

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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MARCH 2022

Victor Cardwell,
Virginia Bar Association

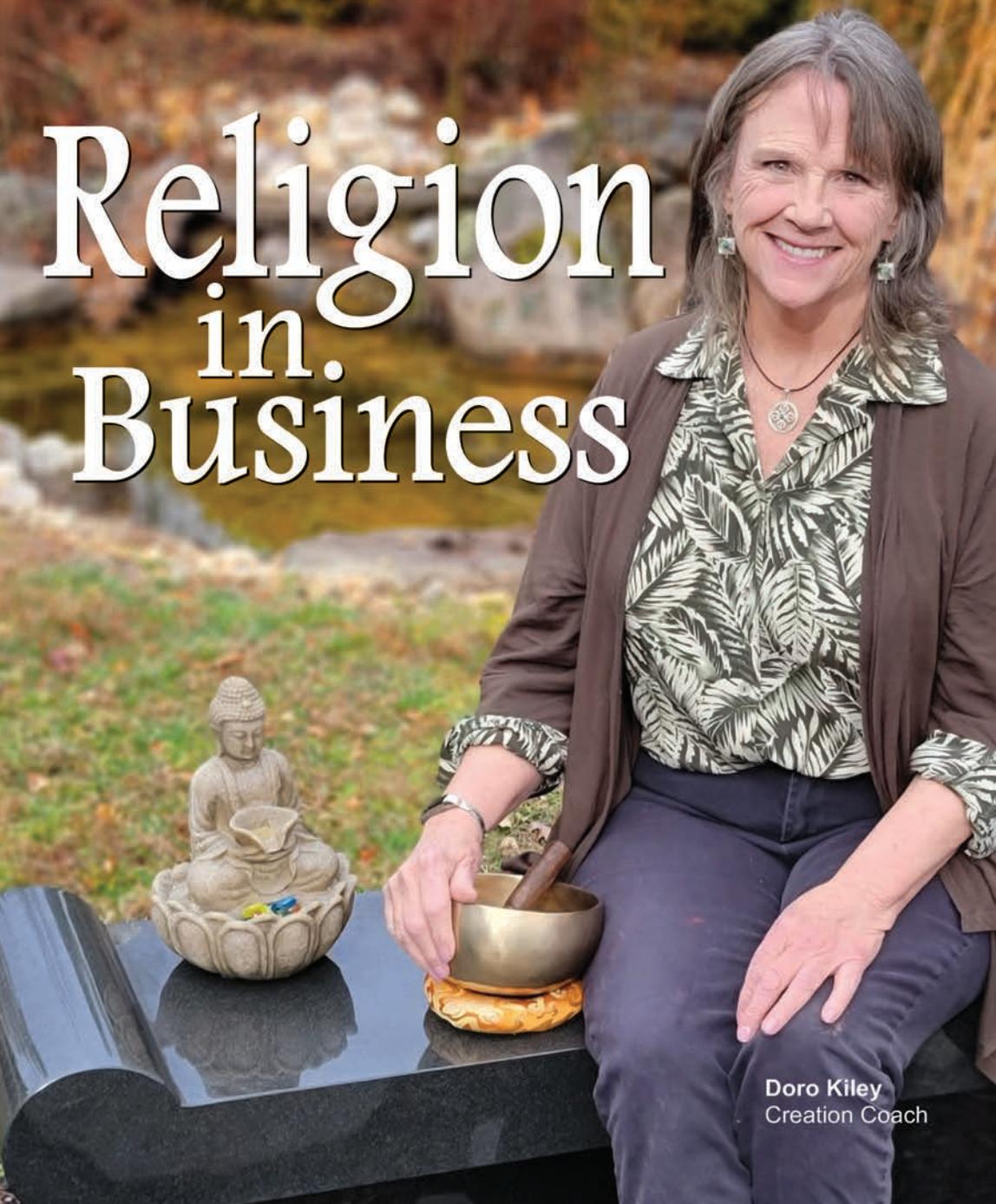
Roy Creasy,
Legal Aid Society

VT/CRC COgro Labs

David Paxton,
Gentry Locke

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Religion in. Business



Doro Kiley
Creation Coach



**FreedomFirst is proud to
support GIVE Roanoke, hosted
by Council on Community Services**



When the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia decided to discontinue Roanoke Valley Gives Day in 2022, the Council of Community Services stepped in to coordinate “GIVE Roanoke” on April 20. We’re thrilled to support this day of giving for all nonprofits serving the Roanoke Valley. Mark you calendars for April 20 as a day to Grow, Invest, Volunteer and Empower!

WELCOME TO THE FRONT

From Wikipedia: "Let's kill all the lawyers" is a line from William Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part 2, Act IV, Scene 2. The full quote is "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." It is among Shakespeare's most famous lines, as well as one of his most controversial. Shakespeare may be making a joke when character "Dick The Butcher" suggests one of the ways the band of pretenders to the throne can improve the country is to kill all the lawyers.

All jokes aside, there are plenty of hardworking ethical attorneys out there no doubt. In this issue we profile several of them that are either groundbreaking or continue to assist the underserved even after they have officially "retired." And we also ask some questions – and get answers – about some of the things employers can and cannot do when it comes to how they handle certain issues within their companies.

We've also got a look ahead at the new wet/dry lab shared spaces planned for both Blacksburg and Roanoke, and some terrific columns as well. With COVID cases dipping sharply as of late last month and more masks coming off it looks like we are once again on a track towards "normal," and that's good news for the business community – and for everyone else as well. Happy reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

““

If you want health and life science companies to not only grow from here but get attracted to this area, having these [flexible wet/dry lab] facilities available is critically important. — Page 57

MEET THE FACES OF GOODWILL®

Meet Jamal, a Goodwill store manager. Jamal feels the way that the Goodwill team embraces the mission — both in the community and the workplace — is what makes it unique. When hospitalized with a health issue, Jamal was touched to get a visit from Goodwill leadership. "They had my back through the toughest times. They get it. They care," says Jamal.

grateful.
goodwillvalleys.com



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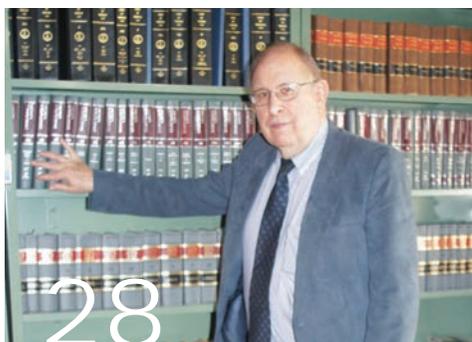
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By Tom Field



“ ”
We can't really empty our minds.
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**Carrie McConnell,
President**



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MARCH



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Doug Kidd



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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



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



William Hall



Gene Marrano



Michael Shelton



Dan Smith

“”
We should share our expertise and help our community.

— Page 17



Lori Baker-Lloyd
Goodwill Industries of the Valleys /
community service



Neal Cummings
Freedom First Credit Union /
finance – credit unions



Kevin Holt
Gentry Locke /
legal

“”
We're coming back better than ever.

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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 40.



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Religion in. Business

Story and photos by Tom Field



Don't talk about religion or politics in mixed company.

We've all heard that advice. But what if religion—your beliefs or world view or faith or spiritual practices—was so ingrained with your thoughts, your decisions, and your actions, that it impacted everything in your life? Wouldn't that spill over into your work? Your business?

For many people, it does.

Certainly, there are individuals who adhere to a religious practice but keep that part separated from their daily occupations. They practice in private and you might not ever know their persuasions or allegiances. How they conduct commerce may follow their teachings, but they're the only ones aware or attentive to it.

But for the ones who actively incorporate some tenants of their "religion" into their business, how exactly is that working?

Acceptance & Discrimination

"There are no easy answers," says David Paxton, as we dig into this subject. He's a labor and employment attorney with Roanoke-based Gentry Locke.

To the question whether a private business can be considered a religious organization, "The company's purpose and character have to be primarily religious," Paxton says. And on the employee side, companies "have to take individual beliefs seriously."

Paxton says disability and religious beliefs are two areas that "have to be accommodated."

But accommodation can get complicated. Take, for example, the following scenarios:

- Can a business require vaccinations? (a timely one)
- Can a bank refuse entrance of an individual fully covered in a burka?
- Can a business refuse to serve someone diametrically opposed to its religious practices?
- Can a business impose restrictions on contractors with regard to product sales and distribution?
- Can an employee simply claim "religious reasons" for not complying with company policies?

Paxton answers these questions with a yes or no. But there can be caveats, and how we understand and apply actions inside (employees) and outside (customers, suppliers, stakeholders) can always be challenged.

Religion & Freedom

“Generally, you can’t refuse service to people who disagree with you if you are a public accommodation,” Paxton says. He can cite a number of “classic examples” as he calls them.

He says it’s easier for non-profits and obvious businesses—like a Christian radio station—to be considered a religious organization.

“Managers have to be careful of proselytizing,” Paxton cautions.

“Virginia was one of the more pro-employer states; but that changed recently. It’s easier to sue employers now.”

Even as Paxton mentions religious “exemption,” it’s not like an organization can get any kind of certification for it. The best guideline we have, is provided by the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). EEOC is the enforcement agency for Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (which Paxton says has jurisdiction over businesses with 15 or more employees).

EEOC’s Guidance (released 1-15-21) provides broad definitions for what is “religion” (no diety required, for example); but goes deep into areas as specific as reasonable accommodations, work schedules, dress and grooming, and of course, hiring, promotion, discipline, and compensation.



Despite these legal complexities and what seems to be an influx of protests and clashes in media reports, the U.S. is still more tolerant, inclusive, and accepting of religious activity (even in commerce) in relation to most of the world. Most statistical reports rank the U.S. in the top five of all countries for religious freedom.

The United States has been described as the most religiously diverse country in the world. In spite of this, it is relatively free of religiously motivated violence. Some observers attribute this to the First Ammendment of the U.S. Constitution. All of the world’s major religions from Asatru to Zoroastrianism are practiced throughout the U.S.

— Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance

That’s not to say all is peaceful in our Land of the Free. Jewish synagogues in our own region have been vandalized in recent years. Other religiously motivated “hate crimes” are still reported.

We might not be as much of a *melting pot* as we would like to imagine we are, but many in America are still on the same *blue plate special*—even if separated in compartments. Many appreciate and celebrate diversity and the freedom to worship (or not) within our own belief system that isn’t afforded to all inhabitants on the globe.

You’re about to meet four local business owners who operate within a framework that incorporates their beliefs.

“Some organizations can be exempted from charges of religious discrimination, but that will foreclose other claims.”

— David Paxton



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"God owns it."

You can't be any more direct than that. Linnie Doughton's talking about his business, DRP Performance in Bassett, just off US 220 near the Route 57/Collinsville interchange in Henry County.

"It's not my business," Doughton continues. "I'm a temporary steward, and there's a higher purpose."

A Christian, Doughton's entire enterprise is built around his faith (or he might say, vice-versa). On the surface, DRP Performance might not appear as a ministry—the business manufactures and supplies parts for the high performance auto industry. But any engagement whatsoever—whether as an employee or customer or partner or vendor—will reveal an undeniable public profession of faith.

In addition to the measuring equipment and hub components (the two most significant products), you get a testimony with every transaction at DRP.

"We're not in business to do ministry," Doughton says. "We're in ministry and happen to have a business."

When you enter the DRP facility, in some respects it's not unlike a church. The large screen on the reception wall presents a mission (the spiritual kind, not just the company mission). Religious literature is prevalent in the lobby.

"We begin every meeting with prayer," says Doughton. "Weekly Bible study."

And thereafter, follows a continuing list of employee tasks and company practices that verify the Christian life at this workplace, is job one.

Indeed, among the stations throughout the plant—the industrial equipment operators, the rows of inventory shelves, the offices—sure enough, there's an employee stuffing Christian literature in product boxes.

DRP is known for including a miniature

version—but entire Gospel of John in every product it ships.

"I was already in business," Doughton says, "and then I met Jesus. I used to keep it [faith] separate... considering business kind of dirty, all about money versus what's holy. But then I felt a desire to go into ministry. I even cleaned up my business in preparation to sell."

At some point, Doughton says he realized he was already in a full time ministry. The "opportunity" he calls it, was in essence, converting the business.

"I have a vision to share the gospel to 100 million people. And right here, I want to transform our community."

Doughton says his ministry started out small; printing a Bible verse on the business card. But "you have to put your money where your mouth is," he says.

Are people offended by Doughton's energy and charisma?

"Ninety-six, ninety-seven percent positive feedback," he reports. Of the few "less-than positive" push back, he's somewhat surprised that "fifty-percent of those are from other Christians." Other faiths and the non-religious are more accepting or respectful than some fellow Christians, Doughton says, who don't agree with what he's doing.

