

Valley Business **FRONT**

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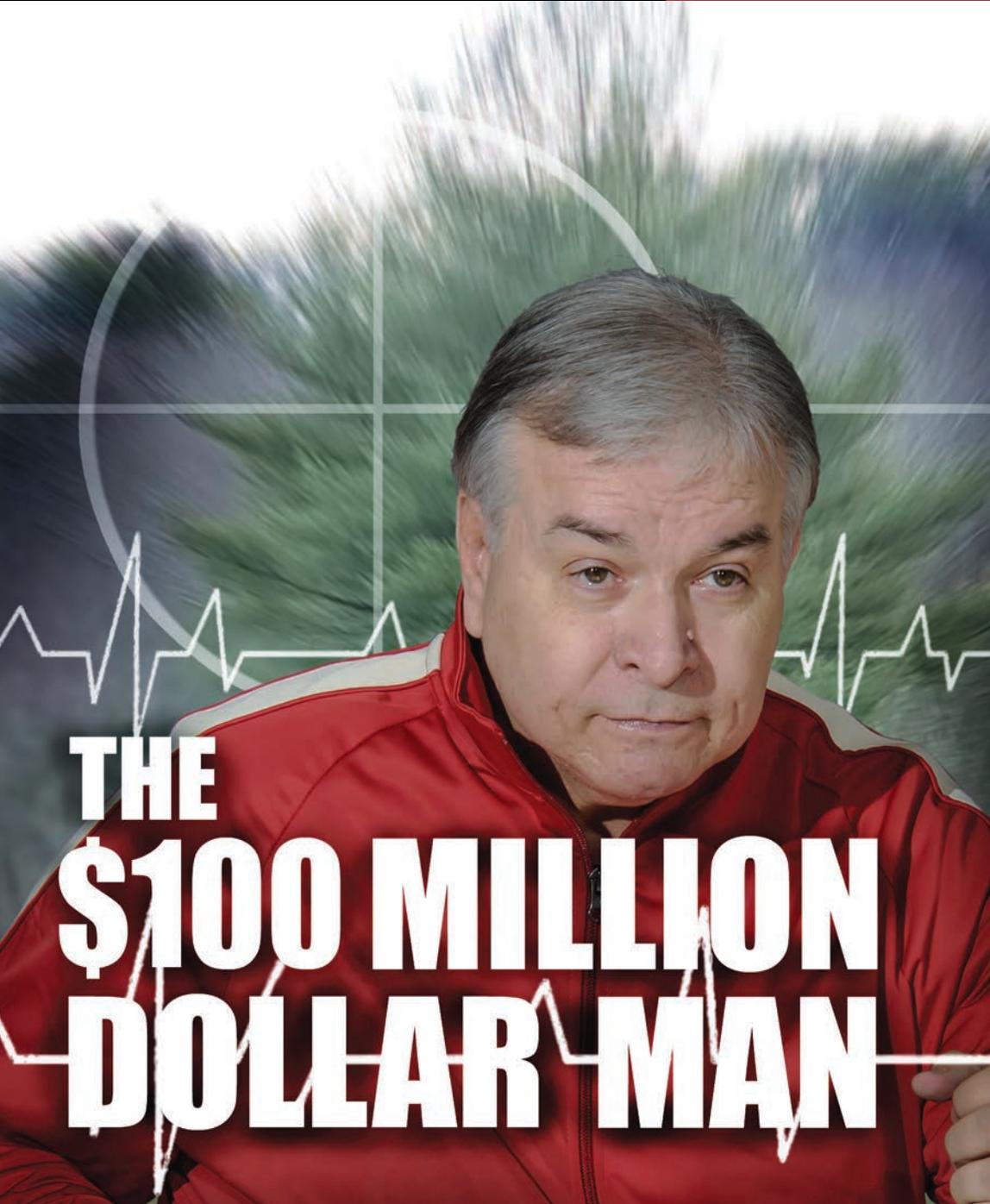
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Mike Stewart

The Berglund Center

MCCC's Steve Baffuto

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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Welcome to 2022. Last year was a year of gradual recovery from a pandemic that is still with us, a recovery that also released—or should we say unleashed—pent up demand for goods and services. That led to supply chain chokepoints and a labor shortage (that helped lead to that supply chain issue) and inflation. People quitting jobs in record numbers even as unemployment and jobless claims dip to their lowest points in years. Wages have upticked a bit, but it seems some employers have held off from raising wages that would bring more people back into the workforce. At least at this point.

Who knows what 2022 will hold? In any case we'll endeavor to let you know, as Valley Business FRONT looks at a variety of business sectors. We start with a cover story on a foundation leader who is working with the organization he oversees to make as much of an impact as possible in helping other non-profits find their footing. Plus, several profiles on people brand new to their positions in what promises to be another year of change.

Happy New Year. And Happy Reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

sure, he can
bring you
a ball of yarn

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if you were brought your own copy of
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He would never have thought that cocktails-to-go would have been allowed.

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Community Foundation Hits \$100 Million

By Anne Sampson



Carrie's Changing Business Banking.



**Carrie McConnell,
President**



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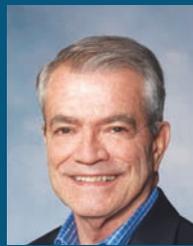
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JANUARY



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Mike Leigh



Nanette Levin



Nicholas Vaassen

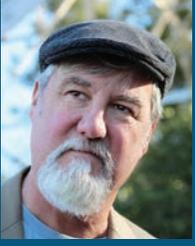


Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

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.

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““
I have not seen a business process that couldn't achieve an improvement of 10% or more in productivity or throughput.

— Page 22

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

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““
I wanted to make sure I didn't stop them. — Page 40



Alan Ronk, President
and CEO, Community
Foundation Serving
Western Virginia

Community Foundation Hits \$100 Million

By Anne Sampson

In 1973, a trio of made-for-TV movies introduced Colonel Steve Austin as The Six Million Dollar Man, which went on to become a popular TV series. In a storyline based on novels by Martin Caidin, Colonel Austin, portrayed by Lee Majors, was a NASA test pilot severely injured in a crash. He was “rebuilt” using bionic parts that replaced both legs, an arm and one eye, greatly enhancing his speed, strength and vision. The cost: six million dollars.

Reminiscent of action hero Steve Austin, Alan Ronk, as President and CEO of the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia (CF), has led the non-profit to surpass \$100 million in assets this year, by deploying a potent mix of speed, strength and vision.

VISION

Alan stepped into his role as the first and only president of CF in 1990, after serving as a consultant during its first year and a half, drawing on his experience as the Director of Planned Giving at Roanoke College. As president, he set the genuinely lofty goal of achieving \$5 million in assets. The organization's first audit, in 1989, showed assets of \$258.07.

"I had no plans to leave Roanoke College," says Alan, "but this held great promise to do great things. I took a leap of faith. They had no money, no way to pay me. The first thing I had to do was go out and raise my own salary. My first office was a 6x6 room, with a rolling metal secretarial desk and a manual typewriter." Even in those early days, he had thoughts of what it would feel like to someday be a \$100 million foundation.

The mission of the Community Foundation, is "to enable people who love their community to easily give back," says Alan. "We are a facilitator for people to do their philanthropy through us to help the communities they live in, a central vehicle where people of wealth and people of modest means can aggregate funds that are perpetual in nature, to help the community forever. People come to us and we work with them to make their charitable dreams come true." The Foundation presents about \$4 million in grants and scholarships annually.

The funds are invested across a diverse portfolio with the

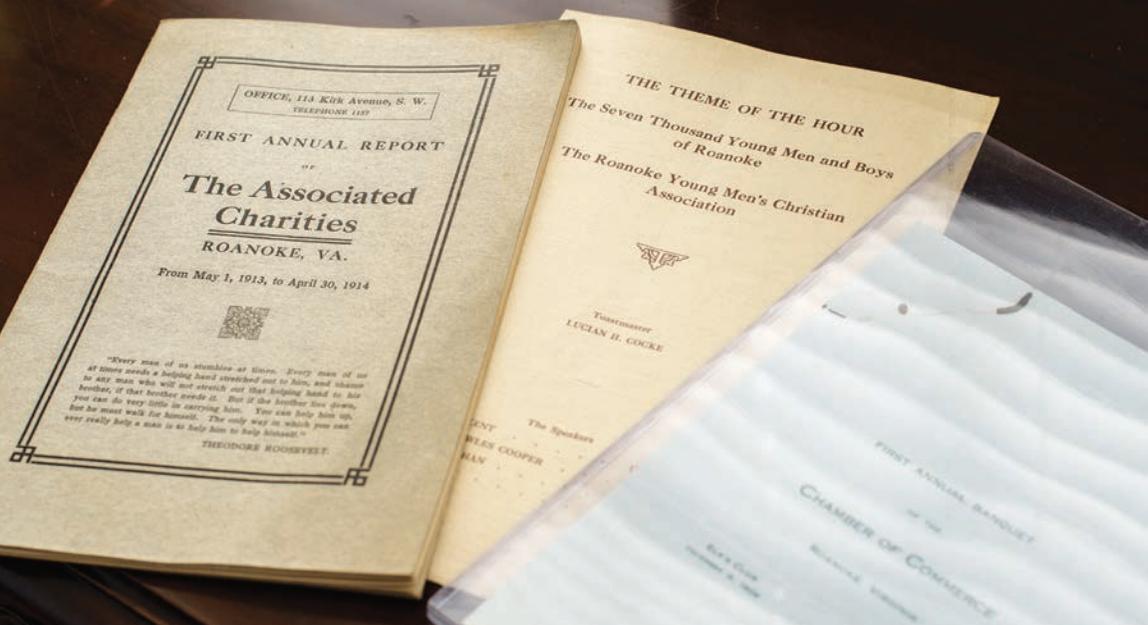


The mission of the Community Foundation is to enable people who love their community to easily give back.

The Community Foundation's Roanoke office is located in the historic Patrick Henry Hotel. This bell is part of Alan's collection of historic artifacts and ephemera.



All photos: Anne Sampson



Early reports from Associated Charities (which became the United Way); the YMCA; and the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce. For 20 years, Alan had a shop which sold collectible ephemera called "Paper Memories" located on Brandon Avenue. "These were the earliest annual reports I could find," for these organizations, he says.



Each fund is very different, depending on the desires of the donor.

—Carly Oliver

input of a professional investment committee, and managed for long-term growth. These pooled resources are disbursed through grants and scholarships, or applied to pressing needs in the community.

"We work closely with donors, nonprofits and professional advisors to set up individual funds. Each fund is very different, depending on the desires of the donor," says Carly Oliver, the foundation's COO.

Community Foundation's service area encompasses most of Western and Southwestern Virginia, excluding a few counties such as Pulaski and Montgomery, which have their own foundation. An office in Martinsville, which focuses on Martinsville City and Patrick and Henry Counties, was seed-funded in part by Harvest Foundation of Martinsville Henry County. The office is headed by Regional Vice President, April Haynes.

The concept of a central hub for community philanthropy first took root in Cleveland, Ohio, where the Cleveland Foundation was founded in 1914. Since then, the idea has grown to total 1700 foundations worldwide, over 700 of which are in the United States, with 23 in Virginia. Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia is the fourth largest in the state in terms of assets, behind Richmond, Hampton Roads and Charlottesville. CF is 20 to 38 years younger than these organizations, which attests to its rapid growth.

