

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 164

MAY 2022

Southern Trust
Home Services

Urgent Care

Wisler Plumbing & Air

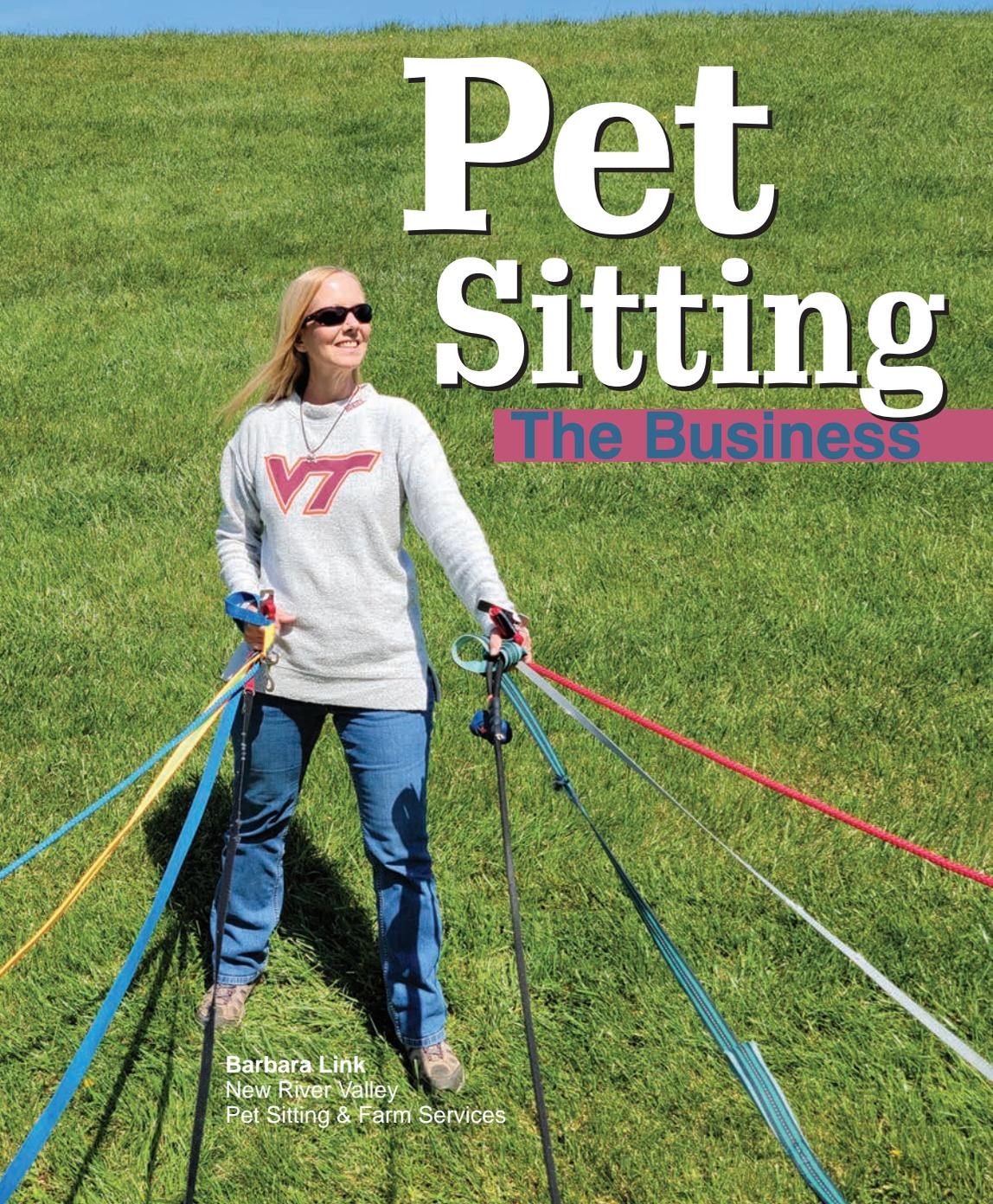
Floyd County's
Soup Lady

RHEC Space

vbFRONT.com

Pet Sitting

The Business

A woman with blonde hair, wearing sunglasses, a grey sweatshirt with a red 'VT' logo, and blue jeans, stands in a lush green field. She is holding several colorful leashes (blue, yellow, red, white) attached to black poles. The background is a vast, rolling green hill under a clear blue sky.