"If you're not receiving persecution, you're not doing enough," he contends.

DRP has been in business since 1991, and employs 30. Doughton says the Christian life is a public profession here. When hiring, he is very open about the expectations and wants his crew to be comfortable.

"Ministry is a line item on our P&L," Doughton says. From the papers on the conference table to the thick pocket folder of reports and charts, all messages that DRP Performance is a Christian operation are received loudly and clearly. At a high speed that might break the gauges.



A store, a culture

Like the ceiling above him, Hisham could have had his spirit crushed.

At the first of the year, heavy snow caused a complete roof collapse at his business, Roanoke Grocery Market. He had just opened it nine months before, and the business was on a roll—gaining incredible momentum from new customers and word-of-mouth about food and groceries here that you couldn't find anywhere else locally.

On top of the business, Hisham Al-Ammuri, a Muslim, was providing things from his religious practice beyond the items on the shelves.

"I want to give back," Al-Ammuri says. "The great thing about the U.S. is we have these government services to help, but we can do greater than that."

Through the grocery business, Al-Ammuri says, "we have a philosophy to feed the homeless once a month; we give a percentage of our profit to Autism support," and he describes a basket drop off program in the store, where customers can buy two items, and leave one behind for the needy. The idea is conducive to Islamic directives in the Quran, which instructs Muslims to feed the hungry and contribute to charity.

Community contribution was on the rise as more people became familiar with Roanoke Grocery Market and its unique and diverse offerings.

"We have things you don't really find here," says Al-Ammuri. "Asian, Arab, Mediterranean..." he begins. Meats, breads, food for "Afghanis, Lebanese, Indians, Iranians..."

Meat (lamb, goat, beef, chicken) from slaughter houses that abide by Halal practice is available here, and Al-Ammuri says that even people who are unfamiliar with the customary preparation notice a difference.

"It's more tender," he says. "People from different faiths try it, and like it."

If you weren't sure how passionate Al-Ammuri is with what he's doing with the grocery store, a look at the odometer on his truck would be all the verification you need.

"We have shortened the distance for all the people who would travel to get good food that wasn't here before."

That includes Patterson, NJ; Washington, DC; Cleveland, OH; Philadelphia, PA—often a single trip on a multi-state-wide circuit.

In compliance with Islamic teaching, Roanoke Grocery Market does not sell alcohol and tobacco products. Al-Ammuri says he doesn't want people putting anything into their bodies that is harmful.

He enjoys the grocery business.

"As you grow in life," Al-Ammuri tells, "your interests change." He worked in the hotel business for 16 years. "I like to mingle. I like to educate about our herbs, breads, sweets, pies, and how we make our foods from scratch."

The store is a way to "keep people connected to each other," Al-Ammuri says. That's as important to him as anything they do.

Which brings us back to that roof. It's still a mess (as of this writing); but Roanoke Grocery Market customers, friends, and family have responded to the crisis. Al-Ammuri says he can't wait around for the usual (insurance and other recovery) processes that will take more than six months. With funding and support from our local community, he's going to proceed with the repairs himself.

He says he is so encouraged by the outpouring of support.

"We're coming back better than ever."



The middle way

Up on the highest mountain peak, sitting in Lotus position, clothed in a yellow Tibetan shawl, sits Doro Kiley.

Not really. We met on Zoom.

But the spirit of conversation is similar. We imagine.

"I don't want to say I'm Buddhist," Kiley cautions and wants to clarify. But she puts into practice the tenants of Buddhism, acknowledges the different schools, is well-versed in the teachings (to the deepest of degrees) and has trekked and sequestered herself at monastic retreats from New Mexico to High View, West Virginia.

Her story is replete with mind and body experiences. And if asked if the Buddhist practices envelop her business as a life coach—that's an affirmative with great certainty. The "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhism apply to her coaching; and that just scratches the surface of her frequent references to the idea of "mindfulness."

"Mine wasn't really a religious upbringing," Kiley recounts. "My father was a Broadway actor and Hollywood movie star. My mother was an astrologist, psychic, but also very scientific...she bought me my first book on quantum physics when I was 13. They both broke off from the church, and encouraged me to find my own path. I was exposed to Emerson and Thoreau; read the entire Bible twice; Hinduism; yogas; Native American culture with the elements..."

"But I questioned everything. 'God is in everything?' some suggested. A fork? And when my father introduced me to meditation, I was 14-years old. He held his watch and instructed me 'no thinking' for one minute. I found out how difficult that is. We can't really empty our minds. We don't control our minds."

Maybe that childhood wasn't religious; but it certainly seems metaphysical.

How do all these spiritual and mental explorations saturate her business?

"Everybody has their niche," Kiley begins. "Where I really shine is for those who are feeling a little bit lost. They're scrambling, trying to find an answer to where they're going."

"Life coaching is not therapy. I'm not looking into a person's past, but to the present and moving forward. I like to describe [my practice] like a guitar string. Not too tight and not too loose. Buddhism is all about the middle way."

Kiley says spiritual quests and meditation can enable an individual to let go of addictions. ("Well, I still like coffee," she admits.) When someone asks what you gain from meditation, Kiley likes the response that says, 'nothing... but I have lost. I've lost anxiety, depression, fear of old age, death.'

Doro Kiley's practice can be found at CreationCoach.com. She resides in Floyd, but her teaching is mostly remote. Her clients, she says, "tend to be those with some exposure to (the philosophy of) mindfulness." About equal men and women, business owners, and "lots of repeat business... some I've had 18 years."

People going through a divorce, empty nesters, and career changes are prevalent issues she currently addresses.

"I work with my clients to reframe perspective," Kiley says. "The benefits of stress reduction and more creativity are important to business. Even the largest corporations, like AT&T and Microsoft understand the importance of happier employees."

"People who go on a spiritual quest are looking for answers," Kiley says.

CreationCoach is here to help. Or, you can climb a mountain in Tibet.



A helpful model

"I learn a lot from my wife and my guru," says Dhimant Sheth. His wife, a physician, is more into "the religious part," he says. But Sheth places high value on the principles of Hinduism; and that does impact his business practices.

In fact, his business, Maruti Construction Company is named after a Hindu god—one that is often described as the god of wind, son of Pawan, possessor of extraordinary feats, strength, and loyalty.

Sheth is in the commercial real estate business in the field of net lease investments. The enterprise serves as landlord, responsible for upkeep and maintenance. Sheth currently owns eight properties, primarily in pharmaceutical and retail.

"In my business model, I try to buy properties that help communities," Sheth says.

The pharmacies (like CVS) and dialysis centers provide necessary products and services, but even the Dollar General and DollarTree stores—particularly when located in rural communities—serve local customers who face challenges when supplies are not nearby. Maruti manages properties (not the business inside those buildings, though) in central and southside Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina.

How do teachings in the Hindu faith complement Sheth's business practices?

"I try to do business while following the three pillars of truth, love, and compassion," Sheth explains.

"I do this on a daily basis.

"For example, in truth, I am transparent with partners. I don't hide anything and I am up front. If a roof leaks or there are structural issues, I tell them.

"In love, I want to help communities. I support causes that are important, like the Red Cross, Rescue Mission, and disaster relief."

Sheth came to the U.S. in 1991. He has a civil engineering degree and background in construction. He, along with friends, started the construction-investment firm in 2010, with one property.

Sheth is a member of Hindu temple in Roanoke and is the board chairman of the India Heritage Society.

Sheth speaks of the virtue of passing along what you can to others you meet along your path—including the contribution in your work or profession.

"I would like for more people to do what I am doing," he says. "We should share our expertise and help our community. I get happiness from that."

Our religious identity

As recently as last year, Shonel Sen, a demographer at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, and Rebecca Draughton, a UVA religious studies graduate student, conducted a study on the Commonwealth's religious demographics. The big surprise, they concluded, is that the more rural, outlying areas were not all that different from urban, metropolitan areas—at least not to the degree that was assumed. Their compilations, coupled with the U.S. Religion Census and Association of Religious Data Archives, also concluded Virginia generally mirrors the rest of the nation (73% identifying as Christian), but there is a climbing rate of non-Christian adherents even in outlying areas, citing Islamic populations in Danville, Jewish populations in Falls Church, Buddhist populations in Charlottesville.

Religious Landscape Study

	U.S.	Virginia
Christian*	70.6%	73%
Non-Christian Faiths	5.9%	6%
Jewish	1.9%	1%
Muslim	0.9%	1%
Buddhist	0.7%	1%
Hindu	0.7%	<1%
Other World Religions	0.3%	<1%
Other Faiths	1.5%	1%
Unaffiliated (religious “nones”)	22.8%	20%
Atheist	3.1%	2%
Agnostic	4%	4%
Nothing in particular	15.8%	15%
Don't Know	0.6%	<1%

* includes Evangelical Protestant; Mainline Protestant; Historically Black Protestant; Catholic; Mormon; Orthodox Christian; Jehovah's Witness; Other

SOURCE: Pew Research Center

The Pew Research Center, the UVA study (cited earlier) and other statistical compilers acknowledge religious identity is not easy to determine. Use of polling, congregational populations, and other measures can only produce estimates; as some religious affiliations are unclear or difficult to classify. On top of that, various groups will disagree who qualifies as a follower or “true believer” and at various degrees. Even the definitions of various theisms and anti-theisms are frequently disputable.

Stand, and testify

Religion~Business in court

THIS JUST IN from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Feb. 10, 2022.

There is no shortage of examples of how business and religion can potentially clash and create controversy and complications. (Wedding cakes for

gay marriages, anyone?) The cases in our court systems that usually come to mind are those involving employment conflicts. But religious practice spills over into other areas of commerce as well.

Consider this report, where the SEC said a company's Shariah-

compliant pledge misled clients.

Wahed Invest, LLC is a robo-advisor (financial advice using digital methodology over human intervention) based in New York. According to the SEC, the firm marketed its services as complying with Islamic, or Shari'ah

Popular Companies with religious ties

Like the Religious Landscape Study, Christianity dominates the list of organizations in the U.S. that choose to make public a religious adherence. But even in the brief lineup below, there are influences of Mormonism (Marriott); Judaism (Timberland); Buddhism (Whole Foods).

**Alaska Airlines • Chick-Fil-A • Curves
Forever 21 • Herman Miller • Hobby Lobby
In-N-Out Burger • Interstate Batteries
Jet Blue • Marriott • Mary Kay
Service Master • Timberland • Tom's
Tyson Foods • Walmart • Whole Foods**

Networking your beliefs

There are business networking groups beyond those that are directed to trades and professions, sales and business development, chambers and geographic markets. Some gather religious adherents or "believers" who share missions and practices. A "congregation for commerce" if you will.

Todd Dodson started a Business On Mission group in Lynchburg in 2016. Along with Lynette Nutter, Dodson says it's a network that brings business leaders on board, under the idea that "you can be a Christian and run a business. And it doesn't have to be a 'Christian business.'" **Todd Dodson**



"We're learning how to be a better Christian in the marketplace," Dodson says; and BOM hosts quarterly breakfasts to fellowship, develop, and foster that concept.

Dodson also describes a second organization, where he is a chairman: C12. With 35,000 members globally, he and principal chair Greg King serve a local Blue Ridge chapter. Dodson says, "C12 is about equipping Christians to have a greater business for a greater purpose, glorifying God."

C12 meets monthly (small groups of 12) in an all day "business Sabbath" retreat-like environment. The members are generally CEOs, executives, and small business owners.

law, but did not actually adopt and implement procedures assuring such compliance.

The investment company consented to

the SEC's order; and without admitting or denying the findings, agreed to a cease-and-desist order, to pay a \$300,000 penalty, and

to retain an independent compliance consultant.

SOURCE: SEC.gov press release



FiftyCentLove Photographie

MINDFUL BUSINESS

By Beth Bell

Executive Summary:
The pandemic continues to negatively impact virtually every aspect of women's lives, from employment to physical and mental health.

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

The case for International Women's Day and the fight for gender parity

Per the International Women's Day website: "none of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor likely will many of our children. Gender parity, a statistical measure that compares a particular indicator among women, like average income, to the same indicator among men. Following the setback of the pandemic, the global gender gap has widened from 100 years to 136 years to get there.

Interesting facts:

- If every country had centered gender into their economic recovery plans via gender mainstreaming, we could have added \$13 trillion to global GDP by 2030. It's not enough to admire—or even agonize over—the problem of inequity. We are sitting on a \$3.4 trillion economic opportunity in the U.S. alone. It's time to move the needle on gender equity. (Katica Roy)
- Gender equity in politics matters because women are 10 percent more effective legislators and deliver 9 percent more money in federal programs to home districts compared to men politicians, according to a study published by the American Journal of Political Science.