Despite this accomplishment, it wouldn't be surprising if you've never heard of them.

"We're the valley's best-kept secret," says Alan. "We've quietly worked with individuals to facilitate their giving. Philanthropy is a very personal thing."

NANCY HOWELL AGEE

There's a general consensus regarding the kind of leadership Alan has brought to the Foundation. Nancy Howell Agee, President and CEO of Carilion Clinic, and a past president of the CF Board, expresses it well:

"The community foundation has been an amazing success," she says. "That's in large part because of Alan's steadfast, thoughtful, pragmatic, yet visionary leadership. He's done a remarkable job leading the foundation and making it a regional, valuable asset. It was a pleasure to work with Alan. I'm not sure I know anyone who's as humble, kind, always considerate, always prepared, thinks two steps ahead and smart as a whip as Alan!"

STRENGTH

That personal approach is both a hallmark and an advantage of Community Foundation. Donors can play a role in their giving in several ways: from Field-of-Interest Funds that address a broad area of concern, such as education or the arts, to Designated Funds earmarked for a specific organization, to Donor-Advised Funds which allow contributors to make recommendations about the distribution of grants.

"There's virtually no area of charitable need that the Community Foundation hasn't touched in some way," Alan says.

Although these philanthropic organizations have been around since the early 20th century, each foundation is, in many ways, unique. "There's that old saying, if you've seen one community foundation, you've seen one," Alan says.

And yet, Community Foundation still stands out.

"There's a specialness about what we've been able to form here," says Alan, "that's happened in a very organic way. Smaller or newer foundations call us with some frequency to ask us what's our Secret Sauce."

So, what is the Secret Sauce?

"The Secret Sauce is sitting around this table," he says, indicating his staff. "Buy-in from the board, passion and dedication from the staff, getting the work done that needs to be done. Donors and financial planners appreciate that we're incredibly responsive; we return phone calls, we do what we say we're going to do. We're incredibly efficient in what we do."

Alan runs a very lean operation, which he feels contributes a great deal to its success.

"We received some guidance early on," he says, "that one

“ “ ”

We're the
valley's best-
kept secret.

– Alan Ronk





Community Foundation's Beth Kelley, April Haynes, Ana Barrios, Cary Oliver, Alan Ronk, Kathy Mattox, Michelle Eberly, Mary E. Hodges

FORMATS FOR GIVING

The Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia offers a variety of formats for giving. *(From the 2020 Annual Report.)*

Unrestricted Funds: are the most flexible, allowing the foundation to respond to the most pressing needs.

Field-of-Interest Funds: allow donors to aim support at broad areas of concern, such as education, or the arts.

Designated Funds: ensure that regular, endowed support flows to specific organizations.

Donor-Advised Funds: allow donors to make recommendations about the distribution of grants.

Scholarship Funds: contribute to the education of students who meet criteria outlined by the donor, such as a particular career path, school, or geographic area. **Memorial Funds:** remember a special person through a fund that reflects their legacy.

Agency Endowment Funds: are created by nonprofits to grow their charitable dollars for future work.

of the best things we could do was not fetter ourselves with artificial bureaucracy.”

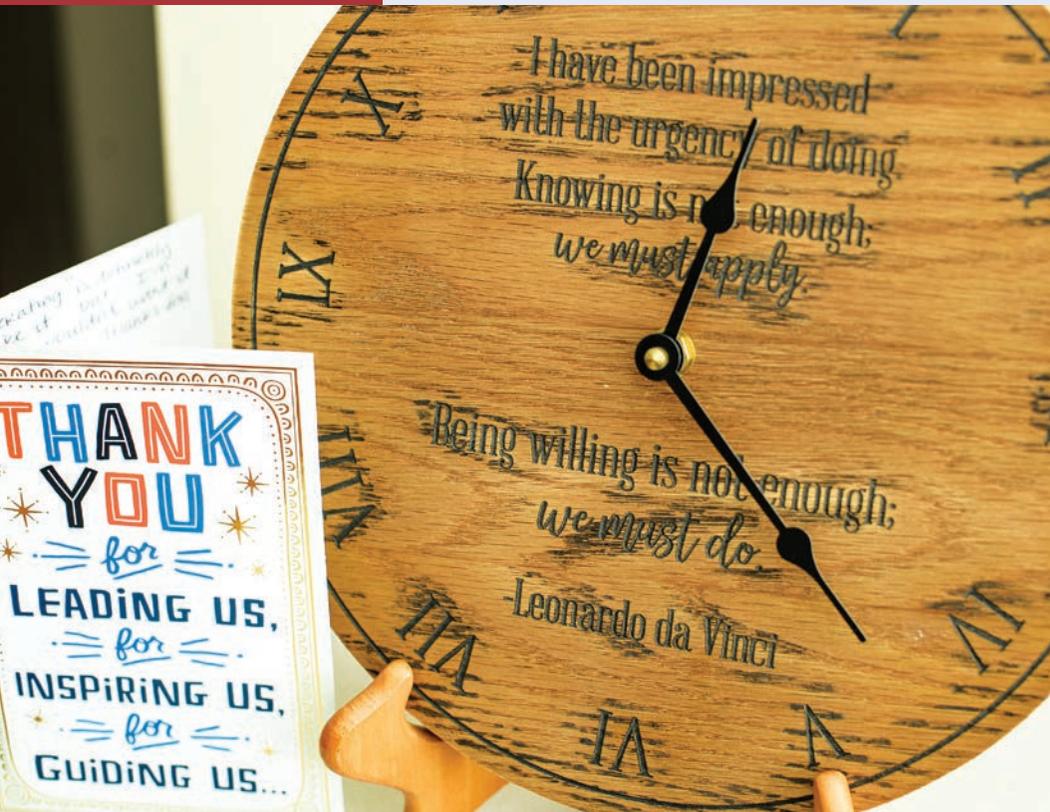
The foundation functions efficiently with a cross-trained staff of eight, rather than the 16 to 18 people who would manage a comparable organization. They run on about 1.3 cents of every dollar they hold in assets. The culture is one of family, teamwork, and caring for one another, which in turn cultivates a longevity that’s beneficial to the team, to the organization as a whole and to the community it serves. Alan and the staff have 93.5 years of dedication between them: after Mary Hodges, Grant Officer, and Ana Barrios, Finance Assistant, who’ve been there a matter of weeks, the shortest tenure is that of Beth Kelley, Director of Finance and Investment, who’s been there nearly eight years. COO Carly Oliver and Regional Vice President April Haynes have tenures of 17 and 16 years, respectively. Michelle Eberly, Director of Grants and Donor Engagement, has been there for 12 years.

“And Alan is the longest-tenured president of any community Foundation in Virginia,” at 32 years, says Michelle.

“It’s hard to build trust with people who might give you millions of dollars if somebody different picks up the phone every time they call,” says Alan. “There’s just no better definition of trust.” Kathy Mattox, the Administrative Assistant who actually does pick up the phone, has been there nine years.



CF manages
over 400 funds
and scholarships.



This quote from Leonardo Da Vinci parallels the Foundation's mindset.

Trust is a huge part of what they do.

"We've been extraordinary stewards of these assets, and have invested over \$60 million back into the community," says Alan. "Donors are comforted by our philosophy of spending."

SPEED

Community Foundation manages over 400 funds and scholarships, some with seasonal grant cycles and some open year-round. There are also unrestricted funds which enable CF to address pressing or sudden needs with agility.

"We have the ability to respond very quickly to needs in the community. We do very good due diligence but when we have an answer, we move on it," says Alan. "Sometimes we move before the organization in need knows we're moving."

For example, CHIP (Child Health Investment Partnership) once lost the van they used to take families to doctor appointments. A week later, with the Community Foundation's help, they had a new van.

"Something I've always been proud of is how effective and efficient the foundation is in applying our assets, but always in a very thoughtful way," Alan says.

This efficiency extends to donor services. With the staff's help,

donors can set up a fund in minutes, laying out criteria for grants or scholarships, such as a geographic area, attendance at a particular school or the pursuit of a specific career path, or a general field of interest, such as the arts, literacy or the environment.

One such donor wanted their philanthropy to benefit nonprofits in a small geographic area which includes Bent Mountain and Check, Virginia. Among the vital nonprofits in this rural community who benefit are the volunteer fire and rescue squad, and Apple Ridge Farm, which offers outdoor experiences and mentorship to underserved and at-risk young people in the Roanoke and New River Valleys. As with all such funds, Community Foundation manages every aspect: receiving and evaluating grant applications, vetting the organizations, research, disbursement and follow-up.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

The team met the obstacles presented by Covid in 2020 with the same action-hero mindset they bring to every challenge.

"They pivoted seamlessly to working at home and Zoom meetings," says Alan. "It was as if they'd always done it that way."

To help relieve the economic pressure of Covid restrictions, CF partnered with Boys and Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia and the United Way in a program called 'Takeout Hunger.' The organization raised \$88,000 to purchase hot meals from local restaurants which would have otherwise been shuttered, and make those meals accessible to families in need.

Paradoxically, the foundation experienced tremendous growth in 2020 and 2021, both in terms of donations and existing assets.

"Two years ago, we were at \$70 million, and last year, \$80 million," says Alan. "I thought, 'Great, three or four more years and we'll get there (to \$100 million).' Then on June 30, 2021, I checked and we were at \$114 million. Darn, I didn't get to celebrate! I didn't want that benchmark to disappear into the landscape, but it kind of blew by because of Covid. The annual meeting is where we would normally have recognized this.

It's powerful and important to be able to say that there's a \$100 million foundation in your midst," he continues. "Now I'm thinking what it would be like to be a quarter billion-dollar foundation. We currently have \$140 million in future estate commitments. The quarter billion is there, 20 or 30 years down the road.

One of the rewards is seeing donors with tears in their eyes, knowing that a life-long passion of theirs will finally be realized." 



We have the ability to respond very quickly to needs in the community. We do very good due diligence, but when we have an answer, we move on it.

– Alan Ronk



Mike Stewart

New ROA Director hopes to help fix old problems

By Gene Marrano

The Roanoke Regional Airport Commission has their man after a search that took about ten months.



Tom Field

The new executive director as of October 2021 is Mike Stewart, who like his predecessor, Tim Bradshaw, had previously worked at ROA – and looked forward to returning. (Bradshaw left suddenly about a year ago - in what one media report called after reviewing court records the aftermath of leaked information during a bidding process for airport services.) Mike Stewart

had spent the last 14 years with the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority in administration and airline development, most recently at Dulles International as a manager. His early career in the mid-90's included four years as a station manager and supervisor for US Airways. Two of his four children were born while Stewart worked at ROA. "I feel like I'm coming home," Stewart

said in October. “We loved this area while we were living here.”

Stewart faces several sticky situations, starting with COVID: while leisure travel picked up nicely over the course of 2021, business travel – an airport’s bread and butter – was still down from pre-pandemic levels at the end of 2021. Much like Bradshaw and those before him, getting more locals to fly out of Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport – and attracting additional flights – including the long sought after non-stop to Dallas-Fort Worth – remain as long-term goals. Recruiting flights and business to Dulles was part of his mission – a much larger facility to be sure “but the basics are about the same,” notes Stewart.

