

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 158

NOVEMBER 2021

Botetourt County
Manufacturing

VT's Apex Center

Cowden's Drone Docks

Big Lick Comics

Astonish Antiques

vbFRONT.com

Making Things (happen) In Botetourt

A man with short, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a light blue dress shirt, and a yellow and blue striped tie. He is standing outdoors with a blurred background of green grass and trees. His right hand is in his pocket.

Ken McFadyen
Botetourt County



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

No doubt you've been reading, hearing or watching stories lately on worker shortages, understaffed restaurants and retail shops. All sorts of other businesses including manufacturing and transportation (truck drivers) needing more help; that is contributing in some ways to the supply chain gaps bedeviling this country and many parts of the world. Not to mention workers quitting jobs or striking in large numbers, demanding better pay. The pandemic has made many at the lower end of the economic scale – especially when they were getting an extra 300-600 dollars a week, courtesy of the federal government when put out of jobs in 2020 due to COVID-19 – realize that the extra money made a difference, when it came to paying bills, affording childcare, or just putting food on the table.

Now many want higher wages before they go back to work. There are record numbers of people quitting their jobs. Its led to employers begging for help – in many cases boosting starting pay, offering sign-on bonuses etc. Will employers have to rethink their hiring practices? Will publicly traded companies have to convince stockholders that dividends may be lower – the tradeoff being more stability in the workforce, which is better in the long term? Read our Best Practices, No Bad Hires and Business Operations columns in this issue for some very timely insight. Welcome perhaps to the New, New Normal – and happy reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

““ We're always looking for a company that matches our needs – as much as we meet their needs. – Page 13



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Manufacturing drives growth in Botetourt County

By Gene Marrano



“ ”

It's not a store, it's a story.

— Page 26

Cover photo of Ken McFadyen by Tiffany Bradbury, Botetourt County Administration.

Thanksgiving Morning



5k Run and Family Walk

In-Person: November 25

Virtual: November 1 - 30

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NOVEMBER



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Michael Shelton

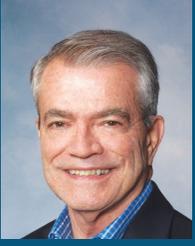


Nicholas Vaassen

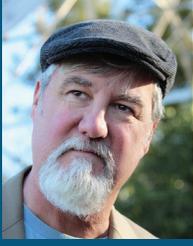
Advisory Board

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



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Mike Leigh



Gene Marrano

“”
We get to work on something new just about every day – I love it.
— Page 61

“”
To win in the marketplace, you must first win in the workplace.
— Page 29



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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 54.



Michael Waldvogel
Waldvogel Commercial Properties /
commercial real estate

“”
It's all about 'speed-to-market.'
— Page 10

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Manufacturing drives growth in Botetourt County

By Gene Marrano

“We want to attract the manufacturers that bring the dollars here from elsewhere.”

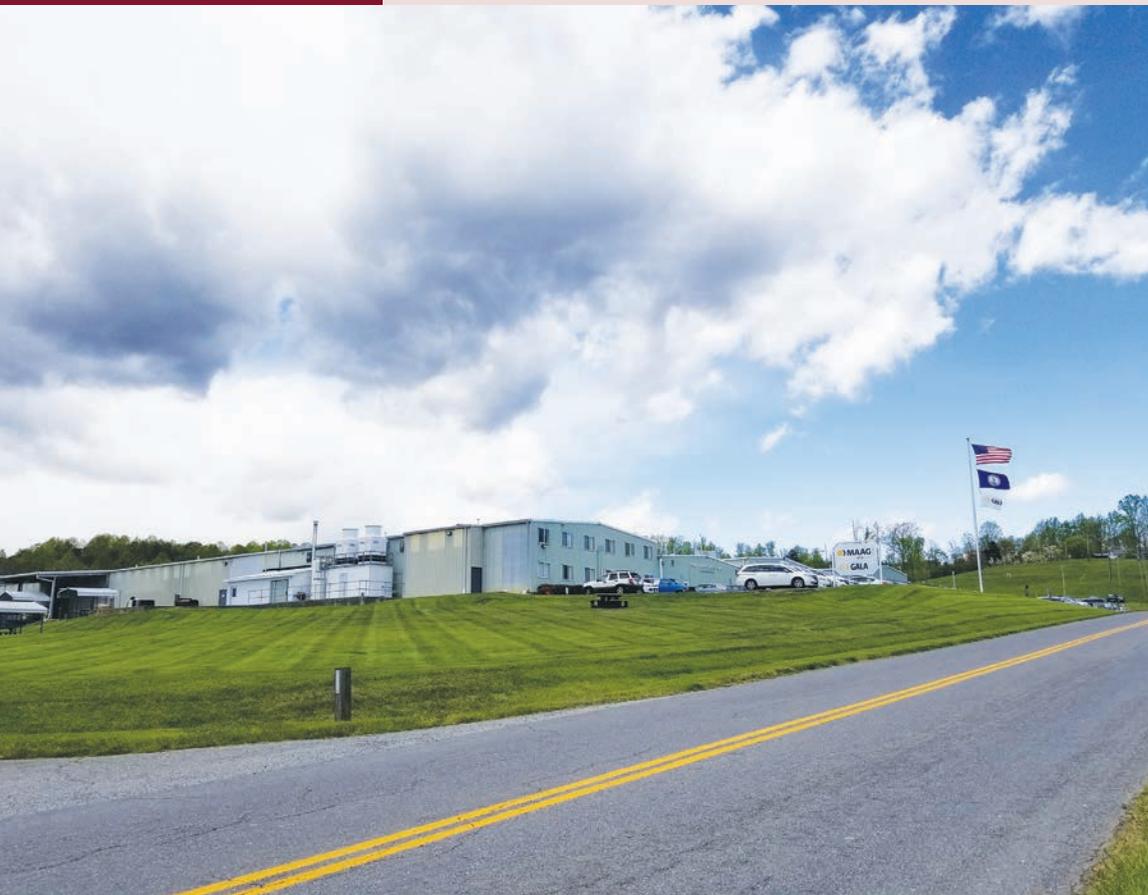
Ken McFadyen is Director of Economic Development for Botetourt County, after coming aboard in 2016. He points out that manufacturing represents the largest sector of private employment in the County, standing at 18 percent at this point in time and one of the highest paying as far as wages go. That growth over the past

few years, fueled by the arrival of Eldor Corporation, Constellation Brands (nee Ballast Point Brewing) and growth at transportation-related companies like Dynax America, Altec Industries, and Metalsa has also led to residential and business growth, especially along the US 220 corridor in Daleville.



In March 2018 there were 1730 manufacturing jobs in the county; "it's now 1900," says McFadyen, "[largely] from the organic growth of our employers." On the way is the relocation of Munters Group AB, which broke ground last May on a \$36 million state of the art facility on a 30-acre site at the Botetourt Center at Greenfield, which will replace an existing facility for the Swedish-based climate solutions company. When it opens next year that will bring another 200 employees in the manufacturing sector to Botetourt County. The Botetourt facility will house manufacturing, research and development, and sales in the data center





cooling systems and high-temperature industrial process systems industry.

McFadyen says there's still plenty of room left at the Botetourt Center. "We have another 400 acres we could work with ... about 200 acres could be under roof. That's another 4-5 Eldor sites." Eldor Corporation is the Italy-based automotive parts manufacturer that opened its doors there in 2018, promising to invest \$75 million and eventually create 350 new jobs. The utilities are in place and some site prep on the pads where buildings could go up has taken place. It's all about "speed to market," and being ready when a prospect says they are ready to make a decision – often in a much shorter time frame these days he adds.

"Much of Botetourt's success has been built on the investments we've made in Botetourt Center at Greenfield, which continues to be a preferred location for companies considering the Roanoke Region," said Gary Larowe, Botetourt County administrator, when Munters broke ground. The Roanoke Regional Partnership also stated then that "it represents the 13th nation in the Botetourt County manufacturing Community."

The forgettable COVID year of 2020 aside, McFadyen said from 2017-2019 the county's GDP (gross domestic

“ ”

Manufacturing represents the largest sector of private employment in Botetourt County.

BY THE NUMBERS

- Manufacturing accounts for Botetourt's largest share of private sector employment, with 1,900 jobs or 18% of all jobs in the county, as of March 2021. The job count as of March 2021 in Botetourt is 10,579 positions.
- The Botetourt average weekly wage for all jobs is \$849 per week (March 2021), with manufacturing jobs paying an average wage of \$1,099 per week.
- Manufacturing job growth in Botetourt from March 2018 to March 2021 has been approximately 10%.

-from Ken McFadyen, Botetourt County as of October 8, 2021

product) grew 5 to 7 percent every year with manufacturing growth a key driver – also exceeding GDP growth in other nearby localities. As for the ripple effect just take a look at Daleville Town Center, which has grown into a mixed-use commercial/residential center and with 100 apartments at Botetourt Commons at capacity or reserved (near the Kroger shopping center). "It's an effect of all the new job growth we've had in manufacturing. That's the point – we want to attract the manufacturers that bring the dollars here from elsewhere."





Much of Botetourt's success has been built on the investments we've made in Botetourt Center at Greenfield.

For example, says McFadyen, Altec Industries (also at the Botetourt Center) sells its electric utility, telecommunications, tree care, lights and signs, and contractor markets, bringing those dollars back to the county, where employees spent the money locally to buy homes, rent apartments and spend money at local establishments. Metals and Dynax America are other automotive components manufacturers with plants in the county

Establishment of a small business development program in concert with the Regional Small Business Development Center in downtown Roanoke also turns some of those dollars into new tax-paying entities. "They give us a dedicated person three days a week to work with Botetourt County small businesses." That SBDC growth has gone from 10 in 2016 to over 200 clients served.

Community colleges in the region (Virginia Western, New River Community, Dabney S. Lancaster, etc.) have worked with the county on training programs to upskill the worker pool, allowing them to step into increasingly technical manufacturing positions with less of a learning curve involved. Some of those programs have taken place at the Greenfield Education Center. McFadyen says they have committed to Munters AB that they will cover the cost of training workers for the new Botetourt plant, in conjunction with community colleges.

McFadyen has been to Texas and California on recruiting missions with the Virginia Economic Development





Partnership – “but it is a better operation when it’s at the regional level,” which is where the Roanoke Regional Partnership and its marketing efforts come into play. Botetourt lets the Regional Partnership know if they have a site that would work. Often the prospect has done their own homework on a locality as well.

