

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 166

JULY 2022

North Cross School

Salem High School  
Forensics

NRVCC ELA

Millstone Kitchen

Lynsey Allie with  
Botetourt's History

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## Business Startup Story Time

Laura Godfrey  
and Avery  
Bookelicious



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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Hard to believe we are halfway through this year already, but here we are. A few different takes on education this month, both from feature writers and from our columnists. From launching a school book subscription service—to accomplished professionals learning English as a second language—to learning the ropes of running a business at a shared use kitchen space—to a championship high school forensics team. There are lots of ways to learn. That includes by reading this issue!

On a personal note (this is Gene speaking here) I was honored to take part in the Carilion Clinic 70.3 Ironman Virginia's Blue Ridge Triathlon last month as part of a relay team that included a Congressman (Morgan Griffith, who did the swim) and a biker about half our age (Amanda Coker, a world record holder for miles biked). I ran the last leg, the half marathon, as part of the VBR Twenty 22 team put together by the Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge folks. And when I got just a bit wobbly at the end from the heat after 13 miles, medical school students from right across the street at the Virginia Tech Carilion Med School had a field day, giving me an IV, drawing blood, checking my vitals (all good), getting me multiple Gatorades. I told them they could do whatever they wanted to as long as it didn't cost me (it didn't). I was so impressed by their professionalism and bedside manner (at least some were first year students) that I even sent the school's dean, Dr. Lee Learman, a note about that. Wherever these young folks wind up in residency, patients should be in caring, knowing hands. See some pictures from the Ironman – a great event for the region – inside. And happy reading.



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor



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## Bookelicious: a business story about a story business

By Tom Field



“ ”

It was a very symbiotic relationship. — Page 59

FRONTcover photo of Laura Godfrey and Avery by Tom Field



“Atlantic Union Bank’s financing solutions addressed our unique needs and those of the university.”

Ali Halatay  
University Club of  
Virginia Tech

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# JULY



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Bonnie Chavez



Mike Leigh



Gene Marrano



Nicholas Vaassen

## Advisory Board

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

# 2022 CONTRIBUTORS



**Jennifer Poff Cooper**



**Dan Dowdy**



**Tom Field**



**Holly Marrow**



**Michael Shelton**



**Dan Smith**

“ Knowledge alone doesn't change behavior.

— Page 20

“ There is no 'typical' student.

— Page 31



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commercial real estate

“ It's such a colorful tapestry.

— Page 27

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

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Laura and Avery read at home as best friend listens in.

# Bookelicious:

a business story about a story business

By Tom Field

## Once Upon A Time...

Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, all the kids loved that day in school when the teacher handed out a colorful printout. It was from some magical book club, far, far away; and kids would look through all the exciting and fascinating book covers and summaries in the catalog to pick out their favorite books to order. Some kids begged their parents to let them order more than one or several. Some kids didn't get to order any and were left empty-handed when the boxes came in to the classroom weeks later.

Today—that idea—the idea that it's a good thing to put books in the hands of children—is still in place. But it's been updated.

## Chapter One: Laura Grabs Her Data

Laura Godfrey loves books. She also loves technology and bringing creative ideas to market. All of these passions combined one day when she met another entrepreneurial soul like herself, who had an idea to help children want to love books even more.

But before we get to that part of the story, a little about Laura.

Within seconds of meeting her, you can tell Laura Godfrey is a bright, energetic, creative person. Her home is a stylish artisanal remodel in the Greater Deyerle neighborhood of Roanoke—practically Salem; and she lives there with her husband, Tom, and two daughters, Harper (12) and Avery (9). An introvert, her shyness isn't hidden by downward head or averted eyes. Though she won't offer her story uninvited, if you ask—you'll get the accompanying smile and a soft-spoken reply. And you'll quickly discover you're in the presence of a true entrepreneur in every sense of the word.

Consider this timeline of multiple startups.

First, we have Claire V. At 23 years old, Godfrey launched a women's accessory wholesale and retail line of products. It expanded throughout the US and into Europe, even appearing in product placements on television shows like *Desperate Housewives*. Actor Lindsay Lohan held

## EMPOWERMENT AND MOTIVATION



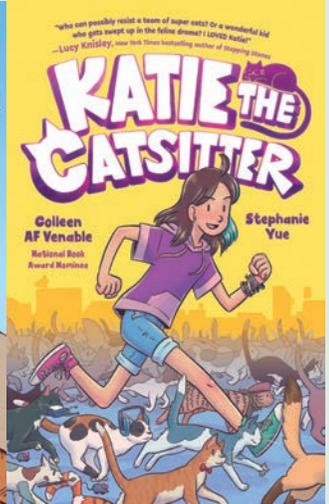
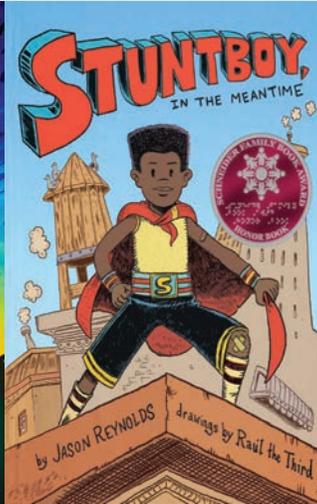
Lea Anne Borders, CEO & Co-Founder

"I love books. Bookelicious is such a fun way to share that passion for reading with kids! We match children with books that reflect their age and interests and empower them to choose what truly resonates with them. And that's the key to engaged, motivated reading—high interest plus choice."

- Lea Anne Borders

Bookelicious was founded by Lea Anne Borders, JD; LLM; MS, Mgmt. Formerly a partner at Cooley, LLP, and general counsel for MyWire, Inc., an online media retail startup, Lea Anne's experience as a parent, and as a board member with literacy organizations, has provided insights into the challenges of helping children become enthusiastic readers, her bio reads. If the name Borders and books rings a bell, that's because her husband, Louis (also an advisor at Bookelicious), was the founder of Borders Books (1971—2011); they owned what was at one time the largest bookstore in the U.S., employing as many as 195,000 employees in the retail chain. Today, that marketplace sector is almost completely dominated by Barnes & Noble, and of course, that other warehouse: Amazon.

- TF compiled



Popular selections from Bookelicious

## WE'RE NUMBER 4 (KIDS)



ThinkImpact ranks Virginia fourth in the nation for childhood literacy. The top three states for highest child literacy rates were Massachusetts, Maryland, and New Hampshire (highest to lowest). The state with the lowest child literacy was New Mexico; with Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alaska also trailing behind. Washington DC ranked low as well.

In adult literacy, Virginia didn't rank so well... 28th position. The highest literacy rate for adults included New Hampshire, Minnesota, North Dakota, Vermont, and South Dakota; while the lowest (from the bottom) were California, New York, Florida, and Texas.

Nationwide, on average, 79% of all adults in the U.S. are literate in 2022.

*A resource for education statistics, ThinkImpact used data from the 2018 Digest of Education Statistics.*

- TF compiled

a Clair V bag in Style magazine.

Eight years later (2009) Godfrey opens Polished by Clair V; a spa-like boutique that also contributed to a nonprofit for women in recovery.

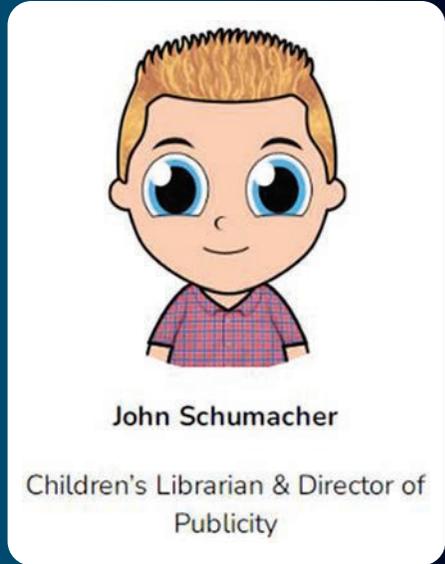
Not even a year later, she co-founded Brand Point Analytics and also collaborated with Farfetch; agencies (and platforms) that develop luxury fashion brands. "It's like Amazon for luxury," Godfrey explains.

And then, around the end of 2019, Godfrey and Lea Anne Borders (see bio) launch Bookelicious. Indeed, it's the old-fashioned subscription "book club" idea, if you will—but seriously updated beyond what most publishers are doing. Its model uses a formula that includes database management, artificial intelligence, interactive consumer engineering, smart distribution, social awareness and engagement—all driven by educational and psychological research.

All of these companies were fortified by creative marketing, Godfrey's almost accidental and serendipitous networking referrals (remember, she's an introvert) from mentors, friends, colleagues; and her reliance on technology, analytics, and her knowledge and experience with consumer markets.

# TWO SIDES (AT LEAST)

Laura Godfrey often mentions “Schu.” That would be John Schumacher, who the Wall Street Journal called one of “The Rock Star Librarians Who Choose What Your Kids Read” in a report it published in 2017. Schumacher serves as the children’s librarian and publicity director for Bookelicious. He’s also a “traveling librarian” who visits schools to share his own love of books and increase kids’ enthusiasm for reading. He’s an ambassador of school libraries, has taught elementary school, a lecturer at Rutgers University, and a published author himself.



In an interview with Publishers Weekly, Schumacher said “The most challenging thing was to see people try to take away the joy of reading from my students by imposing their own opinions on it. We see it all of the time—and we’re seeing this right now in record numbers—people trying to ban books and keep children from reading books. Another challenging part was people seeing kids as reading levels. As a result, I’ve seen many kids who would just stop reading books because what they chose to read was not good enough for others. Again, I always stood up for my students and what they wanted to read. I hoped by doing this, and giving them information, that they could stand up to people who didn’t believe the same things.”

Book choice (particularly in school libraries) has always been a highly contested subject, and it is once again a national topic as charges of “book banning” or improprieties in books accessible by young children are levied and debated. In the past year or so, some books by popular children’s author “Dr. Seuss” (Theodor Seuss) were pulled from distribution as they were deemed to be racist and non-inclusive, while other books celebrating diversity in sexual orientation and gender (or just including those characters) were also contested. In our local community, recently, a book about a transgendered child was removed from a Roanoke County elementary school library after a parent complained. In our state, attorney and Delegate Tim Anderson (R-Virginia Beach) has crusaded against books in public school libraries that he says cannot even be described or shown on social media due to their graphic content. Anderson says he is not interested in banning books; only keeping books that are not age-appropriate out of primary school libraries.

The suitability and accessibility of literature has been a controversy for centuries (since human communication, apparently, as archeologists have even discovered marked-out cave drawings); the grand debate is not likely to end anytime soon.

- TF

“I like solving problems and making order out of chaos,” Godfrey says. “And this is best done with small to medium startups.”

# 1:550 BETTER THAN PREVIOUS ODDS



## Virginia Literacy Act

To combat student illiteracy and boost the impact of public education for students in kindergarten through third grade, Gov. Glenn Youngkin signed the Virginia Literacy Act (April 2022). The legislation requires local school boards to appoint one reading specialist for each 550 students (K-3). It also directs local jurisdictions to establish literacy programs and intervention services for students based on Standards of Learning (SOL) reading assessment scores; and it provides funding for literacy coaches and materials for parents to use at home. The legislation (SB616/HB319) passed unanimously and is effective for the 2024-2025 school year.

## Virtual Virginia

Virtual Virginia is a K-12 complementary part-time and full-time online instruction program that teachers can use to blend the delivery of courses via the statewide learning management system. ([virtualvirginia.org](http://virtualvirginia.org))

- TF compiled



Laura Godfrey, COO & Co-Founder

## Chapter Two: The Matchmaker

Remember “another entrepreneurial soul” we mentioned in Chapter 1? That’s Lea Anne Borders, the CEO and Co-Founder of Bookelicious. Laura Godfrey is the COO and Co-Founder.

“Lea Anne gets all the credit [for Bookelicious],” Godfrey begins. “She is the most knowledgeable person I’ve ever met when it comes to books. She’s an MBA, CPA, an attorney; and she started her business during maternity leave. She researched literacy rates and found that over two-thirds

of kids in the fourth grade were below level. She discovered extrinsic motivation doesn’t work; so we needed to find a way to intrinsically motivate kids to read.”

The secret to that motivation was revealed early on. If this business success would be the result of matching up two entrepreneurs, maybe the way to get kids more interested in reading would be to match the books.

“Number one, was to [establish] high-interest choice,” Godfrey says. “We would need to curate the best books and generate our virtual bookshelf from the back end. Then, number two is book-matching.”