It wasn't that long ago that women weren't "allowed" to be the CEO or Board President of a Chamber. In 1986, less than three percent of Chambers in metro cities were run by women*. Women are under-represented in local (25-30%), state (30%) and national (25%) government roles. These are the organizations that Chambers and minority business groups work with to influence decisions that impact business and quality of life. It's important for women to be at the table and I'm not afraid to pull up my own chair.

**Magicians of Main Street*

The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce is hosting a 10 -month women's LeadHERship series beginning with the kickoff on March 8th, International Women's Day at South County Library. All women are invited to register for the IWD event or the entire series, where topics such as Creating a Sense of Belonging, the Neuroplasticity of Women, Dealing with Conflict in Conversation, and the importance of serving in a local government position to make change will be highlighted. Contact Beth at director@s-rcchamber.org for more information. 

Is cash safer than securities?

As a Dave Ramsey SmartVestor Pro, I recognize there are good reasons for cash reserves. In fact, I've recommended in this column that people strive to set aside six months of living expenses in liquid accounts. Since the pandemic hit, though, people have been hoarding cash.

The problem with this strategy is inflation. Even CDs and money market accounts won't keep you ahead of your cost of living. Those boasting the best rates right now are paying a paltry .55%. The inflation rate hit 7% in December of 2021. Do you see the problem here?

Inflation affects your money's worth

There's as much risk holding cash as there is investing in equities, bonds, and fixed income products. Sure, securities go up and down, but over time, provided you're not trying to time the market, you can estimate returns. According to Goldman Sachs, that number is 9.2% over a ten-year period based on the past 140 years of trading. One thing is all but guaranteed. If you choose cash, or CDs, or money market accounts in the current climate, your money will be worth less against inflation.

The Fed is expected to raise interest rates this year. That might bring your savings account returns up, but it's unlikely they'll get close to the inflation rate. Goldman Sachs estimates the Fed will raise interest rates to 4% by the end of this year. But that's not the rate you get for putting your money in bank savings products. It's also less than you'll pay when you borrow money, which is going to get more expensive this year. You might want to lock those variable rate loans into fixed rate products if possible.

The US personal saving rate, which is calculated by dividing household income by personal savings, hit a record 33.8% in April of last year, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. They cite the previous record as 17.3% in May of 1975. Numbers have come down since then, but they're still higher than average. With so much disposable income, it makes sense to get strategic about making your money work for you.

Keeping cash on the side is often driven by emotional decisions. So is pulling invested funds. If your goal is to accumulate a retirement nest egg or leave a legacy, it's important to factor inflation into your decisions. Money earning less than the inflation rate means your savings are shrinking. That's not a good plan. 

“Get strategic about making your money work.”



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
Money earning less than the inflation rate means your savings are shrinking. That's not a good plan.

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



Dan Smith

Victor Cardwell: "I grew up poor, but I didn't really know it. I learned that the family is the cornerstone."

Victor Cardwell: Super Lawyer, Family Man

By Dan Smith

The new president of Virginia's Bar Association has been one of Roanoke's most prominent lawyers for years and now he's the first Black lawyer to hold his spot. And he says it's all about family.

For Victor Cardwell it is not about race or even about his own remarkable success. It is a tale of family. He was recently named the 134th president of the Virginia Bar Association, the largest and most influential organization for lawyers in the Commonwealth. The Chairman of the Board of Woods Rogers in Roanoke, Cardwell is the VBA's first African-American president. He has been with WR since 1991 and a

principal since 2006. He comes equipped with a sterling list of previous honors:

Virginia Lawyers Weekly selected him as a "Leader in the Law," and he was Roanoke's Lawyer of the Year as named by Best Lawyers in America. In 2019, Cardwell was selected for the Martin Luther King Jr. Drum Major for Justice honor awarded by Roanoke's chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

He is consistently listed in industry rankings including Virginia Super Lawyers and Best Lawyers in America.

He believes his family is at the core of his success. Cardwell is the son of Thomas Cardwell, who was the head janitor at E.C. Glass High School, and Jean Cardwell, who worked at GE-Lynchburg. His sister Renee is a retired judge (who swore him in as president of the VBA). His sister Reva C. Cosby is Superintendent of Schools near Dayton, Ohio.

He has two brothers, Thomas of American University (retired from Xerox), and Kevin, an attorney at the Justice Department. He says of his family, “there is, or was, a showcase of my family—really my parents—at E.C. Glass. They were and remain extraordinary. I am prouder of my parents every day. They did the impossible in raising us on a poverty level income but a millionaire’s love. We never thought we were poor.

“If we needed it, we got it.” Both parents have died. Cardwell was the fourth of the five children and “I grew up poor, but I didn’t really know it. I learned that the family is the cornerstone.”

The 60-year-old Cardwell has taken what he learned growing up and incorporated it into his own family: wife Joann is MDS Coordinator at the Virginia Veterans Center in Salem; son Max is a 19-year-old freshman at Bridgewater College (and a track performer); daughter Ariana is an 18-year-old North Cross School senior.

The 5,000-member VBA is a voluntary organization, unlike the Virginia Bar, which is an administrative agency of the Supreme Court of Virginia whose purpose is to regulate the state’s legal profession. Membership is required in the Virginia Bar. There are an estimated 29,000 lawyers in Virginia, many with small or minority firms. “They need to be in the VBA,” says Cardwell. “A lot of lawyers see the VBA as a big-firm,



Submitted

The Cardwells of Roanoke: Jean, Max, Ariana and Victor



Courtesy of the University of Virginia

Victor Cardwell as a hard-hitting linebacker at the University of Virginia in 1982

Richmond-based group, but I want to promote it for all lawyers. Small firms, especially, need it more than ever before. The way law is being consumed is changing” and the VBA can help ease that transition, he insists.

The VBA, says Cardwell, “is about professionalism. I have always believed that there must be an elegant way to find a solution” to disagreements. Being the first African-American chosen to lead the organization is meaningful, he says. “Make no mistake, I know how many great lawyers, Black and otherwise, have deserved this honor in the past and my goal is to make sure that more diverse attorneys become involved in the VBA and take advantage of the benefits as have I.” Among his first actions will be to appoint members to a new committee of the VBA, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, which was established only last year.

Cardwell believes COVID-19 has limited opportunities for hands-on mentoring of young attorneys and says the VBA can help firms in the development of

talent with training and camaraderie. Woods Rogers colleague, Thomas M. Winn III, says, “In addition to Victor’s magnetic charisma, his thoughtfulness and intelligence attract people to him and make him a very effective leader. He has real wisdom about him that makes him well-suited for the position he is assuming.” Cardwell is the seventh Woods Rogers attorney to serve in the post. Cardwell’s practice is labor/management with management serving as his primary client list.

Cardwell gained notoriety as a young college student on the University of Virginia’s football team, playing linebacker. He was recruited as a smallish defensive back by Coach Dick Bestwick out of Lynchburg’s E.C. Glass High, but his final three years at UVA, he was coached by the legendary George Welsh and became a bulky, hard-hitting linebacker at a time—the early 1980s—when Virginia football “was turning the corner,” he says.

“I was an athlete,” he says, “and I know about competition. But I also know that if you spend too much time arguing, you’re not listening. I want to make my living helping people, promoting collegiality. I am a man of my word, and I will disagree respectfully. The VBA can help. I want lawyers to embrace that. If you’re practicing law for the money, go do something else. You can achieve ends without somebody losing.” He says athletics “helped me learn to interact with people in tough situations. It made me listen, to accept different ways of doing things.”

Covid has changed how law is practiced, says Cardwell. “Now lawyers get used to being alone with no chance to learn from mentors.” Clients often have little in-person contact with their lawyers because of social distancing and that makes the practice more difficult.

Cardwell says he has no ambition beyond the practice of law. “I have great friends and partners on the bench [judgeships], but I like practicing law and now [as head of the VBA], I get to give back.” 



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BEST PRACTICES

By William R. Hall III

Executive Summary:
Not all clients are created equal.

Take stock of your client base

An article I read made the analogy that diversifying clients is the same as diversification in your stock portfolio for a your business. At first, I wasn't sure what I thought of that. Are you basically looking at clients as a stock certificates that can be bought, sold and traded based on performance? I didn't like that analogy because for us at Beacon, client care is paramount.

The article described having clients that are the blue chips and do business with you on a regular basis. Then there were the regular stocks that could spike on occasion or drop off the revenue radar, but you could usually count on their value over the year. Lastly, they talked about the penny stock clients, the ones that the business made very little money usually and mostly just cost your business money. As a former financial adviser, I began to understand what they were saying. Your client makeup for steady and measurable growth, much like a portfolio, needed more blue chip and average clients. Instead, you needed to minimize the penny stocks that were just huge takers of time, without any significant return.

Didn't seem a whole lot different than what they taught us in college. The more I chewed on this idea the more I thought about how this applies to my business. As a consultant, our client portfolio is super important to manage correctly. We need a good blend of clients who can use our services without putting our whole firm's future in one client's hand. Starting out, sure...but we are five years in, and things look different now. I began to review our client accounts and in doing so found a lot of diversification. We have a couple of bigger clients for sure; however we have some clients that pay their part each month and while anyone of them we wouldn't want to lose, it wouldn't put the company at risk if they did. As I think about some of the most successful businesses in America, your Amazons and Walmarts of the world, they too have diversified strongly in both their in-store and on-line platforms.

So, what's the takeaway? Mine was simply, not all clients are created equal. The best businesses find as much value in their clients as their clients find in them. Sometimes the penny stock clients that cost you more than they produce must just cut loose – taking short term take the loss for the betterment of the portfolio/business. 

“ I began to understand what they were saying.”

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

Suit up to make your best impression

In today's climate of flex schedules, work from home and the new breed of casual clothing that have hit the business scene, there is no way better to make a stunning impact than to suit up. When I suit up, I feel like I am putting my best foot forward. I feel crisp, confident, and ready for my day. When I want all the odds in my favor,... I suit up. If I have a big appointment for the day?... I suit up. If I have a speaking engagement for the day?... I suit up. If I have a photo to shoot for the day? ... I suit up. When I want to feel my most confident?... I suit up. My weakness is blue. I love a blue suit. Gray is fine. Charcoal is sleek. Black can be on point. Earth tones have their place. The next time the occasion demands your best, will you consider suiting up? 



STYLE NOTES

By Doug Kidd

Executive Summary:

Warmer weather is coming. With apologies to that work-at-home uber-casual Zoom style, is your business wardrobe ready when you step out?

“When I want all the odds in my favor... I suit up.”

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



David Beidler (left) and Roy Creasy

A lifetime dedication to the law – for those in all walks of life

By Gene Marrano

“We’ve all been blessed and need to give back. Not only money but time and services. That’s what I’ve always believed in. I’d like to think that it’s important to everybody,” says Roy V. Creasy.

Roy Creasy graduated from Virginia Tech with a degree in engineering (1968) and then an MBA in Industrial Management (U. of Tennessee, 1970). After Tech he worked on the towering Saturn 5 rocket program at the Marshall Space Center, “one of the most fascinating things I ever did,” he says of the mammoth vehicle that propelled the Apollo astronauts into space.

A few years later however the Roanoke County resident was drawn to the law, while working for a railroad in Beckley and dating a woman who was heading to law school. He hadn’t thought of that career path. “I got kind of excited about it and decided I’d go back to school again.” In 1975 Creasy earned his law degree from West Virginia University. He soon entered

private practice as an attorney with an uncle in Roanoke, and then in his own practice, a run that lasted until 2021 and retirement. Real estate and corporate law (including bankruptcy) was a strong emphasis. He was an attorney on a notorious bankruptcy case for a Lynchburg company that was distributing contaminated peanut products. “I’ve done a lot of Chapter 11’s,” notes Creasy. His business background including that MBA drew him to that side of the law. “It was complicated enough to be interesting,” says the former engineer.

That wasn’t the whole story, however. On the side he taught a Legal Assistant course at Virginia Western Community College for more than 20 years, also lecturing for the Virginia Bar Association and at other functions.

LEGAL HONORS FOR ROY V. CREASY

- Law Review West Virginia University 1973-1975
- Super Lawyer (Virginia) Bankruptcy and Creditor's Rights: 2008 to 2021
- Best Lawyers in America Bankruptcy and Creditor's Rights: 2008 to 2021
- Legal Elite (Virginia) Bankruptcy and Creditor's Rights:
- Fellow: Virginia Law Foundation 2007
- Roanoke City Bar Association - Distinguished Service Award (2020)

Creasy spent much of his career as well working with the Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, offering help to a clientele that typically cannot afford to hire an attorney, for issues that include eviction and other housing situations.