Barbara Link
New River Valley
Pet Sitting & Farm Services



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Service industries come in all shapes, sizes and varieties. Many were hit hard during the pandemic – either forced out of business or coming close. Or on the other hand, like the urgent care centers new contributing writer Holly Marrow describes, overburdened at times by the line at the door. Other service industries are having a hard time finding enough skilled tradespeople, certainly not a new problem, but often worse these days in the aftermath of The Great Resignation.

But on a lighter note, some walk your pets or serve homemade soup. Read all about it in this issue. A great column also from Wellness column writer Valarie Angle, who relays her own issues with a brick-and-mortar experience, offering good advice to others. Here's to a great summer. Get outdoors when you can. Happy Reading.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

““

She was even asked to milk cows.

— Page 10

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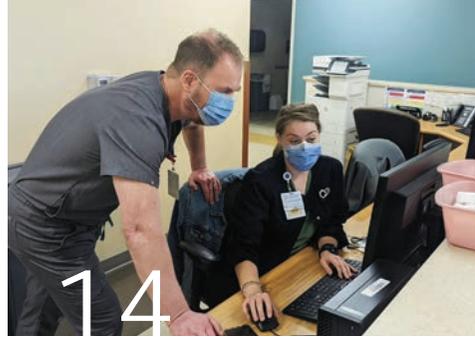
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“ ”
1099 workers need
to track things. — Page 21

COVER STORY PAGE 8

(Fur) Baby-sitting

By Jennifer Poff Cooper





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Staff

Publisher / Creative Director	Tom Field tfield@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945
Editor	Gene Marrano news@vbFRONT.com
Advertising	Dan Dowdy (540) 797-7943 ddowdy@vbFRONT.com ads@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945
Graphic Design	Nicholas Vaassen nvaassen@berryfield.com
Office Administration	Emily Field info@vbFRONT.com
Production	Berryfield, Inc. PO Box 1041 Salem, VA 24153 (540) 389-9945

Departmental Contacts

Advertising	ads@vbFRONT.com
Subscriptions	info@vbFRONT.com
News / Releases	news@vbFRONT.com
Admin / Ops	info@vbFRONT.com

(540) 389-9945
vbFRONT.com
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Valarie Angle



Jennifer Poff Cooper



William Hall



Jennifer Leake



Michael Shelton



Dan Smith

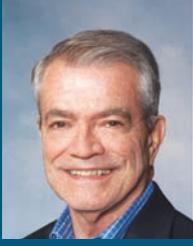
Advisory Board

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



Shannon Dominguez



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Mike Leigh



Gene Marrano



Holly Marrow



Nicholas Vaassen



Neal Cummings
Freedom First Credit Union /
finance - credit unions



Michelle Darby
Goodwill Industries of the Valleys /
community service



Christopher Finley
LewisGale /
healthcare



Micah Fraim
Fraim & Cawley CPAs /
finance - accounting



Kevin Holt
Gentry Locke /
legal



Jeff Merritt
Cox Communications /
technology



Mary Ann L. Miller
Bank of Boletourt /
finance - banking



Michael Waldvogel
Waldvogel Commercial Properties /
commercial real estate

“Chicken liver pate in Italy made this vegetarian re-think her meat ban.

— Page 61

“He stinks.

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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 42.

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Photos: NRV Pet Sitting & Farm Services

(Fur) Baby-sitting

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Seventy percent of U.S. households, or about 90.5 million families, own a pet, according to the 2021-2022 National Pet Owners Survey conducted by the American Pet Products Association (APPA).

