 in large part as a cost-cutting move.

It will be a wood-bat league that is targeting the nation's top 300 available collegians. "We're told that this is going to be a really talented group of rising freshmen and sophomores," first-year general manager JW Martin said. "Based on what we're seeing trickle out, that's likely to be the case." Some of the national powers said to be sending players to the Appalachian League are TCU, UCLA and Vanderbilt.

"I feel the on-field talent should be just as good if not better," [as Advanced Rookie League was Pulaski was] Martin noted. "Major League baseball tells us that, over time, more athletes could graduate to the majors from this league than there were under the previous structure of the Appalachian League. There's a lot of reason for optimism."

Pulaski's new manager this year is Matt Crist, the shortstop on the University of Arizona team that won the 1980 College World Series. He spent four seasons in the minor leagues before going the coach-scout route. He was involved in the scouting of such recognizable pros as Albert Pujols and Kenny Lofton.

Player selection for the River Turtles was still in the works as of in late April. "USA Baseball is working to recruit the athletes," Martin said. "It's a process and I don't know what that process entails. We've been told there might be a draft but we're not quite sure what that will look like or whether it will be this season or not."

Martin, previously in the auto-racing business, is the new general manager, taking over from Betsy Haugh, who is now with the United Soccer League as its Director of Women's Soccer Operations. With the Pulaski Yankees in 2018 she was named the Rawlings Woman Executive of the Year. The season is slated to start June 5-6 against Princeton, W.Va. Other teams in the league are from Burlington, N.C.;

"I've been working here for a couple of seasons dating back to 2015, when our organization took over the ballpark," Martin said. "Every game night, I served in a game day role in 2018 and 2019. So, I do have some experience here at Calfee Park." David Hagan (the Shelor auto dealerships) is the owner.

Martin is from Marion and went to college at Radford, graduating in 2009. "There's a lot of enthusiasm," he said. "I can't speak for the fan-base in general but here in Pulaski, I feel our community has responded. Season ticket sales are going very well, the boxes that we rent out every year are tracking 2019 numbers. The response so far has been overwhelmingly positive."



Calfee Park

Courtesy photo

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“ ”
I'd probably have 10 different restaurants with 10 different concepts, that's how much I love it. — Page 22



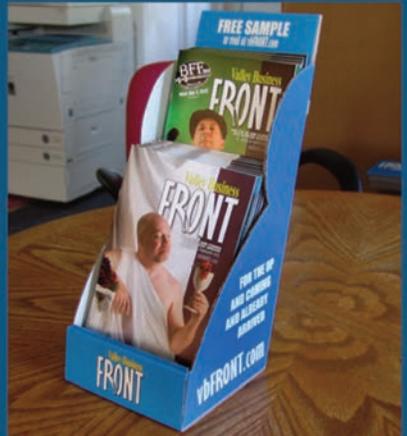
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