Roy Creasy isn't done just yet however: he continues now to donate his time as a Lawyer Emeritus to the Legal Aid Society, about two days a week. A Virginia Bar Association program that encourages retirees to give back by continuing to practice for a Legal Aid chapter means the VBA will cover membership fees and malpractice insurance premiums in return.

Former Counsel Henry Woodard also continues to serve under that Emeritus status. Even in law school Creasy spent time with Legal Aid clients, much like his uncle (and first law practice partner) had done as an original board member for Legal Aid. Creasy became a board member himself in 1990.



Roy Creasy

For those who qualify due to their income status the help from Legal Aid can be free except for minor filing expenses. Those with representation in court are twice as likely to come out with a positive result notes Creasy. Two attorneys working together on opposite sides can often settle out of court.

Creasy also allotted time for several roles in the community, with Boy Scouts of America (he is still there as BSA goes



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David Beidler

through bankruptcy procedures – “a huge case.”), the Jaycees, and with the Cave Spring Recreation Foundation. (While coaching youth basketball he recalls this pesky kid named J.J. Redick causing his teams all sorts of trouble with deadly shot making).

Ironically perhaps, David D. Beidler, the current General Counsel for The Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, was a district executive for the Boy Scouts (the current bankruptcy case stems from youth abuse charges) in southwest Florida before he turned to the law. Beidler says he worked to help push the Equal Rights Amendment through in Florida in the 70’s before deciding to attend law school.

The Legal Aid Society chapter in Roanoke was the first one established in Virginia (1966), created during that era’s Civil Rights movement. “We were one of the first in the Southeast,” says Beidler, adding that it’s about “equality in the legal system.” He doesn’t see Legal Aid going away anytime soon, saying the need to provide

services for low-income clients “will always be there.” Housing cases have shot up by 70 percent or more in the COVID era for example, people who lost jobs or had to quit work while their kids learned remotely. “It really affected the working poor.”

A rent relief program the Legal Aid Society administers, drawing from federal funding, is helping. Several hundred clients in the Roanoke Valley have received more than a million dollars total in rent relief funds. “We aren’t even close to meeting [all] the needs. Our staff isn’t large enough.” Domestic violence issues are up as well, and two full time staffers are focused on that.

Beidler estimates that Legal Aid can only cover about twenty percent of the clients that would be eligible for their services. They just don’t have enough lawyers. “We’re hoping to get more people like me coming in, to do what needs to be done,” adds Creasy.

Beidler appreciates being able to collaborate with lawyers like Roy Creasy and Henry Woodard, taking advantage of the “tons of experience,” and the mentoring they are able to offer. Even after practicing himself for almost 40 years, he’s still learning. There are seven full time attorneys on Beidler’s staff at Legal Aid, in addition to the volunteer hours put in by Creasy and Woodard. It’s not enough.

Creasy notes that the Virginia Bar Association sets an aspirational goal for all lawyers to spend two percent of their time doing pro bono work or assisting the Legal Aid Society with its clients. He says the Commonwealth is only about a third of the way towards that goal hour-wise. “We never had enough to meet the needs of our people.” He urges young attorneys to take on volunteer cases, or man the Legal Aid hotline when they can. The local Roanoke Bar Association also promotes volunteerism. In fact, he wants to see the VBA do more.

“If we don’t have a system that provides legal services to the poor, then our legal system isn’t very good. It needs to be equal for everybody. That’s what our Founding Fathers wanted – and it’s not.” 



What can Fiber Internet do for your business?

Jeff Merritt | Technology Advisor, Valley Business Front

The Internet connection you choose plays a major role in your business as it impacts everything from employee productivity to customer satisfaction.

While standard Internet is enough for most small companies, fiber Internet providers, like Cox Business, have a long-standing history of providing robust fiber networks to help businesses of all sizes.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you determine which Internet option is best for your business:

Standard v. Fiber

Standard Internet delivers service connectivity and business Wifi access through a modem and router, with connection speeds ranging from 10 Mbps to 1 Gbps. Typically transmitted through a coaxial cable, this Internet type is ideal for businesses that need to upload and download files, stream video and utilize small business phone service through Voice over Internet Protocol technology.

Fiber optic Internet is more advanced, using flexible strands of glass or plastic to transmit data as light. It offers reliable fast speeds of up to 100 Gbps that allows businesses of any size to take advantage of the dedicated connectivity found in a fiber solution. Additionally, the speed is symmetrical, giving you equally fast upload and download speeds starting as low at 10 Mbps.

Customization

Most standard Internet plans come with set upload and download speeds. With fiber Internet from Cox Business, you can adjust bandwidth to accommodate business spikes. Pay for what you need, when you need it, by adding bursting capabilities. If your business is seasonal, for example, fiber bursting allows for bandwidth to increase without placing an order. Cox Business sales teams are dedicated to helping you design the solution that best meets your business needs, so you always feel connected and supported.

Scalability

As your business grows and evolves - even if only temporarily - Cox Business can adjust bandwidth and performance needs without making major changes to your configurations. Evolving during this "new normal" has taught us that change can happen overnight and businesses that remain agile and that can pivot successfully are the ones that thrive.

“
Evolving during this
"new normal" has
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can happen overnight
and businesses that
remain agile and that
can pivot successfully
are the ones that thrive.

For businesses in need of a dedicated Internet connection that will meet business demands with symmetrical fast speeds and reliable service, fiber is the best choice. Keep your employees connected and optimize productivity with Cox Business. Learn more at www.coxbusiness.com.



Gene Marrano

New home for female cycling team here >

Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge and the Virginia Tourism Corporation announced – to much fanfare in late January - that **Team TWENTY24**, a diverse team of female professional and junior cyclists, have officially relocated their base of operations from Idaho to Virginia's Blue Ridge. The team's name is now Virginia's Blue Ridge TWENTY24, or VBR TWENTY24. For more than 17 years, "America's premier women's cycling team," says VBR, has been responsible for developing and managing many of the most successful American female cyclists, "establishing a consistent pipeline for talented road, gravel, and Zwift eSports athletes."

The team has earned 14 Olympic and Paralympic medals, 17 World Championships, and many National Championships. The 2022 roster consists of six professional athletes racing road and gravel, five Zwift eSports athletes, and 27 junior athletes (ages 9 –17 years). The multi-discipline team includes 2021 #1 ranked Zwift eSports female rider, Kristen Kulchinsky (USA), and 3-time Olympic gold medalist, Kristin Armstrong (USA). The VBR TWENTY24 intends to spend time in the local community at meet and greets, or maybe during group rides.



Nicola Cranmer is the longtime general manager and founder of the team now located here. A personal friend and avid biker who lives in Roanoke suggested she look at the area; the team was already thinking about moving back east to cut down travel time when traveling to competitions in Europe: "[this] is our youth development group. They're focused on 2028 [Olympics] and beyond." Members of the 2024 Olympic team however are expected to convene in the region for training as those Games get closer. "These country roads and the smaller communities are just incredible ... beautiful. It reminds me of the English countryside and that's where I'm from." VBR Board Chairman Lee Wilhelm also envisions economic possibilities: "we felt like it was something the community would benefit from, and as a tourism organization it fell to us to go ahead and make it happen." Wilhelm said at the announcement that they had just started considering all the ways that having VBR TWENTY24 here can boost the region's draw as a cycling center.



Salem-Roanoke County Chamber



Wayne Adkins with the City of Salem mentioned workforce development: “we’re working with the Regional Apprenticeship Program ... made up of all county schools, City of Salem schools and Roanoke City schools to create an apprenticeship program that young people can get involved in.”

Director of Economic Development for Roanoke County **Jill Loope** told the audience at Roanoke College’s Colket Center that, “for core planning and infrastructure development, we have about \$60 million dollars in transportation programming for the 419 corridors alone, so we’ve been investing heavily, especially with broadband infrastructure as well. We are also spending a lot of time to read development initiatives by our partners, so we’ve had a lot of success in those areas and also a number of expansions in the past few years working with our businesses.”

Vinton Town Manager **Pete Peters** noted that “we’ve been working with a hotel developer and that will be build downtown. They’re going to break ground in the spring.” Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge Vice President Catherine Fox read off stats from Moody’s: “the economy projects that we’re going to see about a 3.5% growth in 2022, and hopefully look to exceed the 2019 [pre-Covid] numbers. The regional site investments are contributing to higher levels of economic opportunity.” Valley Business Front editor Gene Marrano moderated the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber panel discussion.

Salem-Roanoke County Chamber holds annual meeting >

The 89th Annual Meeting of the Chamber last month featured and economic development outlook update from a panel that included representatives from Salem, Roanoke County, the Town of Vinton and from Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge.



BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:

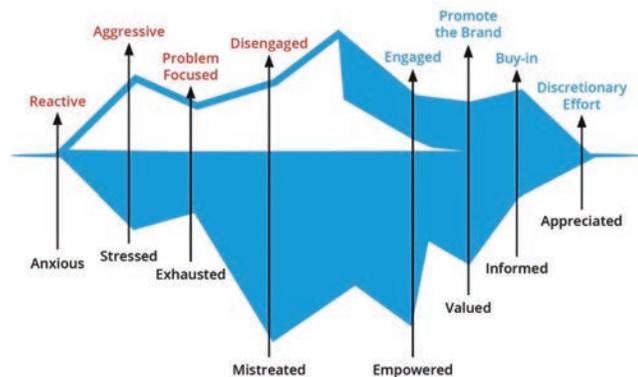
"Your employees' emotions affect how well they engage and how well they perform."

Emotional culture – what is it and why is it important?

Workplaces have always been emotional places, but even more so during these unusual times. We all experience a wide range of pleasant and unpleasant feelings at work as we interact with coworkers, customers, suppliers, and others. When the unpleasant emotions outweigh the pleasant emotions, we experience stress – and it's not unusual for times of change or uncertainty to be stressful.

Emotional culture in the workplace refers to the emotions, attitudes, and values in a company, and greatly influences what it's like to work there. It's a key driver in engagement and productivity because how employees feel affects how well they engage and how well they perform.

According to the Harvard Business Review, "every organization has an emotional culture, even if it's one of suppression. Emotional culture influences employee satisfaction, burnout, teamwork ... financial performance and absenteeism.



Pleasant feelings are productive emotions and have a 'broaden and build' effect causing us to think more broadly, engage more deeply and perform better. Pleasant emotions at work are consistently associated with better performance,



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quality, and customer service. It's part of the reason why being your employees' Best Job Ever is so important.

Unpleasant feelings are also unproductive as they tend to have a 'narrow and limiting' effect, causing us to be more closed-minded and less engaged. This results in more negative outcomes, poor performance and high turnover.

These emotions impact the bottom line, for better or for worse. Research shows that people in high performing organizations experience more positive emotions and less negative emotions than those in low performing organizations.

Do you know what your employees are feeling and how they really feel about working for you? Do you wonder what you can do to retain great staff and attract new employees? You may have a feeling or opinion about what your employees think of you, but what you see or think might not align with the feelings of your team.

Genos International, an international leader in Emotional Intelligence, offers a short, no-cost survey called The Emotional Climate Index. It's designed to measure employee emotions in your workplace, offering clear data to help you make better decisions and be more proactive in your recruitment and retention. For more information, contact me at Jennifer@AssessmentPros.com 



Emotional culture in the workplace greatly influences what it's like to work there.



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Dr. Kimberly Mattson leads new Student Success Center

The Roanoke Higher Education Center (RHEC) is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Kimberly Mattson as Coordinator for its new Student Success Center. Launching this summer, the Student Success Center will offer students the tools and resources to achieve their academic goals. The RHEC offers more than 200 programs of study through their member institutions. Opening an academic resource locally offers students the benefit and convenience of accessing services in the same place that they take their classes. Services will be available both in-person and virtually. According to Mattson, “The Student Success Center is a place of optimism and expectation. The Center provides programs to help students define what success means to them and has the services to help them achieve that success.”

These services run the gamut from support with basic writing skills to subject-specific tutoring. Peer-to-peer learning and peer-to-peer counseling will also be available. Plans are underway to offer workshops on topics such as work/life balance and effective note taking. Students can also have help with resume, essay, and letter writing; as well as study skills and how to apply them properly.

Student Success Center services are free for students of the RHEC educational member organizations. Members of the public may utilize these services for a fee.

Dr. Kimberly Mattson comes to RHEC motivated to apply her skills in project management to her role as Coordinator for the new Student Success Center. Mattson earned her PhD at Virginia Tech and has undergraduate and graduate degrees from Temple University and Michigan State University. Recognized for her work in science education and as a leader with community partners, she has an extensive background in designing, promoting, implementing, and evaluating education programs. She is looking forward to engaging with academic and community organizations in promoting opportunities at the new center.