“It’s about what we can sustain in the air service business. Everybody working together. At the end of the day what brings [more] air service is people willing to fly [from ROA] and support the service that we have.” That also means some of the traffic that’s been going to other nearby airports where fares may be cheaper – Greensboro, Raleigh, Charlotte, Dulles etc. coming back home to the Roanoke Valley. The more business and leisure travelers opt to fly locally means a better chance to attract additional flights – or even more carriers to the market. “Airlines can see when people are doing that.”

Putting up a “united front,” and appealing to the business community to fly from ROA more often is a large part of Stewart’s mission. There’s a lot of the chicken and egg theory involved – when more people fly from ROA airline ticket prices could come down – or will more fly from here after the prices are lowered and become more competitive with other facilities? Which comes first after all? International markets that were slow to open up again also put a crimp in flights from ROA – which does not offer travel to

non-US destinations – hence it is not an “International Airport,” although it does offer connections to Dulles, Raleigh and other airports that do leave the country.

Business travel has always been the core [business],” notes Stewart. Going out to the local business community and making that case is a big part of his mission going forward. Airlines struggling with a pilot shortage as demand ramped up again for flights in the latter half of 2021 doesn’t make that task any easier. United pulled back some of its service from Roanoke to Dulles, most likely due to a pilot shortage says Stewart.

He has met with the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Regional Partnership in recent months, making sure all parties involved with growing business in the valley – and potentially business air traffic – are on that same page.

Being in position when airlines are back to full staff and ready to serve new markets – like ROA – is a major goal. “I need to understand how they are selling the region,” Stewart said during a November interview. The airlines also need to know when Virginia Tech and other large local entities that normally are frequent fliers loosen the reins on employees as COVID [hopefully] subsides for good.

Long range plans for airport expansion – more gates, runway and airport road improvements etc. – have been on hold in part due to the pandemic but Stewart has been “knocking the dust off,” a plan that still requires FAA approval and of course funding. It’s a long-range plan that entails the next 10-15 years or more. “It’s a great opportunity to keep on working in a business that I love. I’m just excited to be back,” says Mike Stewart; “it’s all about growing the economy. We’re here to be an economic engine for the economy.” 



I feel like I'm coming home. — Mike Stewart



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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Since the pandemic recovery began, the challenge of finding good people has become even greater.

Send your questions
or comments to Mike@
OpXSolutionsllc.com

Labor shortage antidotes

We are currently in a labor shortage. Millions of workers left the workforce for various reasons during the pandemic, but not all of them have returned. This shortage has been a contributing factor to supply chain issues and inflation.

Organizations that need more employees will usually invest more time and money to recruit, sometimes offering higher salaries, bonuses, or greater benefits. HR managers are actively seeking new and innovative ways to recruit. Putting emphasis on recruiting is important, but most companies are neglecting two other strategies to their labor shortage problem that I believe are more important.

Employee retention. For every good employee retained, one less employee needs to be recruited, hired, onboarded, and trained. Employees are quitting at the highest rate ever recorded, yet few organizations invest enough into keeping their team members. There is a lot of bad leadership creating bad cultures. I am shocked at how many leaders fail to regularly meet one-on-one with their employees to explore their needs and career desires yet suffer high turnover and complain they can't "find good people." One local company I worked with who suffered from this decided to replace their operations leader. Not only did the exits slow down, but their employees told their friends and their former employees returned because of the positive change. Leadership matters!

Process Improvement. Instead of adding more people, organizations should invest in greater productivity. I have not yet seen a business process that couldn't achieve an improvement of 10% or more in productivity or throughput. Most companies simply don't spend much energy improving their processes. Not only does this strategy compensate for labor shortages, but it also lowers costs, increases profits, and improves competitiveness.

Investing time and money into retaining employees and improving processes should be a priority for every business. If they are not doing this, the new year is a good time to start! 📌

“Most companies are neglecting two other strategies to their labor shortage problem... employee retention [and] process improvement.”

Putting your money to work in strange times

Prognosticators keep saying we're due for a bear market. Sure, we've had a few corrections, but we continue to remain in the longest running bull market in history. While most doomsayers are off by at least a few years, it's reasonable to expect this stock market boon will end. With stocks getting riskier, and bond yields continuing to be crappy, are there other options?

IntraFi Networks are becoming more prevalent and popular. They allow investors to spread money around to get more FDIC insured coverage than the traditional \$250k limit. Multiple accounts can be administered by a single bank. They're an alternative to traditionally safe bonds that are paying next to nothing – and sometimes less – and riskier stocks. JP Morgan, CAIS, and Fidelity are companies creating products with a slightly higher risk than bonds, but with opportunities for higher rewards.

These vehicles can offer guaranteed returns with no risk of lost principle. Demand deposit, money market deposit accounts, and CDs are the products. Account maturity terms range from four weeks to five years, with CDs maxing out at three years.

According to the Federal Reserve, America's richest residents are investing the least amount of money in US government and municipal securities than they have over the past 20 or so years. Investment in the last decade alone is down \$1.5 Trillion. There's a reason for that. The average 10-treasury was paying 1.55% as inflation hovered above 5%.

The bull market started in 2009. That's not going to last forever. It's a good time to start considering alternative investments to what's worked in the past. IntraFi Networks are open to businesses, not-for-profits, individuals, and even fiduciaries. It's one middle-road alternative that tempers the risk of securities with returns that make more sense than bonds.

Keep your eyes open as there are likely to be more new investment alternatives cropping up for investors as times keep changing. 

“
IntraFi Networks... allow investors to spread money around and get more FDIC insured coverage.”



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
*Keep your eyes open ...
as times keep changing.*

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



Montgomery County Chamber

Steve Baffuto

From ABC to MCCC

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Steve Baffuto has worked in public service for 27 years and sees his new role as the President & CEO of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce not as a change, but rather as a continuation of that mission.

Steve Baffuto, who began the job on December 1, came to the Chamber from Virginia ABC (Alcohol Beverage Control), where he was Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Law Enforcement for regions extending from Pulaski to Lynchburg. Prior to that he spent six years with the Roanoke City Police Department in the community policing unit. Baffuto holds a master's degree in criminal justice with a focus on public administration. Additionally, he has attended numerous leadership trainings, including with the FBI and the R.B. Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech.

This background translates seamlessly to his new Chamber duties.

Economic growth is a primary goal of Chambers; likewise, ABC promotes business growth by providing alcohol licenses. In ABC, Baffuto also worked with business on how to grow alcohol sales just as the Chamber assists members with marketing. Other areas he developed, such as networking, communication, and problem solving, are needed in the new role as well.

"This skill set allowed me to carry over to working with the Chamber," Baffuto said.

In making the career shift, Baffuto was "ready to start a new chapter." He wanted to give back to Montgomery County, where he has resided for 21 years, by "helping the community grow and prosper" and lifting up future leaders.

Outgoing President & CEO Sharon Scott and her staff have "set a good foundation," said Baffuto. "I am impressed every day when I hear about what they're doing," he continued in the November interview.

Still, he has some new and innovative ideas to bring to the table.

Baffuto's mantra is "fly our flag," meaning let the community know of the work the Chamber is doing. His vision for the Chamber includes reaching out to non-members to make them aware of opportunities the Chamber offers, which include networking,

leadership development, and having a voice with legislators.

Thinking outside the box is important to Baffuto, as he said, "what we did two or three years ago is not the same thing as we do now." COVID ripple effects are a large part of the reason and are the most critical problem facing businesses, he said. In an example from his ABC days, he would never have thought that cocktails to-go would have been allowed. Baffuto has a novel idea to put on the Chamber website: podcasts or videos to instruct businesses on subjects like how to start a business or how to get an ABC license. These, and some other privileges, would be for members and non-members alike.

"The Chamber is here to help everyone in the community grow," he said.

When asked about the strengths he brings to this job, Baffuto mentioned two things. First, he touted his training in leadership and 10 years' worth of supervisory experience. Also, from his ABC work, he was responsible for positive relationships with restaurants and businesses, forming an extensive network in Montgomery County that he can mine as he seeks to build Chamber membership.

To achieve a work-life balance in the demanding position, Baffuto is confident in delegating to the Chamber team, which consists of Leo Priddy as Marketing & Communications Director and Jenna Phillips, Membership & Sales Director. Sharon Scott is staying on for an additional month to ease the transition.

Baffuto will also take advice he has received to "take things in stride" and "take a deep breath." Prioritizing tasks as they come in is also key. He said that closing emails and coming back to them later with a "clear head" is a good way to deal with issues.

Baffuto does not have plans to go elsewhere anytime soon. "I feel fortunate to be selected for this position," he said. "I am looking forward to the future." 



STYLE NOTES

By Doug Kidd

Executive Summary:
Versatility has never been more important when investing your wardrobe dollars!

Navigating the new landscape

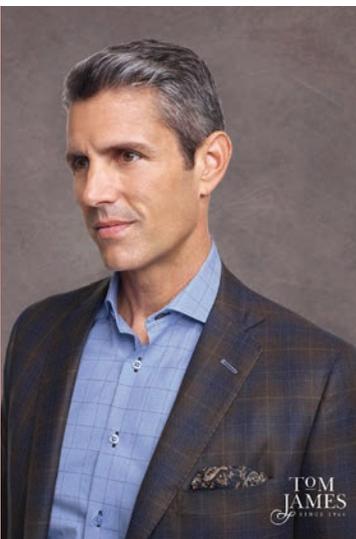
With so much uncertainty in today's workplace, you never know if you might be swept up in an all-day Zoom marathon that calls for at the very least a professionally dressed top half, or an in-person client facing meeting. Has your workplace defined what is the norm? Do you feel prepared for anything your schedule might throw your way?

Enter capsule dressing: It works for women; it works for men.

Capsule dressing is functional ensemble clothing that works as a unit. For women: a jacket, pants, dress, skirt and even a vest made out of the same material. Typically done in basics that can then be interspersed into an assortment of different outfits over a month. Dressed up or as business casual. For men: a textured solid suit or up-to-date plaid with a complimentary brown or black buttons can be interchanged as a sport coat with a tie, or even dressed down with a pair of jeans. If the original is made as 3-piece suit, then the vest can be worn as an individual layer as well. Make your wardrobe dollars work for you and add pieces that provides plenty of solutions for what the shifting marketplace demands. 

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

“ Make your wardrobe dollars work for you.



Reaching higher

Do you want to become a skilled worker who excels in your career? One way to achieve this goal is to be a lifelong learner. Education and training are two important components that boost your confidence and motivate you to strive for upward mobility, reinforce job security, and strengthen your chances of increased wages to support yourself and your family. The mission of the Roanoke Higher Education Center (RHEC) is to provide access to educational opportunities to the citizens of this region and is ideal for adult learners to obtain a degree or earn a certificate or endorsement.

Established 21 years ago, the Center offers more than 200 programs of study. Thus far, over 10,000 degrees and certifications have been awarded. The RHEC is unique in the number and types of organizations that have joined forces to expand access to educational resources at every level. Residents of the Roanoke region can earn anything from a GED to a doctoral degree and have the option to enroll with any of the twelve colleges, universities, or workforce agencies.