Godfrey’s solution to matching books with kids involved AI (artificial intelligence) and using “bookmojis” where the children (consumers, subscribers) would build their own characters based on smart profiling to reveal specific kinds

# BENEFITS OF READING TO CHILDREN

## Vocabulary

Children who are read to have significantly larger and more developed vocabularies.

## Language Patterns

Children learn to speak primarily by listening to their parents' use of language. They hear language structures and grammar usage and will naturally mimic those.

## Thinking Skills

When children are reading or listening to stories, they are thinking. This develops those skills.

## Independent Reading

Reading to children encourages them to learn to read themselves.

## Writing Skills

Reading improves language skills, which in turn improves writing skills.

## Bonding Time

The process of reading to children is a bonding experience; they appreciate undivided attention.

## Problem Solving

Reading provides an experience for them to discover how others (characters) go about solving life's day-to-day challenges. This also fosters analysis and decision-making.

## Concentration

When children listen to stories, they increase their ability to concentrate on what they're hearing. Unlike watching screens, reading stimulates real focus.

## Memory

Following a storyline, involves using memory. The more children use their memory, the stronger this skill becomes.

## Moral Lessons

How children perceive character decisions and actions will impact their own morals and values.

## Love of Reading

Reading together forms a habit—a healthy habit—from a very young age.

## Listening Skills

When you read to children, they are actively listening for details. This has a massive impact on their overall listening ability.

## Life Skills

How many life skills are children really learning through standardized testing and the current educational system? Reading teaches children about relationships, friendships, family, and life situations.

## Brain Power

Listening to a story takes a lot more brainpower than watching a TV program passively.

## Conversation

Reading is the perfect activity to spur a conversation with a child. This is great for developing expressive language.

## Knowledge

Children are sponges, absorbing information. They never stop learning into adulthood, but the greatest volume of learning occurs during the first six years.

## Stress Relief

Reading is a calming activity.

## Empathy

When children become engrossed in a story, they learn to develop empathy and see things through others' perspectives.

## Imagination

In the world of stories, anything is possible. In order to keep up with the constantly changing world, children need to be quick thinkers, problem solvers, and be able to imagine and create things that don't yet seem possible.

*Adapted from EmpoweredParents (April 2022)*

- TF compiled

of stories, genres, and subject areas that would be most appealing.

On the surface, bookmojis seem simple, fun, perhaps even too obvious. But Godfrey says there is a lot of science behind each and every creative building step.

## Chapter Three: Laura Builds A Library

“My brother used to joke that I went from zero to world domination in seconds,” Godfrey says, tearing up when answering the question about her entrepreneurial spirit. (Her brother, Peer Segelke, was well-known in the business community as CEO of Lawrence Companies, and died unexpectedly at age 40 in a golf cart accident in 2019.) The buildup of Bookelicious mirrors that characteristic as its progress can only be described as fast-tracked.

“We’re now at 1,800 schools and expect to double in 2022. We’re in the U.S. and 18 countries.”

Books are available in English and Spanish at this point. Godfrey says a big part of the mission of Bookelicious is to work closely with both schools and parents. “Decisions should be shared... made with teacher and parent.”

“I love what Rudine Sims Bishop [called the ‘mother of multicultural children’s literature’] says about books,” Godfrey recounts. “She said books should be windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. This is how we curate our books; an experience. It’s our ethos.”

Bookelicious currently serves readers in elementary school, pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade. The business was built with an entire “library” of resources and connections.

Godfrey says she was amazed at how supportive our local community has been. She cites the contributions of RBTC (Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council—she was recently nominated for the 2022 TechNite “Rising Star Award”). The seed funding for Bookelicious came from myriad sources, including angel investors, venture capitalists, and groups like Trolley Ventures, the VTC Fund, James Ramsey, 757 Angels, Charlottesville Angel Network, and The Launch Place. In full disclosure, Godfrey served as a charter member of this journal’s advisory board (2008-2012).

““”

Godfrey cites the contributions of RBTC, Trolley Ventures, VTC Fund, James Ramsey, 757 Angels, Charlottesville Angel Network, The Launch Place.

“Jazzy” bookmoji:  
company mascot and  
Lea Anne’s dog in real life



Sample of bookmoji  
created by an actual reader



With near-monopoly-status megacorporations like Amazon and Barnes & Noble, it might be tempting to think there is little or no market opportunity for a subscription service like Bookelicious. Godfrey doesn't see it that way.

"We have a ripe opportunity to change how we look at literacy," she says, distinguishing the company's mission beyond consumerism. "There is a direct correlation between reading scores and homelessness," she continues, citing the socioeconomic benefits among a litany of others. She also touts family engagement with reading in the home and how vital it is to have access to your own books.

Godfrey shares one more insight related to this Bookelicious campaign.

"I used to think it was so important to pick the right books," she says. It mattered to her that children got the best kinds of books and reading material that would improve their lives in specific, measurable fashion. That's a perspective that would be natural to a person who cherishes data and analytics.

"However, I discovered it doesn't matter so much what they're reading... as long as they are reading," Godfrey concludes. "It's solely about time spent reading."

Bookelicious is positioning itself to ensure that happens.

With that, there's only one way to end this story. And you know how it goes; so say it with me:

## ...And They All Lived Happily Ever After

Sample of bookmoji  
created by an actual reader



Author's (of this  
report) bookmoji



## DID THE PANDEMIC ALSO INFECT LITERACY?

Across each elementary grade, fewer students are on track for grade-level reading instruction now than before the pandemic, and the earliest grades have the fewest students prepared. For example, from 2019 to 2022, the share of students who are on track in reading by the middle of the school year has fallen from 55 percent to 47 percent in kindergarten, 58 percent to 48 percent in 1st grade, and 59 percent to 51 percent in 2nd grade. By contrast, 57 percent of 5th graders are on track in reading, only a single percentage point lower than the on-track share pre-pandemic.

—*Education Week report (2/16/22)*

*NOTE: This report also states that some positive rebounding may be occurring. It also posed the question of why parents or children would not be reading more since they were at home more. The report postulates that distractions from pandemic disruption might be the reason.*

- TF compiled



Submitted

North Cross groundbreaking

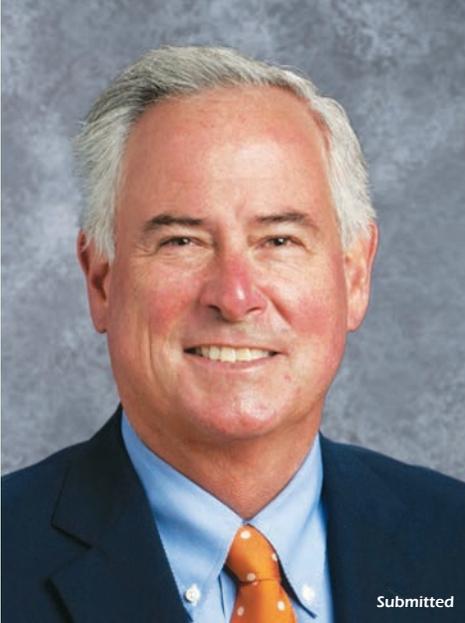
# North Cross School will enlarge its footprint overseas once again

By Gene Marrano

**Hands across the water: the Roanoke County private school is going global for a second time.**

Already established with a campus in Shanghai, China, which offers an upper school curriculum, North Cross School in Roanoke County, which offers K-12

learning, will establish another outpost in Hsinchu County, Taiwan, beginning in the Fall of 2024 after ground was broken on a new facility this past February. Much



Submitted

Christian Proctor



Submitted

Nicki Dabney

like back home, the Taiwan school will offer a three-division model designed to replicate the Roanoke County campus, starting with grades 1-3. Expansion to middle and high school grades will follow. Hsinchu students will complete the same requirements – in English – as their peers in Roanoke, including courses in Global Studies, US History and the DeHart senior speech program.

Students will be eligible to receive both Taiwanese and American diplomas and “will be well poised to continue their studies at American and other overseas universities,” according to a news release

from the local prep school. Plans call for a student-cultivated outdoor garden space and a student kitchen where they will learn how to prepare healthy foods. A “green” rooftop space will also be employed for physical education classes.

Recently retired North Cross Head of School Chris Proctor calls it “truly exciting to be delivering a cross-cultural model to such young students and to be offering a truly global perspective from the earliest stages. These kids – our kids [too] as they grow up are going to live in an international world. We value the ability for our kids to be cross-cultural, to be



North Cross Taiwan signing ceremony

able to understand other countries.” Students from all three campuses have (or will) travel to meet and learn together. Geo-politics aside, “we work on the individual basis [with students],” said Proctor in a recent interview, as his black lab dog roamed the school office hallways and stopped by for a nuzzle or two.

The Taiwan campus is a collaboration with

the American Eagle Institute, founded in 1999 in the Hsinchu Science Park, where the new North Cross campus will be located as well. American Eagle had much the same vision – improving Taiwan’s English education to increase the student’s competitive advantage in a global world. The Director of International Operations at North Cross School, Nicki Dabney taught at the Taipei branch of an American Eagle

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school (she speaks the Chinese Mandarin language and studied it in college) and was approached about opening another North Cross satellite campus in Taiwan. There are plenty of “cram schools,” to learn English in Taiwan after the regular school day, but not as part of the regular academic cycle she points out.

Dabney, who also teaches in the Upper School at North Cross, has a background in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) something that started when she was finishing a Fulbright Scholarship in Taiwan. She stayed on there for a second year with American Eagle Institute. “Having that American diploma is important. A lot of students are interested in coming here for college, to be able to operate globally on a business level, to interact with people from other cultures.” These foreign campuses where students pay full tuition rates also provide another source of income for North Cross School that helps keep tuition here for local students lower says Dabney, who participated in a groundbreaking/signing ceremony with Proctor for the Hsinchu site, albeit remotely.

The North Cross overseas model also allows students more time to develop outside interests and hobbies, something very rare in China she says with the sunup to sundown model of schooling that is narrowly focused on the academics model. In Shanghai (the campus there opened in 2015) more adherence to the Chinese model is required. The Hsinchu campus

curriculum will also have to get the OK from the Taiwanese government, so “there is a lot of heavy work on the front end,” notes Dabney. “It’s always rewarding to teach students when you see them have a light bulb moment,” says Dabney, who considers her time at American Eagle in Taiwan a highlight of her career as an educator.

Dabney has also taught at the college level where she encountered Chinese students who came to America without the English language skills need to thrive. “Its very challenging for them.” Shanghai students who came to Roanoke for summer camps (pre Covid) got to hang out with local North Cross students, who acted as camp counselors, strengthening that relationship -and their grasp on the English language.

Dr. Proctor, who is relocating to Charleston, SC following his retirement, will stay involved with North Cross School as a consultant on projects like the Hsinchu campus, even doing some traveling for the school. “This will be our first [K-12] venture overseas, everything we’ve done in Shanghai so far has been just the high school,” which Proctor says mirrors a more standard high school AP curriculum taught in English. “The rules as to what you can do with foreign education is a little bit different in Taiwan than in mainland China. And we found a great partner. The goal is to make that school [in Hsinchu] exactly like our lower school curriculum [for starters]. This will be us.” 

## MEET THE FACES OF GOODWILL®

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# BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

**Executive Summary:**  
*The state of leadership effectiveness in organizations is not good.*

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

## State of leadership

There is nearly universal agreement that strong leadership pays huge dividends, and now more than ever, leadership skills are needed to help organizations attract and retain their workforce. You would think that most organizations would be investing in effective leadership development (LD).

Consider a recent Fortune survey where only 7% of CEOs believe their companies are building effective global leaders, and only 10% believe their LD initiatives have a clear business impact. Maybe that's why roughly half of all managers receive no leadership training.

Effective leadership development is possible and needed in most organizations, but most popular methods don't work. Books, podcasts, seminars, webinars, E-learning modules, and most university courses are simply not effective.

That last statement might be controversial, but consider this – when have you seen these methods result in leadership behavior changes and measurable results for their organization? The information and knowledge they provide are good, but knowledge alone doesn't change behavior. Unless LD training, or any other training, creates behavior change and measurable results, there will be no impact for the organization. To be effective, LD methods should incorporate the following:

- Mindset/Attitude change – Without changing the attitudes that drive behavior, leaders won't put into practice the new knowledge they gain.
- Spaced repetition – Psychology and neuroscience show that we quickly forget information when we are exposed to it only once. Repetitive exposure, spaced over time, is needed for long-term retention. For this reason, advertisers bombard us repetitively with their ads, so we internalize their message, remember it, and change our attitude toward their products.
- On-the-job application / mentorship – Until a leader puts new concepts into practice, the learning is not complete. Application is even more effective with a mentor or coach to provide guidance and feedback. Adults typically retain just 10% of what they hear in classroom lectures, versus two-thirds when they learn by doing (McKinsey Quarterly).
- Goal-focused objectives – Isn't this why we train people – to achieve better organizational results? Training efforts should include clear, measurable objectives and outcomes that help the organization, and its leaders, improve.