With that comes the constant responsibility of caring for the pets, even if owners cannot be home 24/7. That's where the burgeoning business of pet sitting comes in, with myriad options.



NRV Pet Sitting & Farm Services

Jordan Kelly

According to Barbara Link, owner of New River Valley Pet Sitting & Farm Services, LLC, pet sitting is becoming more recognized as a professional service.

She began pet sitting as a young Virginia Tech graduate with an animal science degree. After almost 30 years in the corporate world, she started pet sitting again as a side gig, sometimes leaving her home at 5 a.m. and not returning until late in the evening. It was hard work, but what she learned was that there was a demand for pet sitting services. "The market was receptive," she said.

So after a year, in 2018, she invested in pet sitting professionally by becoming a LLC. Using word of mouth and free Facebook posts, she built up the business and was finally ready to leave her day job. Then, six weeks after she hired her first employee, COVID hit. With clients staying home, her bookings dried up. One client who

NATIONAL PET STATS

70% of U.S. households own a pet, which equates to 90.5 million homes.
(In 1988, the first year the survey was conducted, 56% of U.S. households owned a pet.)

Number of U.S. Households that Own a Pet (millions)

Bird	9.9
Cat	45.3
Dog	69.0
Horse	3.5
Freshwater Fish	11.8
Saltwater Fish	2.9
Reptile	5.7
Small Animal	6.2

Pet Ownership by Generation

(% of Current Pet Owners)

Gen Z	14%
Millennial	32%
Gen X	24%
Baby Boomer	27%
Builder	3%



Average Amount Spent by Dog and Cat Owners in the Past 12 Months

	Dogs	Cats
Surgical Vet Visits	\$458	\$201
Routine Vet	\$242	\$178
Food	\$287	\$254
Food Treats	\$81	\$72
Kennel Boarding	\$228	\$78
Vitamins	\$81	\$47
Grooming aids/brushes	\$47	\$31
Toys	\$56	\$41



**Note: APPA does not ask Survey Participants how much in total they spend on their dog or cats annually. The expenses listed above are not all inclusive and each category was asked separately of the survey participant.

SOURCES: American Pet Products Association; 2021 APPA National Pet Owners Survey

had to travel even during COVID “kept me going.”

Link made a “little profit” in 2020 and then tripled her gross income in 2021. Today, she has five employees, with plans to hire numbers six and seven to handle the summer rush.

Other investments she has made include liability insurance, workman’s comp insurance, employee background checks and bonding, and a business license where required. She also joined Pet Sitters International, a professional organization that provides educational opportunities for Link and her employees. They are all Red Cross pet first aid certified. Link said she learns a



Barbara Link, owner of New River Valley Pet Sitting & Farm Services, LLC, plays out as our FRONTcover model. And “plays” is the correct description, because she says she doesn’t really recommend walking that many dogs at the same time—the scene is just for fun. But it does represent the need and market opportunity, she admits. To be profitable (which her business is now) takes way more effort, time, energy, and sacrifice; though many people think of dog-sitting as a simple little side gig. Barbara’s business is well-structured, bonded, and staffed by committed and trained professionals. Services include new client meet-and-greets, dog walking, at home dog and cat sitting, small animal, aquarium, and reptile care, pet transport and supplies pickup.



lot through Facebook groups of other pet sitters, too. While more people are doing pet sitting professionally, it is also a common side hustle, as evidenced by the popularity of rover.com.

Having grown up near a barn with an array of animals, “that was my world,” said Traci Roberts of Anywhere Pet Care. It only made sense that when she tired of the monotony of a desk job, she started a profile on rover.com. Rover has benefits for clients: guaranteeing that sitters pass background checks, covering vet care if something goes wrong, offering 24/7 support, and reservation protection.

Now, several years into pet sitting, Roberts books some gigs through rover.com and others come through her “friend network.” She does not need to use social media or business cards, as referrals provide the majority of her business.

Roberts likes being independent. For one thing, Rover takes 20% monetarily. The app frustrates some people, she said, especially her senior clients. She also likes a lot of information, more than rover.com asks in its questionnaire. Mostly, she feels like she can tailor her services and rates to what clients need when working on her own.