Mr. W. Heywood Fralin, Chairman of Retirement Unlimited, Inc., believes the Center contributes to a better quality of life. To show his gratitude, he established an endowment fund with the RHEC Foundation in the fall of 2021. Mr. Fralin stated, "In the future, our nonprofit organizations will have to rely significantly on incomes from endowments to survive. There's just not enough money to go around, and organizations that create permanent endowments now will be the ones that survive in the decades ahead." The RHEC Foundation plans to grow this endowment through estate gifts, trusts, and other planned giving efforts. RHEC's Executive Director, Dr. Kay Dunkley, states, "We appreciate Mr. Fralin's financial support and hope others in the community who have a passion for lifelong learning will contribute to this fund." The endowment is one-way RHEC can sustain its efforts toward creating an educated and well-trained workforce. 



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Kaitlyn Van Buskirk

Submitted



W. Heywood Fralin



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Robyn Schon

Courtesy photos

Berglund Center adapts through interesting times

By Nanette Levin

From the darkness of the COVID grip and a summer transitioning, to the glow of getting back to busy, Berglund Center adjusted through a challenging year. The GM looks back on that process.

What a difference a year makes. These days, the Berglund Center (including the arena, the performing arts center and the special events center) are hosting 5-10 weekly events. Robyn Schon, General Manager, expects it will be 2023, though, before things are back to pre-COVID normal.

In the meantime, she's being careful about booking events, choosing safer entertainment options over riskier ones. Meeting and training session space requests are on the rise. "We're really, really happy where we are right now," says Schon. "The hardest part is being this busy and not having a full staff."

The staffing shortage isn't by choice. The Berglund Center currently has about 280 employees, which is down 25-30% from pre-pandemic numbers, according to Schon. Like so many other service-sector businesses, the facility has struggled to get people back to work. Many were furloughed, still on payroll but not working. Some found other fulltime positions. "Part-time labor is almost impossible to find," she says.

Working through COVID

During the height of the pandemic, the Center was down to a skeleton staff. "There were only three of us here setting up tables, lights, doing cleaning," says Schon.

The coliseum area was transformed to

accommodate COVID vaccination crowds in April. The staff trio worked, often from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., to support the flow of residents coming in for shots while also providing for, and cleaning up after, volunteers. Carilion and the Virginia Department of Health split responsibility for orchestrating vaccination events with different layouts, which added breakdown and revised setup time. "We had more than just the coliseum to take care of," says Schon. They were doing graduations too.

"We would come in, reset tables and chairs, set pipe and drape, set up microphone and sound equipment to play soft music in the background, run power strips, constantly take garbage cans out," she says. The staff would then clean and sanitize the building at the end of the day, make sure all doors were locked and get ready to be back at 6 a.m.

"That was an amazing experience for us because we were doing the equivalent of two major conferences a week," says Schon. She estimates more than 100,000 people came through to be vaccinated during this period. "We played a part, all be it a small part, in trying to keep our community safe and healthy." Schon notes the strong friends built with Carilion and VDH partners. "It was like nothing I've ever experienced in my life, and I hope I never do again, but it was nice to be a part of it."



Eric Church

Looking ahead

Winter should be busy. Schon mentions hockey (the Rail Yard Dawgs), Scooby Doo Live, Broadway shows including Jersey Boys, Gordon Lightfoot, and comedians as planned events. Winter Jam will also be returning after a 3–4-year hiatus. “Some of our legacy events have returned,” says Schon, noting the October Craft Show and the Greater Home & Garden Show scheduled for February. “Through all of that we have sprinkled meetings, kid’s recitals, smaller shows, you name it.”

In addition to the standard fare, the Center will continue to provide space for small local groups and not-for-profits. The latter get special rates, but Schon states the facility is willing to work with anyone to tailor solutions to fit stated budgets and needs. “We want to make it a situation where

people say that it was a great experience, we want to go back, we can afford that, the food was great, the environment was great.”

Safety protocols

“Part of the responsibility of staying safe and healthy is on the customer,” says Schon. “On the venue side, our staff wear masks all the time. We disinfect the venues before and after a show with hospital grade disinfectant.” In addition, the facility is following CDC guidelines and has implemented touchless alternates as much as possible. This includes bathroom fixtures and concession adjustments. Food items are covered. Condiments are no longer on the concourse; customers must request access from servers.

“We’ve taken stringent methods here to take responsibility for our side,” Schon says. “It’s one of those things where you hope that



Jason Aldean

people will use safeguards, and if they don't, then you yourself have to take precautions by wearing a mask and sanitizing, washing your hands. It's a very strange time to be in sports." COVID protocols are the antithesis of what this facility is designed to do, she explains, namely putting a lot of people tightly together to enjoy an event experience.

Some events are now requiring people

to wear masks. "None of our shows have required proof of vaccination yet," Schon states. Whatever the current safety mandates are, it's been inching back towards normal over the latter half of 2021 and on to 2022: "we're busy, and are not taking it for granted, that's for sure. We hope that people will continue to use our facility and give us a chance if they haven't been here before, whether they come as a client or customer." 



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Gene Marrano



Future aviation employees? >

NEXTGEN Aviators is a division of Bridgewater-based Dynamic Aviation and is described as a 3-hour immersive experience designed to inspire middle and high school students to pursue a career in aviation – as a pilot, in avionics, ground maintenance/ support personnel or as an aerospace engineer. The program returned last month to the **Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport**, to the Fixed Base Operator (FBO) facility behind the commercial passenger terminal, where those that fly small planes can find

the services they need. More than 1000 6th, 8th and 10th graders from local school districts came through the NEXTGEN program over a three-day period - checking out private planes, trying their hand at CAD systems, and “flying” in cockpit simulators. **Anthony Whitehead** is the relations and engagement specialist: “the kids come out, they get introduced to a bit of engineering, they get to actually bend metal and rivet and walk away with something they’ve built.” Many also got to fly in a King Air jet, “many for the first time [in a plane],” Whitehead noted. “We hope that a certain amount [of students] will be turned on to aviation.”



BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:

Do you know what employees are looking for in 2022? Have you incorporated these things in your hiring and retention plan to find new talent and retain the talent you have?

A new focus for 2022

Many of my 2021 columns discussed how to make better hires. Bad hires cost time, money, customers and affect company reputation and profits. I offered suggestions to help ensure you are hiring the best people. But in today's business environment and into 2022, the biggest challenge employers will continue to have in hiring is finding candidates. One way to avoid having to hire is taking steps to retain the key talent you already have.

Some things employees are looking for in 2022:

- Jobs that fit their goals and lifestyle.
- Company mission and values they understand and support.
- Feeling appreciated, valued, and informed.
- Career pathway and future opportunities.
- Workplace experiences, not just a title or position.

Therefore, my column for 2022 will have a new name - Best Job Ever – with a mission to focus on ways to retain current employees. What is a Best Job Ever? It's a place where employees love what they do, enjoy who they work with and respect who they work for. This creates a company culture that has less turnover and open positions to fill. It's doing things to attract people to your company with referrals from current employees and/or because of your company's reputation in the marketplace.

This is a passion of mine because my **Best Job Ever** is still my first official job as a teenager. It created my model for what a good job is all about. Read my story at assessmentpros.com/meet-me.

Daniel Zhao, a senior economist at Glassdoor, cites their research on getting to the heart of employees. Based on how they found employees feel and need, Zhao offers these predictions for 2022:

- **Hiring will continue to be hard.** There will be a continuing imbalance between the demand for workers and the supply of workers.



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- **Employees expect the option of remote work.** Employees are looking for policies that make a better work-life balance.
- **A desire for a workplace community that exists beyond office walls.** Employees are seeking more than being physically located with their peers. They want authentic conversations, advice, and the ability to know of opportunities in both the company and their industry.

To support these trends, some topics I'll be covering in 2022 include:

- **Emotional Culture Index** – Understanding productive and unproductive employee emotions that affect your employees.
- **Candidate experience** – how your recruiting actions may be leaving a bad first impression, costing you candidates and affecting retention.
- **Stay Interviews** – talking to employees BEFORE they leave. How to know what's on their mind to keep them from deciding to leave.
- **Emotional Intelligence** – reasons and ways to build it in both your workforce and leadership.

Thank you for reading my column in 2021. I'm always open to column suggestions so feel free to contact me at Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com with ideas or questions. I look forward to doing 2022 together. 

Jennifer Leake CMC® is a workplace consultant, podcaster, and certified assessment expert. Visit her podcast at [SalesHiringStraightTalk.com](https://www.SalesHiringStraightTalk.com) for hiring tips. Go to [AssessmentPros.com](https://www.AssessmentPros.com) to learn how you can make your employees feel they have the BEST JOB EVER.

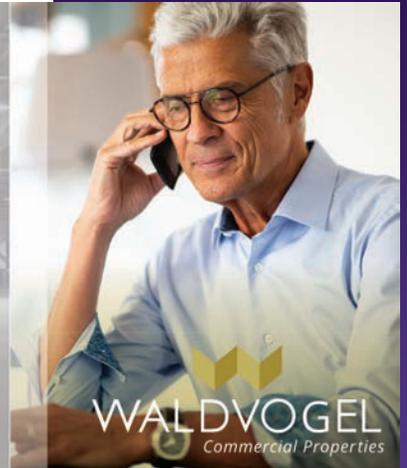


In today's business environment and into 2022, the biggest challenge employers will continue to have in hiring is finding candidates. One way to avoid having to hire is taking steps to retain the key talent you already have.

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Executive Summary:
Sister organizations Sustainable Blacksburg and Sustainable Roanoke aren't just advocates, they are active for environmental causes.

Environmental rapport

There's an organization in your community that makes it super easy to take a first step for involvement: simply start by joining the email list. Whether you take your "membership" further is up to you. The organization is going to keep you informed on activities and volunteering opportunities. There are no dues or participation requirements.

Actually, there are two organizations. One mission.

Sustainable Blacksburg and Sustainable Roanoke are all-volunteer nonprofits with a mission to enhance our region's livability by reducing our impact on our regional environment. Here's where you can keep informed on issues such as ecological integrity, local food systems, smart growth and mobility, social equity, waste reduction, and recycling.

A quick follow on both organizations' Facebook pages will reveal how the "clubs" pass along news and tips where you can be more attentive and active to preserve our environment and improve sustainability. The ideas are current and relative; for example, during the holiday season, eco-friendly gift ideas were presented, such as shopping local, giving memories and experiences, upcycling and repurposing second-hand items.

The vibe here is a positive one. It just makes sense to do our part in keeping our "home" in the best shape and to our best abilities, say our friends at Sustainable Blacksburg and Roanoke.

For more details check out sustainableblacksburgva.org and sustainableroanoke.org or scroll through their Facebook sites. 