RHEC plans to officially open the Student Success Center in the summer of 2022. For more information, contact rhecstudentsuccess@education.edu. 

“The Student Success Center is a place of optimism and expectation.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Executive Summary:
A new Student Success Center is coming to RHEC.

New plate, subtle difference

Friends of the Blue Ridge is “hoping to preserve the environmental beauty of the region, as well as the cultural uniqueness of the Blue Ridge area,” says Julie Whalen, executive director. The organization was known as Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway for 33 years; changing and shortening its name in 2021 to emphasize a new mission.

Current projects include raising funds for playgrounds (in Waynesboro, Explore Park, Hillsville) to hosting summer concert series at Explore Park.

“With the focus now on communities along the Blue Ridge Parkway, we have nine volunteer chapters in Virginia and North Carolina... looking for projects and partnerships to improve those communities.

Expanding the scope beyond the Parkway itself has “brought a new member and volunteer base to us that we didn’t have before,” Whalen says.

“For about ten years, we’ve had a specialty [license] plate; and it is an important revenue stream for us. We’re redesigning that plate, subtly, so that it is still recognizable and maintains that continuity. But we want to make sure the public is aware of the impact the funds have in their local communities.”

Whalen says the new plate should be ready soon, after the existing inventory is used.

The best way to connect to the organization, Whalen says, is at www.blueridgefriends.org. 

“” We have nine volunteer chapters in Virginia and North Carolina.



GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:

The popular license plate is about to change, because the organization changed.



www.cfwesternva.org

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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

*Your position
offends me.*

You do you

I've always supported the right for businesses and organizations to proclaim their allegiance to whomever they want; and yes, those with fickle customers should carefully consider doing so. I don't unfriend those who disagree with me; and I don't hesitate to walk right into a business with opposing viewpoints. Business owner/operators who post partisan signs and messages tend to be the ones who practice that in every election cycle; and I applaud their conviction - even when I might consider it just plain stupid, misinformed, or misdirected. Heck, there are people who won't support a local shop if it has a rival high school team mentioned on its signs. But the day we decide it's better to restrict our freedom of expression merely in the interest of not offending others is when we begin to erect even more fences between us. You never encourage dialogue, civil discourse, and open minded thinking by refusing business or association with those who don't believe exactly as you do.

You'd think that I, as a writer, would keep a journal, document my observations, store notes like a pack rat. I don't. Well, there's this exception (excerpt above). For some reason, it remained in my "draft" email folder; and I don't recall why. The dateline reveals it's from years' ago; so I can delete it now, since I drug it out for this commentary... because it somewhat fits our FRONTcover story.

I sure do hate to sound trendy with these words, but I truly am tired of the silencing and canceling and shaming that has crept into our social discourse lately. Sorry—invaded—not crept.

Social media platforms are policing posts. College campuses are disinventing speakers. Talk show hosts are punished or fired. Comedians are told not to cross the line. Public forums are turning disruptive if not violent. Every confrontation is considered victimizing and bullying.

I haven't seen this much finger-pointing since I was in first grade and the teacher asked the whole class who shot the spitball.

Rather than insisting that someone be forcibly silenced—because his position is clearly wrong—here are other tactics we might employ:

ignore—shake your head—don't patronize—disapprove—don't attend—give a bad review—move on—support a competitor—write a letter—request change—start your own thing—count to ten—vote for someone else—let it go—throw up (in your own toilet, with the door closed, please)

I hope you don't contact the publisher and insist that I be removed. Or shoot me with a spitball. 🍷

Don't blame extended unemployment benefits for bulk of worker shortage

Even with the fastest rate of growth for the US economy in 37 years announced recently for 2021, there are still labor shortages. A local career and job data "guru," has some answers. Deb Squire with Directions - Career Life Transitions says don't blame it on the extended unemployment benefits that expired more than five months ago: "there's like twenty different reasons why we have a worker shortage. [The public] is listening to the sound bites and think that's the only reason. Then we're solving the wrong problem."

Besides says Squire, (also last month's cover shoot subject), health insurance the unemployed must pay when out of work ate up some of those extended unemployment benefits. But she notes: "the extra unemployment gave some people a breather and maybe be a little more specific about what they were looking for that fits within their value system. We in the United States have a tendency to put people on the hamster wheel, and they just keep going and going. Sometimes they break and sometimes they make it through. That isn't the case in other countries."

Among the major reasons says Squire, "The Career Whisper," as to why labor shortages persist, quoting from a variety of labor data sources - more are self-employed, have chosen early retirement, are still impacted by COVID in some ways - and recent changes to immigration policies that have also depleted the labor pool. Not to mention about 400,000 workforce age Americans who have died from COVID and contributed to that shortage. Too-long lead times to hire and then trainer employees doesn't help matters. More than a million people were on disability due to the long term effects of COVID; an increase in home equity and 401k's also allowed some to be more selective before going back to work. "For people that think they can understand the dynamics of the workforce of today by themselves - they're probably missing some really great opportunities. It's exciting to help people [find those]."

There's also been an increase in workforce dropout due to childcare issues, caring for parents, variability of school attendance, death of spouse/family member, burnout, anxiety, stress, depression, uncertainty and other mental health issues. The unemployment rate for women is the highest since 1948.

Deb Squire referred to multiple diverse statistical reports including the US Bureau of Labor Statistics; Jobs Report, GDP Report, Household Index, McKinsey, Gallup, Reuters, Forbes, Harvard Business Review, Business Insider, Career Thought Leaders, and Squawk Box for her analysis. 



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

There's a myriad of reasons why many employers are desperate to hire more people

CONTRIBUTORS

Lori Baker-Lloyd is the Chief Advancement Officer at Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. She is a strategic leader whose career has focused on guiding people, processes and resources that align strategy to successful outcomes - bringing big ideas to life! Her community work focuses on strengthening and building bridges between individuals, groups and communities, and she currently serves as board member, volunteer and associate in a number of local organizations. Lori has a BBA in Marketing from Howard University and an MA in Strategic Communications and Leadership from Seton Hall University.

Beth Bell is the president of FemCity Roanoke, a 300-member business networking community for women. [Roanoke@femcity.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 FCCU provides local underwriting and personalized services that benefit a variety of individuals, operating businesses, and non-profit organizations.

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

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

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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]

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

Kevin Holt is a partner at Gentry Locke's Roanoke office where he has worked

since 1998. His specialty practice area is commercial, real estate, intellectual property, and ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act) litigation. He enjoys supporting and attending games of his two sports-active daughters and enjoys traveling (visiting 27 countries and 38 states).

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

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

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]

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@discover360Financial.com]

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

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

Letters

More tips

Editor:

I loved reading the stories of the career switchers and even knew a few of these folks. You can hear their energy and passion in their stories. Thanks for sharing a diversity of roles and also some of their “how to” steps on career switching. I am an executive coach and I have been overwhelmed in the past two years with the number of people wanting to talk about whether they are in the right profession, industry, role, region, etc. This is a period of great reflection and I would offer a few more tips.

1. Try to find a resource to help guide your thinking. Deb Squire suggested *What Color is My Parachute* which is great. I would also suggest reading *Living Forward* by Michael Hyatt and Daniel Harkavy.
2. Write down your skills, talents, interests and values. Look for patterns and see if you can build a career around the intersection of what you wrote down.

3. Network with interesting people and share your story and ask for feedback/suggestions on what you shared.
4. Find a good accountability partner—significant other, good friend, mentor or a coach.
5. Have patience, find joy in discovering what you care about and do not take yourself too seriously.

Thank you for all you do to provide interesting stories about our region. I also appreciated your feature story on Dr. N.L. Bishop. He is a great example of career switcher—police officer, hospital administrator, pastor, college president, healthcare executive. He is an even better mentor and person! Finally, N.L. is an example of someone that was able to recreate themselves inside of his company most of the time. Leaders—I would work hard to re-recruit your superstars and find ways to help them reach their desired outcomes. Keep up the great work!

Jeff Smith
Fortify Leadership Group

Send us your feedback in a letter with name and where you live – good or bad: news@vbfront.com

“ ”
I am prouder of my parents every day.

— Page 23

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FRONTReviews >

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



Goodpies adds to culinary scene

A first visit to Joe Goodpies at Vinyard Station in downtown Vinton, where a Ford Motors dealership was located for decades, did not disappoint. As the name suggests Brick Oven Pizzas are a specialty, with all sorts of toppings. My margherita pizza – tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella, Roma tomatoes and basil, on almost a flatbread-type crust was good; the gourmet burger my friend had looked pretty yummy. Homemade salads, wings and a host of other appetizers in the remade car dealership building that has a warm yet industrial feel made it worth the trip to Vinton. Give it a try and arrive hungry.

—Gene Marrano

Intrepid search for her roots

As a child Gayle Jessup White had long heard stories about her ancestral roots, from relatives like Aunt Peachie, who told her “You are descended from Thomas Jefferson ... but I’m not.” Wait-what? That began a four decade-long quest for Jessup White, who hit detours and dead ends in a race against time to track down people who might have recalled what they knew about the family’s ties to the country’s third President - and the enslaved Sally Hemmings, with whom Thomas Jefferson had a host of children.

Reclamation: Sally Hemmings, Thomas Jefferson and a Descendant’s Search for Her Family’s Lasting Legacy (Amistad/Harper Collins, 2021) is basically a true-life mystery as Jessup White - a former journalist/part

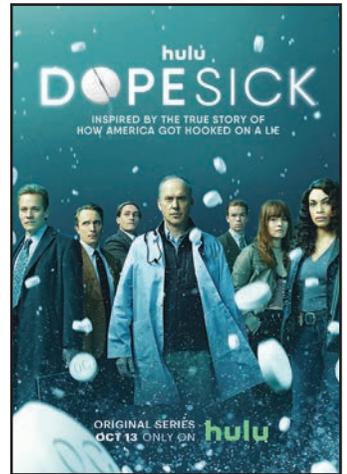
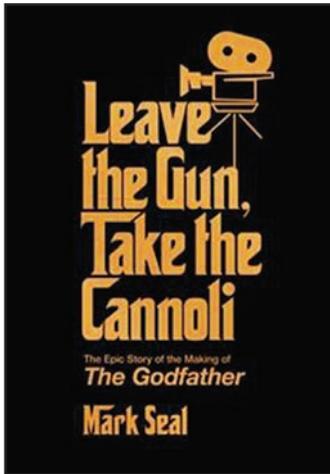
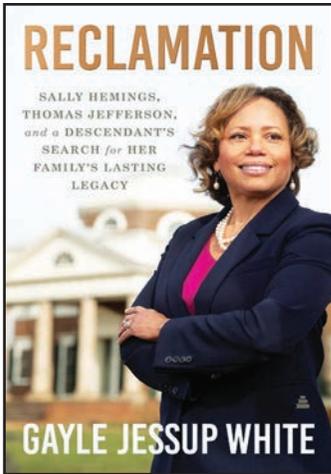
time actor who ironically now works as the Public Relations and Community Officer at Monticello, Jefferson’s estate, where he owned hundreds of slaves and had them sold after his death to pay down substantial debt. Gayle Jessup White is proud of her link to Jefferson but doesn’t let him off the hook for the paradox of having slaves while also being a principal mover behind the Constitution that proclaims, “All Men Are Created Equal.” Turns out she is also the great-great-great granddaughter of Peter Hemmings, Sally Hemmings brother.

—Gene Marrano

Blockbuster saves studio

Paramount Studios was on the ropes in the early 70’s for a string of box office bombs when it bought the rights to a novel by struggling author Mario Puzo. You may have heard of his book, *The Godfather*. What happened over the next few years - the struggle to tame a sprawling story, to cast it (studio head Robert Evans thought Al Pacino was too short and too unknown to play Michael Corleone), to keep Paramount from firing young director Francis Ford Coppola (who thought more than once he was his way out) is the stuff of legends and now a book, *Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli: The Epic Story of the Making of the Godfather* (Gallery Books, 2021) by Mark Seal.

It’s a fascinating tale of having to work with unions – and The Mob – in New York City to ensure spots for location shooting. In fact,



some lower-level mob members even have parts in *The Godfather*, which spawned two sequels and made Mario Puzo rich. He and Coppola made an odd couple but became fast friends. (They also agreed not to use the word “Mafia” in the movie.) The “leave the gun ...” line is one of the more quotable passages in the original *Godfather*, which broke box office records and revived Paramount when some at the studio predicted it would be just another bust. But the casting after many debates turned out to be spot on – including Marlon Brando as Don Corleone, despite the fact that he was just 47 at the time so they had to age him. (Brando is credited with initially stuffing his cheeks with tissues to create that jowly look.) If you are one of those movie buffs who can’t change the channel when happening to come upon *The Godfather* when surfing, *Leave the Gun, Take the Cannoli* will be in your wheelhouse.