A site selection can be made now in a matter of weeks now says McFadyen, so having those ducks all lined up is necessary. Everything slowed down and there was less tire-kicking in 2020 due to COVID but the pace has quickened in 2021. “We’ve had quite a few conversations.” Quality of life is a factor; when they meet a prospect at the Greenfield Center for example McFadyen says they will point to a nearby ridgeline, letting a potential employer know that the Appalachian Trail and other outdoor opportunities like the James River are right around the corner. There’s even a hiking path – the Cherry Blossom Trail – inside the Botetourt Center at Greenfield. Schools and cultural amenities are also on the wish list. The lower cost of living and reasonable housing prices when compared to many parts of the country are also factors.

It’s all worked well for Botetourt County in recent years, especially when it comes to attracting manufacturing companies that can employ hundreds, paying livable wages and salaries. “We’re always looking for a company that matches our needs – as much as we meet their needs,” concludes Ken McFadyen. 

“ ”

It is a better operation when it's at the regional level.



Submitted photos

Mickey Cowden

Opening Doors in the Drone World

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

“Life will throw something at you,” says Mickey Cowden. “I’m surprised at how wrong I have been.” But he soldiers on.

“The drone market has exploded in the past few years,” said Mickey Cowden, founder of the Blacksburg-based Cowden Technologies, which is taking advantage of the phenomenon. The new company works in drone technology, focusing on robotic autonomy. Cowden, a 2004 Virginia Tech graduate with degrees in computer science and math, was part of a Hokie robotics team which was a finalist in an international robotics competition in Abu Dhabi. “It was a great learning experience,” he said.

However, as the team was doing field tests, Cowden discovered that they spent so much time switching out batteries and hardware in the drones, it “made me daydream about having it done automatically.” After graduation, Cowden worked at Tech and in industry doing software engineering. In 2015, “a contract fell into my lap.” He started

his business, which then focused on web app development and mobile app consulting.

Now, Cowden Technologies is working on product development. There is a charging component. The technology monitors and recharges batteries, enabling continuous drone operation without human supervision. “The battery charging market has changed quite a bit,” said Cowden. Battery charging is an expectation now. So, he is branching out to other features.

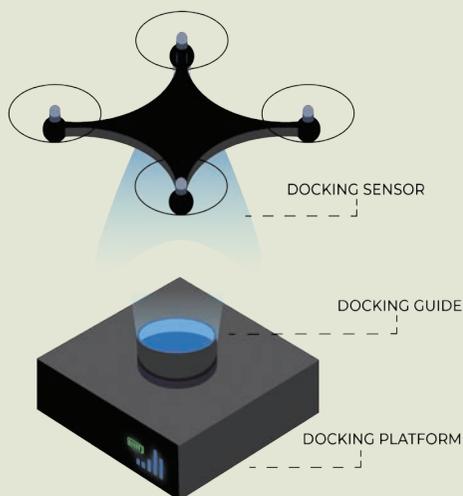
One is a smart docking station. A computerized docking module is retrofitted to existing drones and commands can be issued for docking and undocking. Sensors gather information such as identifying the docking platform. A secure docking mechanism ensures the drone is secure on the charging

platform. There is a data logistics component which can, for example, upload raw data such as a video to the cloud.

While different industries can use the platform, Cowden has chosen to focus on agriculture first. Cowden found a good fit with mid- to large-sized farms. They have concerns about efficiency which drones can address. A drone can detect issues with crops or livestock. With crops, the drone can identify areas infected with disease and provide guidance, so chemicals are only put down where needed.

Finding customer problems that he can generate solutions for is Cowden's goal. He spoke a word of caution, though: he can find exciting solutions, but they need to provide value to the customer. In other words, will customers be willing to pay? Because he is not a businessperson, Cowden has hit some bumps along the way. "Trying to raise capital, working on something for no money, was a painful transition," he said.

However, Cowden Technologies has had some good fortune as well. In 2019, when Cowden was seeking office space, the Corporate Research Center was a natural place to look as he had no interest in leaving Blacksburg. That same month, the CRC was opening its COgro co-working space. The timing worked out for him to rent there, and COgro "put me in touch with people."



FAMILY TIES



As if Mickey Cowden didn't have enough on his plate as sole founder of Cowden Technologies, he is co-founder with his sister Valarie Cowden Ramsey of Cowden Family Farm. It is truly a family farm – the one on which they were born and raised in Elk Creek, Virginia.

The siblings run a vineyard there. They installed 500 vines last year and 500 this year. The earliest that the grapes can be used is probably the year after next, Cowden said. Now they are focusing on getting the root systems growing. "It's a long-term investment," he said.

Cowden Family Farm is a much smaller operation at which Mickey Cowden works part-time on weekends, doing manual labor in the fields. "I would love to use the farm as a test bed for drone technology," said Cowden. It would help get them out of manual labor, and it could be an attraction. "It would be a novel concept for people to watch," he said.

Using drones in vineyards has experienced slower adoption on the east coast, but Cowden sees the farm as an exposure opportunity for Cowden Technologies. They could apply the drone technologies to the agriculture projects there and demonstrate how it works and how it could benefit other farmers. Regulatory changes would have to happen first, Cowden said, to allow autonomous drone flying, but he is "banking on it."

His sister Valerie went through The Gauntlet mentoring-competition earlier this year with Cowden Family Farm and had a positive experience. Now, "it's nice to have a common language to talk about business," he said.

-Jennifer Poff Cooper



Cowden has also had the benefit of local mentorships. In 2020 the company went through The Gauntlet, part of The Advancement Foundation non-profit in Vinton, which provides a Shark Tank-like experience. There was a 10-week class covering different aspects of building a business. The resulting business plan went through a judging competition, and the top 25 moved on to the next phase: the pitch presentation. Cowden Technologies came in third place and won a \$5,000 award which helped it buy a 3D printer. The connections made were also valuable.

Cowden is already mentoring others in The Gauntlet, passing on wisdom he learned. "I talk about things I've gone through that were hard," Cowden said. "Why it happened, and what I could have done differently."

Now, Cowden has begun the RAMP regional accelerator program with the Fall 2021 co-hort. He lauds its mentors, like Director Mary Miller, who is "so helpful and generous with her time. I learn something new every time we talk." He hopes RAMP can promote connections, make him a better

businessperson, and "help me figure out what will be coming at me."

Another win for Cowden was receiving a \$75,000 grant last year from the Commonwealth Research Commercialization Fund administered by Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology. The grant was for an unmanned systems concept, to build a prototype and program software for smart docking states for drones. Though the period of performance is over now without the prototype being quite finished, Cowden anticipates having it ready by the end of the year. He is hoping for early adopters and their testimonials for marketing purposes.

Cowden has gone against conventional wisdom in one area: he is the sole principal in his business. Therefore he "wears lots of hats," and says that finding work/life balance is one of his biggest challenges. Others are balancing the technical and business sides of the company, and how to position the company in the evolving market.

While Cowden Technologies is not yet ready to produce units for the docking station, he hopes to do small scale manufacturing in-house using his 3D printer by the beginning of next year. Of course, he wants to see growth, but not so much that he cannot manage it on his own.

Cowden knows that that sometimes the expected is exactly what will not happen, so he is averse to making future projections. "Life will throw something at you," he said. "I'm surprised at how wrong I have been." 📺



Watch **BUSINESS MATTERS** with Gene Marrano

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Blue Ridge PBS



The year was 1976. *Silly Love Songs* was the number one song and Montreal hosted the Olympic games. That same year, I was born, and Cox purchased a little company called Roanoke Valley Cablevision.

A lot has changed throughout the past four and a half decades, but one thing has remained constant: our unwavering commitment to serving the communities where our employees and customers live and work.

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These investments ensure that every Cox customer in Roanoke, not just certain neighborhoods, will have access to the best broadband connection in their homes, including access to 10G in the near future.

Serving our communities also means supporting our local economy. Over the past 45 years, we've donated millions of dollars to local nonprofits that make the Star City shine, in addition to nearly a half a million dollars through our Cox Charities Community Grants that are awarded annually of behalf of our employees.

But I believe nothing demonstrates our company culture and commitment to this community better than our response to COVID-19.

When the pandemic hit, we donated \$60,000 to Meals on Wheels to ensure homebound seniors in the Valley continued to receive a nutritious meal each day, made Connect2Compete free for new customers, partnered with Roanoke City and Roanoke County Public Schools to connect teachers and students, and found new ways to support the unique needs of our business customers.

All these things make me incredibly proud to work for Cox. As we celebrate our 45th service anniversary in Roanoke, and I celebrate my milestone birthday, know that we're both here for the long haul. We're committed to ensuring the Star City continues to be a vibrant place for families, businesses, and visitors. ★



Stacie Vest is the Marketing Director for Cox. Her responsibilities include customer retention strategy nationally. Born and raised in Roanoke, she graduated from Virginia Tech, and has served on numerous boards including Downtown Roanoke, Inc., and Center in the Square.



BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:

During the pandemic this past year, you've probably noticed longer than normal delays and out-of-stock items when buying goods. A year ago, my wife and I ordered a couple mountain bikes. We're still waiting for one of them.

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

Inventory Management and JIT

Manufacturers are in a supply chain crisis. Demand is high for products, but the pandemic has severely disrupted the flow of parts and raw materials. The most highly visible impact has been a shortage of circuit cards used in automobiles and other modern devices. Without a reliable and resilient supply chain, organizations cannot promptly deliver their goods and services.

To compensate for supply chain disruptions, many organizations choose to keep extra inventory as a buffer. But excess inventory ties up free cash flow, takes up space capacity, and reduces productivity due to extra material handling and management.

After WWII, Toyota recognized the high cost of excess inventory and developed the concept of Just-In-Time (JIT). Simply stated, the JIT philosophy aims to eliminate excess inventory to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and provide product more quickly to the customer. I've heard and read many opinions this past year that blame the JIT concept for these supply chain disruptions. But these opinions fail to fully understand JIT.

JIT does not promote eliminating inventory. It promotes eliminating excess inventory. Excess inventory is inventory above what a company needs to ensure no disruptions in production. Toyota, and other organizations that fully understand this concept, do not reduce their inventory unless they have first developed reliable suppliers and have accounted for supply chain risk. For this reason, Toyota partners closely with their suppliers and, where possible, uses suppliers located close to their factories, thus reducing the risk of overseas shipments from other countries.

After the earthquake and tsunami in Japan several years ago, Toyota recognized the fragility of the circuit card supply chain. After the earthquake, they took actions to reduce their risk of this important component and increased their inventory of these parts. This does not go against the JIT philosophy. While US auto manufacturers have taken a big hit in sales due to the chip shortage, Toyota increased their US sales in Q3 and has surpassed GM so far in 2021.

After decades of chasing low-cost parts in low-cost countries overseas, the pandemic has put a spotlight on the risks of this supply chain strategy. I'm hopeful this will lead to developing a stronger domestic supply base and a resurgence in manufacturing in the US. 🇺🇸

“Just-In-Time does not promote eliminating inventory. It promotes eliminating excess inventory.”