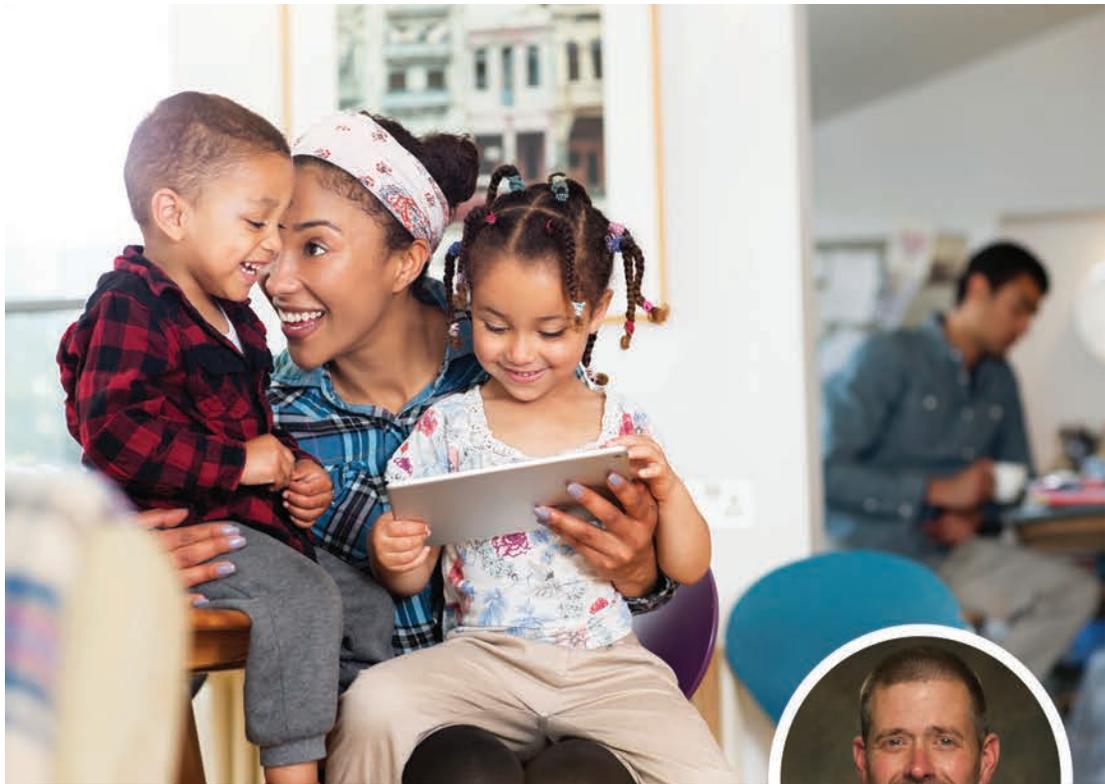
“Keep informed on ecological integrity, local food, smart growth, social equity, waste reduction, recycling.”



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From resolutions to business goals, we all feel inspired to become the very best versions of ourselves during this time of year. So, whether you're figuring out how to set up and use all those smart toys you got for the holidays or gearing up to expand your business in the new year, know that our network is ready to support you without sacrificing speed or quality.

Only Cox can give you a connected lifestyle from the living room to the board room because we have the technology to bring people closer and a culture that puts people first.

Cheers to connecting in 2022!

Jeff Merritt
Vice President
Roanoke Operations





I didn't stop her

Malala Yousafzai is a champion. The now 24-year old Pakistani wants all girls to have access to education; a seemingly obvious privilege most of the world takes for granted. Of course that's not the case in oppressed areas, such as countries controlled by Taliban. She shared her story on the Stanford Graduate School of Business podcast "View from the Top;" and it was the catalyst of her earliest years that made me want to call my own three daughters, as well as share what she said with you.

Malala's father was asked often about whether there was anything he did to inspire his young daughter to become such an advocate and powerful voice—and force—for change and standing up for girls and women who weren't permitted to go to school, work wherever they wanted, or even go to the market without a male escort (even if that escort was a little baby brother).

"People would ask my father what he did," Malala recounted. "And he told them, 'it was what I DIDN'T do.'"

"I didn't stop her."

Four powerful words. A man shouldn't have power to stop or allow a woman from doing anything; but here was a society where those distinctions don't just happen—they are expected.

Parents, of course, have to stop their children at times. Prevent harm, dissuade bad decisions, inform and advise before proceeding. But Malala's father believed Malala was heading in the right direction. A direction unlike the expectation, unlike the custom, unlike the societal norm, unlike the law itself.

So, why did I want to call my "girls" after hearing Malala's story? I wanted to make sure I didn't stop them. I wanted to apologize if they reminded me of times where I might have stopped them after they had reached an age where they should have been able to make their own decisions. I also know that you can stop someone in ways that go beyond the command and the words. A subtle disapproval, a show of disappointment, a holding on to long-standing beliefs, traditions, and even one's world view.

Surely, we don't stop women here, in our country, in our time, anywhere close to the way they are oppressed in places like Afghanistan, right? I think we can indeed celebrate the freedom women have to pursue most opportunities. But we're still not where we need to be. A lot of inequalities remain; the majority are under the surface.

Depending on the definition, I'm a feminist or I'm not a feminist. But I do believe one of the best tributes any fellow could have bestowed (particularly a father) is to simply affirm: "He didn't stop me."

Even better, if that assessment were followed with: "He didn't even slow me down." 

ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
Encouragement is powerful; but retracting your own authority can result in an even greater power.

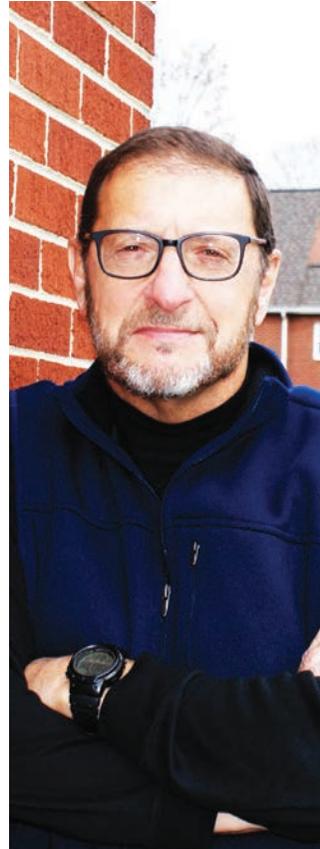
Another alliance takes a crack at the skilled trade worker pipeline shortage

News item from Virginia's Community Colleges (dateline mid-December): *Virginia's Community Colleges, businesses, and trade associations across the state are teaming up to address Virginia's acute shortage of skilled, credentialed infrastructure workers. The Virginia Infrastructure Academy (VIA) is an unprecedented collaboration that will ensure community college training programs produce high-demand graduates at business speed to address the needs of the transportation, wind and solar energy, and high-speed broadband industries.*

There are apprenticeships, paid internships, and existing certificate programs of course. Now the "VIA" says by scaling up and replicating successful infrastructure-related community college training programs, 4,000 graduates of short-term certificate programs could be produced annually over the next five years, ready to work on the roads, tunnels, bridges, rail, and broadband projects the "skinny" infrastructure bill will help fund. Says outgoing chancellor of Virginia's Community Colleges, Glenn DuBois, set to retire this spring, "we've arrived at yet another urgent moment. And our ability to connect individuals with high-demand infrastructure jobs, which offer family-sustaining wages and career advancement opportunities, will determine not just their future success but that of the entire commonwealth."

The Lumina Foundation, which works to lower barriers for minority groups seeking skilled, well-paying careers, is helping fund VIA's launch with a two-year, \$400,000 grant. Assistant Vice Chancellor for Grants and Workforce Programs for Virginia's Community Colleges, Randy Stamper, says VIA, which should be ready to sail in earnest by this summer, will build on the Fast Forward and G3 state programs already in place to help people find the technical training they need – and be able to pay for it. G3 for example is a tuition assistance program for any Virginia resident who qualifies for in-state financial aid and whose family income falls below an identified threshold. G3 can be used for designated programs in five of Virginia's most in-demand industries: Early Childhood Education, Healthcare, Information Technology, Public Safety and Skilled Trades.

"All of our colleges contribute to the infrastructure workforce currently to some degree," says Stamper, noting the Bay-Bridge tunnel expansion on Chesapeake Bay and work on I-81 closer to home. Conversations with the road building industry about their workforce needs spilled over into other infrastructure sectors says Stamper, leading to The Virginia Infrastructure Academy, a "collaboration that will engage community colleges and business leaders to ensure that existing training programs are addressing urgent community needs and forecasting when and where the programs should expand," said the Virginia Community College news release. Passage of the Virginia Clean Energy Act will also mean "huge demand" for skilled



THERE'S
SOMETHING
HAPPENING
HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
With the Infrastructure Bill now law, Virginia's Community Colleges join forces with private industries to get more workers the skills they need to fill those jobs.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

Design & Copy

Did you notice anything about our FRONTcover this time? If you have a history with us, if you've been a patron reader for at least the past three years, you may notice a bit of a change. For our volumes in year 2020 and 2021, we transitioned from a design model we established from our inaugural issue (2008). From 2008 to 2020 we presented conceptual covers. Some featured our FRONTcover model subjects in character form, a metaphor or analogy that represented our topic. Some showcased our subjects in their environment or capacity within their industry in an illustrative fashion. A few were even more extreme—shown in costume, elaborate sets, eclectic or surprising props.

We received more comments and reactions from our FRONTcovers than anything else. But for the past two years, we decided to "pivot" to a more conventional, business-like cover. The timing was impeccable; because the pandemic would have made our creative cover productions far more difficult.

Many of you told us the more straightforward covers were fine. But even more of you told us you looked forward to our next FRONTcover—because you had no idea what we would "pull off next." Even though we are known for our covers, and the anticipation of what we might show was higher than anything else we do; the guts of this journal remain the same as all the content we have produced all the way back to the original Blue Ridge Business Journal from 1988.

We don't cross the line; but we do like having a little fun. At least on the FRONTcover. A lot of you agree. So, we're returning to our roots and progressive, non-stuffy heritage—as depicted on this January 2022 FRONTcover.

Business is exciting here.

Thanks for your patronage and celebrating that energy along with us.

Marrano / There's something

from Page 41

personnel in the solar and wind industries according to Stamper.

"We need a lot more workers," is the general consensus, says Stamper, with skills that cross into a number of infrastructure fields. "Individuals need a base set of skills whether they are working on the I-81 expansion – or the development of new solar." All 23 community colleges in Virginia will be part of the VIA initiative, offering short term certificate programs for adults, more closely aligned with infrastructure projects going on in their region. Getting high school students interested in some of those jobs is Phase 2, "continuing to fill the pipeline," if that goal of 35,000 newly skilled workers in five years is to become a reality. "I don't know if that will meet all of the demand," notes Stamper, "but it'll put a dent in it." 

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““ Employees are looking for policies that make a better work-life balance. — Page 35

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FRONTReviews >

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

A motivational cast

Like the popular board game *Clue*, *Cut by Cut* (Modus Operandi Books; 2021) by Patricia Vaccarino offers the classic whodunit formula by assembling a cast of characters where everyone has motive. What's changed is the set—instead of the mansion we get a dark and stormy Pacific Northwest, and the suspect pool—instead of a random collection of professions we get a crew tied to the commercial film production industry. Those changes make our story insular and interesting.

Our eventual victim is hardly sympathetic; and it's particularly fitting that his demise is presented in clips of SMPTE time codes, with lots of visual images tied to... the floor—including the old notion of cut "film" on the editing suite floor as well as graphic splatterings on the crime scene floor. (Not to mention sloppy shoes and slippery decks from the relentless Seattle rain.)

The pacing is intriguing here (as if you're watching one of those old detective shows on 1970's television). And though you need not know how to read SMPTE (simply an extended military clock to the per-frame second), you could pay close enough attention to inform whether you're in current, flashback or future time, with investigator-precision. Again, like a well-drafted tv script, our storyteller's time jumps are easy to follow, not distracting, and add to the character development and plot with intentional fashion. The whole affair happens on a single November day.