—Gene Marrano

A poignant, local SOS

Better than hoisting a megaphone on Capitol Hill, Beth Macy has rallied up the fight against prescription drug improprieties. We’re all familiar with her blockbuster book; how does the television series compare? It’s a much different reception and eventual impact.

Dopesick (currently available on Hulu streaming service) is about the best way one can offer a perspective in a secondary channel. The audiences for the book versus

the show can be completely different, and likely they are. The book goes deep. In Macy’s investigative journalistic form, you better be prepared to be fully engaged. The show—well, it can just smack you in the face.

I initially found the show skewered a bit on the stereotype introductions. Rich = despicable and evil; Poor = good and exploited. No need for white and black cowboy hats here; the opposing characters are as plain as the stark background in the coalfields of Southwest Virginia. The pinnacle evil pharma godfather did everything a comic book would bring you but rub his hands together in dastardly fashion.

But I’m retracting that critique. TV-*Dopesick* is not a documentary; neither is it journalism. The extra layer of sensationalism is permissible here, because it’s intentionally judgmental as much as it is advocacy. It’s a compelling story; the acting is excellent (especially Dever, Keaton, Poulter, Dawson, and yes, even Stuhlbarg’s amplifications). Cinematically, there’s a mixture of moody photogenic scenery to almost soap-operatic stagings. In the end, you feel Macy’s and her subjects’ voices all screaming, “somebody has GOT to do something!” It’s powerful; and we are STILL watching fallout and news from Perdue Pharma and the Sackler family. Watch all eight episodes.

—Tom Field

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

You break, they fix >

Tech repair franchise **uBreakiFix** recently opened at the Roanoke Valley View Mall. uBreakiFix specializes in the same-day repair of personal electronics like smartphones, tablets and computers, a service in high demand with many still working from home and relying heavily on technology to connect with friends and family. uBreakiFix says they will actually repair anything with a power button - from drones and hoverboards to vintage arcade games and light-up Christmas sweaters. General manager **Kyle Mills** says they focus on smart phones, tablet and laptops. "It's almost always a better option to repair a device, because it's essentially a fraction of the cost as opposed to replacing it," notes Mills; "we do anything from screen repairs to small component replacement." Mills says the local franchisee plans to open up 6 more locations, including in Christiansburg and Harrisonburg. There are around 700 uBreakiFix outlets nationally he added.



Emory & Henry College Welcomes Inaugural Class of Nursing Students >



Ten **Emory & Henry College** students pledged a commitment to ethical and compassionate care during a White Coat ceremony held in January at the McGlothlin Center for the Arts in Emory. "This group of current students at E&H are among the first to enter the new pre-licensure BSN program," said Founding Dean for the School of Nursing **Laurie Anne Ferguson, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, FAANP**. "They have met the GPA and prerequisite course requirements, to be admitted to the nursing program." Graduates will be prepared to sit for the NCLEX-RN licensure exam to become Registered Nurses.

Support for local educators >

Roanoke-based **Blue Eagle Credit Union** employees fund a Teacher Grant program that, since inception in 2016, has awarded \$33,528 to local teachers. For the latest grant round 17 local teachers received a combined \$8,370 for classroom projects that will impact more than 3,200 students this academic year. Each fall, teachers in the greater Roanoke and Lynchburg areas are eligible to apply for a Teacher Grant up to \$500 to fund classroom projects. **Jeff Thompson** is the Blue Eagle Credit Union CEO: "education is foundational. Teachers have limited funds available to support an engaging classroom experience, and we want to help create learning experiences that enrich the lives of the students and teachers, and in turn, our community."



Cryptocurrency in Craig County >



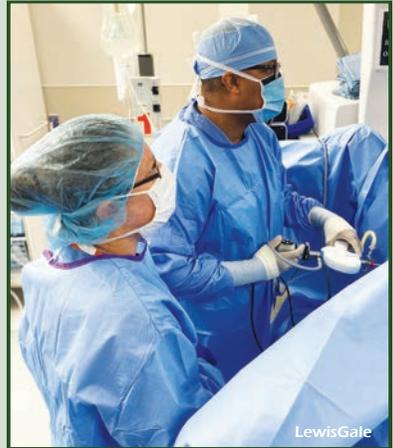
Submitted

Salem-based Congressman **Morgan Griffith** (R-VA) toured **Manifold Mining** in New Castle. The facility "mines" cryptocurrency and repairs computers used in mining. "Cryptocurrency is emerging as a valuable technology in today's economy," Griffith said following his January visit. "It is important for policymakers to understand this industry, be aware of the potential benefits it can bring to our local economy and know the demands it places on local infrastructure."

Another first says LewisGale >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem claims it is the first hospital in Roanoke Valley to offer a new treatment option for patients with Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH), a condition in which the prostate enlarges as men age. The outpatient procedure uses technology, known as UroLift®, to insert tiny implants to hold open the obstructed pathway that is blocking urine flow, eliminating the blockage instead of continuously treating enlarged prostate symptoms.

LewisGale says BPH affects nearly 40 million Americans and 500 million men worldwide. More than 40% of men in their 50s and more than 70% of men in their 60s have BPH.¹ BPH is a benign condition and unrelated to prostate cancer. **Dr. Christopher Starks**, MD, a urologist with LewisGale Physicians, performed the first procedure at LewisGale Medical Center: "this treatment has demonstrated a significant improvement in quality of life for men so they can resume daily activities."



LewisGale

Non-surgical knee treatment center opens >

Acute knee pain has sidelined many a weekend warrior and kept others off their feet as well. At the ribbon cutting for **Joint Regeneration** on 2nd Street Southwest in Roanoke last month, managing member **Nick Campagnoli** said their 5-shot regimen and subsequent platelet therapy will help restore fluidity in a knee and the damage from arthritis - without surgery: "what we tried to build here was an atmosphere that was more spa-like than medical. We want people to come in and be relaxed. What we do is virtually painless." Campagnoli says the treatment is covered by insurance and has been shown to last at least from 6 months to two years. Roanoke Vice Mayor **Trish White-Boyd** helped cut the ribbon, saying it's always good to have a new business open in the city, especially "in these trying times."



Ian Price

Quantum Leap for Tech? >

During the 2022 State of the University address at **Virginia Tech** in January one emphasis was the development of **Quantum Information**. Virginia Tech has been at the forefront of when it comes to Quantum research that can impact many things of critical importance. That's according to **Dr. Sophia Economou**, founding director of the new Virginia Tech Center for Quantum Information Science and Engineering: "in terms of cybersecurity, quantum information ... offers new approaches for secure communications. Medicine and other industries [can also employ it] for the design of new molecules, drugs and materials." The federal government has also established the Quantum Economic Development Consortium with a group of stakeholders including Virginia Tech, to continue working to enable and grow the U.S. quantum industry.



New home for VT construction programs >



Virginia Tech leaders and donors broke ground last month on Hitt Hall, a 100,000 square-foot facility that will house the **Myers-Lawson School of Construction**, additional dining capacity, and academic classroom/collaboration space. "This building is a tribute to what is possible when academia and industry collaborate to address the workforce needs of the 21st century, supported by generous

friends and alumni," Virginia Tech President **Tim Sands** said. The building is named in recognition of a lead gift by the Hitt family, which founded one of the nation's largest construction firms, HITT Contracting. Company CEO Kim Roy is a member of the Virginia Tech Class of 1999.

LewisGale rolls out new heart surgery procedure >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem now offers transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) service, a minimally invasive alternative to open heart surgery. Candidates for TAVR suffer from aortic stenosis, a serious valve problem in which the aortic valve opening narrows, restricting blood flow and affecting pressure in the heart. It replaces damaged aortic valves through a catheter, in contrast to open-heart surgery in which surgeons cut open the chest to expose the heart.

"The minimally invasive surgical procedure repairs the damaged aortic valve without removing the native valve, which causes less trauma to the heart and to the patient. The TAVR procedure allows for a mechanical replacement valve to be wedged within the patient's aortic valve to achieve a return to normal function," said interventional cardiologist **Dr. Owusu Asamoah**, who called it "a gamechanger," as well. "The addition of structural heart services like TAVR to our existing cardiac program will allow residents of Southwest Virginia to seek alternative treatment for aortic stenosis without traveling far from home," said **Michele Gillespie**, LewisGale Medical Center vice president of Cardiovascular Service Line.



RISE in Christiansburg >



The **RISE Dispensaries** Virginia ribbon cutting in Christiansburg took place last month. Christiansburg Mayor **Barber**, Christiansburg Town Council Member **Tim Wilson** and Town Manager **Randy Wingfield**, were among those who joined the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce Board and Ambassador Team, local business leaders, and others for the occasion. RISE Medical Marijuana Dispensary is located at 1675 Roanoke St in

Christiansburg. There is also a RISE cannabis dispensary on West Main Street in Salem.

Roanoke County announces Lowe's distribution facility >

The home improvement chain **Lowe's** will be building a new distribution center at Valley TechPark, the western Roanoke County industrial center near I-81. The \$11 million development deal includes a new 60,000 square foot warehouse, employing about 70 jobs once it is completed within the next year. It's taken several decades, but now Valley TechPark will be full once Lowe's – the fourth and final tenant moves in. Roanoke County Director of Economic Development **Jill Loope** on what's trending: "tons of new interest in warehousing and distribution projects due to internet [sales increases] and demand for products. They're trying to get closer to the consumer."

Roanoke-based **Cherney Development** will oversee construction. "We're on the cusp of great leaps in logistics and the delivery of consumer goods enabled by the roll-out of 5G and IOT [internet of things] technology," says **Jim Cherney**, Founder and CEO of Cherney Development. "To realize the full benefits this provides, we need physical infrastructure in place." The Lowe's Distribution center will serve the home improvement chain's customers in the region. "It's great news for the County," says Loope. Valley TechPark is also home to the Mack Trucks manufacturing plant that opened in 2020.



Courtesy Roanoke County

New home for orthodontics firm >



Real Life Ortho calls their services "a modern orthodontic experience." In late January they cut the ribbon on a new office in Blacksburg (on Sheffield Lane)

with help from the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and local dignitaries.

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

LEGAL FRONT



Cardwell

The Virginia Bar Association has installed **Victor O. Cardwell** as its 2022 president. He is co-chair of Woods Rogers PLC's labor and employment practice team as well as chairperson of the firm's board of directors. Cardwell is based in Roanoke and is the seventh Woods Rogers attorney to serve as president of the VBA and the first Black president of the membership organization formed for lawyers and judges in 1888. Cardwell will also appoint members to a new committee of the VBA, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, which his predecessor Richard Ottinger established

in 2021. (see story on page ?? in this issue)

FINANCIAL FRONT



Wilkes

Scott Insurance has appointed **Jack Wilkes** as a Benefits Consultant in its Roanoke office. As a Benefits Consultant, he serves mid-market employers consulting on health and welfare programs, with a specific focus on funding, pharmacy carve-out, employee benefit captives and plan design. Prior to joining Scott, Wilkes served in on-site management and project roles at Carpi USA. Wilkes received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Richmond where he was an All-American Scholar.

TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



Dorsett



Gardner

Elizabeth Dorsett has joined Citizens Telephone Cooperative (dba Citizens) as a business development account manager. With more than 20 years as a seasoned sales professional, she will serve clients with Citizen's personalized and customized business solutions for networks and telephone systems, including VoIP digital phone service; bulk and hospitality TV packages, web and email hosting, and Internet connectivity.

She joins **Joy Gardner**, another 20+ year veteran, to lead the business development team.



Young

Torc Robotics, an independent subsidiary of Daimler Truck AG based in Blacksburg, has named **Marnie Young** as Chief People Officer. She will lead People Operations, Human Resources, Talent Acquisition, Benefits, and Compensation. Young is the former vice president of human resources for Luna Innovations and for GE Digital. She brings more than 25 years of experience in a variety of people optimization, management, and engagement roles to Torc, where she joins an executive team focused on commercializing

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DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Sowder

Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer has announced that **Dorothy Sowder** has joined the Roanoke office as Client Coordinator. Sowder has 20 years of experience as an executive administrator in the Roanoke area. She will be responsible for assisting both the commercial brokerage and property services teams.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT

The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) has named **Josh Meyer** as its director

Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to news@vbFRONT.com

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



Meyer

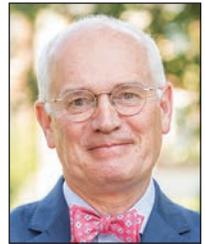
of communications. A Virginia Tech alum, Meyer joins VTCSOM after more than two decades of experience in higher education communications and journalism. He was recently at Virginia Western Community College as the director of marketing and strategic communications for nearly 11 years.