Black Friday isn't what it used to be

Thanksgiving is a time of gratitude – and sales. Black Friday, though, didn't come with the digital age. The late 19th century brought Santa as a finish to Thanksgiving Day parades. The not-so-subtle message: time to start shopping.

The holiday's prompted presidential proclamations. Lincoln chose the last Thursday of November. Roosevelt, prodded in 1939 by hungry retailers wanting Christmas shopping to start sooner, moved it to the next-to-last Thursday. It took a literal act of Congress in 1941 to get it moved to the 4th Thursday of the month. That resolution made it tough for any future president to mess with the date.

This year's Black Friday may seem almost as different from recent norms as it is from those early days of parades and presidential proclamations. Store door buster crowds are unlikely as COVID concerns continue.

Selling and buying is happening more online. Black Friday sales, now starting as early as June, are diluting purchases during the traditional Christmas shopping season. Shortages continue, leading consumers grab what's in stock now, rather than wait for discounts.

Business & Buyer Considerations

Company owners need to get more creative with their sales. Lowest price no longer rules. Instead, consumers are looking for advantages to buying choices. If you're shipping product, don't forget about the new USPS holiday surcharges. That's going to erode profit if you don't plan for it.

Consumers beware. Just because someone says it's a sale doesn't mean it's so. With increased information online, it's easy to research good deals. Avoid impulse buying decisions. They usually cost you more.

Security concerns

Know the difference between buying with a debit or credit card. Fraudulent debit card purchases are hard to recover. Your bank may say they'll help, but once the money's been taken from your account, it's usually gone for good.

Banks and credit unions don't have the back office to spot fraudulent transactions. That means ACH transactions, which can be easily captured by skimmers at gas stations, aren't protected. A thief with access to your debit card information can withdraw all the money in your account.

Credit card companies invest in systems to track purchases, flag unusual transactions, and warn you if things seem off. Most fraudulent credit card purchases are covered in full by the card issuer. That's why it's smarter to make online, gas, and other holiday purchases with credit vs. debit cards. The Black Friday rush may be gone for good. That's not a bad thing. Being more grateful on Thanksgiving could do us all some good. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

The Black Friday rush may be gone for good. That's not a bad thing.

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



Virginia Tech photos

ENTREPRENEURIAL ENERGY AT NEW OFF-CAMPUS APEX CENTER

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

There's a new home for Hokies seeking a physical location to meet, put their heads together, and receive needed support and advice for their startup companies.

Virginia Tech's Apex Center for Entrepreneurs is a 6,000-square-foot technology-enabled, posh space located above PK's Bar & Grill at 432 North Main Street in Blacksburg. Apex opened at this new location on September 20.

The Apex Center, which is under the umbrella of the Pamplin College of Business, provides programs and support to students who want to become entrepreneurs. Apex was launched in 2014 inside a small, 500-square-foot office space in Pamplin Hall. The program has grown rapidly and is one of the reasons that the Princeton Review ranked Virginia Tech number 25 in undergraduate entrepreneurship programs last year.



The concept was the vision of Robert Sumichrast, dean of the Pamplin College of Business, said Derick Maggard, Executive Director of the Apex Center for Entrepreneurs. Maggard is a Tech alum with a graduate degree in Industrial and Systems Engineering who himself had been owner of many companies. He was Executive Director of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council when Sumichrast hired him as the founding

executive director of the new center. The center received a big boost in 2015 with a \$5 million endowment from the founders of Apex Systems.

The first year, the center worked with 135 students. Today it works with approximately 3,500 Virginia Tech students annually and at least 40 startup teams a semester, groups that it coins its Startup Hokies community.

The Startup Hokies community is where students who are interested in entrepreneurship can come to learn about how to start a business and see the full portfolio of programs that Apex offers, including mentorships and possible seed funding.

Now, in its much larger home, the center's staff and students can collaborate, and the center can host workshops, pitch competitions, and other programs. Previously, Apex had to host student programs in locations such as auditoriums and classrooms throughout campus. The constant shifting caused confusion and missed opportunities for students, said Maggard.

"Previously we were like a chef operating in a borrowed kitchen," he said. "Now we are the cooks in our own kitchen."

Through the new space and Startup Hokies programs, students can meet others interested in starting businesses. Also, those who are actively working on a new venture can participate in more formal programming, such as the incubator or accelerator programs. Startup teams are selected for the incubator or accelerator programs



Derick Maggard

depending on the stage of their business.

Though the majority of Apex students come from Pamplin or the College of Engineering, often the student business teams that win pitch competitions comprise Hokies from more than a few disciplines. This interdisciplinary aspect makes the Apex Center "very different" from similar centers at other universities.

"Any Hokie, any major, any year" can participate, said Maggard. By serving

Aztec Rental
www.aztecrental.com

A Bobcat skid steer loader with a backhoe attachment, parked on a dirt surface. The loader is white and black with a red stripe.

Stump Grinders
Concrete Saws
Bobcat Loaders
Trenchers
Mini Backhoes

A yellow backhoe loader, partially visible, with a large digging arm and bucket.A yellow boom lift, also known as a scissor lift, with a long telescopic arm and a platform at the end. It is parked on a gravel surface.

Tool & Equipment Rentals



all students across campus, the center promotes networking among disciplines and breaks down barriers between them.

In talking with students from other schools, Isabella Rossi, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, said, "The resources with Apex are broader and more beneficial than at other universities."

Another unique aspect of Apex is that it is "entirely experiential," said Maggard. Students receive no credit or pay but rather choose to spend their time building this skill set. "Students want to put into practice what they learn in the classroom," Maggard said.

When asked about the biggest challenge

the center faces, Maggard quickly answered: funding. In the list of the top 50 entrepreneurship programs, Apex was the center with the smallest budget. "That speaks to how scrappy we are," said Maggard, "but it puts us at a disadvantage."

Financial sustainability is a top objective moving forward. The center is privately funded by corporate sponsors and philanthropists, except for a small slice from Dean Sumichrast's budget. Awareness is another objective. The goal is to increase the center's visibility of entrepreneurship and innovation to the public and to be accessible to the student teams that Apex serves. Said Maggard, "We want to be the destination of choice for student entrepreneurs." 



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INNOVATION

By Erin Burcham

Executive Summary:
Attracting and retaining technology talent is more important today than ever. COVID has accelerated a high demand for technology solutions and that trend only seems to be increasing, especially in support of education, life sciences and healthcare.

*Erin Burcham is Executive Director for the Roanoke – Blacksburg Technology Council
erin.burcham@rbtc.tech*

The technology talent higher education pipeline

It is time to be creative in filling our talent needs and retaining the talent that is already here. Our biggest talent generating asset is our strong higher education institutes in the region. There are many Fortune 500 companies that show up at our four-year institutes ready to scoop up the technical talent that our region is producing. The traditional way for employers to navigate a regional college or university to access talent is through their career center as a starting point. Many majors have specialized clubs and student organizations that provide professional development to their members, and they are always looking for thought leaders in the region to speak and provide mentorship.

Another popular model of connecting students and employers is through project-based learning. This is a great way to meet faculty and students to expose both parties to your brand without having to take on an intern internally at your company.

The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC) has partnered with Exelation, a software development company with a nationally recognized internship program, to offer a new pathway for connecting undergraduate software engineers with local employers using funding from the ELITE (Experiential Learning Through Tech Employment) Grant.

The ELITE Grant is a two-year program funded by GO Virginia and facilitated by the RBTC. Through fall 2022, it will equip the region's businesses with the funding and tech talent to complete mission-critical tech projects. The state expects to reap workforce rewards such as regional retention of engineering graduates and attract employers from beyond the region to bring business to the area through project-based learning.

"The ELITE Grant presents an incredible opportunity for Region 2 employers," said Steve Cooper, CEO of Exelation. "We formed Exelation for companies in need of a technology internship, but without the capacity to run one. Tech recruiting is broken, and the permanent solution is to invite more participants to the tech workplace and get them started earlier. That's what Exelation does, and we can do it even faster, thanks to the ELITE Grant."

Virginia's Region 2 companies are eligible to take advantage of the grant, receiving up to \$25,000 to engage professionally mentored software development interns. Companies can apply for the program through

RBTC and then get connected with ExelARATION to complete their tech projects utilizing undergraduate developers managed by full-time technology experts.

This marks the first time a government entity has provided funds to connect developers with employers to build technology solutions through a professionally managed internship or apprenticeship program. It underscores the importance of solving the region's technology challenges both in the near- and long-term, particularly when addressing the local technology talent deficit companies face.

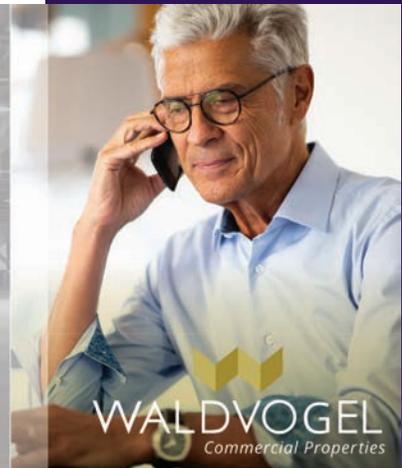
Virginia has a noticeably urgent need for new workers in the field, especially in the Roanoke, Blacksburg, and Lynchburg areas. With this grant, the award-winning ExelARATION program will accelerate its work to bridge that gap by creating more internship positions and bringing new tech engineers into the workforce before graduation. Those positions will help local companies previously stifled due to budget constraints or reduced employment resources.

The Roanoke – Blacksburg Technology Council is thrilled to work with ExelARATION to implement the ELITE grant to enable regional businesses to up their technology. After graduating from the region's world-class universities, those joining the workforce often leave the area in search of nationally known employers. By introducing talented students to local companies and allowing them to foster a connection to the community, they are more likely to remain in the area upon graduation. That's a win for the students and the local economy. 

“”
The state expects to reap workforce benefits.



This marks the first time a government entity has provided funds to connect developers with employers to build technology solutions through a professionally managed internship or apprenticeship program.





HEROIC HABITAT

Imagine working in a comic book shop. It's not a store, though, co-owner JD Sutphin insists... "It's a story." Big Lick Comics (6,000 sq. ft.) opened in Roanoke earlier this year. It's a kid's (of all ages) giant playroom. Currently open Tuesday through Saturday, 10am-7pm. Just east of downtown in the strip mall at 3424 Orange Ave. Meet your favorite characters here. It's super. Heroic.



WORK SPACE





NO BAD HIRES

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:
Learning to be more methodical about the hiring process.

Jennifer Leake, CMC® is certified in multiple assessments used for hiring, engagement, leadership and emotional intelligence. For more information on improving your hiring, go to www.AssessmentPros.com

Be their best job ever

My first job was my neighborhood pharmacy – a job that today is still my BEST JOB EVER! Predominantly young workers knew exactly what was expected with training and clear direction. One of the rules was – the phone MUST be answered by the third ring. To this day, I can't hear a phone ring more than twice without getting nervous!