Consider these elements to ensure leadership development efforts are effective and not just a waste of money. 

## Making sense of this mess

War, COVID, inflation, a rocky economy (in all parts of the world), supply chain issues and ongoing uncertainty with China make today a world we've never seen before. More than ever, global situations are affecting us at home. It's not just international markets, either. We've become so connected no one is immune to the challenges facing everyone. Have you tried to buy a car lately? If you think those prices are high, you should see how Roanoke County is valuing automobiles for property taxes. Forget depreciation and Blue Book value, that new or used car you just bought is appreciating daily, at least according to the "collector of the revenue."

### Hold or sell?

The common advice when experiencing the kind of stock market tumble we saw starting in April, is to hold. That makes sense in normal times. Historically bear markets recover to levels higher than prior bull market gains. Selling's usually a bad idea during volatility. If timing the market worked, day traders would be featured in Forbes. Wait long enough and everything will stabilize.

But what we're experiencing today isn't like anything we've seen before. Many believe we're in for more retraction, with some projecting an additional 10-20% pull back before the year ends. Even businesses that are amassing huge profits during these troubling times can't get the parts or people they need to meet demand.

There will be winners and losers when things settle down. It probably won't be the traditional players. Given all the upheaval in the marketplace and the world, it might make sense to rethink the standard status quo strategy. When you look at the market, you can see a shift in the types of industries logging successes. That may not be what you're holding.

In every bear market, there are items that perform well. They're usually not the same as those that do so in bull markets. It might be worth taking a look at some of the old, conservative staples that get classified as necessities. It's anybody's guess what the market will do next, but if your plan is to hold on tight to what you have, reconsidering some of your investments could help you do that. 

“”  
There will be winners and losers... it probably won't be the traditional players.



## FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

### Executive Summary:

*Just when you think things might stabilize, another surprise hits us. No wonder people are having trouble figuring out what to do with their money.*

*Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at Michael@360Wealth Consulting.com*



Dan Smith

Nash Larkin (from left), Ryan Long, Taylor Berenbaum, Mark Ingerson, Julia Vaughan of the Salem High School forensics team.

# FORENSICS 'SHOWED US WE COULD DO THE HARD THINGS'

By Dan Smith

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**Salem High's 16 straight state titles have taught students some basic and valuable lessons about business.**

When Coach Mark Ingerson looks up and down the roster of his forensics team, he sees future sales professionals, lawyers, doctors. When he looks at the walls and shelves of his classroom and of the Salem High School library, he sees evidence of the school's remarkable 16-season winning streak, one that has resulted in a state championship each of those seasons and a massive number of individual event titles.

That winning streak became a Virginia High School League record as this past season ended recently, breaking the streak of 15 in a row, held by Blacksburg High. Ingerson has coached at Salem High for 20 years. None of this is by accident. Future teams are built among elementary and middle school children in Salem and enhanced by summer forensics camps for kids 6th through 9th grade. Eighth graders can

be on the high school team, since students in many high school sports (the non-contact ones) are eligible to compete for five years in high school.

Salem had 16 competitors this past year with 25 total team members. Several more competed in debate only. Salem won five of 10 individual events at the state tournament. State champion Ryan Long, a junior, played basketball early-on, but "saw the forensics students [dressed up, including coat and tie] and thought they were cool. I didn't belong in basketball," so she jumped at forensics.

Forensics, for the uninitiated, is a natural for future business leaders. According to [smallbusinesschorn.com](http://smallbusinesschorn.com), forensics competition is "a contest between individuals or teams in various argument and advocacy skills. The

American Forensic Association (AFA) trains college students in public speaking and ‘reasoned discourse in public life.’”

For high school students, that can mean a lot, beginning with confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness and learning interpersonal skills that can help in everything from applying for a job to performing that role with skill and confidence. Ryan Long says she is good with people because of forensics. “When I apply for a job,” she says, “I appear personable; I separate anxieties, connect and communicate.”

Nash Larkin, a senior who won a state title working in partnership with his brother (“He’s 6-foot-5 and does basketball, too”), says forensics “gives you an innate confidence when speaking in front of people. It is a unique skill set. In the eighth grade, I was the weird kid who didn’t talk. Theater and forensics opened [a new world] for me.”

“The beauty of it,” says junior Taylor Berenbaum, “is that just about anybody can do it.” Senior captain Julia Vaughan says, “Watch the stage. It’s unbelievable. ... You definitely learn a lot of skills.” She plans a career in business management.

There is nothing about this team, or the teams that preceded it, that is written in stone. Ingerson says that change is the norm and just because you won a state title the year before in a specific discipline, doesn’t mean you will even compete in that event this year. “We encourage team members to flip events,” he emphasizes. “New events are a challenge.”

Taylor Berenbaum says, “I was comfortable in a serious category, and I had only ever known serious.” Then she tried humor “

because it would make me feel rounded. I was scared, absolutely.” And then she nailed it.

Changes “keep you modest and humble,” says Nash Larkin. Julia Vaughan says she tends toward the quiet and serious but working with humor “was fast-paced and helped me help others as captain.”

Ingerson emphasizes that forensics events “must be fresh” to the competitor. “This is primarily a peer-coached sport. It is cool to be coached by your peers. That actually evolved because I couldn’t coach 30 students. It would be chaos.”

Competitions often involve 10 to as many as 80 schools and the state tournament had about 20 high schools, 200 or so competitors involved. The competitors lay it on the line. Says Ryan Long, “At the beginning of the season, I didn’t have a speech memorized and had to give it anyway. It went terribly. It was a wake-up call for me to be more serious.” It was a speech about embarrassment. Mark Ingerson says, “Students will fail, and then they will win,” as Long did.

Taylor Berenbaum says she has been competing in theater since she was six “and I looked up to the older kids. This is a way of giving back for me. It is so lovely.”

“One of the defining moments for me,” says Nash Larkin, “came in Durham [N.C.] when Julia and I were competing as a duo. We were terrified. A lot of the duos we saw were simply phenomenal. And then we made the final six and ended up third. It was such a confidence-booster. It showed us we could do the hard things.”

And doing the hard things is what business is all about. 



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## SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Bonnie Chavez

### Executive Summary:

*Is educational overdose a thing? It seems like every week there is a new educational platform, subscription service, Facebook group, TikTok channel, or virtual seminar. Each one with a promise of change, cure for boredom, or level up in some way.*

*Bonnie Chavez is the CEO of Building Beloved Communities, a local consulting firm specializing in community-centered business solutions.  
bonnie@buildingbelovedcommunities.com*

## Keeping your educational journey on course

Every time I typed in my credit card number, I was renewed with excitement and blocking off time in my calendar to fit it all in. Eventually, I was filled with overwhelm, a few completed courses, half read books and a feeling of guilt set in. Sound familiar? If so, here are my cliff notes and hopefully, tips to aid your educational journey.

1. Your professional development and personal enrichment are the same exact thing. Yes, there are specific, professional CEUs or coursework for degree attainment, let's set those aside. I challenge you to think of education as both personal enrichment and professional development. When you eat a meal - you are nourishing your whole body, not just your fingers or muscles. Your entire body is getting something from that meal, including joy and satisfaction from a tasty dish or lovely company. Just like a painting class can spur creativity in the boardroom.
2. Set a budget for yourself and increase it every year. Think about yoga retreats, talks at a higher ed institution, YouTube videos, libraries, online courses, community learning, whatever floats your boat. Free or paid - but set a goal.
3. Repeat tip two, in the context of a time. Make time for your learning. It can look like a block on your calendar, a lunch break, while the kids are at practice, during a commute, or early Saturday morning when everyone is sleeping - including the dogs.
4. Reward yourself when you finish. Invite your spouse or friend to dinner once you complete your course/book/module and talk about it. Your circle wants to see you succeed and support you. So let them!
5. Be kind to yourself. The world will not fall off its axis and spin into oblivion if you don't finish that podcast on fundraising. You can always try another book, seminar, or come back to it next week. Just keep trying. We all learn differently, life happens, priorities change, and you are the best judge for what you want to learn.
6. If it does not serve you - let it go. We are all humans and if it doesn't light you up, challenge your brain, or give you value for your precious time, move on. No regrets, no guilt, peace out.
7. Take stock of your success! Keep a running list throughout the year, review it annually, see how much you grew. Celebrate your results - once you've basked in your genius - start over.

Learning and education are lifelong pursuits. Enjoy the journey, freely share your knowledge, and soak up what others have to offer. You've got this - smartie pants! 



Left to right: Jessica Clervoi, Renata Hairston, Dareous Davis, Alberta Craighead, Bridgette Bentley, and Larry Jackson, Director of External Affairs, Appalachian Power.

## RHEC awards scholarships

The Roanoke Higher Education Center (RHEC) awarded scholarships to five individuals at a ceremony held on June 1. The money to support this tuition assistance program was made possible by a grant from the American Electric Power Foundation through their Social and Racial Equity: Diversity in Partnership™ initiative. To be eligible for the funding, adult learners were asked to justify a need for financial assistance and verify their program of study was offered on-site at RHEC.

This is the first time in the history of the Center that scholarships were available. “The American Electric Power Foundation is pleased to support the work of the Roanoke Higher Education Center,” said Larry Jackson, Director of External Affairs, Appalachian Power. “Access to education is critical to unlocking the true potential of our region,” Jackson added.

A total of \$13,500 was distributed to the following: Bridgette Bentley, a James Madison University student enrolled in an Educational Leadership Certificate Program; Jessica Clervoi, a James Madison University student working toward a Master’s degree in Educational Leadership; Alberta Craighead, a Radford University student seeking a Master’s degree in Social Work; Dareous Davis, working toward a Bachelor of Nursing degree at Radford University; and Renata Hairston, who is studying to be a Licensed Massage Therapist at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College. 

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



This is the first time scholarships were available.



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photos: Tom Field

# *Botetourt's history champ*

By Tom Field

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**Lynsey Allie directs historical preservation and story of Botetourt County—a history as rich and deep as any in the nation.**

"A lot of us were Botetourt residents and didn't know it."

Lynsey Crantz Allie is talking about Botetourt County, and one of the most interesting facts of which most folks outside of this area aren't aware. That is—Botetourt County used to be quite a bit larger than its current 546 square miles. How much bigger? Get this: founded in 1770, and after a post-Revolutionary War extended jurisdiction, Botetourt County went all the

way to the Mississippi River, encompassing West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, even parts of Illinois and Wisconsin.

So, yes, indeed, there are generations of Americans with roots and connections to Botetourt County, Virginia far beyond the residents and families tied to the current map.

The draw to that history is what keeps Lynsey Allie busy.



As executive director of the Botetourt County Historical Society and Museum, Lynsey says her primary charge is that of “preserving history.”

“We’re here in a place that actually precedes US history,” Lynsey reminds us. “With such a historic area, we would do well to preserve it. We can’t forget the past.”

Lynsey’s love of history, her position at BCHS, and her upbringing are well matched. She grew up in Botetourt and graduated from Lord Botetourt High School. An “archivist by training,” she says, she got her degree in archival studies at Clayton State University (Georgia), and she’s worked with groups such as the Historical Society of Western Virginia and the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation.

Botetourt County Historical Society began in 1966; and Lynsey says she’s honored to continue the legacy of the Society’s mission.

“I enjoy welcoming visitors,” she says, and describing everything from the most obvious contributions of figures like Lewis and Clark, all the way to the details of family life here over the past 250 years.

“Of course, genealogy research and family histories [are popular requests of BCHS],” Lynsey says; but she can describe the impact of commerce and culture throughout all of the “ages” as well, and likes conducting tours, presenting, and setting up exhibits.

From the “massive stretch of land” in 18th Century to today, Lynsey tells the stories of the family farms (including the rather recent

transition to agritourism by some of them), and the contributions of not only agriculture, but the mills, the canneries, mining, and more.

It’s such a colorful tapestry, Lynsey shows how those developments helped to create current-day Botetourt, even as our society has faced great changes. Many changes were challenging (wars, economic hardships, pandemics), and many have demonstrated progress and improvement (access to education, transportation, business).

Recently, the BCHS building and museum moved from the historic brick building adjacent to the Fincastle Courthouse complex to another historic building, the “Hagan House” (1871), just a few buildings down the road. Lynsey, BCHS members, and volunteers have been busy moving all the artifacts and configuring the new space, which doesn’t officially fully open to the public until summer.