So, do we find out whodunit? Maybe. No spoiler here; you'll have to read it. Because this one includes the final cut; and there will be no sequel.

—Tom Field



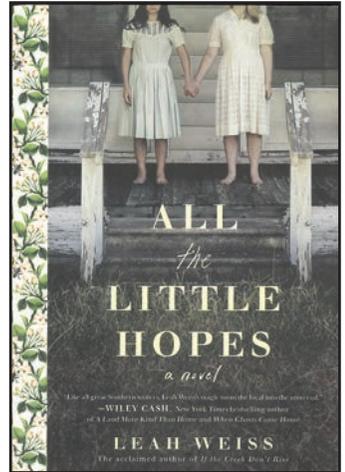
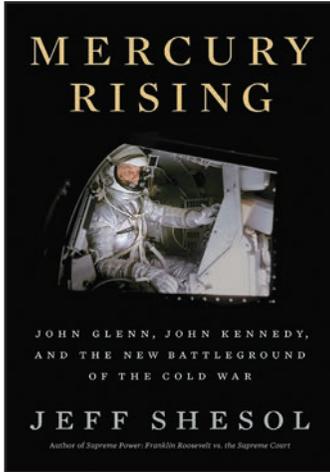
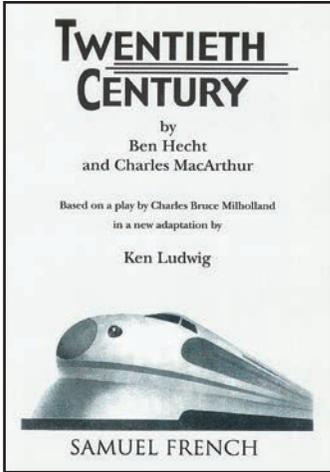
A funny train excursion

"Do you want these, Dad?" My daughter has a collection of paperback plays from Samuel French, the definitive champion of all things theatrical, from publishing plays to managing scripts to representing artists to policing productions. She scored this little collection from a field trip she took to New York City with her high school theater program.

I accepted them; because I vaguely remembered that I enjoyed actually *READING* plays at one point (even well before I became an English major). The first one I opened this time is this little jewel called *Twentieth Century* by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, based on a play by Charles Bruce Milholland in a new adaptation by Ken Ludwig. (If I don't reveal all those credits S. French will attack me.) Now that I've preserved the S. French copyright demands (god forbid I act out a snippet on Tik Tok), I no longer have remaining word count for a decent review.

Let's just say it's delightful. Neil Simon-esque. *ATTENDING* plays is the goal; but if you haven't *READ* one, give it a try. A super easy way to start is with *Twentieth Century*. It's funny. It's uncanny how well it still fits our contemporary society (originating in the 1930s). And if you haven't been desensitized by the lazy reception from tv sitcoms and social media videos thrown at you, you might be surprised how your mind is stimulated as you provide your own visuals and voices. You might just get your ticket punched on this little train commute to New York/Boston. Wait 'til you meet your fellow passengers.

—Tom Field



More derring-do in outer space

We live in another Golden Age of Space, with private companies launching near-space “tourist” jaunts and sending crews to the International Space Station. Meanwhile new unmanned probes aimed towards Mars and deep space and a new orbiting infrared telescope that will “see” almost to the Big Bang creation of the universe are being prepped. A far cry from the early days of the Mercury program – “Spam in a can” Chuck Yeager called it. *Mercury Rising: John Glenn, John Kennedy and the New Battleground of the Cold War* by Jeff Shesol (W.W. Norton & Company, 2021) focuses on Glenn, who aspired to be the first American into space, and his relationship with the rest of the Mercury 7 – and with JFK, who laid down the challenge to land a man on the Moon and return him safely before the 1960’s ended.

Apollo made that trip; Kennedy didn’t live to see it. Glenn wound up as the third American in space – but the first to orbit the earth as we played catchup with the Soviets. He became the face of the NASA space program – deemed too much of a hero to launch again lest something tragic take place. PS; I met Alan Shepard at a trade show once and then-Senator John Glenn a few months before he went up on the space shuttle in his late 70’s – the former Marine Aviator was fit as a fiddle of course. *Mercury Rising* is a good read for space buffs, and a tale of courage as NASA cut some corners in an effort to catch up – and pass by – the Soviet space program.

—Gene Marrano

Little proves big

The difference between western and eastern North Carolina extends beyond the type of barbecue. Travel along with Lu and Bert in *All the Little Hopes* (Sourcebooks; 2021) by our own local author Leah Weiss, and you’ll get all the delightful differences from our two young female narrators. Set in 1943–1945 as small town America grapples with the difficult trailing end of World War II, this novel format is presented with absolute perfection as voices alternate with each chapter. In her acknowledgements, Weiss says her agent and agent assistant “challenged me to move from the character-driven format of my debut novel *If the Creeks Don’t Rise*, to a plot-driven format.” I can’t imagine better advice, given the result—though this story hardly shies from colorful character development.

Here, we get mountains and flatland, tobacco and honey, tarot cards and Ouija boards, embedded locals and interrupting foreigners, celebrations and sickness, all topped with revealing historical markers that heap flavors upon flavors that rival any barbecue you’d find, east or west.

Mostly, we get redemption, forgiveness, and the southern grown stubbornness to carry on. Like her first published novel, this is as perfect of a work as you’ll find anywhere.

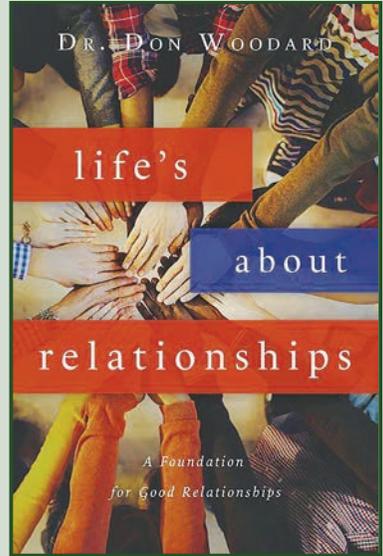
—Tom Field

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

Relationship 101 >

Been in a bad relationship - or have little clue as to what makes for a good match? The eighth book from a local pastor who says he likes to "help people with life," may help. A former evangelist who worked with teens and a counselor who says he's helped thousands; **Don Woodard** has now released *Life's About Relationships - A Foundation for Good Relationships*. Quoting Bible scripture, Woodard - the pastor at Beacon Baptist Church in Salem - says good family role models early on can guide lead young people towards better relationships: "I think the best foundation for a good relationship is trust. And then ... being able to communicate with each other and express yourself."

Woodard says in general his books focus "on helping people with life" - including bouts of depression or those who have suffered abuse of some type. "People today have more baggage than they ever had before. The family has broken down." *Life's About Relationships* by Dr. Don Woodard can be found online.



Friendship honors >

It was the first "Visions & Values" awards for community leaders have been handed out by **Friendship Foundation** recently, and the senior community living non-profit plans to make it an annual happening. A neighborhood group leader, a former Advance Auto CEO, a Carilion Clinic grants director, an architect who specializes in retirement communities and a museum chair were the first Visions and values award recipients. **Sarah Stephens** is a development officer for Friendship: "we wanted to recognize all of the people who are just doing such amazing things in the community." Respectively to previous listing, **Estelle McCadden**, **Garnett Smith**, **Dr Cherie Hartman**, **Tye Campbell** and **Charles Price** were the honorees. Stephens said Visions & Values winners also align with Friendship's mission of being leaders in the local community. It was also a fundraiser for a program that helps Friendship residents "bridge the gap between income and expenses," said Stephens. "We want to support residents, but we also want to support the community and make [it] a stronger place."



Submitted

Onward awards >

Onward New River Valley presented the 2021 Regional Impact Awards to four companies at the organization's Annual Dinner in late November. The Awards are presented annually and celebrate companies who are making an impact by bringing new jobs and investment to the region. These four announcements will bring a total of 274 new jobs and \$29.05 million in new capital investment to the region. **Moog:** Expansion announced in February 2021 resulting in 75 new jobs and \$10.7 million in new capital investment in Montgomery County. **Oransi:** Project announced in April 2021 resulting in 101 new jobs and \$5.6 million in new capital investment in the City of Radford. **Xaloy:** Expansion announced in July 2021 resulting in 35 new jobs and \$1.75 million in new capital investment in Pulaski County. **Patton Logistics:** Expansion announced in August 2021 resulting in 63 new jobs and \$11 million in new capital investment in Pulaski County.



New home for business is historic house >

Glow Healing Arts has moved to its new home at Preston Place on West Main Street in Salem, which gets its name from the Preston family. Family descendants donated it to the Salem Historical Society in 2014. It's the oldest home within Salem; the last descendent to live there was the first female doctor in the area, according to **Meredith Novak**, the owner of Glow Healing Arts. Glow offers wellness workshops and massage therapy.



Kudos for MontCo official >

The **Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce** has awarded Montgomery County Administrator **Craig Meadows** the 2021 Distinguished Government Leader of the Year award. The criteria included an individual's ability to demonstrate and model professional excellence; promote the community; and develop and mentor others. "This award just solidifies a fact that we already know," said Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, Steve Fijalkowski. "Craig is an outstanding leader and Montgomery County is fortunate to have him."

"I seek out opportunities for collaboration and productivity in every aspect of our County operations. In my role as Montgomery County Administrator, I strive daily to make sure the needs of our citizens are met," said Meadows, who over the past decade notes the Chamber helped facilitate the construction of four new schools, a courthouse, a fire station, an animal care and adoption center; the purchase of 100 acres for the expansion of Falling Branch Corporate Park; the renovation of five schools; the renovation and repurposing of seven former school facilities, a former courthouse, and a former fire station. (Photo provided by Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. Pictured from left to right: Henry Bass, 2021 Chamber Board Chair; Craig Meadows, Montgomery County Administrator; and Adam Workman, member of the Chamber's 2021 Awards Committee.)



Roanoke County students - and future hot rodders >

Two engine building teams from the **Burton Center for Arts and Technology** competed in the annual Hot Rodders of Tomorrow Engine Building Challenge national competition in Indianapolis last month. The **E3 Sparks Plug** team (pictured), led by motorsports instructor **Chris Overfelt**, captured their fourth national championship with a final average time of 20:51. Each member of the team also won a \$10,000 scholarship. The team previously captured the national championship in 2014, 2016 and 2018. The NASCAR Tech team, led by automotive instructor **Steve Hoback**, placed 17th in the nation.



Another tenant opens its doors at Summit Business Park >

Valley Star Credit Union had a ribbon cutting last month to open their new administrative campus at the 550-acre Summit View Business Park in Franklin County, which is still being built out and seeking additional tenants. **Becky Fremal** is the Vice President of Brand for Valley Star, which originated in Martinsville as a credit union for Dupont employees there. "Franklin County was a key partner in all of this, to get us up and running. This will be for all of our back-office employees and our executive team." Fremal adds that the external view of the mountains is "absolutely beautiful." An internal gym/fitness center and a lactation room for nursing moms are among the employee-friendly touches adds Fremal, a former TV news anchor.