Surprises are the biggest challenge Roberts faces. Some are easily overcome, such as not booking back-to-back sessions to allow for traffic and other contingencies. Communication solves most of the others, which circles back to Roberts’ desire for lots of details about the pet, the home, and the situation.

Pet sitting clients encompass a wide range of people. Link has a niche with farm services, caring for everything from goats to alpacas. She was even asked to milk cows by



Photos: Anywhere Pet Care

VIRGINIA-BASED MARS INC A BIG PLAYER IN PET FOOD

Fortune Business Insights identifies MARS Incorporated as one of the top three major players in the global market for pet food. That's right, the same company that brings us Mars candy bars, Snickers, m&m's, Starburst, Skittles, Twix, Lifesavers, and Wrigley gum. The pet division alone constitutes 100,000 Petcare Associates, working in more than 130 countries, with research and development at the Waltham Petcare Science Institute, according to the press kit. The sustainability mission claims to "improve our environmental pawprint, operating and sourcing responsibility, and expanding access for pets and influencing policy." MARS has developed a State of Pet Homelessness Index to address the issue of abandoned pets. The company owns more than 2,500 veterinary hospitals.

MARS is family-owned, over 100 years old, headquartered in McClean, VA, reporting \$40 billion in net sales (2021).

Some of the pet brands include these popular products:



SOURCES: Fortune; Forbes; MARS, INC.





Photos: NRV Pet Sitting & Farm Services

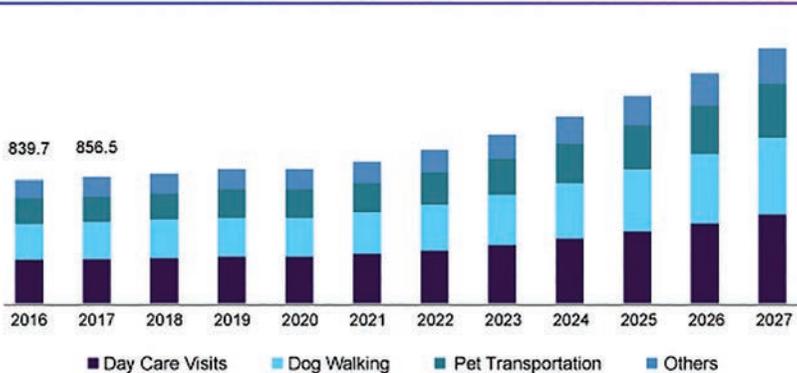
one prospective client. Most of her clients, though, are families where both parents work and they want to give their pets more potty breaks or a little extra exercise during long days.

“They think of their pets as another family member,” Link said.

SIT!

The global pet sitting market size was valued at USD 2.6 billion in 2019 and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.7% from 2020 to 2027. Increasing spending of consumers on the pet and its services has resulted in a growing need for time-saving pet care services, thus fueling the growth of the pet sitting business. In addition, the increasing number of pet ownerships among people, particularly across U.S. and European countries, is driving the need for pet support services, thereby propelling demand for pet sitting services. Over the years, the pet market worldwide has been growing at a significant rate as many countries have witnessed a high rate of pet adoption and animal health spending.

U.S. pet sitting market size, by application, 2016 - 2027 (USD Million)



SOURCE: www.grandviewresearch.com

Roberts said her clients range from college students who cannot take their pets home for breaks, to young professionals who are gone for eight hours, to seniors who visit their children and grandchildren. Some “snow birds” here even paid her to pet sit at their second home in Florida.

The main services that Link’s business provides are pet sitting and mid-day dog walks. When families are out of town, Link or her employee comes to the house twice daily; in addition to caring for the pet, they will perform small tasks like bringing in the mail or watering house plants. With dog walking, the dog gets to go out while the owner is at work, which can prevent accidents and relieve boredom.

Roberts performs similar duties plus offers flexibility for unique situations such as coming late at night to tire out a pet before the owner goes to work on night shift.