It’s a great time being the “chief host” of Botetourt’s history. The 250th Anniversary hit in 2020, but due to the disruptions from the COVID pandemic, “we’re all continuing to celebrate this milestone,” says Botetourt Chamber of Commerce director Khari Ryder. “We’re calling it 250-Plus.”

We can only imagine the great assembly of people, their lives, and their stories if everyone who had a real connection to Botetourt County gathered in Fincastle to recognize their history.

After all, that’s seven states, nine generations, and 250+ years’ worth. 



## WELLNESS

By Valarie Angle

**Executive Summary:**

*Increasing stress, distractions, and stimulation in home and learning environments require that students today must be resilient. Local entrepreneurs are working together with families and schools in creative ways to support students in evolving successfully toward an unpredictable future.*

*Valarie Angle is the owner and director of The WellNest, a Global Holistic Network. Learn more at [www.thewellnestroanoke.com](http://www.thewellnestroanoke.com)*

## Community partnerships allow students to thrive

Amanda Wright is the founder and owner of Creative Genius Solutions, a mobile service-based company that provides brain health coaching, parent coaching, subject tutoring, and classes that support student learning. Understanding how the brain works (spoiler: we're not all the same) is the first step in helping both her adult and adolescent clients. Amanda is a Certified Brain Health Coach through Amen Clinics, a certified life coach, and a graduate of Roanoke College where she majored in physics.

"As a brain health and academic coach, I have been able to pinpoint executive function disorders that may be affecting the student. Now the parents are armed with new information on how to better support their child when IEP's are reviewed in the Fall. For the student, it gives them a name for the thing that they struggle with and a better understanding of how their brain works; along with coping skills they can use to minimize the effect of the disorder. This summer, some of my clients are working on penmanship and organization. Other clients are working on learning how to use textbooks or take notes from a lecturer. All of these methods increase the client's ability to communicate better with the outside world, whether they decide to attend college or not."

While academics, psychology, and brain health all play a valuable role for student success; fellow entrepreneur Antonio Stovall takes a different approach in reaching students and their wellness needs. As a child, Antonio would naturally fall into meditative trance, so later when he met mentors who helped him discover Brain Balancing, the 13 Moon Calendar, Galactic Purpose Signature, and Kemetic Yoga; it helped him realize his life purpose based on his innate skills. He completed Kemetic Yoga Certification in Egypt and returned home to many open doors. He first began teaching mindful meditation through TAP (the local social service agency) for at-risk youth with great success. That led to the opportunity at William Fleming to teach African American Culture, where he was able to change the culture of his classrooms and help his students understand the richness and beauty of their ancestral history. Students now understand that their ancestors valued the power of meditation, yoga, nutrition, and spirituality. Now, he uses breathwork, meditation, and deep historical lessons to impact his students' perspective of themselves and the world. Antonio is passionate about helping students find resources, mentors, and teachers outside of the traditional classroom to learn who they are, the importance of growing food, how to be self-sufficient, self-care, and alternative ways to heal and deal with trauma.

"I went through the school system. I went to college. It wasn't until I started to study with mentors and traditional

healers from around the world when I started to blossom into who I am and who I'm becoming. Me, personally, I was one of those youth who came from poverty and an environment where education wasn't the focal point. It wasn't until I started to study about who I am: my history, my culture, my spirituality, that I really started to change my life."

You may know Jeremy Price by his musical talent—he regularly performs with popular Roanoke band Low Low Chariot, but did you know that he is also the region's only Certified Wim Hof Method Instructor? Jeremy modestly admits that he is a lifelong student, also certified in Functional Movement, Massage, and Yoga. In addition to teaching regular classes at Lancelot Sports Complex, Jeremy spends hours a week working with youth at local schools, offering yoga and meditation sessions. What he says the students want, more than anything, is someone to see them and hear them. By providing his time and expertise, he creates space for a deeper human connection where students are allowed to let down their guard and relax.

"We're seeing a trend where western analysis is scientifically validating ancient eastern intuition. To instill this wisdom in our young people is to change their future for the better. Integrating modern medicine with intrinsic well-being is paramount in bettering our quality of life, life expectancy, and overall health outcomes."

Partnerships between government agencies, school systems, and private enterprise have proven to be a powerful collaboration in helping students access the tools that they need for success. While it may seem that the future is heavily focused on technology and communication; ancient practices and spiritual connection is proving to be the anchor that allows students to adapt and evolve gracefully in a sometimes erratic world. 🏠



Ancient practices and spiritual connection is proving to be the anchor.

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SELECT THURSDAYS

# Let's Learn English

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

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**Pipelines into the workforce are needed now like never before, and New River Community College (NRCC) is addressing the current labor shortage through its English Language Acquisition (ELA) program.**

ELA candidates are those whose native language is not English. They must pass a screening interview, commit to one year of class attendance, and not be currently attending or associated with a college or university. The focus is on preparing students for the workforce or post-secondary education instead of just social situations and lifestyle needs like reading recipes (although those skills are still incorporated).

Sue Parkhurst, ELA Co-Coordinator, said that ELA (formerly ESL, or English as a second language) is funded solely by a government grant under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. The school must re-apply for the grant every three years, and, said Parkhurst, the process is competitive. The grant is partly dependent on students demonstrating progress.

The ELA program entails accountability. To

satisfy the grant requirements, classes are academic in nature with homework and textbooks. They also have attendance requirements. Post-tests are part of the grant mandate, and the Department of Education follows up on outcomes. Parkhurst said it is important to note that ELA classes do not satisfy the requirements of an F1 student visa. Instead, the classes are non-credit and part of continuing adult education.

The ELA program was conceived in 2010 as NRCC noticed more immigrants in the area. There were three students. Now, there are 69 students in beginner, low intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced levels. Students are placed in a level based on a screening, an interview, and a pre-test. "We evaluate the whole person," said Parkhurst. This includes speaking, reading, and writing skills.

There is no cost to participate, so demand is



Alisson Gabriel Alexandrino Ramos



Sue Parkhurst

high. The program is selective, and targets people who live and work locally. "We feel obligated to serve people who pay taxes and live here," Parkhurst said. Word of mouth is the main way the program has grown year to year. There is no "typical" student, she said. The program has included an ER doctor from Egypt and a high school graduate from Colombia, with ages ranging from 18 to 70.

The core software program New River Community College settled on is Burlington English. One goal is to help students become digitally literate. "We refine as we go," said Parkhurst, noting that the program is always changing based on the needs of the students and the business community. For example, a course in healthcare basics was added. Parkhurst said healthcare is one of the top three industries in the area, along with information technology and manufacturing, so the need is there. Also, NRCC found that the CNA (certified nursing assistant) program was "too much" for most of the ELA students. The healthcare basics course gives them the vocabulary to succeed as they progress.

Some ELA students want technical training, some want a GED, and others want to go to college. The ELA program hosts students who were skilled employees like nurses in their home countries, but in order to transfer their skills here they need to master the English language first; the ELA program helps them bridge that gap.

"We also teach soft skills that are needed for the American workplace," Parkhurst said. Cultural differences are inherent with immigrants, and the ELA program addresses that. She cited personal space, which Americans need more of, and time management, which is "fluid" in some countries whereas the U.S. values punctuality.

Classes now are half online, half in person. Parkhurst said the online portion helps folks who come from outlying areas participate since only one day per week is in person, minimizing the need for travel and childcare. Besides the price of gas, transportation is not a huge barrier since most of the students live on a bus line which can get them to the NRCC campus at Uptown Christiansburg mall.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Bishop Abdelsayed is from Egypt and has lived in the United States for three years. He felt successful in the advanced ELA program, saying, "It makes me a very good English speaker." He added, "[The teachers and staff] are very good cooperative persons and they understand that we are from different cultures and different backgrounds and they were too patient with us to reach to this level that we have reached."

Alisson Gabriel Alexandrino Ramos has lived in the U.S. a little over a year, coming from Brazil. He stated on the Facebook page that ELA had helped him accomplish his goals: "Even though I don't consider myself fluent yet, my advanced level of English gave me the opportunity to apply for jobs in my area and I just got hired. He added that he would recommend the program, saying, "ELA classes helped me a lot because, in the classes, they used to mix pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary in one class, connecting them in a way that the classes do not become monotonous or boring."

The best way to reach the ELA program is via email at [esl@nr.edu](mailto:esl@nr.edu). It also has a Facebook page where these student excerpts came from.

The number of students depends on the number of teachers available. NRCC limits classes to 14 because that is the maximum number that works well on Zoom. Lower-level classes are even smaller.

Parkhurst wishes there was enough demand to hold classes in Giles and Floyd, as having a full cohort is an important component for students to build camaraderie. NRCC tried to take ELA into businesses, but that has not worked out as hoped. Employers who are already strapped for workers have to buy in and give these employees time off for class. During busy times, Parkhurst said, employers would pull an employee/student out of class back into the workplace. "We would love to have closer relationships with the business community," Parkhurst said. "We are here to help them." 



## Ironman returns >

Several thousand triathletes and their families were at the **Carilion Clinic IRONMAN 70.3 Virginia's Blue Ridge Triathlon** last month. The course - and the valley - impressed some of the out-of-towners – from the 1.2-mile swim at Carvins Cove to the 56-mile bike ride that included a long stretch on the Blue Ridge Parkway and the half marathon on the Roanoke River Greenway. High praise from the overall winner for males in the Ironman triathlon, Matt Genter from Colorado: "I live in Boulder, a place that's amazing for cycling, but this rivals it for sure. It seems like a beautiful area to me. I love the climbs. It was awesome." Boulder was an early leader in making communities biking friendly. Meanwhile says the overall female winner, Anna Marie Strehlow from Wisconsin of the varied biking opportunities in the valley: "its been great and the hospitality has been unbelievable. What I really like about this race is the police and fire squads volunteers were just amazing. You can tell that the town really comes together for this race."

Carilion Clinic IRONMAN has one race left next year on the contract, unless it is extended. A number of hands shot up when asked from the stage which participants

might come back for the Carilion Clinic IRONMAN 70.3 Virginia's Blue Ridge Triathlon in 2023. Strehlow might be among them: "I love [Carvins] Cove, it's absolutely beautiful! I wish you could swim there regularly. It was gorgeous. Getting up the parkway was beautiful; it was shaded. The climb as hard but because it was shaded it was fun." The Ironman 70.3 brought lots of visitors and their dollars to the valley; local businesses like Cardinal Bicycle got exposure and some business from local competitors - **Whit Ellerman** is the owner: "we provided bikes for the course officials to use ... and the riders who led out the lead [half marathon] runners. But more than that we just want to be here and be supportive. Its such a great event for our community. Just seeing the excitement." Ellerman says "every little bit helps" - events like Ironman and the Junior National races at the end of June - if the Roanoke Valley wants to establish a true "biking culture." Valley Business FRONT editor **Gene Marrano** (half marathon) was part of a relay team that included 9th District Congressman **Morgan Griffith** (swim) and **Amanda Coker** (bike), a Floridian who holds records for the most miles biked in a year. **Catherine Fox**, formerly with Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge, helped assemble that relay team.



## Electrifying show – and a unique side hustle for contractor >

The “On The Line” documentary about Roanoke’s **Davis H Elliott** electric utility contracting company premiered at the Grandin Theatre on May 26. The theatre was packed with company employees old and new, business associates, other community leaders, family and friends connected to the business. In addition to the interesting story of the legacy, the hard work, how the company transitioned and worked through various markets, public-private utility commission agreements, union struggles, strategizing and financing the growth, and tying it all together to celebrate the “family,” **Bill Elliott** presented a \$25,000 check for the Grandin’s fundraising campaign.

Meanwhile that inhouse documentary, produced at what Elliott calls a state-of-the-art facility at the company headquarters in Lexington, Kentucky (he’s still in Roanoke, where the firm originated) has also spawned a spin-off business, **Studio 46**, producing

training films for other companies on a contract basis. After three attempts to produce a written history of the 75-year-old electrical contracting firm (which often works with public utilities after storm damage), and after assembling photos, videotaped interviews with long time employees (some no longer here) the concept of a documentary that could also be used for new employee training came up. After hiring someone to produce safety videos, Studio 46 had morphed into a standalone entity of its own before On the Line came about. “It grew into a pretty sophisticated TV-style studio with different sets that we could use for different people that were addressing our crews.” The “interesting, smart people,” hired to produce those inhouse videos says Elliott, still the company chair, are now contracting with other companies to produce content under the Studio 46 banner. A complete facility with all the latest equipment, Bill Elliott (pictured at right in the photo where a crowd is shown milling about in the lobby) says cable TV channels have even used it for remote interviews with guests from the Lexington area.