A BEST JOB EVER is a place where employees love what they do, enjoy who they work with and respect who they work for. They want to be there, give their best and contribute ideas and solutions. They're engaged and invested so take on leadership roles. It makes recruiting easier because they recommend working at your company to others.

A BEST JOB EVER is a place known for results, retention and recruiting. For better hires, more committed employees, and more effective managers, arm yourself with 3 key elements:

Objective Data on Employees: You take an inventory on most other things, why not your people? A clear understanding of who you have and who you need helps you make better decisions based on facts and not just feelings.

Knowledge About Your People: It's hard to manage well with a one-size-fits-all philosophy. Successful leaders know what motivates individual employees. They create a personal plan for success to offer on-going coaching and feedback rather than a once a year "performance review."

A Plan to Build Respected Leaders: Successful organizations have strong, skilled leaders in place ... AND on their bench. Employees need to respect a leader's knowledge and experience AND their skills in managing and motivating others. You also want leaders to move from personal producer to one who gets results from others.

BEST JOB EVER companies have:

- Better hires who fit their job and produce results faster.
- Better commitment from employees who contribute energy, ideas and engagement.
- Better Bosses who manage, motivate and develop employees.
- Better Training and ROI because it's the right training for the right people for the right reasons.
- Better Employee Performance resulting in better company performance and more dollars to the bottom line.

Doug Conant, CEO of Campbell Soup says, "To win in the marketplace, you must first win in the workplace." How do you do this?

Hire the Right People – hire for fit and improve who and how you hire.

- 80% of turnover stems from bad hiring decisions.
- 95% of employers admit to hiring the wrong people.

Engage Employees – Engagement happens when you communicate, develop and empower employees.

- 71% of executives believe employee engagement is critical to their company's success.
- Managers account for 70% of employee engagement scores.

Lead with bosses who manage and motivate – people join a company ... and quit a boss.

- Only 10% of employees are natural leaders and 38% of new leaders fail within the first 18 months.
- Only 14% of CEO's have the raw leadership talent needed to grow their business. (Forbes) 

“”

[Employees] want to be there, give their best and contribute ideas and solutions. They're engaged and invested.

“”

A BEST JOB EVER is a place where employees love what they do, enjoy who they work with and respect who they work for.

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Dan Smith



Celebrating the arts – and supporters >

The **Perry F. Kendig Arts and Culture Awards** - sponsored jointly by Roanoke College and Hollins University – celebrate those working in the arts and its supporters. The 2021 Kendig Awards were handed out early last month. Nominees for 2020 were included with the 2021 nominees (the award ceremony was canceled last year due to COVID-19) and two winners in each categories were announced instead this year. The Kendig

Awards are named for the late Perry F. Kendig, Roanoke College’s seventh president and a supporter of the arts, and were established in 1985. Kendig Award recipients pictured: **Todd Ristau** of Hollins University and **Pat Wilhelms** of PB&J Theatre (formerly with Mill Mountain Children’s Theatre and Roanoke Children’s Theatre) - individual artists; Roanoke College’s Olin Galleries and Smith Mountain Arts Council - Arts and Cultural Organizations; **Don and Barbara Smith** (posthumous) and **Shelby and Jason Bingham** - Individual or Business Arts Supporter.



A year later the FBRI at VTC cuts the ribbon >

A year after it actually opened the doors to teams of researchers and new state of the art technology, the **Fralin Biomedical Research Institute** at VTC in Roanoke cut the ribbon on its \$90 million, 139,000 square foot addition. "This expansion will keep Virginia Tech researchers at the forefront of biomedical discovery," said Virginia Tech President **Tim Sands**, one of the speakers during the mid-October event. "The extraordinary growth of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC is expanding our capacity to improve human health, educate the next generation of leading scientists, create new jobs in STEM-related fields, and serve as a catalyst for economic growth in the commonwealth."

The ribbon cutting was delayed for a year due to COVID safety precautions. "This state-of-the-art new facility, equipped with the most advanced technology and spaces for research on some of the most pressing health challenges facing us today, demonstrates the commitment of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and Carilion Clinic to discovery and translation in the service of the nation's health, and points to the even greater potential that lies before us," said **Michael Friedlander**, executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute and Virginia Tech's vice president for health sciences and technology.

The FBRI is equipped with wet laboratories, meeting spaces, and offices to accommodate and 400 additional researchers, students, and support staff. Carilion Clinic President and CEO Nancy Agee, Speaker in the House of Delegates Eileen Filler-Corn (the Commonwealth chipped in about half of that expansion price tag) and a director for the NIH (Walter Koroshetz via a recorded message) also addressed attendees at the ribbon cutting, which also included building tours.





AshleyEaglesonPhotography

Understanding the importance of HUMAN CAPITAL

Artificial Intelligence is making strides and maybe one day will be able to change that but as of right now, every business must have human involvement at some level. From the chief executive officer to the client and everyone from the Vice President to janitor in between, humans are the business. With that said also make no mistake that without a human in the role, there would be a breakdown in continuity.

As owners or leaders in the business community, we must consistently work on improving the experience of our Human Capital, which is a key growth factor. Human Capital sometimes doesn't see a client in this category - but why not? Consumers are human; without the business wouldn't have revenue and thus cease to exist.

Experience in the world today has become one of the most critical factors to get right. With so few employees looking for positions and a plethora of positions available, retention of employees (good ones) is becoming more important than we may realize. So how do we create a great experience for your team? How do we ensure they feel heard, appreciated, and are part of a culture of which they are proud?

For each business that looks a little different, however, here are a few ideas that we have implemented with clients in the past that have shown great results.

- 1.) Provide a place for open communication for employees – some of your top market research and process efficiency experts are in your building every day, leverage them.
- 2.) Acknowledge accomplishment – financial resources might not be there to give a bonus or raise, but acknowledgment requires no financial cost. Spotlight an employee on a board in the breakroom who goes above and beyond or print off a certificate of achievement and present it to them in front of their peers. You'll be surprised by the effectiveness of this technique when done correctly.
- 3.) Communicate – let the employees know what's important to you, from not only an expectations standpoint but also in the core values you hold - and want them to buy into. Give examples of how your leaders demonstrate these and why it's important

We have more, and I'd be more than willing to share if you want to reach out. As I'm limited in words we will have to stop there. Lastly and most important, never lose sight that your people are people, they will make mistakes and they will achieve beyond your expectations, but at the end of the day, they are only HUMAN. 

BEST PRACTICES

By William R. Hall III

Executive Summary:

What is the motor that drives all businesses?

From the biggest to the smallest, they wouldn't exist without their people.

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

Newer office serves older folk

The Local Office on Aging (LOA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping older persons remain independent for as long as possible. LOA administers over 25 community services that provide nutrition, education, advocacy, and socialization for those 60 and older and their families in the Fifth Planning District of Virginia, including Alleghany County, Botetourt County, Covington, Craig County, Roanoke City, Roanoke County, and Salem.

LOA recently purchased property at 4902 Frontage Road, adjacent to its Roanoke headquarters for expansion of services and to further its mission.

"We've got a lot of exciting things planned there that will help our seniors remain independent and live longer with improved quality of life," says President and CEO Ron Boyd. "Our goal is to equip them with the knowledge and services necessary to avoid early institutionalization and help support caregivers who may not be able to stay with their loved ones all day. We're hoping to begin renovations in November, and we can't wait to share more in-depth plans in the future."

The new facility will serve as LOA's Health & Wellness Center and will house the nonprofit's nutrition staff, Meals on Wheels office, a new congregate diner's site, as well as classes, programs, and activities aimed at providing greater options for healthy aging. The renovations are anticipated to be completed in the spring of 2022. Learn more at www.loaa.org. 

— Information submitted by Access Advertising & Public Relations

“We've got a lot of exciting things planned that will help our seniors.”



GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:
LOA helps seniors throughout our region remain independent.



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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
*Indirect routes can
have their advantages.*

Taking the backroads

Years ago, I worked for a company that had an office in an industrial/business park off U.S. 460 just east of downtown Roanoke. Morning drive-in and evening drive-home traffic was rather horrendous then in the early 90s; unfortunately, it still is. Tapping into my own GPS app (which consisted of mental recall from times when I was a teenager driving around anywhere, everywhere, and anytime I could all over our valley and mountains), I figured out a back way to get to work. A lot of twists and turns and unlikely directions.

Right up there with navigating to and from Blacksburg on college game day—or getting right on through Salem during the I-81 backed up traffic snarl that hits almost daily now—I was delighted with myself for discovering the secret, new way to work. Total daily drive time was reduced by at least 45 minutes.

That's stress-reduction at its finest. When one takes delight in the smallest improvements.

That secret backroad reminds me of today. Our new way to work, with video meetings and remote workers and operations that were turned upside down almost overnight in March of 2020, served as a catalyst for a lot of us finding backroads to business.

Some of the changes, brought about without our choice or preference, have turned out to be not so bad. As an old-school guy, I've been surprised about the transactions I've completed over a video conference. "We're the kind of business where we MUST meet people face-to-face," I often chanted to staff for the past 33 years with this journal. "Ours is a market where folks expect to do business in person," I firmly believed.

Recent times have proved new ways can work. But again, telephone calls and emails and snail mail... none of those are exactly new. I was setting up the "new" video-over-phone demonstrations back in the late 80s and early 90s at trade shows across the nation that came from developments out of that very office off U.S. 460.

The reality is we just changed methods. Okay... "pivot" if you must use the cheugy buzz word.

"Nothing is new under the sun," Ecclesiastes tells us; and... well... ain't that the truth (I don't know who said that).

I do know those hidden backroads didn't just pop up overnight. Most of them were there before the new-and-improved faster roads showed up on the map. And strongly preferred by GPS.

Check out different routes. In fact, I once heard the advice that a person should take a different direction now and then on their daily commutes just for the sole purpose of keeping your mind sharp or avoiding dull, drum, boredom.

And if you find yourself one day going to work in the new technology park being developed right now by Roanoke County at Woodhaven... it looks super convenient smack there at our I-81 / 581 interchange to Roanoke.

I've got a secret: I know many backroad routes. That was my old stomping grounds as a teenager. 

Roanoke County looks to ELEVATE its appeal

Roanoke County Economic Development held two public meetings last month to receive citizen feedback on the draft ELEVATE 2026 Strategic Plan. ELEVATE is all about “crafting a comprehensive and effective Strategic Plan that will help guide Roanoke County’s economic growth for the next five years,” states the county.