Local bank will support E&H School of Business >

First Bank & Trust Company has presented a check to the **Emory & Henry College School of Business** for \$50,000. The school says it, "will allow the College to connect with students throughout the region via an innovative education space in the East Wing of Carriger Hall, home of the School of Business." The space will be dedicated to engaging learners digitally via the latest technology with innovative, engaging and relevant content stated Emory & Henry in mid-December.

"Supporting Emory & Henry College is a natural fit for our organization. They are the only four-year private college in Washington County, and we are the only bank headquartered in the county, and that alone makes our partnership impactful on many levels," stated **Mark Nelson**, President & CEO of First Bank & Trust Company. "Emory & Henry College does a tremendous job preparing future leaders ... we look forward to building on our long-standing relationship with the college by supporting their undertaking with the School of Business."



Chamber salutes Warm Hearth employee >

Amy Slone, Associate Director of Development for the **Warm Hearth Foundation** received the Individual Outstanding Community Service Award from the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) at their annual meeting December 2. Criteria for the Individual Outstanding Community Service Award

includes contributions of one's time, talents and resources to the community and MCCC along with the scope and impact of those contributions. Slone joined the Warm Hearth Village (WHV) team in 2016, became active in the Chamber in 2018. Since then, she has joined the Chamber Ambassador Team and has become an advocate and champion for other local businesses and organizations. Slone was also recently named to the Board of Directors for Leading Lights NRV. Their vision is to strengthen our community by inspiring a culture of volunteerism.



Ian Price



Rosie's expands >

Rosie's Gaming Emporium in Vinton showed off its \$28 million expansion last month which more than doubles the size and almost triples capacity at Rosie's, which opened two and a half years ago. It features 350 more games, including ones not seen there before. Rosie's in Vinton also has a new large circular bar and a sound stage to hold up to six musicians. Outside, there is a new parking ramp to handle the increased capacity with almost 300 spaces. **Ernie Dellaverson** is the regional General Manager. "This was a year in the works," he notes. And the expansion couldn't happen quick enough: "there are nights and weekends we were at capacity where we have to hold the door. Its simple supply and demand. Our customers wanted more gaming space. We also have a venue [for music] here as well." The expansion also means 50 new jobs says Dellaverson, who hails the Town of Vinton from working with Rosie's. Capacity has gone from around 400 to over 1000 and he says bringing an entertainment component to the bigger Rosie's with live music shows, "there was demand for adult entertainment in our area."

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



Dickerson



Bowman

Freedom First Credit Union has added **Deanna Dickerson** and **Steven Bowman** to the Freedom First Mortgage Team. Dickerson has worked in the credit union industry for 15 years, with the last 4 years in mortgage. Steven Bowman has worked in the mortgage industry for almost 10 years. They will work out of the New River Valley.

Bank of Botetourt announces **Tina M.**



Huffman

Huffman has been hired as the Deposit Compliance Officer. She will work from the Bank's Buchanan Care Center. Huffman has twenty-five years of banking experience, starting as a teller before transitioning to an auditor and most recently as an Assistant Compliance, BSA and Security Officer. She earned her bachelor's degree in Accounting from Radford University, is a Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist (CAMS) and has completed the Bank Secrecy Act Officer Certification Program (CBAO). Prior to her time with the Bank, Huffman served in the Army as a Radio Repair Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) and obtained the rank of Sergeant.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Burcham

Erin Burcham is the new President of Verge, the regional technology alliance that includes the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, Valleys Innovation Council, and RAMP, the region's accelerator program, effective this month. Outgoing CEO Greg Feldmann said, "the opportunity to be a significant technology hub, building upon the health, life science, advanced manufacturing, software, and autonomous systems clusters already present in the region, is abundant. Erin's experience and connections in the region will help Verge have an even greater impact on growing our innovation economy."

Burcham will remain as executive director of RBTC but will hire a new associate director for the organization for day-to-day operations.

WELLNESS FRONT



Draper

Roanoke-based Universal Health Corporation has added **Dr. Elizabeth Draper, DO** to provider team. She brings her extensive nursing home experience to the Universal Health Corporation Team in Roanoke and Salem. Draper joins Universal Health with several years of experience as a Hospitalist and Medical Director for skilled nursing centers in Virginia. Universal Health Corporation provides onsite healthcare professionals

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EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Josh Meyer has joined the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine as Director of Communications. Meyer had been the Director of Marketing and Strategic Communications for Virginia Western Community College



Danilowicz

The Radford University Board of Visitors has appointed **Bret Danilowicz** as Radford University's eighth president, effective July 1st, 2022. Danilowicz succeeds Brian Hemphill, who left Radford in

June to lead Old Dominion. Danilowicz has served since 2018 as provost and vice president for academic affairs at Florida Atlantic University. "Working together I am confident that we can accelerate Radford University ... and we can raise the university's profile on to the national stage," said Danilowicz when he was announced last month.

Priscila Serpa has recently joined the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine as a research assistant professor of clinical pathology. Serpa is the newest



Serpa

member of the college's research program, which covers disease research, veterinary clinical research, public health research, and more. After earning her doctorate of veterinary medicine, Master of Science, and doctorate of science from Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Serpa took a postdoctoral

position at Cornell University and completed her residency and a second masters at Purdue University.



Holt

Nicole Holt has recently joined the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine as assistant professor of practice and director of the Master of Public Health (MPH) program. Holt earned her

Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to news@vbFRONT.com

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



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CONTRIBUTORS

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

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [coopjpp1@gmail.com]

Neal Cummings is senior vice president, commercial lending at Freedom First Credit Union. He brings over 25 years of experience in commercial and retail banking, commercial real estate lending, and small business development. The Commercial Lending team at FFCU provides local underwriting and personalized services that benefit a variety of individuals, operating businesses, and non-profit organizations.

Mike Dame is the vice president of marketing and communications at Carllion 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 Carllion in 2008. Mike lives in Roanoke with his wife Valeria and enjoys golf, guitar, spending time with friends and cheering on his beloved Florida Gators.

Dan Dowdy is the business development

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

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

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Kevin Holt is a partner at Gentry Locke's Roanoke office where he has worked since 1998. His specialty practice area is commercial, real estate, intellectual property, and ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act) litigation. He enjoys supporting and attending games of his two sports-active daughters and enjoys traveling (visiting 27 countries and 38 states).

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

Jennifer Leake is an expert in employee assessments and their use to better select, engage and lead employees. Jennifer has over 20 years

of assessment experience and is certified in multiple assessments, including Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement tools.

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

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

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

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

her husband, Matthew and their son Ira.

Anne Sampson is a photographer and writer who has been active in local arts and events for 20 years. Her work highlights the sights of people of the Roanoke Valley. She specializes in fresh looks at familiar subjects. [samps07@gmail.com]

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

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

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.



Thus far, over 10,000 degrees and certifications have been awarded. — Page 27

bachelor of science, master of public health, and doctorate of public health degrees from East Tennessee State University. She has worked as an assistant professor and assistant MPH program director at Eastern Virginia Medical School. Her research interests include oral health and childhood obesity.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Rotenizer

David Rotenizer was named Executive Director of the Montgomery County Blacksburg Christiansburg Regional Tourism Office last month. Said Craig Meadows, Montgomery County Administrator, "David has a lot of related industry experience,

and we are fortunate to have him leading our tourism program." As Executive Director of the regional tourism program Rotenizer is responsible for managing and initiating programs that foster and support tourism initiatives throughout both towns and the county, working with the Montgomery County Tourism Board. "This is home. I was born in Radford, grew up in Blacksburg and Montgomery County has always held a special place in my heart and soul," said Rotenizer. Prior to joining Montgomery County, he worked for Franklin County serving as Director of Tourism with the Office of Economic Development.



Caywood

The Roanoke County Board of Supervisors

has selected **Richard L. Caywood, P.E.** as its new County Administrator. The Board conducted a national search for the new County Administrator, assisted by The Berkley Group, of Bridgewater, Virginia. Caywood has served as Roanoke County's Assistant County Administrator since March 2013.



St. Clair



Hill

Brad St. Clair has been named Assistant County Administrator for Montgomery County, and **Angela Hill**, who most recently

served as Assistant County Administrator and CFO, was promoted to Deputy County Administrator/CFO. As Deputy County Administrator/CFO, several of the County's department directors will report directly to Hill. Hill will also coordinate long-range strategy and direction with the County Administrator with regard to all County operations.

St. Clair was hired after a search and interview process was conducted for an Assistant County Administrator. As Assistant County Administrator, St. Clair is responsible for oversight of Emergency Services, Human Services, the Animal Care & Adoption Center, and Parks and Recreation. St. Clair began his career with Montgomery County in 1999. In 2017, he was named Chief Deputy Sheriff, overseeing a staff of 125 employees in that role.

Compiled by Gene Marrano



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Airport funding

Airports in Virginia are expected to receive \$399,740,660 in federal funds over the next five years as a result of the bipartisan infrastructure deal signed into law last month. The two DC-area airports, then Richmond and Norfolk get big chunks of that. Locally, Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional: \$14,977,645 and Virginia Tech/Montgomery Executive: \$1,480,000 were in the mix. A spokesperson for ROA said they were studying how that money can be used, per FCC guidelines etc.

PPE plant coming to Wytheville

Governor Ralph Northam attended a groundbreaking last month for Blue Star NBR, LLC and Blue Star-AGI, Inc., a joint venture between Blue Star Manufacturing and American Glove Innovations. They have committed to invest \$714.1 million to establish an advanced, nitrile butadiene rubber manufacturing plant.

The joint venture has committed to build a manufacturing operation that projects to employ 2,500 people and produce up to 60 billion medical gloves a year. "This is about investing to bring jobs back to the United States from overseas and doing it right here in rural America. This can be transformational for all of Southwest Virginia," said Northam. The Commonwealth will chip in \$8.5 million for infrastructure upgrades at Progress Park. Personal Protective Equipment - PPE - became a prized and sometimes scarce commodity during the height of the pandemic shutdown.

Who spends that money?

After President Joe Biden signed the bipartisan \$1.2 trillion (or so) infrastructure deal there have been people worried about the federal government wasting that money or not distributing it fairly. Senator Tim Kaine believes the solution lies

largely in state and local governments. "I think local leaders often are the ones that make the best decisions, about how to use these dollars." Kaine told the assembled remote media last month, "this money will go to the Commonwealth Transportation Board. So, on the road and bridge [portion of the bill] we let the local officials make the priority decisions." Kaine also agreed with Biden's decision to appoint Mitch Landrieu, the former mayor of New Orleans and former Lieutenant governor of Louisiana, to help monitor the distribution.

VT Innovation Campus

Virginia Tech has announced a gift it says will enhance research and education at the Innovation Campus in northern Virginia, and in Blacksburg. Tech President Tim Sands announced last month that Northrop Grumman will provide \$12.5 million towards the expansion of work in the field of quantum information science and engineering:

"this partnership with Northrop Grumman will dramatically enhance the university's work in a field that has the potential to reshape industry – and profoundly alter the dynamics of national security." The Virginia Tech Innovation Campus plans to invest almost \$16 million on top of the gift from Northrop Grumman to establish the Center for Quantum Architecture and Software Development.

BWX expansion

BWX Technologies, Inc., in Lynchburg, a leading supplier of nuclear components and fuel to the U.S. government, has announced a multimillion-dollar investment to create a manufacturing and research and development center to be called the BWXT Innovation Campus. It will sit on an 11-acre property adjacent to the company's existing facility and will, "showcase their services and technology in Campbell County." The company currently has three locations in Central Virginia and

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employs 2,630 workers across those facilities. A \$400,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund assisted Campbell County with the project. A performance-based grant of \$700,000 from the Virginia Investment Performance Grant was also given.