Carol Jessee

## GOOD WORK

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:** Many folks are aware of Angels of Assisi; but the nonprofit also serves neglected farm animals on 90 acres in Botetourt County.

### They know they're safe

"When you step out on the farm there is such a feeling of peace here. First, it's a beautiful place; but the animals seem to know they are protected; there's no fear."

That's how Carol Jessee describes Harmony Farm Sanctuary—a nonprofit operating under the umbrella of Angels of Assisi (the better known, popular animal welfare, shelter, adoption, and veterinarian services organization headquartered in downtown Roanoke). Harmony Farm Sanctuary was established in 2003 and was created primarily to aid animal control responding to farm animals that are neglected or living in cruel conditions, Jessee says. The 90-acre Farm sits off Route 11 in Botetourt County.

"We have about 300 animals now," Jessee says. "That includes a two-legged goat (who happily rolls around on his wheels), roosters rescued from cockfighting, peacocks..." And yes, the large farm animals and livestock as well. The animals are there for life; but occasionally, Jessee says "we do adopt out rabbits, piglets..." 

*Carol Jessee is the director of development for Angels of Assisi. The full story of both organizations is available at [angelsofassisi.org](http://angelsofassisi.org) and the extended path: [www.angelsofassisi.org/harmony-farm-sanctuary/](http://www.angelsofassisi.org/harmony-farm-sanctuary/)*



Submitted photos

“”  
The animals seem to know they are protected.



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We also just announced a multibillion-dollar infrastructure investment which, over the next several years, will help us build a 10-Gigabit-capable, fiber-based network that will power the next generation of internet users. Expanded fiber-to-the-home connections, combined with breakthrough enhancements to DOCSIS 4.0 technology, will deliver multi-Gig, symmetrical speeds to both residential and business customers.

On Tuesday, June 7, 2022 leaders joined to celebrate the successful public-private partnership between Cox and Roanoke County to extend broadband services to the rural Bent Mountain community. At the event, future plans for investment and broadband expansion in the region were announced, and leaders acknowledged the critical role broadband access plays in promoting equity and inclusion in today's connected world.

Visit [www.cox.com/digitalequity](http://www.cox.com/digitalequity) for more information about our affordability portfolio.



*Pictured left to right: Bill Hunter (County of Roanoke, IT Director); David Radford (Roanoke County Board of Supervisors, Windsor Hill District); Jeff Merritt (Roanoke Market VP, Cox Communications); Virginia Senator David Suetterlein; Josh Hess (District Director for Congressman Morgan Griffith)*

*Photo courtesy of Roanoke Valley Television*



## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:**  
*If you seek competitive ideology, look no further than the discussion on what fosters competition.*

## The catalyst for competition

Here's a great summer read as you prepare to unwind and relax at the beach or lake, perhaps. It's *The State of Labor Market Competition* by the US Treasury Department; March 7, 2022.

It addresses the fascinating nuances of our American job market, including monopolies, unions, minimum wage, and productivity. The 68-page report is not a fast-read, but it's certainly revealing. Revealing in its honest assessment that a highly-regulated market is our best chance to ensure success and enhance competition.

When one compiles enough facts and statistics, all backed by research, with economic theories described, and accompanied by concise case studies, we have to listen, correct?

Sure we do.

With a grain of salt.

It's a well-written exposition. For the common folk. Surprisingly easy to follow for a governmental agency. It appears to make its case.

But I'll just show you 10 words out of the 23,748 words in the report (yes, I had my word processor count them) that obliterate the thesis. *The State of Labor Market Competition* concludes that we improve competition by:

### **Increasing and expanding union representation** (p. 52)

This is simply untrue. You can say unions improve safety, elevate wages, enhance benefits, and provide other contributions to employment conditions; but unions do not expand competition. They actually shrink it and limit market offerings. One microcosmic local example: We just watched a documentary of the Davis H Elliot company and how its growth and building of the electric grid was only possible by its unlikely maneuvering around unions, exercising entrepreneurialism, and collaborating with other companies and entities. (See FRONT'n About Spotlight this issue.)

### **Policing employment contracts** (p. 53)

Enforcement on issues such as non-competes, bid-rigging, price-fixing, poaching, wage-fixing, etc. sounds like a noble cause. Employees need protection, yes? Sure, you can rely on a federal governmental agency to preserve all of your rights as a worker; especially since it has such a stellar record of doing exactly that. But even if these rights are best-maintained by rules and laws and penalties, those applications do not increase competition. We're better off having both good and bad places to work versus all mediocre. Overregulation actually hurts small business and rewards only the biggest players. Innovative win-win employment agreements create competition and thrive in that environment.

continued on Page 38

## A changing of the guard at RAMP

RAMP - the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program – has a new director, as its first leader steps away from that position. Mary Miller has been director of the RAMP business incubator - focused on high-tech startups - since its debut five years ago. Miller retired from her position at the end of June, just after the latest cohort of startups went through its Demo Day dog-and-pony show for mentors and potential investors. “We can help connect you to the resources you need to take the next step. No one should have to ‘get lucky’ to find the resources they need. My goal has always been to see the resources kind of get above the waterline [so they can be found more easily].”

RAMP - now part of the VERGE consortium – also holds monthly “pitch clinics” where startups including those not enrolled in a cohort (typically 5-6 entrepreneurs who make the cut after applying) at the incubator on South Jefferson Street take part. “So many good things are going to happen in the next 5 years, I can assure you. Here we are five years later, and 33 companies have gone through our system, A lot of success and more success to come.” Miller says the thought that startups have to go to places like Austin, Texas or Silicon Valley to launch successfully is changing - with the Roanoke-Blacksburg region now on the radar screen. She knows a thing or two about startups – having launched her own software development company in Blacksburg several decades ago.

“There’s a real belief and initiative to bring companies to us,” declares Miller. “I’ve been nurturing companies that are homegrown here. I do believe in the not too-far distant future we will be attracting companies that want to move to our region because of the cooperation and the friendliness of the community that we have ... a real fabric of support.” Lisa Garcia - already involved with the RAMP program through Verge - will assume Miller’s role this month. Miller, who intends to stay involved as a mentor, says the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute has been a major player in growing the entrepreneurial ecosystem - also noting that RAMP will be involved once the shared wet lab space managed by the FBRI is up and running: “that new investment in bio-tech absolutely aligns directly with what RAMP is doing – and will continue to do.” 

“”  
No one should have to  
'get lucky' to find the  
resources they need.



## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
*The high-tech business incubator's first director is moving on from that role but will stay involved.*

## Field / On Tap

from Page 36

### Occupational licensing (p. 58)

At first glance, it appears there is a suggestion of lightening the requirements of licensing (someone noticed the restrictions hurt more than help); but the “reform” in this report is all about maintaining compliance. You can praise the assurance and sense of legitimacy or protection consumers get from licensed operators, but the practice does not increase competition. It scares the majority of civilized people to think of a “Wild West” scenario where anyone and everyone can provide products or services; but when competition is that fierce, the best providers win. If you think free market capitalism is exploitative, try a collective, socialized and heavily-regulated system.

So, enjoy your summer reading. I have no doubt many of you will disagree with my review. In any case, we’d all be better served by reading a kid’s book: *What Should Danny Do?* (It’s available at Bookelicious—see our cover story!) 



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"Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grows."

– Ben Stein

My personal relationships have made all the difference throughout my career, and this magic carried into my role as Director of RAMP.

Five years ago, I accepted the opportunity to help start up the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program. Never did I worry that it could be done. Our instructors, mentors, advisors, LUNCH & LEARN presenters, and PITCH & POLISH sessions were supported by wonderful, generous people I have known as I lived and worked in this region. Our regional secret sauce: we are personally connected.

I am thankful that this generous community has created a program that supports the work of our entrepreneurs and helps them connect. While being an entrepreneur can be challenging, each founder needs to know they are never alone. I believe we have accomplished this with the 33 companies that have completed RAMP, which is why, even after stepping down, I know I must stay connected.



Looking forward, RAMP will have two outstanding individuals who have worked with the program for many years. I am so pleased to see Lisa Garcia and Sarah Spotswood leading the way. I know the program will flourish under their leadership.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be RAMP's first Director. It has been my pleasure.

"M2"  
Mary Miller

RAMP is headquartered in Roanoke's Gill Memorial Building on Jefferson Street. RAMP hosts two cohorts each year that provides startup tech and health science companies with a 12-week program that features:

- Expert 1:1 mentoring with the region's top entrepreneurs and executives
- Free office space with high-speed internet in downtown Roanoke in Virginia's Blue Ridge
- Access to venture capital
- \$20,000 in equity-free funding
- Membership into the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, GAN and Shenandoah Club

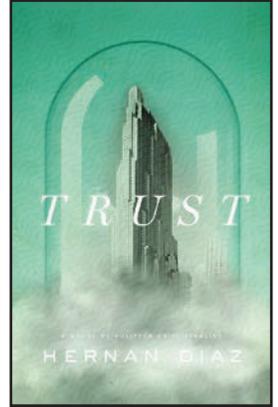
No matter where you find yourself in the startup pipeline, if you are building a technology-based business with high-growth potential then RAMP wants to connect you to the region's resources.

For more information contact RAMP:  
<http://ramprb.tech> or 540.595.7315.



## FRONTReviews >

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



### *Whose story is it?*

Not gonna lie... I was confounded at first by the formatting and sentence structuring of this book. (Just like starting this review informally, without a proper subject.) But I didn't stop turning the pages. No way. *Trust* (Riverhead; 2022) by Hernan Diaz is a rich exploration that grabbed me on two specific platforms (and that's in addition to the attractive high language and dialogue). First, are the speculations on economics and prosperity. Set in the late 1920s (yes, including that fateful October 29, 1929 crash), the views expressed by the two primary extremes (full throttle capitalism and fully restrained collectivism) as held by our characters were absorbing. And indeed, Diaz either didn't share—or he carefully hid—any subjectivity... 'twas only revealed by our characters as far as I could tell. The reader's only adherence or disdain to the socio-economics would be due to their presuppositions and the likability of our practicing men and women here—beyond policy metrics. That literary maneuver, my friends, was brilliantly exercised.

The second platform to support my full attention was the current cultural relevance. The biographies of men and women are as full of truth as they are fabrication. Not only do the generations of individuals in early 20th Century mirror today; but the simultaneous tearing down or whitewashing major figures in American society continue to perplex truth-seekers and fact-checkers. *Trust* (an excellent title by the way) makes us question whether we truly know or knew anybody. I half expect to hear that Mother Teresa was exploiting hunger all along and actually leveraged low life expectancies to advance her mission. You only become a leader if you're dirty; and those with noble intentions never make the news.

A brilliant little study of diverse voices telling the same story that hardly match one another.

—Tom Field

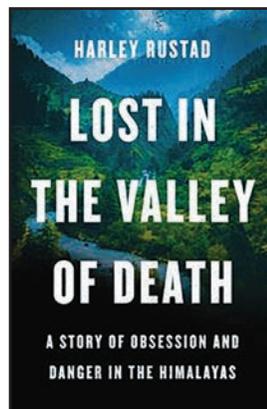
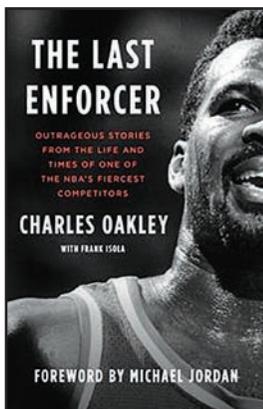
### *Food trucks, food trucks, food trucks*

Publishers Weekly says the children's book *Little Taco Truck* (Schwartz & Wade; 2019) is "a familiar story about standing up for oneself [that] gets a tasty twist courtesy of the urban culinary zeitgeist and plenty of visual pop from digital illustrations." I included it in this month's review section because it's available at Bookelicious (our cover story); and it allows me to pontificate about something in our local market:

Long ago, our experiences with food trucks were pretty much limited to the fair or occasional street festival. Remember? Then, we had a big explosion in our local market; and I distinctly recall how odd I thought it was that one of our economic development groups put on a workshop for prospective food truck operators (when at the time, there was just a small handful).

As these operators sprung up, we were pleasantly surprised. Food was dang good!

Which brings us to today. The best news? We have tons of options... sitting on trucks and trailers parked here and there and everywhere. The less-than-great news? We're finally getting some bad ones. Sorry to say that—but it's true. Fortunately, the good food trucks we have far outnumber the bad ones. But it is an interesting phenomenon... the ones early in the game had more to prove. A few of them today, are hardly cutting the mustard. (Literally...