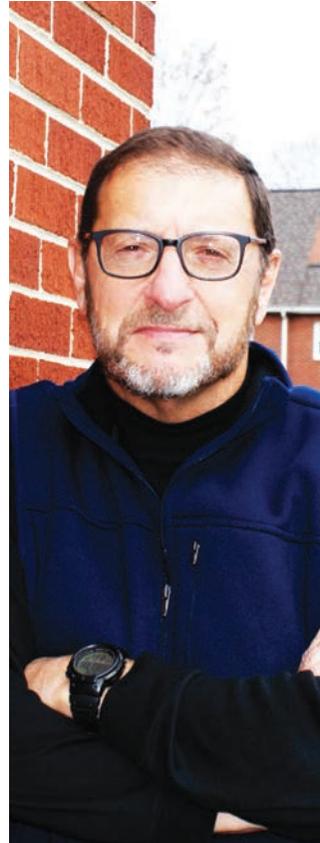
Putting those long-range strategic plans together cost money and often involves outside consultants. Appalachian Power has ponied up \$15,000 for the cause, with Brad Hall, the Vice President of External Affairs stating that, “without a plan, you fail. Communities that plan are communities that succeed. [But] what we don’t want is a plan that sits on the shelf. We’re going to be at the table. We want a good product.”

Roanoke County has been holding a series of public meetings over the past few years for its “Imagine” visioning projects in the 419/ Tanglewood corridor (which is starting to bear fruit), Hollins and Oak Grove areas. Mixed used development and finding more of that “cool factor” to help retain and attract residents is one goal. The county has lagged well behind Roanoke City when it comes to coolness – there’s no downtown core, no Virginia Tech-Carilion campus with scores of talented young people, no Grandin Village or Wasena (an up-and-coming outer downtown district) in the county.

Jill Loope, Director of Economic Development for Roanoke County, says ELEVATE is intended to “steer the course,” of county investment over the next five years. It’s different than the comprehensive plan, “but they actually do work together. You can’t have land use decisions without understanding the economic development impacts.” Economic Development and the county Planning Department are putting their heads together on this one – with input from residents last month, no doubt with more to follow.

The ‘burbs may be fine for many but for some others, especially younger people that grew up in the ring that is Roanoke County surrounding the City of Roanoke, there’s not much “juice,” no buzz. That’s one reason the lure and lore of the big city takes them away. (I know this firsthand).

There have been internal initiatives but in her twenty years with Roanoke County, Loope says this is the first time they have “formally adopted a strategic plan for economic development.” As for relevance to those Imagine visioning sessions, “they all work together. All of them have been targeted towards infrastructure [and] transportation improvements. They all have a specific impact on economic development.” See yesroanoke.com for more on how Roanoke County hopes to ELEVATE its profile – and coolness factor – over the next five years. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

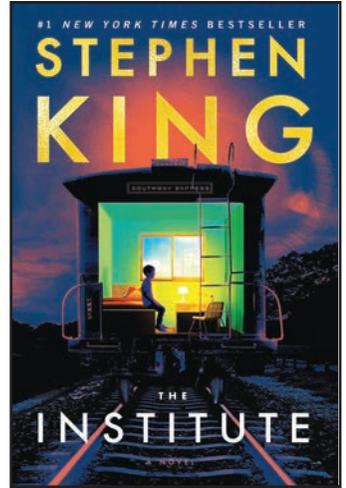
By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

“Without a plan, you fail,” says APCO spokesperson; “communities that plan are communities that succeed.”

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.



Movie or not, another solid

I don't recall the last time I read Stephen King. Thirty, perhaps even forty years ago? When someone becomes that prolific, where everything he does immediately gets turned into a movie, I'm afraid I begin to pass by their contributions on the bookshelf. But finding myself at the beach recently (accidentally bookless!) King's relatively new-in-paperback *The Institute* (Scribner; 2019) was the only logical choice on the limited CVS drugstore rack this late evening. Horror-sci-fi easily beat out the six or so trashy romance novels. I was instantly transported back to when I was a young lad, reading *The Stand* and his other early works. Simple! Clean! King has those most subtle allusions and references scattered throughout his storytelling that I find fulfilling; but for the most part, it really is like reading a movie script. He just tells the story, about as straightforward as one can. No wonder Hollywood loves him.

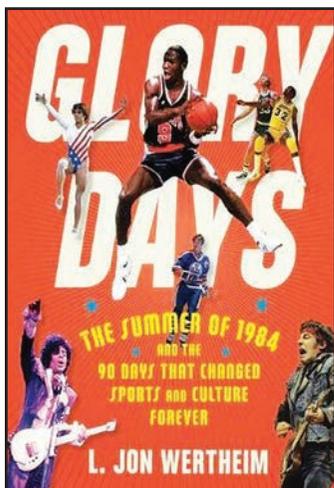
True to form, this story is an easy read. It's built well; and you get caught up in the unfortunate trials of our 12-year old protagonist. Child abuse here, is revealed as child torture; and you're equally empathetic for the kidnapped as you are infuriated with the villains. This is one of those tales that could have turned sloppy (with the amount of details, plot

twists, and switchbacks between real and supernatural) but no beat was skipped. The Netflix series "Stranger Things" might substitute the necessity of taking *The Institute* to the big (or little) screen this time (a lot of similarities); but, I mean, it's Stephen King... so you can always hope for the film version.

—Tom Field

A summer to remember

The executive editor and a senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*, L. Jon Wertheim is also a contributor for *60 Minutes*, the venerable CBS TV franchise. His latest book is *Glory Days: The Summer of 1984 and the 90 Days That Changed Sports and Culture Forever* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021). Its zeroes in on three summer months in 1984, and how events in the sports world mingled with American culture at large, often in transformational ways. Each chapter stands on its own, with the rise of Michael Jordan that summer, first as an Olympian at the '84 games, showing up in several. Johnny Mac and Martina, Larry versus Magic, Jordan and the Nike "It's the Shoes" deal, Donald Trump and the USFL, how the Jackson Family Victory concert tour (I went to that in Denver) eventually impacted the New England Patriots ownership, the rise of commissioner David Stern and the NBA, etc.



Ike's Kitchen

1772 Rooftop on Main

1984 was a good year for me. I was single, living in Boulder Colorado when it was at its hippest (and not so pricey); I saw The Jackson Family and Bruce Springsteen at Mile High Stadium that year – and Trump's New Jersey Generals when they played the Denver Gold (I was a season ticket holder.) For those that remember the Summer of 1984 but didn't quite piece it all together the way Jon Wertheim has, *Glory Days* is an enjoyable trip down memory lane for sure.

—Gene Marrano

Unique eateries

I've driven by the small shopping center where **Ike's Kitchen** is located on Electric Road in southwest Roanoke County for the past four years since it opened but was always puzzled about what they served; I had trouble reading the sign graphics from the road for one thing and they seemed to be closed a lot. But recently my son turned me on to Ike's, which offers "Authentic Japanese Cuisine," as it states on the menu, and it was a great find. Open Thursday through Sunday only, Ike's – which has a small indoor seating area – was busy the whole time we were there, with people in and out. They specialize in Ramen dishes - noodles with all sorts of ingredients on top that you can customize – like a half-marinated

egg (yum), pork bellies, mushrooms etc. The Gyoza pork-chicken dumplings and the Onigiri rice balls (infused with salmon) were also good. Check it out – a bowl of Ramen on a chilly day is a winner.

Meanwhile the Barkett Family that owns the Pie Shoppe in quaint, historic downtown Fincastle opened the **1772 Rooftop n Main** about a year ago on the very top of that building on Main Street, across from the Botetourt County Courthouse. I stopped in last month to check it out and sat at the bar – where behind the counter the liquor stock is housed inside a repurposed small airplane fuselage. The very industrious and personable bartender explained that there are pilots in the Barkett family. Wasn't that hungry so "settled" for a bourbon & coke – and a slice of the Pie Shoppe's peanut butter pie. Good stuff. They intend to keep the 1772 Rooftop open into the cooler months with the help of gas heaters. Check it out for the bucolic views of Fincastle, the menu (besides pies) runs from burgers and steaks to rainbow trout, mussels and lam meatballs. A unique restaurant in a most unlikely setting.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Tom Field** is publisher of FRONT; **Gene Marrano** is editor of FRONT.

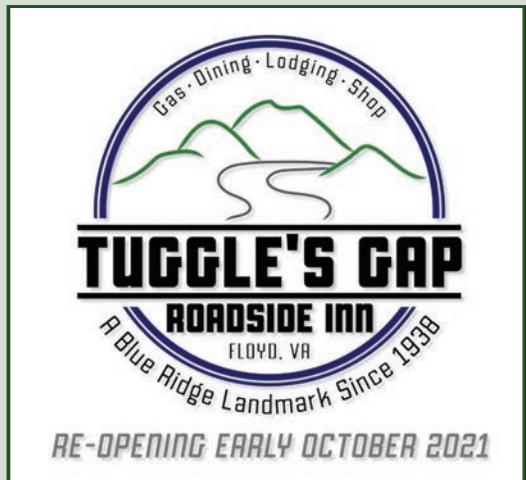


Pinnacle honored >

Pinnacle Financial Partners remains one of the nation's Best Large Workplaces for Women, earning the No. 6 spot on the latest list from FORTUNE magazine and Great Place to Work®. The Nashville-based firm, which recently held a COVID-delayed ribbon cutting for its downtown Roanoke location, ranks among the best in the nation for the way women associates view their experience in terms of fairness and equity. This is Pinnacle's fourth appearance on the list, having earned this distinction in 2020, 2018 and 2017. The Best Workplaces for Women award is based on analysis of survey responses from more than 5.6 million U.S. employees. In that survey, 98 percent of Pinnacle's female employees said it's a great place to work.

Tuggles Gap landmark returns >

The **Tuggles Gap** Restaurant in Floyd County just off the Blue Ridge Parkway has been around since 1938, a stop off for many people of all stripes. Parkway visitors for sure; motorcycle groups seemed to find it often. The food menu is varied and well prepared. Now under new ownership and after some renovations the plan was to reopen in late October with a slightly different name as the Tuggles Gap Roadside Inn (see logo).





Submitted



Richfield cuts another ribbon >

Richfield Living has cut the ribbon at The Health Center-Roanoke Campus on Mecca Street in Roanoke. Calling it a major objective of the Vision 2020 Strategic Plan, "opening The Health Center – Roanoke Campus ... provides a significant shift in the environment of long-term health care," said **Cherie Grisso**, Richfield Living CEO. "The new Health Center offers a unique home-like setting and every resident enjoys a private bedroom. Changing from the former institutional care to a residential care setting is paramount in Richfield transition to person-centered living in which every long-term resident is dignified with privacy and more choice in their daily living routines."