A newer service is pet taxi, in which Link or her employees take an animal to the vet for easy, non-emergency treatment, or pick up supplies for the pet. Roberts will also take dogs for car rides or pick them up from the groomer’s.

During the pandemic, when Roberts was uncomfortable going into people’s homes, she boarded five animals she knew at her own place. While Link may add kennels to her business one day, she touts in-home pet sitting over boarding for a number of reasons. The pet is less stressed staying in its own environment, and there is less risk for a health issue such as picking up kennel cough. The pet stays clean and gets a lot of TLC, plus enrichment activities like exercise and positive reinforcement training.

Link says her employees would say their favorite thing about the job is working with the animals. For her, she loves providing a service she knows people need and that gives them peace of mind.

Roberts loves meeting nice people and forming relationships.

“They become your family,” she said. In fact, one of the dogs she sits for is willed to her in case of the elderly owner’s death.

Roberts looks at pet sitting as not just a job but a lifestyle. It gives her a sense of purpose. She said, it is about “caring for pets and caring for people. There is so much love.” 



“Pet care gives me purpose and gratitude at the deepest level. My love for pets started on farm in the mountains of Carvins Cove caring for dogs, cats, horses, cows, chickens, rabbits, pigs, a goat and a peacock. We focus on fun so they don’t miss you!”

—Traci Roberts,
Anywhere Pet Care



Taylor Love

NRV Pet Sitting & Farm Services



Holly Marrow photos

Med Express facility on Williamson road in Roanoke.

Urgent Care Facilities in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond

By Holly E. Marrow, RN

Urgent Care centers in the region played an important role during the pandemic

When Nancy Collins of Christiansburg arrived at the Velocity Care clinic on Peppers Ferry Road on January 8, 2022, the parking lot was completely full of waiting patients. As a diabetic, she has learned not to ignore unusual skin

changes, and a golf ball-sized rash had appeared on her ankle that morning. Collins had to park in front of a separate business up the road, then followed the instructions on the sign in front of Velocity Care to call from her car.



Nancy Collins of Christiansburg



Sign outside Med Express on Williamson road in Roanoke.



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Julie Greer RN in newly renovated Velocity Care lab, electric road facility.

She was able to enter the clinic to provide her insurance information, then sent back to her car to wait - for two full hours. When Collins was called to enter the clinic, she waited another 30 minutes before being seen. She felt the practitioner who saw her was a bit curt and was not concerned about her rash. "He seemed really irritated that

I was there," adding that the entire staff seemed "maxed out." Collins added that during a second visit to the same facility in February of this year, she had no wait-time and was "in and out in 10 minutes, ...a much more pleasant experience!"

During the past two years of upheaval from COVID-19, the disease caused by

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Goodwill Team Member, Jesse, works in our Radford production facility.



the SARS-CoV-2 virus, Collin's January visit was not an atypical patient experience. However, this does not represent urgent care's original intent, nor what area medical directors hope will be a renewed focus with diminishing cases of COVID-19.

Urgent Care facilities provide urgent but non-emergent care for our community. The wait time is often shorter than a local Emergency Department (ED), which should be reserved for true emergencies such as cardiac distress, neurological events, severe burns and major trauma. Additionally, a visit to an urgent care facility carries a lower fee or co-pay for patients. Kim Roe, Vice President of Family and Community Medicine for Carilion, estimated this figure could be up to "a fifth of what co-pays would be" in a typical emergency room.

Roe was an original founder of Velocity Care in 2012, and she uses the data

presented an interesting trend at that time. "A large percentage of primary care patients [were] going to the emergency department," unnecessary visits that could have been handled in a less emergent setting, and for the benefit of all involved. The advent of urgent care facilities helped to decompress the ED and provided more access to patients who either could not get a convenient appointment at their primary care physician's office or needed care after hours.