I think some of that mustard is outdated.)

—Tom Field

## Back when the NBA was badass

For basketball fans who wait patiently for the next NBA season after the Golden State Warriors led by Steph Curry won another title last month (connection to the area – Steph’s dad Dell played at Virginia Tech) check out *The Last Enforcer: Outrageous Stories From the Life And Times One Of The NBA’s Fiercest Competitors* (Galley Books, 2002) by Charles Oakley, the big bruising power forward traded to the New York Knicks from the Chicago Bulls, where Michael Jordan was a teammate before the Bulls reeled off six NBA championships. In his 10 seasons at The World’s Greatest Arena with the Knicks (circa 1990’s) – Madison Square Garden – “Oak” came of age and was regarded as one of the toughest players in the league, a fierce rebounder and defender in the era before ticky-tack fouls became the norm.

*The Last Enforcer*, written with the help of veteran NBA reporter Frank Isola, is indeed frank, funny and fierce itself. Oakley dissed Knick teammate Patrick Ewing (a “B player” at crunch time in the playoffs) and goes through his infamous public spat with Knicks owner James Dolan, who Oakley and others claim have run the New York NBA franchise into the ground at times. Dolan kicked Oakley out of his floor seat at the Garden several years ago it was right behind his. MJ - Michael Jordan, still a friend - gives the foreword for *The Last Enforcer*, a good, rollicking read for hard core hoops fans.

—Gene Marrano

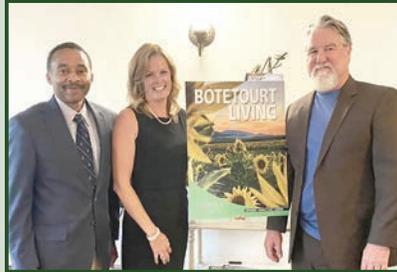
## A search for his true inner self that went too far

Justin Alexander Shetler journeyed around the world looking to find himself, what really mattered to him and how he wanted to live his life, giving up a good job, the comforts of a home, relationships and family until he focused on India and the Himalayan Mountains. He lived in caves and spent time with Indian holy men, including a Sadhu with a questionable past he set off on for a journey through the rugged Parvati Valley in 2016 – never to return. *Lost In The Valley Of Death: A Story Of Obsession And Danger In The Himalayas by Harley Rustad* (Harper, 2022) details Shetler’s fascination with the outdoors and survival skills as a youngster and his growing focus on the mystical/spiritual that some associate with India and the Himalayas.

Shetler was a restless enigmatic explorer driven to ever-greater risks. The author (Rustad) embarked on a journey to India himself looking for traces of what happened to Justin Alexander Shetler after he set off for “the valley of death,” the Parvati Valley, where other foreign adventure seekers have also disappeared over the years. Fans of Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild* about another restless man who wound up far from the comfort zone most of us enjoy should find *Lost In The Valley Of Death* compelling – even if they can’t comprehend the daring and dangerous life choices Shetler made – while maybe being a bit envious at the same time.

—Gene Marrano

*The reviewers:* Tom Field is a creative director and publisher of FRONT; Gene Marrano is editor of FRONT.



Photos: Courtesy of Jennifer Vance

## Botetourt membership soir e >

**Botetourt Chamber of Commerce** 2022 Meeting of the Membership was held June 7 at Sunnybrook. The packed room and veranda hosted dinner and presentations by Botetourt Living publisher **Tom Field**; scholarship recipient and author **Rachel Edwards** (James River HS grad to Hollins University); retiring **Rachel Nichols** (Apple Barn merchant in Troutville); and sponsor representatives **Andrea Milliron** with MemberOne and **Brad Boettcher** with Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport. Shown is Chamber Executive Director **Khari Ryder** with **Rachel Edwards**; Chamber staff **Abby Choi** and **Jennifer Vance**; member **Candice Monaghan** (Sunflower Festival) with Botetourt Living magazine cover; and incoming/outgoing presidents **Anna Muncy** and **Kaleigh Duffy**.



## Bring Me Down (to The Coves) >

**The Coves** [Amphitheater] at **Smith Mountain Lake** continues to bring in surprising national acts, despite its small, secluded location on top of opening during the pandemic. On Saturday, June 11, Raul Malo and **The Mavericks** played to an enthusiastic crowd (shown here). Previous (and this season's upcoming) entertainers have included Ana Popovic, Ricky Scaggs, Allman Betts, Legacy Motown Revue, Bruce Hornsby, The Marshall Tucker Band's 50th Anniversary Tour, Kenny G, Marty Stuart.

## Remote award accepted in person >

**OpX Solutions**, a Roanoke County business providing operational improvement training, was selected as a 2022 SWaMmy Community Impactful Business Honoree from the Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity. OpX Solutions was recognized at a ceremony in Richmond for providing free webinars during the COVID-19 lockdown to help teams adjust to the sudden remote work environment, and for working with two manufacturers to increase output and reduce backlog of PPE and a COVID-killing device for HVAC systems.



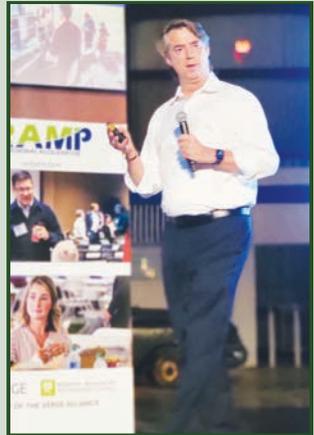
"Being recognized for our Community Impact is especially gratifying," said OpX president **Mike Leigh** (who is also a contributor to FRONT with his Business Operations advice column). "We got into this business to help other companies and people be more successful. That our team was able to support our community during the pandemic was a privilege."

Recipients of the 2022 SWaMmy Community Impactful Business Honor were selected from over 180 applicants. Telly Tucker (left), now president of the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research presents award to Mike Leigh of OpX Solutions.



## LEAP expansion >

The **Local Environmental Agricultural Project** is going to create a new center by renovating a building in the Roanoke West End neighborhood on Patterson Avenue as part of its effort to bring local and healthy food to more people. This new location will continue to operate in addition to the LEAP shared use kitchen already on Patterson Avenue and the LEAP-run Grandin Village Farmers Market. Administrative Services Manager **Laura Burns**: "this building will enable LEAP to centralize [most] of our services in one location. There will be a community room, a retail space, food hub and the LEAP offices." Recently, LEAP received a \$50,000 from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to help support the project, planned for completion in 2023. *Pictured left to right: Virginia Delegate Sam Rasoul, Commissioner of VDACS Joe Guthrie, LEAP founder and board member Brent Cochran, LEAP Director of Support Services Sam Hedges, LEAP board member Susan Clark, LEAP Director of Programs Kelly Key.*



## D2 + M2 >

Those who love all things technology and entrepreneurial were treated to an informative and celebratory evening at Center on 9th in Roanoke on June 16th at the **RAMP** (Regional Accelerator) **Demo Day** and special recognition of **Mary Miller**. The packed warehouse featured update presentations by RAMP (alumni) cohorts Jeeva Informatics, KinergyCare, Chorda Pharma, Tiny Cargo, BEAM Diagnostics, and ArchiveCore. Spring 2022 cohorts Axon Acuity and CytoRecovery also introduced and described their businesses. The evening concluded by recognizing outgoing executive (and charter) director Mary Miller, including a video of congratulatory and thank you remarks. New director **Sarah Spotswood** and development VP **Lisa Garcia** were also introduced.



Submitted photos



## Essential Soul >

**Carilion** has brought back its Healing the **Essential Soul** event series. First launched last year it offers opportunities for the public to reflect on and express aspects of their own healing journey through the arts. Carilion's Community Health and Outreach team is partnering with the system's Dr. Robert L.A. Keeley Healing Arts Program to host regular Friday evening events at the Morningside Urban Farm in Roanoke (full schedule below). The public is invited to share original art – including visual art, creative writing, poetry, movement or music – during the coffee-shop-style gatherings. "Mental health is the number one community need right now as identified on the [Carilion] community health assessment," says **Angela Charlton** with Carilion Community Health and Outreach, "so this is a wonderful opportunity to help provide support in that way." Light refreshments will be provided, and events will be facilitated by Carilion's artist-in-residence, **Bryan "Harvest Blaque" Hancock**, a self-described musician, poet and actor. "If they just want to take some time to story tell, be able to share however they feel, I think its important. It builds community; people gravitate to the program." Each event offers a general theme to provide inspiration. No previous artistic experience is necessary. All Healing the Essential Soul events take place from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

- July 8: My Storm and How I Coped
- July 22: Where I Found Joy
- Aug. 12: Where I Found Beauty
- Aug. 26: Out My Window
- Sept. 2: My COVID Experience
- Sept. 16: A New Chapter
- Oct. 7: Letters to My Younger Self
- Oct. 21: My Soul Revival

## For those fliers a bit rusty on the rules >

The **Transportation Security Administration** is preparing for an increase in travelers during the summer months and some might be rusty when it comes to the rules at the TSA security checkpoint. Some flyers are unaware or have forgotten there is a "3-1-1" rule on liquids, gels, and aerosols which can increase wait times. TSA Spokesperson **Lisa Farbstein** on the rule during a stop at **Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport**: "3.4 ounces or smaller, one quart-sized bag, one bag per person. If you can spread it, spray it, pump it or pour it, then you know it should be 3.4 ounces or smaller." Many of these items include everyday products such as bottled drinks, sunscreen, toothpaste, and more (see photo of confiscated items at ROA.) Travelers should check online for more guidance. The Transportation Security Administration is also reminding flyers about the protocols when it comes to firearms, which must be unloaded. Ammunition must be in its original box, locked in a hard sided case, and checked in at the counter to be transported in the belly of the plane. Penalties incurred can vary depending on the area and circumstances if a firearm is found to be wrongfully handled at a security checkpoint. A number of firearms are confiscated at ROA every year despite all the warnings and signs.



Alex Powell



## BRL grant supports literacy programs >

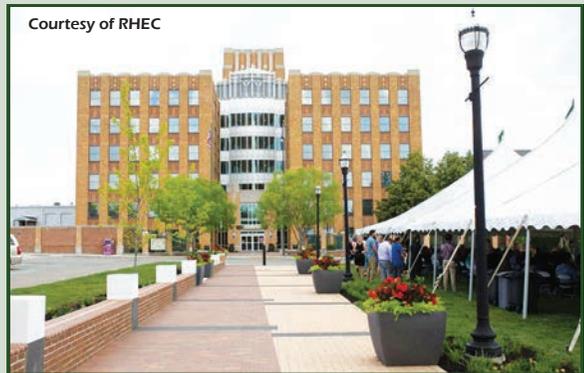
The Dollar General Literacy Foundation has awarded **Blue Ridge Literacy** in Roanoke an \$8,000 grant to support adult English literacy. This local grant is part of the Dollar General Literacy Foundation's recent award of \$10.5 million donation to support summer, family, and adult literacy programs. Blue Ridge Literacy offers in-person and online ESOL classes at Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Levels as well as

context-specific English and Health Literacy and English and Digital Literacy classes. ESOL class programs provide adult learners with the reading, writing, and English communication skills they need to interact and operate in everyday settings, to obtain employment and to improve living conditions for themselves and their families.

## Walk this way, higher >

**Roanoke Higher Education Center** hosted a ribbon cutting on June 1 for its newly completed Central Walkway Plaza at the building's entrance. The Walkway expands the campus footprint and connects the main building with the Claude Moore Education Complex. It provides green space, a brick walkway, a seat wall, and an outdoor learning lab for culinary arts students. The new plaza honors the rich legacy of Roanoke's Gainsboro neighborhood and the contribution of African Americans and the thriving business and entertainment that influenced the district. There are historical themes engraved in the walkway, a sidewalk kiosk depicting the law office of civil rights attorney Oliver White Hill, Sr. and a mobile app of The Gainsboro History Project.

"The ribbon cutting ceremony is a way for us to show our gratitude to the past leaders of Gainsboro," shared RHEC Executive Director **Kay Dunkley**. "We appreciate their achievements in the areas of civil rights, business development, health care, and education."



## New law office >

The employment law firm, **Yugo Collins, PLLC**, held a ribbon-cutting ceremony recently at its new downtown Roanoke office at 25 Franklin Rd. The event was led by the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce.