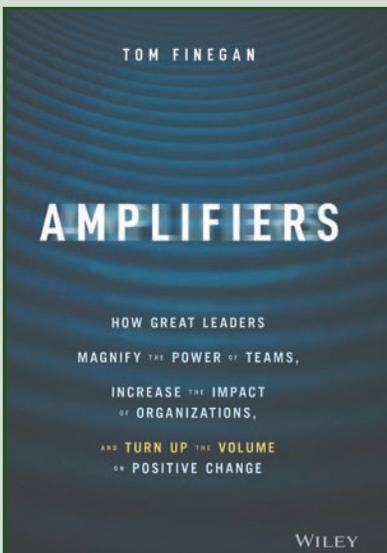


Courtesy

Clarkston CEO with his take on leadership >

The chairperson and CEO of a North Carolina-based company with an affiliate in downtown Roanoke has just released a new book about leadership. **Tom Finegan** is the Chairman and CEO for **Clarkston Consulting**. In Roanoke, Clarkston Technology Solutions has just settled into a new home near Luck Avenue and 5th Street. (Finegan is part owner of that repurposed building.) His new book is *Amplifiers - How Great Leaders Magnify the Power of their Teams, Increase the Impact of Organizations and Turn Up the Volume on Positive Change*. "We need leaders to be better leaders so they create that environment where people can speak up when [the organization] is not on the right course, says Finegan; "companies that can course correct can be great companies."

Good leaders are also good followers as they work their way up says Finegan. "Even people who sit in the top spot are following directions from the markets they need to follow, the vision of the board, their customer base and really have a sense of what their employee base is [saying]." Those followers also need to be heard when they know something isn't right. "When someone is telling you to do something that doesn't make any sense and is contrary to public benefit – don't do it ... challenge that person." And enjoy what you do adds Tom Finegan. Amplifiers is available at online booksellers.





Long time service dogs supporter really steps up >

A contribution north of \$500,000 towards a planned outdoor space for training **Saint Francis Service Dogs** – a need recognized at the height of the pandemic – came from supporter **Jo Lynn Draper**, currently a Board member. The 1,500 square-foot Draper Woody and Jo Lynn Draper Pavilion now exists on the property, with in-kind support from **Lionberger Construction**. Draper had made previous major contributions (over a half million dollars in two years) according to a St. Francis release, to support its training program. Saint Francis Service Dogs is a Roanoke-based nonprofit that helps children and adults with disabilities to become more independent and self-sufficient with help from professionally trained service dogs.

To date more than 160 service dogs have been trained to assist people with a wide range of disabilities, including autism, cerebral palsy, joint and/or muscular diseases, multiple sclerosis, brain injury, paralysis, Parkinson's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and many other conditions. The service dogs are trained in over 40 different skills. "An idea born in COVID to help us weather the pandemic, it has become another wonderful venue and operations space that helps us maximize the potential of our property," said Saint Francis Service Dogs Executive Director, **Cabell Youell**.



Tiny Cargo takes the next step >

Tiny Cargo Co., a biotech startup founded by **Rob Gourdie**, professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC in Roanoke, is among five companies to receive a Washington, DC Health Innovation QuickFire Challenge award. Spencer Marsh, a postdoctoral researcher in Gourdie's laboratory, presented the pitch that awarded the company \$50,000, the opportunity to reside at JLABS @ Washington, D.C. with access to a bench, workstation, and community for one year, and mentorship from experts at the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies. Tiny Cargo, highlighted previously in Valley Business FRONT, uses exosomes extracted from cow's milk to produce nanosized "drug delivery capsules," that can help prevent further damage after a heart attack. The next step for Gourdie and company is to commercialize the process. Gourdie is also director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute's Center for Vascular and Heart Research.



Gene Marrano

New greenway segment can help alleviate McAfee Knob parking crunch >

Roanoke County has cut the ribbon on the new 1.7-mile **Catawba Greenway**, with the trailhead located at the Catawba Sustainability Center just off Route 311. The Center is operated by Virginia Tech's Division of Outreach and International Affairs and is involved with agri-forestry research. The natural surface, looped trail system also includes vistas of the Catawba Valley. It connects to the fire road that intersects the Appalachian Trail on the way to the McAfee Knob rock outcropping, reportedly one of the most photographed spots along the entire AT.

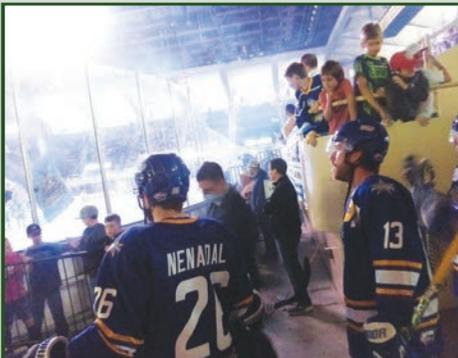
Roanoke County Supervisor **Martha Hooker** represents the Catawba District: "the trail features two crossings of Catawba Creek and pastoral views of the Catawba Valley. A portion of the trail follows the former Route 311 roadbed." Pathfinders for Greenways contributed over 3,000 volunteer hours toward the project, from 38 volunteers. The Catawba Greenway trailhead includes a new 25-space parking lot, which creates additional parking availability for McAfee Knob hikers. The roundtrip hike to and from McAfee Knob from the Catawba Greenway trailhead is just over 10 miles.



Courtesy

Tractor Supply opens third location in Roanoke Valley >

Tractor Supply Company has cut the ribbon on a Hardy Road store in Vinton. TSC carries products for lawn and garden, livestock, pet care, equine, etc. The Vinton Area Chamber of Commerce and Town of Vinton officials were on hand to help out at the store opening early last month.



Gene Marrano

Dawgs finally hit the ice >

Wearing patches on their jerseys that signified "601" – the number of days between games with last season wiped out due to COVID crowd size restrictions at the Berglund Center – the **Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs** were welcomed back last month by a lively crowd and some of their younger fans as they skated at home for the first time since early 2020. Forward **Josh Nenadal** said he had been working since June to shake off any hockey rust: "I've been on the ice every day at 6am, working my best to get back into shape. We're building [towards that] every single day."

Gene Marrano



Chicken Salad Chick opens at Tanglewood >

The **Chicken Salad Chick** franchise owners in Christiansburg, **Mary Lisa** and **Lee Anderson**, have expanded to Roanoke at Tanglewood Mall, with their new location occupying the former Applebee's location. They offer about a dozen variations of chicken salad at any one time (with short-term seasonal specials) in scoops, on bread, on croissants or in salads. The first 100 people that lined up on the day they opened had the chance to win free chicken salad (once a week) for a year. Tanglewood will soon offer other new dining opportunities as part of its makeover, including a Chipotle.

"It is a simple concept but its done really well, and its something that's not already saturated in the community," says Mary Lisa Anderson of Chicken Salad Chick, which she says now has around 200 franchises. Pictured left to right: Lee and Mary Lisa Anderson and their new partner in Roanoke, **Hunter Cray**, who "we stole from corporate," joked Lee Anderson. Cray had been a Chicken Salad Chick corporate trainer; he helped the Andersons get the Christiansburg franchise off the ground previously.



Bear Dance anniversary >

The **Bear Dance Market & CBD Cafe** in Christiansburg celebrated its two-year anniversary last month in Montgomery County. **Sarah Vogl** and **Chris Reese** spoke about starting the business. The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and Christiansburg Councilwoman **Johana Hicks** were on hand for the occasion.



Teacher of the Year saluted by a very well-known business owner >

A 7th grade math teacher at **Lucy Addison Middle School**, **Eboni Harrington**, has been named the Region 6 Teacher of the Year by the Virginia Department of Education. Harrington was also Roanoke City Public Schools' Teacher of the Year and is one of eight regional winners. The news was delivered at an assembly by a special guest: NBA legend Earvin "Magic" Johnson. The connection to Roanoke? The Lakers Hall of Famer owns SodexoMagic, the Roanoke City Public Schools food services vendor. School superintendent **Verleta White** approached Johnson about delivering the happy news to Harrington.



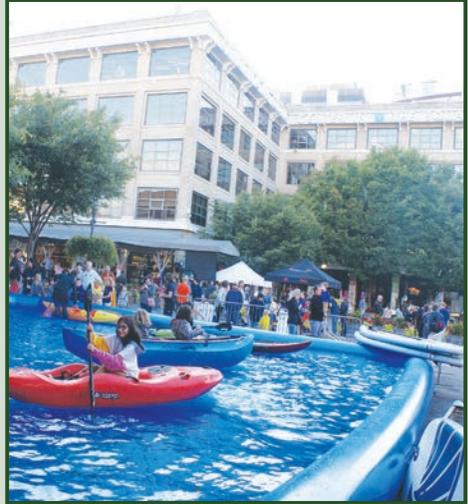
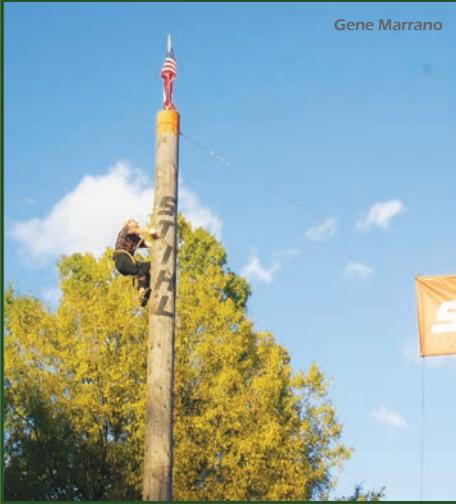
Still hammering it out >

The ever popular **Pumpkin Festival at Sinkland Farms** in Christiansburg celebrated its 30th Anniversary this year. With picture-perfect weekends in October, folks could have been intimidated as they approached, with seemingly endless cars parked all around the cornfield; but the spread out attractions allowed plenty of space so that it never felt crowded. Sinkland added a sunflower festival this year, and of course continues to serve as a venue for weddings and special events. With a farm-fair-like environment, children's play area, tractor/horse rides, corn maze, farm animals, vendors and merchants with a variety of goods, numerous food trucks, produce, beer, wine, kettle corn, and more—the Pumpkin Festival remains Sinkland's biggest draw of the year, and the site has become firmly established as a representative of the best agritourism attractions in Southwest Virginia.



Spirited Salem characters >

Ghost Walk 2021 was held the first Friday and Saturday of October in Salem at the **Salem Museum** and East Hill Cemetery. Visitors perused the museum as they waited for their tour guide to escort them on a walking tour through the cemetery, where prominent figures in Salem's history shared their stories. The family-friendly, non-scary shindig included the "ghosts" of Williams C. Williams (builder of the relocated house that now serves as the museum); Mary Eliza Davenport (former enslaved person who worked at Sherwood Mansion); Robert Fallam (European explorer who shared his field notes of Salem in 1671); Elizabeth Lewis (wife of Salem's Andrew Lewis, Revolutionary War hero); Lucy Johnston (Preston Place owner mid-late 1800's); Charles B. Griffon (Salem artillery captain during the Civil War); Knox Martin (Salem's famous aviation pioneer); John Payne (actor from Salem, most notably, "Miracle on 34th Street" movie); and Alfreda Peel (prolific folklorist who collected over 2500 songs and stories).