Gauntlet 2022

The Advancement Foundation in Vinton announces GAUNTLET 2022, which is Virginia's Largest Business Program and Competition, is accepting applications for 2022. The Gauntlet "offers a proven formula to develop business knowledge, pairing entrepreneurs with mentors, and open up numerous resources for new and expanding businesses." To date the program has served over 650 entrepreneurs, developed a mentor network of 250 professionals, and awarded over \$7 million in resources including grants, cash, and in-kind prizes. It includes business training, mentorship, scaling strategies – with

over \$300,000 cash and prizes for the entrepreneurs who make it to the competition rounds. Virtual classes begin February 1.

Carlos signing off?

The building that houses the popular Brazilian eatery Carlos Restaurant was listed for lease last month. Carlos originated in downtown Roanoke before moving to a hilltop just off Electric Road/419 in the Tanglewood area of Roanoke County.

What goes up must come down

Richfield Living, the in senior living and rehabilitation company, has demolished the Richfield Recovery and Care Center. Constructed in 1970 it will make way for another Vision 2020: Project Home building. The Mountain Retreat independent living apartments will be constructed with 64 units. Cherie Grisso, Chief Executive Officer, shared that, "demolition of RRCC is an emotional

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time for residents, families, and team members with ties to the building. As we look to the future, the household model of care replaces the institution that was a standard of the past. Today we move into a new era."

BoCo broadband funding

Botetourt County and LUMOS have received funding for universal broadband coverage for homes and businesses from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Universal broadband coverage means that all residents and businesses have access to reliable internet service with speeds that meet or exceed the federal definition of 25/3

service. This grant will allow delivery of Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) broadband connectivity to 1,901 addresses in Botetourt County. LUMOS is also planning additional expansion projects targeting universal fiber coverage in the area. Botetourt County will receive \$3,084,796 in VATI grant funding.

RoCo gets broadband funding as well

Roanoke County also been awarded four Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) grants totaling more than \$3.7 million to fund broadband expansion for residents. The County also partnered with internet service



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providers to leverage more than \$7.7 million to improve broadband connectivity throughout the County. Roanoke County will work with the Craig Botetourt Electric Cooperative, Cox Communications and Shentel to build fiber broadband more than 1200 unserved locations, achieving universal coverage in Roanoke County when combined with other projects.

Meanwhile in MontCo ...

Governor Ralph Northam announced in mid-December that Montgomery County received a \$27.6 million Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (“VATI”) Grant to assist with a \$50 million project to bring high speed fiber optic broadband service to thousands of citizens and businesses throughout the County. “We, as a government entity, understand the only way to achieve this goal is to partner with private companies like GigaBeam and Appalachian Power Company,” said Montgomery County Administrator Craig Meadows. GigaBeam Networks and Appalachian Power Company are finalizing plans for the project that

will bring high-speed internet for up to 8,822 citizens, businesses and community organizations located throughout Montgomery County.

Roanoke steel company purchased

Alro Steel has acquired Ace Steel in Roanoke. Alro says it will grow its customer base while providing improved service for cut-to-size metals and plastics. Ace Steel’s customers will now have access to Alro’s inventory including aluminum, carbon steel, stainless steel, tool steel, cast iron, red metals, alloys, and plastics. Ace Steel was founded in 1992 as a steel distributor serving the Roanoke Valley. Alro was founded in Michigan in 1948 and has over 70 locations in 12 states.

Martinsville joins The Gauntlet

The Advancement Foundation announced that “Uptown Partnership” with match funding from the City of Martinsville was selected to receive the Governor’s Community Business Launch grant through a highly competitive process across the state of Virginia. The \$90,000

grant will boost business development training and resources to enable new or existing businesses to accelerate growth through Vinton-based The Gauntlet Business Program and Competition. Uptown Partnership in collaboration with the City of Martinsville aims to diversify its retail business mix with a focus on main street small-scale manufacturing and businesses that fit within its Main Street Transformational Strategies of “Handmade, Craft-made, Artisan,” and “Uptown Living.”

Second location for RND

A Roanoke-based coffee company has opened its second brick and mortar location in Vinton. Roasters Next Door - or RND Coffee - is opened at Vineyard Station, at the corner of South Pollard Street and Washington Avenue. Co-owner Quincy Randolph on they chose to open a new location in the town of Vinton: “we saw a lot of the same characteristics [as the original Wasena store] as far as revitalization and investment in the community and the excitement happening in Vinton.” Randolph also says Vinton Town

Manager visited the original RND on a number of occasions – almost recruiting them he adds. No drive-through service here but Randolph adds that the parking lot (which it shares with Joe Goodpies at what used to be a Ford dealership before a remodeling) is big enough for patrons to park, grab a quick coffee, and hit the road again. RND’s first location is off Main Street in the Wasena area of Roanoke.

Closing the broadband gap

New grants will advance Virginia 90% towards the goal of achieving universal access to broadband and high-speed internet. Virginia will allocate more than \$722 million to provide universal broadband infrastructure in 70 localities, which will close 90% of Virginia’s digital divide. The funding is from the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) and the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA); it will support 35 projects, connecting more than 278,000 households, businesses, and community institutions to high-speed internet. The total



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broadband investment in Virginia is now above \$2 billion over the past four years, according to Governor Ralph Northam's office.

Funding for new shared lab spaces

The GO Virginia Coalition has approved a grant award to the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (VTCRC) to fund the expansion of laboratory space and facilities. In addition to the construction of shared lab space by the VTCRC, this "Project Eagle" will support the

creation of 125 new biotech jobs over the next five years. "Through collaborations, we aim to fill the demand from biotechnology companies and provide full access needed to support research to commercialization aspirations," said Brett Malone, President & CEO of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. The VTCRC – with funding from GO Virginia – will lead a coalition, including Montgomery County, City of Roanoke and Carilion Clinic, to support the development of a shared lab facility in

Blacksburg and site design for a larger facility in Roanoke.

In addition, a new collaboration established between Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center and Johnson & Johnson LLC, will provide early-stage innovators in the region with access to their virtual residency program which includes expert mentoring, programming and resources offered through Johnson & Johnson Innovation – JLABS (JLABS). In the first year of the collaboration, JLABS and the VTCRC will

select up to five companies for participation in the JLABS virtual residency program. "Additional wet and dry lab space in our region is a real boost for life sciences and biotech innovation, especially as it relates to improving healthcare delivery," said Don Halliwill, executive vice president and chief financial officer for Carilion Clinic, who also helps lead the work of Carilion Innovation, the organization's internal incubator.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

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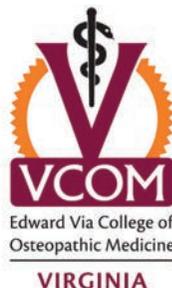
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Anne Sampson

Kevin Holt

DEFEND THE PLAN DESERVE THE WIN

By Anne Sampson

Valley Business FRONT welcomes Kevin Holt as a 2022 Patron Advisory Board member representing the region's legal sector.

Kevin Holt is a partner at Gentry Locke's Roanoke office where he has worked since 1998. His specialty/practice area is commercial, real estate, intellectual property, and ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act) litigation.

Gentry Locke has served the Roanoke Valley for almost a century. The firm has evolved over the years along with the region and has relied on its dynamic, innovative, and creative talents to become the second-largest law firm

in the Roanoke/New River valleys with offices in Roanoke, Lynchburg, and Richmond. Many of Gentry Locke's clients are small, privately-owned businesses in the regions served by the three offices.

During the past 20 months of pandemic-related instability and economic upheaval, businesses and organizations of all sizes have been affected. When asked what he saw as the biggest challenge or obstacle that regional businesses faced during this period, Holt stated

that in most cases, it boiled down to continuity of service—continuing to be available to customers and clients as businesses shut down and went virtual.

Many enterprises moved more quickly to virtual ways of doing business. (Who hasn't used Zoom over the past year and a half?) Gentry Locke wisely had a business continuity plan in place. The firm's IT infrastructure was key to being able to pivot quickly to virtual/remote working. In general, this region rebounded to in-person business more quickly than larger metro areas observes Holt. For Gentry Locke, and for other organizations, this occurred because of working collaboratively in teams.

The practice of law is inherently interactive, usually face-to-face. Gentry Locke had to adapt and learn virtual platforms. Virtual hearings, depositions, and even judge/bench trials required quick resiliency. Whereas many of these practices have returned to normal, Holt predicts that hybrid models of conducting business will be common in the future. Combining virtual with fewer in-person meetings will save time and costs.

Holt noted that the most successful businesses were the ones that switched as quickly as possible from face-to-face to virtual, and were able to return to normal practices as it became safer to do so. That required being prepared and thinking outside the box.

An economic crisis doesn't always spell doom and gloom for businesses. One of Gentry Locke's clients closed a major acquisition and doubled its geographic footprint in April 2020, demonstrating resiliency and a steady focus on clear, predetermined goals. This underscores the importance of planning and goal-setting as essential to managing unexpected crises.

When asked in what ways Gentry Locke most frequently helped regional businesses, organizations, and individuals during the pandemic, he noted that staffing and employment issues were

"IN BRIEF"

- B.A., University of Virginia
- J.D., University of Virginia School of Law
- Married with two daughters.
- Traveled to Denmark and Sweden to support his older daughter's club soccer team.
- Frequently listed among Best Lawyers in America in commercial and intellectual property litigation.
- Favorite quote: "Deserve Victory" (from a Winston Churchill World War II poster). It inspires Holt to be a zealous advocate for his clients, play by the rules, and be fair in order to "deserve victory" for those he represents.

at the top of the list. In addition, advising clients on PPP (Payroll Protection Program) loans and helping them qualify, apply, and determine eligibility for loan forgiveness were primary areas of assistance provided to clients.

Holt believes that Gentry Locke's diverse practice areas and its culture of problem-solving, responsiveness, and helping clients achieve their goals are two of the firm's noteworthy strengths. Assisting clients in solving their problems and working toward achieving favorable results are what Holt most enjoys about his work.

Holt's advice for what businesses can do to be prepared for the next major calamity is to plan ahead: assume the worst, and hope for the best. The operative word here is "plan". He categorized this kind of plan as "the one that all of us wish we had had in March 2020".

Being a supporter for his two sports-active daughters and attending their games is at the top of Holt's personal interests list. Travel is also a priority: he has visited 27 countries and 38 states. He thinks that Iceland is the most interesting place he's visited because of its stark beauty and unusual topography. 

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More than 100,000 people came through to be vaccinated.

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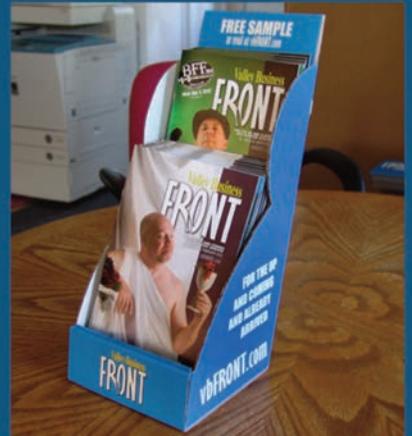
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