## Major cycling event >

Around 700 bicyclists from around the nation were expected in Roanoke City and Botetourt County at the end of June-beginning of July for the **USA Cycling Amateur Road National Championships**. The races included cyclists between the age of 11 and 22, and the courses were up to 23.3 miles long. Chair of the Botetourt County Board of Supervisors **Richard Bailey** at the announcement: "the fact that it's a national championship. We've not had those types of events in the Roanoke area and Botetourt County in particular. Having and hosting a national championship in any sport is a big deal. Especially cycling – kind of new to us and growing."



## Now that's a good gift these days >

**Friendship Retirement Community**, a senior living and rehabilitation organization, in an effort to help employees with the current rise in gas prices, gave away 250 gas cards for the month of June. "I jumped up and down!" said winner **Sybil Terry**, "I am grateful that Friendship does this for their employees and think it's a great incentive." Friendship team members at the Hershberger and Starkey Road locations entered to win each day they come to work. "I was so excited," said winner **Deleva Pierson**, "I think it's really nice that Friendship is doing this, especially with gas prices increasing."

## Still punching that time clock >

**LewisGale Hospital Pulaski** is celebrating the 50th work anniversary of **Sammy Mabe**, an employee who has served as a switchboard operator since 1972. Long before the days of cell phones or pagers, Mabe became an expert at tracking down physicians when requests or medical emergencies came in requiring their attention. Now 50 years later, technology has changed, but Mabe is still known around town for his work at the hospital and for helping others. "I feel like I'm doing something to help somebody else, and I love my job," Mabe said. "The time has flown by, I always thought I would only do this for a few more years and then I'm going to try something else, but the time has rolled by and I haven't left."





Gene Marrano

## Freedom First grows again >

**Freedom First Credit Union** branch has cut the ribbon at its new location on Orange Avenue in the Bonsack area of Roanoke County. The building used to be a Suntrust but was revamped and renovated before late May ribbon cutting, several months after its

actual opening. Lionberger Construction did the makeover. "It needed a lot of tender loving care," said Freedom First CEO **Paul Phillips** on the location, but it really fills out our branch network in the Roanoke Valley." The new Bonsack building is the ninth branch for Freedom First Credit Union, making it one of the most visible financial institutions in the area. "For the folks that work and live in this area, this will be really convenient for them; it's really about serving our members," says Phillips.

## One-stop banking center >

**Member One Federal Credit Union** celebrated the grand opening of its new Member Service Center in Roanoke with a ribbon cutting event recently. The 6,511-square-foot building unites a variety of member needs under one roof. Members now have

access to retail branch amenities, as well as a Real Estate Center and a Business Services Center, all in one downtown location. "The Member Service Center represents a new model for our Credit Union, and one we believe provides a more convenient experience for members with a variety of needs," said Member One President and CEO, **Frank G. Carter**.



Submitted

## NRCC supports future nursing students >

**New River Community College** recently recognized the recipients of the first class of NRCC Nursing Scholars, a new scholarship program that fosters opportunity and success for outstanding high school junior and senior students who show interest and ability in NRCC's Nursing Associate of Applied Science degree. **Audrey Bucy** of Radford High School, **Greta Dargel** of Montgomery County (homeschool), **Melanie Gallimore** of Floyd County High School, **Mary Graham** of Radford High School, **Paige Lilly** of Pulaski County High School, and **Elaina McCoy** of Blacksburg High School were awarded scholarships at a ceremony held at NRCC on May 16. At the event, each student was presented with a new stethoscope. Nursing Scholars will receive support from advisors who are charged with helping scholars make the best possible transition from high school through completion of NRCC's Nursing AAS degree. *Pictured from left: Mary Graham, Audrey Bucy, Elaina McCoy, NRCC President Pat Huber, Paige Lilly, Greta Dargel, and Melanie Gallimore.*



Submitted



## Bullish about a new butcher shop >

**River and Rail Restaurant** celebrated its tenth anniversary last month in South Roanoke with a block party. It was also an early coming out party for **Yard Bull Meats**, an old-fashioned craft butcher shop on Crystal Spring Avenue that **Tyler Thomas** – the executive chef at River and Rail – plans to open this summer. “The resurgence of the neighborhood butcher shop is happening across the country, and my goal is to make sure Yard Bull products can rival any big city shop in terms of quality,” says Thomas, who will be the co-owner and head butcher at Yard Bull Meats. “Nose-to-tail cooking has brought our collective attention back to the importance of butchery.

No great chef can achieve quality preparation without premium sourcing and being intimately involved in the butchery process.”

Thomas says the time is right: “with supply chain issues it more important than ever to know where your food chain meats come from.” He intends to work with local farmers that are producing those meat products. River and Rail already has a relationship with local farmers. Yard Bull Meats will be right next door. “We know where those animals are harvested – and just how many hands touch it before it gets to us. That why we can ensure a wonderful product. We don’t have the giant [price] markups. With the way the supply chain has been affected ... our [prices] are now aligned with [grocery stores] because less hands are touching them. Knowing where your food comes from is extremely important.”

## More room for furniture >

**Virginia Furniture Market’s** new Distribution Center cut a ribbon in late May. The distribution center in the Virginia Marketplace Commercial Center is on Route 220 in Rocky Mount. MB Contractors spearheaded the team-build effort. Built on 7.12 acres, the 124,380 SF unit covers nearly 3 acres under-roof and took 8.5 months to complete after a 2 ½ month COVID-related delay in building fabrication. “We couldn’t be happier with how the distribution center turned out,” said **Joel**

**Shepherd**, owner of Virginia Furniture Market, which operates in nine locations. “The success of this and past builds led us to contract with MB once more—this time for a new solid wood showroom which will be located in front of this project.”



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

## TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Frank

Tyson Foods has named **Nancy Frank** plant manager of its new, fully cooked chicken facility in Cane Creek Centre in Danville that is expected to begin operations in Summer of 2023. Frank brings more than ten years of plant leadership experience at Tyson Foods, serving teams at three facilities in Pennsylvania and Maine. The new facility is expected to create nearly 400 jobs. Construction on the 325,000-square foot, state-of-the-art facility expected to be completed in Spring 2023. In addition, Tyson Foods has committed to purchasing 60 million pounds of Virginia-

grown chicken over the next three years.

## DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Horne

Balzer and Associates announces its 3rd generation of leadership with the appointment of **Sean Horne**, LA as President. He succeeds Jim McAden, who has led firm since 1984. Horne earned his Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from Virginia Tech. Since 2001, he led the Roanoke land development efforts until beginning the transition into his new role.

## WELLNESS FRONT

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery has hired



Dudley

**Lauren Dudley** as chief executive officer for the 146-bed medical and surgical facility. Dudley succeeds Alan Fabian, who was recently appointed LewisGale Regional Health System market president, where he also oversees the LewisGale Medical Center in Salem. Dudley has served in a variety of key leadership roles with both large complex and small acute care hospitals within HCA Healthcare. She was serving as chief operating officer for HCA Florida Lawnwood Hospital where she is credited for leading facility construction projects totaling more than \$120 million of capital funding for facility expansion and driving multiple service line technology upgrades.



Choate



Collins

Carilion has appointed new vice presidents for the Department of Medicine, the Office of Investments and Home Care and Hospice. **Hunter Choate** has been promoted to vice president of Medicine/Clinical Operations. Choate received both a B.S.N. and M.S.N. from the University of Virginia. He went on to achieve a Doctor of Nursing Practice from George Washington University. **Lindsay Collins** has been promoted to vice president of Medicine/Acute Care Services.

- 
- Relationship Banking
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Collins received a B.S.N from Radford University, an M.S.N. from the University of Virginia and a Doctor of Nursing Practice from Radford University.



**Greear**



**Sprinkel**

**Fred Greear, CFA**, has been promoted to vice president and chief investment officer. Greear received a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from Denison University and a Master of Business Administration degree in finance from Vanderbilt University. **Lisa Sprinkel** has been promoted to vice

## Have a career announcement?

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president of Home Health and Hospice. **Sprinkel** began her nursing career as a diploma graduate from Roanoke Memorial Hospital's School of Professional Nursing. She received her bachelor's degree in business administration from Mary Baldwin University, and her master's degree in nursing administration from Jefferson College of Health Sciences.

### EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Veterinarian, researcher, and educator **Katherine Fogelberg** has been named associate dean for professional



**Fogelberg**

programs at Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech, effective July 15. This role oversees the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program and is responsible for the design, planning, operation, and assessment of that program. **Fogelberg** currently serves as director of the Center for Innovation in Veterinary Education

and Technology (CIVET) at Lincoln Memorial University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

### SENIOR FRONT



**Parker**

Friendship Retirement Community announces the hire of **Alex Parker** to Director of Marketing and Admissions of Friendship Assisted Living (FAL). **Parker**



# Bank of Botetourt



# CONTRIBUTORS

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

**Bonnie Chavez** is the CEO of Building Beloved Communities, a local consulting firm specializing in community-centered business solutions. Her driving force is to help all organizations overcome business barriers with a lens focusing on smart solutions that benefit the community. Bonnie is a proud lesbian, Latina woman who values her family, roots, heritage, and culture. [bonnie@buildingbelovedcommunities.com]

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

**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.

**Michelle Darby** is Vice President, Marketing & Communications at Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. A graduate of Roanoke College, she previously served in executive roles

at United Way of Roanoke Valley and the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce. She has developed marketing and communication strategies for over 15 years, emphasizing productivity and measurable results.

**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]

**Christopher Finley** is the Director of Marketing and Public Relations for LewisGale Regional Health System. He leads the marketing and communications functions for 44 HCA Virginia Health System-owned patient care facilities, including four hospitals, two freestanding ERs, two regional cancer centers, and affiliations with both employed and independent physicians. Since 2004, he has also served as an adjunct professor for the School of Communication at Radford University where he earned his master's in corporate communications. [christopher.finley@hcahealthcare.com]

**Micah Fraim** is a top-referred Certified Public Accountant and business finance strategist who is well-connected in the regional business community and nationally recognized. Publisher of The Little Big Small Business Book, he also publishes a blog at www.fraim.cpa/blog and is frequently interviewed as a business financial expert in national media channels. [micahfraim@fraimcpa.com]

**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).

**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]

**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]

**Holly Marrow** is a nurse and freelance writer living in Christiansburg. She earned a journalism degree before going back to school to become a registered nurse. [hollym59@gmail.com]

**Jeff Merritt** is vice president of Roanoke operations for Cox in Virginia. He is responsible for leading employees and the day-to-day operations across the Roanoke market. He holds leadership roles in a variety of organizations including Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia, Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, and Virginia Cable Telecommunications Association. He resides in Roanoke with his wife and two children.

**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 and two children.

**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@360WealthConsulting.com]

**Dan Smith** is a Roanoke-based writer and journalist, former editor of FRONT, whose new novel (8th book) NEWS! will be out this summer. [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

**Nicholas Vaassen** is a graphic designer with 20 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.

comes to Friendship after serving for nearly a decade as a full time Minister. He graduated from Liberty University with a degree in Business Administration with a minor in Marketing, as well as a master's degree in Theology.



Gayder

home care and home health agency. Payne brings a background in therapy services with Functional Pathways of TN LLC where she was the Program Director. Gayder comes from Good Samaritan Hospice where she was a Case Manager.



Fox

Development Advisor. Fox is the former Vice President of Destination Development at Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge where she helped increase tourism and media coverage, and helped organize the recent Ironman competition.

of **Kevin Tosh** as Director of Tourism and Marketing and Matherleyn Torres as Clerk to the Board of Supervisors. Tosh has served for the last 13 years with Cable 12, a local origination station focused on promoting Franklin County. Torres previously served from 2013 to 2018 as an administrative assistant specializing in constituent relations and tourism and was recently in the Commissioner of the Revenue's office as a deputy clerk.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*



Payne

**Kristi Payne** and **Suzette Gayder** represent new leadership at Warm Hearth at Home, the Blacksburg-based

The local marketing and growth consultant group Eddy Alexander has hired **Catherine Fox** as their new Senior Tourism and Destination

## MUNICIPAL FRONT

Franklin County has announced the hiring

“” My personal relationships have made all the difference.

— Page 39



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*First Arts Matter grants awarded*

Roanoke City's Arts Commission has handed out the first round of "Arts Matters" grants, for projects focused on wellness, justice and inclusion. Doug Jackson is the city's arts and culture coordinator: "I was so proud of our community when I saw [the applications], they are hitting every one of the [targets]." The Arts Matters grants are funded by the American Rescue Plan; applications are being accepted for a second round of grants now. Some of the first-round artists will use their \$3000 grants to sponsor exhibitions, artwork installations and singing circles.