Anthem Go Outside Festival takes it to the streets >

After a COVID hiatus in 2020 GoFest returned to Roanoke in its tenth year, the celebration of all things outdoors that included the crowd-pleasing lumberjack and BMX trick bike shows, kayaking and standup paddling, live music and booths staffed by local companies that offer outdoor gear. This time **GoFest** was held in the core of downtown Roanoke instead of at the River's Edge Sports Complex, in large part so that downtown retailers and eateries could benefit from the thousands that attended over a three-day stretch last month. Proceeds from a ticketed concert with LA-based Vintage Trouble went to Project Outside, "which helps reinvest in the maintenance of outdoor assets here in the valley," says **Michael Clark**, director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Roanoke.

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



Ransom

Charlotte-based Truist Financial Corporation has named **Thomas Ransom** as regional president for the Virginia region. Thomas has nearly 22 years of banking experience and previously served as the market president for the Greater Washington D.C. area, for Truist predecessor BB&T. His role as regional president will be to lead the locals to serve Truist's clients in the Virginia region.

CREATIVE FRONT

Access Advertising & Public Relations has appointed



Weaver



McKinney

Lucas Weaver as public relations specialist and **Olivia McKinney** as art director. Weaver joined Access after graduating from Roanoke College with a bachelor's degree in business administration and a concentration in marketing. McKinney is a graduate of Virginia Western Community College with an associate degree in visual design. Both Weaver and McKinney joined Access in July 2020.

WELLNESS FRONT



Malaiksaite

Friendship Health announces Nurse Practitioner **Indre Malaiksaite** has joined the organization's newest healthcare offering, Friendship Physician Clinic, which opened in January. Malaiksaite, who did some of her training at Friendship, earned her bachelor's degree in biology from Roanoke College. She later earned a bachelor's and master's degree in nursing from the Jefferson College of Health Sciences.

Richfield Living, a senior living and rehabilitation company in Salem and Roanoke, has announced the



Chocklett

selection of **Sarah Chocklett** as Administrator of The Joseph C. Thomas Center. Chocklett, has four years of healthcare leadership experience. A Licensed Nursing Home Administrator, Chocklett holds a bachelor's degree in Healthcare Management from Jefferson College of Health Sciences (now Radford University Carilion). She joined Richfield in May 2021.



Akers

Warm Hearth Village in Blacksburg recently

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hired **Jennifer Akers** as the new Director of Nursing (DON) for the Kroontje Health Care Center. Akers earned her Associate of Science Degree in Nursing in 2015 from ITT Technical School in Salem. She became a Registered Nurse (RN) in 2016. Akers was previously with MFA Pulaski Health and Rehabilitation Center, where she was the Director of Nursing.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Pennix

The Virginia Tech Office of Undergraduate Admissions welcomes **James Pennix** as senior associate director of undergraduate admissions. Pennix has more than 20 years of experience,

most recently serving as assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management at Elizabeth City State University. Prior to that Pennix served as vice president for enrollment management at Ferrum College; dean of admissions and AVP of enrollment management at Radford University; and director of admissions at Roanoke College.

Curator, artist, and educator **Brian Holcombe** has joined the Moss Arts Center at Virginia Tech as its curator, leading the center's year-round



Holcombe

program of art exhibitions and related educational and engagement activities in its galleries and public spaces. In 2002 Holcombe founded Saltworks, a contemporary art gallery in Atlanta, Georgia, and served as the gallery's director and curator for 12 years.

Christina Fabrey,



Fabrey

associate dean for advising and academic achievement at Prescott College, has been named director of the Student Success Center (SSC) at Virginia Tech. Fabrey is responsible for overseeing retention and persistence efforts related to student support, including orientation and ongoing

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Woteki

Virginia Tech alumna who earned her Ph.D. from the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, was recently named to President Biden's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology and is one of 30 members who will directly advise the president. Woteki currently serves as president of the Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation, a nonprofit organization that works to promote a broader, comprehensive understanding of agriculture through increased scientific knowledge. She is Visiting Distinguished Institute Professor in the Biocomplexity Institute at the University of Virginia, and a professor of food science and



Jeffries

human nutrition at Iowa State University. Virginia Tech's Advancement Division has added **Charleon Jeffries** to its senior leadership team in the newly created position of assistant vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Jeffries previously served as director of diversity, equity, and inclusion for Penn State University's Division of Development and Alumni Relations.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

The Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission has appointed **Andrea Garland** to head its multi-regional commuter assistance program, RIDE Solutions. "Andrea's deep



Garland

background in transportation and mobility planning [she comes from Roanoke City's transportation department], coupled with her long history of advocacy for multi-modal transportation options both within the Roanoke community and elsewhere, make her a natural fit for this leadership position," says Regional Commission Executive Director Jeremy Holmes. RIDE Solutions began as an air quality improvement program focused on carpooling in 2006 and expanded to encompass programs and promotions supporting public transportation, bicycle commuting and pedestrian safety.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*



Paterson

Eric Paterson has been appointed executive director of the Virginia Tech National Security Institute. Paterson has served as interim executive director for the Ted and Karyn Hume Center for National Security and Technology for over two years and has led the Kevin T. Crofton Department of Aerospace and Ocean Engineering as department head for almost 10 years.

Catherine Woteki, a



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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

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

her husband, Matthew and their son Ira.

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

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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.

““

A year ago, my wife and I ordered a couple of mountain bikes. We're still waiting for one of them. — Page 18

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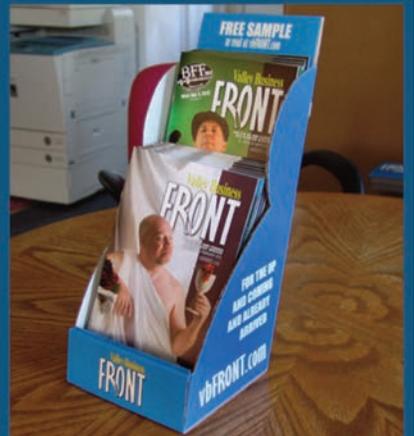


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ROA sees a slump

After a modest upward passenger count trend in recent months, Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport saw a 9% decrease in August 2021 traffic versus July 2021. August 2021 saw 45,726 passengers fly via ROA compared to 50,546 in July 2021, a decrease of 4,820 passengers. The airport's decrease of 4,820 passengers from July to August equates to 155 fewer passengers flying each day. Leisure travel winding down, schools opening, and the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 drove traffic down compared to July. The airport saw an increase in August 2021 traffic of 110% on a year-over-year basis; however, when compared to August 2019 (pre-COVID), traffic decreased 25%.

Kaine pushes for JOBS Act

From the chamber floor US Democratic Senator Time Kaine again highlighted the bipartisan JOBS Act, legislation he said has 39 Senate co-sponsors, in late September. The bill would expand access to federal financial aid for high-quality, short-term job training programs that meet local industry demand. Kaine said the JOBS Act will empower workers to quickly gain skills, enter the workforce, and address the nation's skilled workforce shortage. As of now federal Pell Grants can only be

used for accredited college courses.

"The need for investments and infrastructure in our country are massive and yet the projects don't build themselves. We need to have the workforce that can carry out this ambitious infrastructure investment," said Kaine, who then mentioned Volvo Trucks in Pulaski. "The plant director at the Volvo plant in Pulaski said to me, 'I could hire hundreds more people right now. I want to hire hundreds more people right now. But I can't. I can't. I can advertise everywhere. I can do creative things. I can offer incentives. But I can't get people to come and apply for these jobs.'"

Kudos for NRV winery

The Beliveau Farm Winery outside of Blacksburg took home the gold at the 2021 Mid-Atlantic Southeastern Wine Competition. The "Double Gold" medal went to its 2017 Estate Merlot, described as "a luscious full-bodied wine with a silky-smooth finish." Three estate grown white varieties took SILVER medals: 2019 "Destiny", a dry Vidal Blanc; 2019 "Afternoon Delight", a dry Chardonnay, and 2019 "Discovery", a sweet Niagara. "Soul Singer" 2016 took a GOLD medal. The Chambourcin grapes of Soul Singer 2016 were sourced from a regional Virginia

vineyard; all Beliveau wines are produced, bottled and labeled at their Montgomery County winery. The Beliveau Farm Winery is located on 165 acres 12 miles from downtown Blacksburg. Beliveau Farm is an Agritourism business

Neighbors in Need recognized

Montgomery County has received Achievement Awards from both the National Association of Counties and the Virginia Association of Counties for the Neighbors in Need Program, located at Millstone Kitchen. In 2012, Montgomery County partnered with local organizations to revitalize an older vacant school, now a community center comprised of The Prices Fork Apartments (Phase I and II), the Moon Hollow Brewery, The Millstone Kitchen, and El Ranchero. The idea started as a pilot program accepting donations and grew with partnerships from Montgomery County and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development to access Community Development Block Grant funding.

Former BT Exec. recognized

The Virginia Transit Association (VTA), at their 2021 Annual Conference & Expo in Tyson's Corner, highlighted several

public transportation agencies and individuals for their dedication and support of public transit. Among those honored with the Helen Poore Transit Professional Distinguished Service Award was Tom Fox, who retired from Blacksburg Transit in June as the Transit Director. On his watch the award-winning BT introduced electric buses to its fleet.

Commonwealth makes it easier for small business vendors

Governor Ralph Northam has announced the launch of the free Start Small app to connect app users and state government agencies with nearby vendors. Keyword searches will match users with local businesses from the approximately 100,000 registered vendors to date. Searches can be further refined to only small businesses, including those owned by women, minorities or service-disabled veterans certified through the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity. Start Small helps agencies make routine purchases. In 2019 Northam issued Executive Order 35, directing executive branch agencies and institutions to allocate more than 42 percent of discretionary spending to certified small businesses. Agency purchases are often made using small purchase charge cards. More than \$945 million was spent by

cardholders in fiscal year 2020 according to a release from Northam's office.

Public-private broadband initiative

Botetourt County and LUMOS are partnering to bring universal broadband coverage to homes and businesses by applying for a Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant from the Commonwealth of Virginia. This proposal seeks to deliver Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) broadband connectivity to 1,901 addresses in Botetourt County. LUMOS, which already serves Botetourt County, is also planning additional expansion projects targeting universal fiber coverage in the area. Grant awards should be announced in December. If this project is funded, Botetourt County will add \$200,000 in local funding (from federal recovery funds) for less than \$20 per household, for the approximate 10,000

homes in the service area.