Hinton

Hollins University President **Mary Dana Hinton** has been elected chair of the American Association of Colleges and Universities Board of Directors.

Michael C. Maxey, president of Roanoke College, has been elected chair of the Board of Directors of the Council of



Maxey

Independent Colleges. The CIC, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is an association of 760 nonprofit independent colleges and universities, state-based councils of independent colleges, and other higher education affiliates. Goals are to support independent college and university leadership, advance institutional excellence,



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and enhance public understanding of independent higher education's contributions to society. Maxey joined the CIC Board in January 2018 and was named vice chair for programs in 2021. He plans to retire as the President of Roanoke College at the end of the current academic year.



Folmar

Rebecca Folmar has joined Virginia Tech as director of risk management and insurance programs within the Division of Finance. She will also serve as university liaison with the Commonwealth of Virginia Division of Risk Management and participate in various university governance and committee activities. Most recently, Folmar served as director of

risk management at Southern Methodist University. She previously worked in a risk management role with Planet Fitness Inc. before beginning her career in higher education.



Pitts

Kevin Pitts, currently the chief research officer at Fermilab National Accelerator Laboratory and a professor of physics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has been named the next dean of the Virginia Tech College of Science. Pitts will assume his new role June 13, taking over from Ron Fricker, who has served as interim dean since January 2021. Pitts will also be a professor in the College of Science Department of Physics.

LOCAL FRONT

The Salem Red Sox, the Low-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox, have announced four front office promotions as the team prepares for the 2022 season.

Blair Hoke has been promoted to Assistant General Manager and will continue to serve as the Vice President of Ticket Sales & Services. Prior to joining the Salem Red Sox, Hoke served as General Manager of the Pulaski Yankees and was the recipient of the 2017 Appalachian League Executive of the Year award. **Lior Bittan** has been promoted to Senior Ticket Operations and Analytics Manager. He began his career with the Salem Red Sox in 2019 as Ticket Operations Assistant and was promoted to Ticket Operations Manager in 2020.

Kayla Keegan has been promoted to Merchandise and Special Events Director, formerly

Manager. She began her career in the sports industry with the Washington Football Team and lead the charge of setting an all-time high in Merchandising revenue in 2021. **Payton Powell** has been promoted to Ticket Sales Manager, previously Ticket Sales and Service Account Executive. 2022 marks Powell's second season with the Red Sox. After graduating from Roanoke College in 2018, she began her career in sports as an Inside Sales Executive with the LA Clippers and transitioned to a sales and service role with the Phoenix Suns.

NON-PROFIT FRONT

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, based in Roanoke, has appointed **Hunter French** as Vice President of Information Technology Security. French is responsible for developing, implementing, and

It's what happens inside.

ROANOKE HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER



French

monitoring a strategic, comprehensive enterprise cybersecurity and IT risk management program. French had most recently been with BDO USA, LLP. He was formerly at Medical Facilities of America as a Director of Technical Services and Support and worked for two school districts in Pennsylvania.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Campbell

Governor Glenn Youngkin has appointed **Greg**

Campbell as the Director of the Virginia Department of Aviation (DOAV). His first day at the agency – based at Richmond International Airport – was on February 14. Campbell has served as Executive Director of the Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport (SHD) since 1992. As SHD's Executive Director, Campbell promoted commercial air service for the Shenandoah Valley; led the Airport Commission's 25 employees; and oversaw all aspects of business and air service development, marketing, operations, public safety, finance, planning and capital improvements.



Owens

Roanoke County has appointed **Rebecca E. Owens** as Deputy County Administrator



Blount

and **Doug M. Blount** as Assistant County Administrator. "Rebecca and Doug each bring unique skill sets to our organization and share a commitment to serving our community," said Richard Caywood, who became County

Administrator last month after succeeding the retiring Dan O'Donnell. Owens was appointed Assistant County Administrator in 2019 and previously served as Roanoke County's Director of Finance. Blount began his service with Roanoke County in 2011. He has served as the County's Director of Parks, Recreation & Tourism and General Services departments.

Compiled by Gene Marrano

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New VTC building is eco-friendly

The new Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC wing recently achieved Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification, deeming the structure a model for sustainable architecture. The recognition by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) adds the 139,000-square-foot building at 4 Riverside Circle on the Health Sciences and Technology campus in Roanoke to a growing number of LEED certified Virginia Tech buildings.

Roanoke City, Credit Union team up for loan program

In response to the economic hardships experienced by microbusinesses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, The City of Roanoke, in partnership with Freedom First, is launching a small business relief grant program utilizing the Community Development Block Grant - Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) federal funding. The grant program was created in response to businesses that are at-risk of closing or laying off employees due to COVID-19.

To be eligible to receive a CDBG-CV Small Business Relief Grant, the business must be a for-profit small business in the City that will create and/or retain jobs for low-to-moderate income people in our region. The grants can be used to pay for a limited scope of expenses, such

as working capital such as wages, utilities, rent, etc.; costs to comply with COVID-19 related CDC standards; and other costs that will enable the business to reopen (as outlined in the program qualifications). Applications and further details can be found at www.freedomfirst.com/small-business-relief-grant. Completed applications and program questions should be emailed to ffe@freedomfirst.com by 4 p.m. on June 1 or when funds are exhausted.

Governor wants lab schools

Governor Glenn Youngkin signed a partnership agreement with colleges and universities from across the Commonwealth in January to establish K-12 lab schools. "Education is the gateway to opportunity. Reestablishing expectations of excellence, funding in the largest education budget, investing in teachers, special education, and localities to invest in facilities," said Youngkin.

Grant for VT's Cyber Institute

Virginia Tech has received a \$2.8 million grant from the Department of Defense to continue developing the Department of Defense (DoD) Senior Military College Cyber Institute (SMC21), in its second year at Virginia Tech. This grant builds upon the \$1.5 million grant awarded in January 2021 that aims to prepare civilians to work in the

DoD cybersecurity workforce and related professional roles. The SMC21 is aimed at equipping undergraduate students with skills and experience necessary to work in the DoD cyber workforce, while also addressing the Commonwealth of Virginia's shortage of qualified cyber professionals.

Cultural Institutions get a boost

25 Arts Organizations and Institutions in Virginia have received \$460,000 in grants awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Among them: Bent Mountain Center \$10,000; City of Roanoke, Virginia \$25,000 for Arts Projects; Opera Roanoke \$15,000; Taubman Museum of Art \$10,000.

State of BoCo "very good"

Business expansion, universal broadband coverage by 2024 and improving lines of communication with residents - those were several of the topics discussed during late January's State of the County Address in Botetourt County. The pipeline "is full of opportunities" to attract more businesses says County Administrator Gary Larrow: "we would love to be able to come back here next year and say that we had win, win, win. And we will, is what I predict. But before we get to that we have to be prepared, prepared, prepared." Dr. Richard Bailey, chair for the

Board of Supervisors said that "the State of the County is very good," despite the pandemic's impact in 2021. Bailey also noted that the new Munters air treatment manufacturing plant should be open by this summer.

Car Wash comeback

Thomas Holdings, LLC has purchased the 1.50-acre lot at 950 Orange Avenue in Roanoke, formerly Southern Classic Auto Wash. That long time business closed in January 2021, following significant damage caused by a landslide and subsequent condemnation by the City of Roanoke. No one was injured as a result of the landslide, but Southern Classic Auto Wash has remained closed since the incident. Thomas Holdings, LLC plans to demolish the existing building and redevelop the property with a brand-new car wash facility, equipped with modern technology and state-of-the-art improvements. Exact timing for the project is still being finalized.

New media outlet for Black Dog – a podcast

Known for their humorous, family-friendly banter, and passion for saving architectural history from the landfill, Black Dog Salvage's Mike Whiteside, Robert Kulp, and Tay Whiteside talk with leading experts, celebrities, and personalities about the Architectural Salvage, Maker and Creator worlds in their new podcast

series. They will also share a weekly "Top Tip" on turning trash at home into treasure. Each podcast episode will also go behind-the-scenes of a "Salvage Dawgs" episode (its long cable TV run ended in 2020 but is still available online). "Our salvage projects have introduced us to some of the most interesting people in the maker and creator world," said Robert Kulp. "It's great to share those experiences to an expanded podcast audience."

"It is so great working with Tay and sharing his creative vision for turning old relics into re-purposed treasures you can design a space around," said

Mike Whiteside (Tay is his son, whose Lift Arc studio was profiled previously in VBF). "The podcast is just another way we can share these important trades with a new generation." Black Dog Salvage Podcast is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, Google Podcasts, Overcast Radio and Podcast Addict. Episodes can also be viewed on the Black Dog YouTube channel.

Delta Dental steps up for better oral health

The Delta Dental of Virginia Foundation has awarded \$576,000 in grants statewide to "safety net providers" focused

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on oral health needs. In this region Bradley Free Clinic will further enhance a relationship with the VCU School of Dentistry students who provide services at the clinic. Polly Raible is executive director for the Foundation: "many of the families that our safety net clinics serve have lots of different barriers to overall health.

Oral care is generally one of them. Not only are they improving their overall health, they're improving the confidence that people have in their ability to go to work [and] get a job." CHIP of Roanoke Valley - the Child Health Investment Partnership - will use its \$85,000 Delta Dental grant for its home visit program, and to



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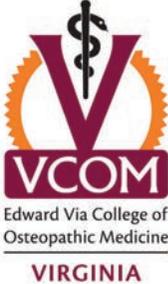
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expand access to Spanish-speaking families.

CHIP Chief Operating Officer Autumn Lavering says it will also target the caregivers of children their program serves, since often they don't have dental coverage, do not yet qualify for Medicaid – and don't have insurance in many cases. "It's for any of our enrolled CHIP families – parents, sometimes its grandparents that are taking care of the children. Whomever is that caregiver is entitled to this benefit." Lavering says a caregiver who is managing their oral own health can also set an example for the children they are with. Grant partner New Horizons Healthcare will take care of the actual dental work. Delta Dental of Virginia is based in Roanoke County.

From Star City to Music City on Allegiant

Allegiant Air is adding new low fare, non-stop seasonal flights and a new destination from Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport (ROA). Allegiant Air will fly from to and from ROA to Nashville International Airport (BNA) in a new service that starts on April 21 and operates on Thursdays and Sundays through August 14, "perfect for travelers to spend a weekend in Music City or the Star City," according to an airport news release. Mike Stewart is executive director for ROA: "when you want to add more flights you fill up the ones

you have [first]. These airlines are in business to make money and that's what it's all about. We've got to show them that we appreciate their confidence in the community and go out and support [them]." It's the first new Allegiant service out of Roanoke since it launched in 2006 with low-cost fares to Florida.

North Cross recognized for expanding female student access to Computer Science

North Cross School in Roanoke County has again been recognized for a commitment to expanding young women's access to Computer Science education through its Advanced Placement coursework. The College Board AP[®] Computer Science Female Diversity Award recognizes schools that are closing the gender gap and expanding young women's access to computer science coursework in AP Computer Science Principles (AP CSP) and AP Computer Science A (AP CSA). Specifically, schools that have either reached 50% or higher female examinee representation in one of or both AP computer science courses, or whose percentage of the female examinees met or exceeded that of the school's female population. Research shows that female students who take AP computer science are more likely to major in computer science in college compared to

female students of similar background and academic preparation who didn't take AP computer science courses.

PitchPlus program gets Truist grant

Valleys Innovation Council, an affiliate of the Verge consortium created last year has received a \$200,000 grant from Truist Foundation, an arm of the banking giant Truist Financial Foundation. It will be used to develop educational program and other support structures to help regional entrepreneurs understand the fundamentals of angel and capital finance, building connections to sources of capital. "This Truist grant will allow Verge and our partner organizations [the RAMP incubator and the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council] to help entrepreneurs and high-growth potential startups ... to successfully grow their companies," said Greg Feldmann, the now-former Verge CEO. Project partners including Blue Ridge PBS, creative firm Eddy Alexander, the RBTC and the Appalachian Council for Innovation will help develop those educational tools.

Time to Thrive says Regional Partnership

A major fundraising effort is underway to help the Roanoke region attract new and high-paying employers, along with the resulting jobs and economic development. The Roanoke Regional

Partnership is leading the "Thrive 2027" campaign, which they rolled out last month at the start of a fundraising campaign public phase. Paul Nester of RGC Resources is one of its co-chairs: "we've seen some of the large announcements in recent weeks and months that have gone to neighboring states. It's so important that we as a region and a state remain competitive." Thrive 2027 seeks to fund initiatives like preparing potential business sites in advance and reaching companies to expand or relocate. It had already raised \$2.8 million by mid-February in the quiet phase, with a final goal of \$3.6 million.