*Never too early*

Hurt Park Elementary School in northwest Roanoke brought back its Career Day event for Pre-K through 5th grade students this spring - giving them early exposure to various job paths and fields of study before they reach high school. Hurt Park Principal Danielle Allen: "we want to be able to see themselves represented in different careers ... all the different options out there." High

school students from RO-TEC - the Roanoke Technical Education Center - were also on hand to help out. Allen and other Hurt Park staff members wore shirts representing the colleges they attended - they want young students to think about higher education as an option as well. Roanoke Fire-EMS, the Science Museum of Western Virginia and other private companies were on hand to talk about potential career paths and subjects young students can pursue when they get to high school. Career Day was also a collaboration with the Links sorority Roanoke Chapter, a local non-profit that brought mentors to the campus this year as well to work with students on career paths.

*Waugh will call it a career*

After more than a decade at the helm, the current President and CEO of the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce, Joyce Waugh, is set to retire at the end of the year. She joined the Chamber in 2000 and succeeded Beth Doughty in 2008. Waugh says she believes Roanoke's business climate is in

a good place. "A much better place than many communities. We do have a resiliency long before COVID that on the whole we've been able to draw upon and find a way to make things happen." The Chamber has also announced that Eric Sichau, currently the Vice President of Membership Services, will assume Waugh's position upon her retirement. Sichau joined the Regional Chamber in 2019 after a career as a minor league baseball executive. "There will always be creative, innovative entrepreneurs that will keep growing new businesses so that we continue to move forward," Waugh promises.

*Foundation grants*

The Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia has awarded \$137,000 in "catalyst funds," to a pair of local non-profits. Roanoke Valley Speech and Hearing Center is launching a unique Vestibular Testing Program that will be able to measure the level of dizziness, especially in older individuals. The Center was awarded \$60,000. Meanwhile Youth Sports Incorporated will receive \$77,000 for

its programs that blend sports and education to foster character development, self-esteem and teamwork.

*Another train around the bend*

While passenger rail service to and from the New River Valley won't begin until 2026, a second train serving Roanoke is set to begin operating this month - pending final agreement with Norfolk Southern and Amtrak. Michael McLaughlin, CEO of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority says Roanoke ridership has rebounded to 2019 levels. "Our trends are going upward, which is good ... very good." A draft schedule presented to the authority showed the second train would leave Roanoke at 4:35 p.m., arriving in Washington, D.C. at 9:35 p.m.

*A little bit of that French Quarter feel?*

A Summer Refreshment Zone in downtown Roanoke, an area designated for outdoor alcoholic beverages where visitors can walk through the space, going in and out of shops, while



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sipping on drinks bought inside that refreshment zone is in place this month. Jaime Clark, with Downtown Roanoke, says the intent is to encourage people to spend time downtown. "Go inside, grab a drink, casually walk around and go visit some of the stores if they allow alcohol inside. Kind of explore the area." The Downtown Outdoor Recreation Area – DORA – will be active from 11 a.m. until 8 p.m. on Friday, Saturday and Sundays until July 31.

### From waste to warmth

The Western Virginia Water Authority has broken ground on a facility meant to convert biogas into renewable natural gas

that will be used to heat adjacent homes near its 13th Street SE facility in Roanoke. The Roanoke Regional Water Pollution Control plant produces methane, and the gas has been used to heat facilities at the plant, but in the winter, there isn't enough methane currently, and in the summer there's more than can be used. Michael McEvoy, the executive director of Western Virginia Water Authority says this is a more efficient use of the gas. "We were just looking for a better use of that gas. This way its available as a renewable energy product to be used by citizens that are customers of Roanoke Gas." Both the Western Virginia Water Authority and Roanoke Gas Company

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will earn and share environmental credits from the project.

### More jobs in Southwest VA

Scholle IPN, a global supplier of total flexible packaging solutions, will invest \$31.1 million to expand its operation in Smyth County by 73,000 square feet

to accommodate new manufacturing lines for film extrusion and packaging, and add over 800 feet in new rail track to support the inflow of resin, an integral raw material for production. Virginia successfully competed with Illinois and Georgia for the project, which will create 75 new jobs. "Catalyzing economic growth in Southwest Virginia is a priority for

# SUMMER 2022

## It's a vibe.

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 | 7/16 - Quiet Riot | 7/20 - Blackberry Smoke |  
 7/22 - Rumours LA | 7/23 - Aaron Lewis & the  
 Stateliners | 8/12 - Face 2 Face | 8/13 - JJ Grey  
 & Mofro | 8/17 - Indigo Girls | 8/27 - The  
 Roanoke Wing Fest | 9/2 - Bee Gees Gold |  
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my Administration, and we are thrilled that Scholle IPN will reinvest in its Smyth County operation and create 75 high-quality manufacturing jobs," said Governor Glenn Youngkin.

### *The Gauntlet awards 2022 competition prizes*

The GAUNTLET Business Program & Competition™ held the 8th Annual GAUNTLET Graduation & Awards Ceremony in May; the class of 2022 attracted a record 153 entrepreneurs from communities across the Roanoke Valley, Shenandoah Valley, and Southside. After 10 weeks of classes, 66 businesses moved on to compete for their piece of over \$400,000 in cash, grants, and in-kind prizes/ services. The GAUNTLET is powered by the Advancement Foundation, a nonprofit founded in 2007, which serves as a catalyst to attract the region's assets with the commitment of partner agencies, economic developers, sponsors, donors, grantors, GAUNTLET alumni, mentors, and regional

innovators making this all possible. "Since the GAUNTLET classes began in February, our graduates have purchased \$760,000 in commercial real estate. Over the next 24 months, they will spend \$502,000 in leasing commercial property; they will create 263 new full-time jobs and create profit revenues of \$3,382,324," says Advancement Foundation president Annette Patterson.

For the first time ever, The GAUNTLET has two first-place winners - Natalie Ashton owner of Electric Iris 3D of Roanoke City and Natalie Hodge owner of Rudy's Girl Media in Uptown Martinsville. Electric Iris 3D has innovative poultry incubator accessories. The invention will help farmers raise new classes of birds from quail to geese; and will help farmers raise more birds at one time by increasing hatch rates. The company will continue to scale into sales across the nation. Rudy's Girl Media is a multi-media content developer company

based in Uptown Martinsville Virginia. Hodge has a master's degree from Cornell University and has worked in the entertainment industry in New York and Los Angeles. She has and will produce short films and a web-based reality series about rural entrepreneurship called Hometown Hustle.

### *In house training with big payoff*

Lawrence Companies headquartered in Roanoke has announced three apprenticeship programs for technicians. The program gives an individual the ability to earn while they learn, instead of being burdened with student loan debt. An individual that remains employed at Lawrence for 10 years potentially could be earning 6-figure wages and have \$100,000 worth of employee stock since Lawrence is an Employee-owned company. Upon completion of the program, the apprentice will be issued a "Journeyman Technician Certificate" from the State of Virginia.

As part of the program, Lawrence will provide a toolbox with tools while the individual is enrolled in the apprentice program. Upon completion the toolbox and tools will be a graduation gift valued at \$1,500 to \$2,000

### *New dentist in town*

Andrew Levine, DDS is now offering dental services at his brand-new office, Salem Dental Care on West Main Street. Salem Dental Care says it is "equipped with the latest products and equipment available in the dental industry," offering Dr. Levine and his dental team the opportunity "to provide the most up-to-date procedures and services to their patients." Levine earned a bachelor's degree from University of South Florida in Tampa, FL and his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from Emory University in Atlanta, GA.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*

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“ ”  
It's always rewarding to teach students when you see them have a light bulb moment. — Page 19

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Submitted

# A simple and sustainable concept: LIVE, WORK, EAT, GROW

By Holly Marrow

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**We can all agree that food is essential to life. Live, Work, Eat, Grow (LWEG) in Blacksburg is one organization fostering food security and sustainability, in addition to supporting local small businesses.**

LWEG was founded in 2012 and serves as the umbrella organization for Millstone Kitchen and three community gardens located in Blacksburg. LWEG began as part of the revitalization of the former Price's Fork Elementary School building, which in addition to Millstone Kitchen, houses Moon Hollow Brewing and El Ranchero Mexican Restaurant.

Laina Schneider, with a background in food systems and a master's degree in international agricultural development, has been the Millstone Kitchen manager since April 2020, and is now executive director for LWEG, a 501c3 non-profit organization. Millstone Kitchen members pay an annual fee of \$150 which includes a keycard to the kitchen, cleaning supplies, and an online reservation platform. There is an additional \$22 per hour fee for use

of the stove and ovens. With access to a state-of-the-art professional kitchen, members can tap into a myriad of resources about food safety, health department regulations, starting a business, food sourcing and tip-sharing with other members. Schneider reminds members that she is not a "business expert," but she is happy to provide a consultation if people want to "flesh out an idea," and stresses "If I can't help them, I can refer them to someone who can."

LWEG provides education programs for the community, most of which are held at one of the Community Gardens so that the kitchen is not tied up when members need access. However, Millstone hosted "From Scratch," a workshop for start-up culinary businesses in early 2020, and Schneider is hoping to reinvigorate this

workshop with the current down-trend in COVID-19 cases. Programs held at the Community Gardens include maple syrup tapping and a children's' summer camp called Seed to Supper Gardening Camp. Registration is through Blacksburg Parks and Recreation.

Millstone Kitchen is the only shared-use kitchen in the New River Valley, and members tend to learn about the facility through networking and word of mouth. "I get inquiries every single week," says Schneider. "I haven't had to do much marketing." Initial funding for Millstone Kitchen was through a Rural Business Development Grant, and The Montgomery County Cares Act provided a grant during the pandemic. Through the Cares Act grant, Millstone has generated 500 weekly meals to seniors and shut-ins. Meals are prepared by caterers and are distributed through 7 different agencies. That grant ends in July of this year, but Schneider is hopeful this program can continue, "if even on a smaller scale."

Rachel Doyle, owner of HazelBea Catering, was the first member and "anchor tenant" of Millstone Kitchen. "It was a very symbiotic relationship," says Doyle. "They needed to learn what their clients were going to need, and (Millstone) had more than we could ever ask for" in terms of kitchen equipment. Doyle goes on to stress how helpful Millstone is to new start-ups. "Whether you are a caterer, baker, make kombucha, or just want to find out if this business is right for you,



Laina Schneider, Executive Director of Live, Work, Eat, Grow

"Millstone is a very neat place to be."

Jackie Gardner, owner of Just Graze & Co, a Blacksburg business that creates made-to-order charcuterie trays, is one of Millstone

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Holly Marrow

Shane Comber, Hazel Bea Catering Chef, and Ashton Carter, a freelance chef



Holly Marrow

Kitchen's newer members. "I was looking for a community kitchen and I just Googled it," says Gardner, "I was thrilled to find a kitchen in Blacksburg" she adds, initially thinking she would have to travel farther away. Gardner joined Millstone in February of this year and hasn't yet had time to tap into networking and making connections with other businesses. She considers this a huge benefit and looks forward to engaging with other culinary artists. "We're all in the same boat, and in a small town like Blacksburg ... this is exciting!"

The three community gardens managed by LWEГ are all within the town of Blacksburg and feature a total of 118 plots, says Steve Kruger, Garden Coordinator for LWEГ since August 2021. The garden plots are available to growers who, for a variety of reasons, do not have access to a growing space at home. Members pay an annual fee of \$20 to \$60, depending on plot size. There is currently a waiting list of roughly 40 hopeful gardeners and the organization plans to add additional

gardens over the next few years. Tools are available for loan, and gardeners are expected to follow certain guidelines - growing organically for one. Organically composted leaf mulch is provided, and no pesticides are allowed. Kruger is always available to help new gardeners get started, and often refers to existing resources such as the county extension service or the NRV Master Gardeners' Association.

Two community gardens - Wong Garden and Garrison Garden are part of existing Town of Blacksburg parks. The third space - Hale Garden, was donated to the Town by long-time resident Arlene Lambert with a stipulation to preserve it as a green space. In addition to garden plots, Hale Garden features a pollinator garden, orchard, and a food forest featuring apple and other fruit-bearing trees, berries, and hazelnuts.

Kruger feels the community reaps many benefits from LWEГ's Community Gardens. In addition to educational workshops and a summer camp, Gardeners seeking



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Holly Marrow



Holly Marrow

camaraderie often make lasting friendships. We actually have “little communities within the big community,” Kruger says. “We have multi-generational growers and a large community of international growers.” Every month at

Hale Gardens, there is a potluck gathering for all community garden members. “We empower people to grow their own food” says Kruger, and in the process, they find community, food security, and the many mental-health benefits of gardening. 

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