Afterschool care also about the economy says B&G Clubs director

A three-year grant from the Virginia Department of Education totaling more than 2 million dollars will allow Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia to add more sites to its afterschool and summer camp programs. Michelle Davis is the CEO for the local Boys & Girls Clubs: "the need for affordable afterschool care for parents who are working, and for childcare in general, is something that I think COVID has helped everyone understand. It's a requirement to keep the economy running. It's no longer just a 'luxury'". The new no-cost four-hour long afterschool programs started last month. Boys & Girls was also looking to fill 64 full and part time positions; Davis says they've hiked the pay rate and offer sign-on bonuses as well. The

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grant will enable Boys & Girls Clubs of SWVA, based on 9th Street Southeast in Roanoke, to double the number of afterschool programs (to 12) it offers at local public schools in the valley.

Financial boost for health care centers

In late September U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine announced that Virginia health centers will receive \$28,545,390 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to better serve vulnerable communities that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. "Health centers are vital to the communities they

serve, and too often they are lacking the resources they need to provide the care Virginians need. These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic," the Senators said in a joint statement. Among the recipients are Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems Inc. (\$663,636), Free Clinic of The New River Valley Inc. (\$556,210) and the Kuumba Community Health & Wellness Center Inc. in Roanoke (\$603,873).

New Greenways Coordinator introduces himself

The new Roanoke Valley Greenways Coordinator was



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introduced at a Board of Supervisors meeting in Roanoke County in late September. Frank Maguire was recruited from Pennsylvania, where he worked on greenways and trails at the state level: “those passionate individuals that are giving of their time and expertise, giving of their funds to see this through [to greenway system completion] really helps to speak to the value to the community that are looking for connectivity,” Maguire told Board members, “I look forward to making all those things [progress].” Maguire succeeds now-retired long time greenways coordinator, Liz Belcher – who now leads the volunteer Pathfinders trail building crew. Greenways and trails have become an economic development engine and a recruitment tool in many localities.

Economic development grant for VT

The U.S. Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) 2021 University Center Economic Development Program Competition is providing \$2.5 million in grants to 25 colleges and universities in 17 states and Puerto Rico to administer programs that promote innovation and strengthen regional economies. “EDA University Centers are important partners in locally-driven economic development strategies,” said Secretary of Commerce

Gina M. Raimondo. “These institutions of higher education will provide critical technical assistance to support regional efforts to boost innovation, create good-paying jobs and ensure American competitiveness in the global economy.” Virginia Tech was on that list, receiving \$101,923 in EDA grant funds.

IEDC award

Roanoke County and the Town of Vinton were recognized by the International Economic Development Council for the Town of Vinton Business District Revitalization Project. The Project won the Bronze award as part of the 2021 Excellence in Economic Development Awards. The Revitalization Project consists of the Billy Byrd Apartments, Roland E. Cook Lofts, former Vinton Library, Vinyard Station, and Gish Mill redevelopment projects. Together, these redevelopments total \$21.7 in taxable new investment with \$533,500 in annual tax base enhancement and over 129 jobs created from redeveloped properties (according to Roanoke County).

Gish Mill achieves Landmark status

The Gish mill in Vinton was recently added to the Virginia Historic Landmarks Register, made official by The Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Gish Mill is a current redevelopment project in the Town of Vinton with plans to renovate it into a hub for local dining, entertainment, and lodging.

Shots, not Sears

The Virginia Department Health (VDH) has opened a state-run Community Vaccination Center at the former Sears location at Valley View Mall, which will offer COVID vaccination appointments (for boosters or first/second doses) from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday, with last appointments at 7:30p.m., at least through December. Walk in slots may also be available. “We want to be where the people are going to be,” said local VDH health district spokesperson Christie Wills, “and what better location than to be at a mall during the holiday season; we were delighted that it worked out, to lease the former Sears site.”

Gloves are big business

A medical glove manufacturing facility promising to employ nearly 2,500 people is coming to Wythe County. Governor Northam’s office made the announcement, calling it “a transformational, generational opportunity.” Two companies have formed a joint venture that plans to invest \$714 million to create a facility that

will make both the raw material and the gloves themselves. Northam says the pandemic and associated supply chain problems highlighted the need for more onshore production of personal protective equipment, including gloves. Blue Star Manufacturing and American Glove Innovations will join forces to create both a nitrile butadiene rubber manufacturing facility and nitrile glove production operation, according to a news release. The facilities will occupy more than 200 acres at an industrial park near the junction of interstates 77 and 81.

Local favorite eatery wins “Ordinary” Award

Mac and Bob’s Restaurant in Salem recently won the 2021 Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association Ordinary Award for Best Restaurant. Co-owner Bob Rotanz was also nominated for Best Restaurateur in Virginia, but the award went to a restaurant owner in Virginia Beach. The Ordinary Awards recognize the best in the tourism and hospitality industries.

DRI newsletter gets re-do

If you subscribe to the free weekly e-newsletter from Downtown Roanoke Incorporated you may have noticed the new graphic drawings sprinkled throughout, and more coverage of

the "smaller" events happening in the Star City. DRI events manager Alicia Hollingsworth was the artist; she created some outdoor murals in Roanoke last year as well. See the Downtown Roanoke Inc. website to sign up for the e-newsletter. Jamie Clark with DRI on the makeover after a recent subscriber survey: "sometimes we don't have the time or the space to devote to some of the smaller events – trivia nights or happy hours, sales

at some of our retailers downtown, that was some of the content that [readers] said they would like to see."

Branch on the move

The Branch Group is relocating and expanding into a new corporate headquarters along Peters Creek Road in Roanoke. Officials with the construction company say they saw the purchase of the former Kroger Regional headquarters as an

opportunity to grow and expand while maintaining their commitment to Roanoke and Southwest Virginia. The company says it will consolidate its three current locations into the new 58,000 square foot facility. The move is expected early next year.

Last call

After four years of operating the downtown Roanoke Tasting Room, Deschutes will not renew

its lease and will cease operations at the end of the year. In part the global pandemic that has reduced traffic in all restaurants, pubs, and tasting rooms is to blame, says Deschutes corporate. The Oregon craft brewer also decided not to build a production facility in Roanoke after a community-wide campaign that had landed a commitment from Deschutes to do that.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

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Still able to “Astonish” after all these years

By Gene Marrano

The art of conservation and restoration never seems to go out of style for Astonish Antique Restoration in Southwest Roanoke County.

From their long-time home on Starkey Road to a shared space with a North Carolina furniture company (Davidson Home) in the Commonwealth Drive industrial park over the past year-plus, Astonish has been doing architectural restoration, touch-ups and repairs for about 15 years. Heirloom furniture, beloved family and historical artifacts are its principal concerns; restoring/refreshing furniture damaged during moving (insurance claims work) or used in commercial environments (Hotel Roanoke, Virginia Tech, etc.) also helps keep the small staff at Astonish busy. Finishing work for a cabinet maker is also part of the mix. Even heavily used doors needing touchup – often onsite.

Marshall Young is now the company president; he’s been with Astonish

for about a decade and the owner for the past two years. His father and grandfather both had woodworking shops in their basements, so this line of work came naturally. He managed a coffee shop at one point and then set up his own home shop. “That’s when I started making guitars,” says Young, something he still does. Young went on to build custom houses locally and at Smith Mountain Lake with a group of German Baptists. “A lot of woodworking involved with that,” he noted during a recent tour of the Astonish shop, with Bruce Soujanen doing some repair work and David Crouch staffing the spray booth.

An old 50’s era panel van driven around by the original Astonish owner Dick Patch caught his attention: “I thought

what a cool car – what a cool job.” They talked, Young started as a part time and now he owns the company. “I love it still.” Word of mouth and advertising drive much of the business. When someone walks through the door an immediate sale, he says is not his only objective; Young says he wants to establish a relationship that leads to trust in the work they do and repeat business. “A lot of my clients have a lot of pieces.” He’s just started using Instagram to post pictures of their handiwork several times a week in an effort to expand the potential customer base.

For those that come in expressing the notion that they want Astonish to restore a piece of furniture so it can be sold, “I usually say no – what you would pay me is way more than you would get for it. I can’t restore a table for twenty dollars.” His costs are based on the hours put into the piece; a glut in the marketplace now also means resale values are down says Young. Family heirlooms and pieces with sentimental value often means clients are willing to make the investment in restoration. Clients come from the Roanoke and New River Valleys typically, and from Smith Mountain Lake. “We get to work on something new just about every day – I love it.”

Intricate repairs are made painstakingly via disassembly and reassembly, with the thought that it can be redone again

down the road; that leaves out quick fixes like “Gorilla Glue and screws,” he notes. If it were his chair being restored – what level or workmanship would he be looking for? All of their work is guaranteed. Artifacts that require a true conservationist are usually referred elsewhere through a trade group Young belongs to.

Yes, the COVID pandemic did make a difference when people were largely stuck at home – staring at that dining room table perhaps with the faded finish and nicks in the legs. Some however have been surprised that the restoration estimate they get from Young is more than the piece is currently worth: wondering why they should pay Astonish Antique Restoration \$600 to fix a table currently worth \$100 for example. “It goes back to the sentimental [value]. It’s a personal thing.” There are lower-level options sometimes he says for just “prettying it up.”

Asked by prospective clients “is it worth it?” Young says only they can answer that. He’s not an appraiser either. Clients have become emotional at times when they see how the Astonish crew has restored a beloved family piece. “That’ll make your month.” He remembers his father bringing pieces back to life in that basement shop. “A quality job that they’re happy with – they have to be happy before they pay me,” says Marshall Young. Sounds like a solid business philosophy. 



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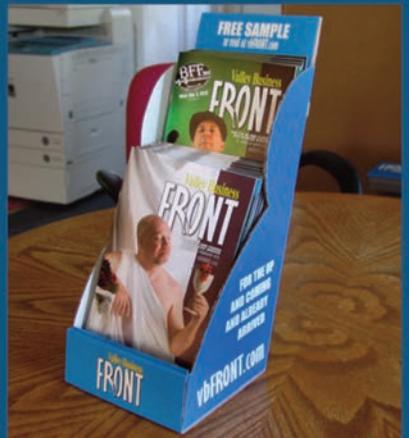
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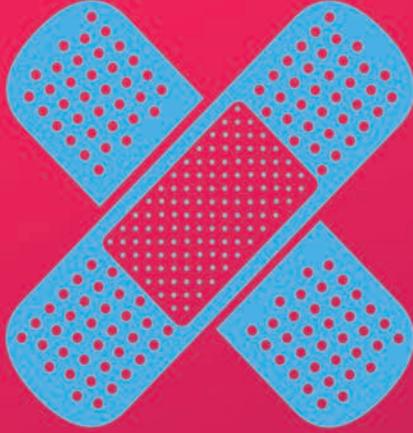


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