Partnership Executive Director John Hull says it is necessary to reach out to a prospect in advance and learn what it needs: "we connect those requirements with the correct real estate, as well as workforce programs and resources, to make their entry into the market a success." Economic growth/innovation, Talent attraction/workforce development, Commercial real estate/infrastructure and placemaking/livability were identified as Thrive 2027 key indicators by the Roanoke Regional Partnership after an outside analysis that included surveys, focus groups and stakeholder meetings. Diversity and inclusion will also help the area reach its full potential according to the Partnership.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*

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Virginia Tech scientists led by Carla Finkelstein (right), test samples for the virus that causes COVID-19 at the Molecular Diagnostics Lab at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute in Roanoke. The university converted the lab from its intended research purposes to provide COVID-19 testing for health departments throughout Virginia, demonstrating the resilience lab space brings to surrounding communities.

CoLABoration

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

A “little group of revolutionaries” has come together to create a long-awaited collaborative laboratory project in our area.

According to Brett Malone, President and CEO of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (VTCRC), new facilities will help meet a need for flexible wet/dry lab space for small- to early-stage companies, which can make starting and building a biotech company a little bit easier.

The VTCRC – with grant funding from GO Virginia – will lead a coalition (see sidebar) to support the development of a shared lab facility in Blacksburg and site design for a larger facility in Roanoke aimed at supporting the region’s growing life science industry.

“There is zero such [shared] lab space capacity and a backlog of companies asking for it,” said Malone.

Greg Feldmann is the now-past CEO of another coalition member, Verge, which is a collaborative strategic alliance established to grow the region’s innovation economy, technology, and life sciences sectors. He said in a December interview with FRONT Editor Gene Marrano that a Verge report showed one of the top needs identified to advance the health and life science cluster that is emerging in this region is access to wet and dry lab space as well as office



Brett Malone, CoGro Labs

space, where spinoff or “spin-up” companies can incubate and operate.

“We really lack that in this area,” Feldmann said. “And studies show if you want health and life science companies not only to grow from here but also get attracted to this area, having these kinds of facilities available is critically important.”

Michael Friedlander, executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (FBRI) and Vice President for Health Sciences and Technology at Virginia Tech, has been in Roanoke for 11 years and has been talking about such lab space the whole time.

He emphasized that such space is important to the emerging biotechnology corridor in the Roanoke and New River valleys, saying it will be both a “keeper” and “attractor” of talent. A keeper in that researchers won’t have to leave the area to move their companies forward, and an attractor in that it will bring people here.

Friedlander explained the relevance: As state employees, Virginia Tech researchers on the health sciences campus in Roanoke are subject to the rules and regulations of any state employee. Research done in its labs becomes part of the university. When researchers make discoveries and want to take them into the “real world,” they are not allowed to use facilities of the state for private

WHAT'S A WET LAB? OR A DRY ONE?

A wet lab is one where drugs, chemicals, and other types of biological matter can be analyzed and tested by using various liquids. Activities include tissue culture, pathology, cell biology, molecular biology, organic chemistry, and physical chemistry.

On the other hand, a dry lab environment focuses more on applied or computational mathematical analyses via the creation of computer-generated models or simulations. With a dry lab, you can complete the analysis of the product before starting full development.

(www.universitylabpartners.org)

business ventures. So, if the researchers want to commercialize, they need other types of spaces.

In the past, Malone said labs were built on demand to the specifications of a company, which was quite expensive. This project, by contrast, is an affordable shared lab concept.



Clayton Metz-Virginia Tech

Michael Friedlander, the vice president for health sciences and technology at Virginia Tech and executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, was among the leaders of Roanoke’s transformation from “train town to brain town” over the past decade.



Submitted

Niesha Savory is an undergraduate Virginia Tech researcher studying the mechanisms of memory in the lab of Shannon Farris, assistant professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute. Savory recently won an award from the National Institute of Mental Health to support her research.

A start-up company can rent a lab or just a bench.

“We want to make the CRC more accessible,” he said, noting that there is no product like this within a 200-mile radius. “We want to make it easy for these companies to get started and grow quickly.”

According to a December press release by then-Gov Ralph Northam’s office announcing the initiative, called Project Eagle+, many of these companies are spinoffs from Virginia Tech and/or alumni of the Regional Accelerator & Mentoring Program (RAMP).

Feldmann notes that, “RAMP graduates that spin up out of Fralin Biomedical Research Institute cite the lack of these types of facilities as a limitation for their ability to continue to spin up commercial enterprises.”

Malone said there are two components to the project. One is physical, which involves the VTCRC creating affordable and accessible labs for small companies. VTCRC’s program – COgro LABS – is designed with 25 lab spaces. It is being housed in an existing building which is being renovated, and it will be across the hall from the COgro shared workspace at the VTCRC (see FRONT, January

2020). Malone said they learned a lot from that launch which is applicable to the new facilities, such as how to manage membership.

What they also learned about shared space, he said, is that “people love it.”

The VTCRC is currently pre-leasing COgro LAB space. There was a waiting list of nine companies before pre-leasing even started. No specific qualifications are necessary; anybody can become a member of the shared lab space. The idea is for companies to “gain traction,” said Malone, and “graduate to their own larger facilities.”

There will also be a bigger lab in Roanoke. Malone said it is too early to disclose its location, but he hinted that it would be as close as possible to the existing innovation corridor. The experiences in Roanoke and Blacksburg are intended to be “very similar in branding and feel.” One membership will grant access to both locations.

The second component Malone mentioned is a new collaboration established between VTCRC and Johnson & Johnson LLC, which will provide early-stage innovators in the region with access to a virtual residency program which includes expert mentoring,



Rob Gourdie

THE COALITION MEMBERS

- Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center
- Montgomery County
- City of Roanoke
- Carilion Clinic
- Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC
- Verge
- Virginia Bio
- Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- Town of Blacksburg
- Virginia Tech Foundation
- EDC
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programming, and resources offered through Johnson & Johnson Innovation – JLABS (JLABS). JLABS, the global incubator network of Johnson & Johnson Innovation, was established to connect budding life science and healthcare startups to critical resources, mentorship, and the community.

Malone said that in 2020 Johnson & Johnson Innovations made over \$500 million in investments in innovation-based companies globally, and those companies had an 88% success rate.

This education and programming complement the VTCRC's physical contribution to the project. In essence, the VTCRC builds the labs and Johnson & Johnson educates the companies in how to be successful.

In the first year of the collaboration, five companies will be selected for participation by a joint committee consisting of leadership from JLABS and the VTCRC.

"We hope to announce soon when these will be available," said Melissa Vidmar, Marketing & Communications Manager for the VTCRC.

Friedlander also touted the "growing connection" between entities here and JLABS, even though there is not a JLABS facility locally. In Washington, D. C., for example, Virginia Tech does pediatric brain

cancer research in the same building as JLABS at the Children's National Research and Innovation Campus.

"The JLABS people are excited about the growing partnership with Virginia Tech," he said.

A spinoff from the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute is Tiny Cargo Co., one of four startups in RAMP's 2021 Health and Life Sciences Cohort. Tiny Cargo is a biotech company founded by Rob Gourdie, a professor and researcher at FBRI. It was among five companies to receive a Washington, D.C., Health Innovation QuickFire Challenge prize. The pitch contest awarded the company \$50,000, the opportunity to reside at JLABS @ Washington, D.C., with access to a bench, workstation, and community for one year, and mentorship from experts at the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies.

"Our experience has been very positive so far," Gourdie said. Not only does JLABS provide mentoring by someone in a similar field, but it puts companies in touch with funding agencies for grants and contracts. "You can't do this by yourself," Gourdie said. "JLABS is active in trying to help."

The \$50,000 in grant funding will help the biotech startup continue to develop its novel drug delivery method – hardy nano-sized



Paras Patel focuses on proteins that regulate the size and shape of the brain. A researcher at Virginia Tech's Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, his aim is to help children born with developmental diseases.

capsules derived from cow's milk. "It will be helpful to the company as we attempt to strengthen our intellectual property position," Gourdie said.

He added that having space is "just part of it." Training biotech talent at Virginia Tech, building infrastructure such as legal intellectual property support, and having access to venture capital are all important.

"It's great to see such structure being seeded and grown here," Gourdie said.

One challenge moving forward is locating appropriate space, Friedlander said. It must meet ventilation and safety protocols, for instance. This places greater demands on buildings and costs much more than typical office space. So, having the right financial mechanisms in place is crucial.

The other piece is recruiting tenants. "If you build it, will they come? It's a bit of a gamble," said Friedlander, noting that the "hit rate" in biosciences is "reasonably low." Picking the right tenants and supporting them are they keys, he said.

Friedlander is excited about researchers turning discoveries into products that can help people, and also helping the local economy and bringing "vibrancy to the area."

Malone said that the Blacksburg lab project,

projected to open October 1, 2022, is expected to create 125 high-paying biotechnology jobs. According to a Cardinal News piece by Erin Burcham (Verge), Marc Nelson (City of Roanoke), and Malone, the Roanoke project could be reality in less than 24 months and would result in 250 jobs and more than \$21 million in wages over the next five years.

Asked what types of start-ups the lab project is targeting, Malone said, "the sky is the limit." He mentioned great potential in diagnostics companies, health technology innovation, and regenerative medicine. Specific examples include 3D printing of cell structures such as kidneys, and monitoring diabetes patients through 5G networks.

"We will market it hard, but we don't have to sell it hard," said Malone. "Once the word is out, the product sells itself."

Malone continued, "What we need as a region is talent and early startups." He wants to ensure people know that if they want to start a company they will have a place, encouraging them to take the leap with this "huge safety net."

In support of emerging innovation, said Malone, "we want to bring a world-class experience to southwest Virginia." 

See www.cogrolabs.com for more information or for membership details.

Milk & Lasers

What does a Blacksburg technology company that's raised over \$600,000 on Kickstarter have in common with a Roanoke lab developing a drug-delivery device from milk?

Both have received vital startup help from RAMP, the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program serving southwest Virginia.

Founded in 2016, RAMP has mentored 31 companies that today employ more than 600 people and sell products and services in all 50 states, plus overseas.

"Supporting our entrepreneurs is critical for the future well-being of our communities," says RAMP director Dr. Mary Guy Miller, "and it is lasting economic development."

RAMP is headquartered in Roanoke's Gill Memorial Building on Jefferson Street where it hosts two cohorts per year (spring cohort focuses on health science and life science ventures, fall cohort assists technology startups) in which up to six companies receive:

- Expert 1:1 mentoring with the region's top entrepreneurs and executives
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- Access to venture capital
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- 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.



In 2020, Martin Angst and Kaelum Hasler's company, Rendyr, was accepted into the RAMP program. They had designed a portable laser cutting and engraving device and needed guidance in creating a business around it.

"RAMP provided us with the mentorship, resources and network we needed to prepare for our product launch and take on funding," they said. "The attentiveness to the startup's individual needs makes RAMP invaluable."

In late January 2022, Rendyr launched on Kickstarter with a \$50,000 goal. Two weeks into the campaign, Rendyr had raised \$623,576.



In spring 2021, Dr. Robert Gourdie and Spencer Marsh, working out of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute lab, were accepted into RAMP's Health and Life Sciences Cohort. They had founded Tiny Cargo, a startup that extracts exosomes from milk to serve as drug-delivery devices for people suffering from heart disease.

Since then Tiny Cargo has been tapped as one of five companies nationwide for a \$50,000 Washington, D.C. Health Innovation QuickFire Challenge award, which includes the opportunity to work out of Johnson & Johnson's JLABS for a year. And Gourdie's lab has received a prestigious National Institute of Health NHLBI R35 Outstanding Investigator grant that provides up to seven years of continuous support and up to \$700,000 a year.

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

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Housing cases have shot up 70 percent or more in the COVID era.

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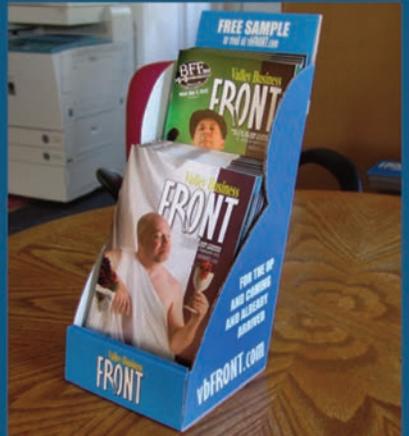
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