Carilion Clinic's Velocity Care operates six clinics, in Roanoke, Salem, Christiansburg, Blacksburg, Daleville and Hardy. Med Express, managed by Optum, has three clinics in Roanoke, Salem and Christiansburg. Med Express/Optum declined an interview request for this article.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in

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Dr. Michael Szilagyi and PA Natasha Vietz confer at work station (Velocity Care)

March of 2020, Velocity Care clinic staff had to learn new routines very quickly, said Dr. Robert Dums, Co-Medical Director of Velocity Care. Practitioners had to wear personal protective equipment (PPEs) for the duration of their shifts and implement new work flows in order to triage patients from their vehicles safely and efficiently. "I'm very proud of our staff," said Roe, "our nurses, physicians,

nurse practitioners and physicians' assistants all went above and beyond."

Often, staff members were dealing with their own personal stressors, adds Dums. Many had school-aged children and other obligations outside of work. Even so, "people were willing to stay extra late in order to see our patients," and many volunteered to work at testing facilities

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on the weekends because they knew the community was in need. “Everyone adapted well,” continued Dums, who added that there were frequent staff huddles to make sure that everybody was okay. “I won’t say it was always easy, but people made it as easy as possible because we all worked together.”

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dums was instrumental in implementing a telehealth system for Velocity Care. This enabled patients with non-COVID illness and injuries to be triaged safely through a telemedicine consult without leaving their homes. Additionally, Velocity care set up a monoclonal antibody infusion center to treat COVID-19 patients in an effort to keep them out of the hospital. Monoclonal antibodies are “laboratory-produced molecules engineered to serve as substitute antibodies that can restore, enhance, modify or mimic the immune system’s attack on cells that aren’t

wanted.” Roe estimated that Carilion/Velocity Care administered roughly 4500 monoclonal antibody infusions over the course of the pandemic.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, according to Dums, urgent care practitioners treated a myriad of conditions, including respiratory infections, injuries, fractures, sprains, lacerations, rashes, ear infections, fevers, headaches, influenza and gastrointestinal disturbances. Velocity Care has the capability to draw lab samples and take X-rays. If a patient needs additional follow-up care, referrals will be made to an appropriate specialist.

“I’m not sure what the new normal is,” said Roe. “We’re getting back to normal operating hours and will continue to provide and integrate services as we can. COVID will always be with us, but everybody is looking forward to getting back to taking care of patients as a whole”. 

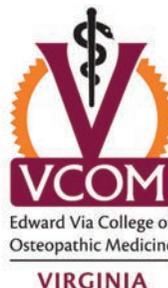
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BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

Executive Summary:
Determining the level of service you provide is important.

Send your questions or comments to Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com

May I be of service?

During the pandemic, I was one of the few people who continued to travel. It was amazingly efficient! No lines. Quick boarding. Lots of open seats on the plane. And no one was entering my hotel room each day.

To reduce the risk of spreading the virus, hotels stopped entering hotel rooms for daily cleaning. I didn't miss it, and apparently many others didn't either. Today, many hotels have greatly reduced this service unless you ask for it.

There is an important lesson here for service industries. How do you determine the level of service to provide? Should hotels provide daily cleaning? Should they continue to make a pretty tissue box flower and fold the end of the toilet paper roll into a neat triangle in the bathroom?

In short, the level and quality of service an organization provides should primarily be defined by the customers. Unfortunately, this is often not the case. Many service organizations, especially smaller ones, define their service standards by what the owner and managers believe is best instead of what the customer wants and values. This can cause two problems.

First, the services may be insufficient. Consider the airline industry. Does anyone consider flying to be enjoyable and hassle-free? Baggage fees, front-to-back boarding sequence, no leg room, and high prices are not what I value. Insufficient services create unhappy customers.

Second, the services may exceed what the customer values. Case in point is hotel room cleaning. It appears that the new normal for hotels will be less frequent room cleaning. Because of pandemic precautions, the hotel industry discovered that few guests really want or need the daily cleaning. Why is too much service a problem? Because it's wasteful and adds unnecessary costs to the company. In the field of process improvement, this is called overprocessing.

It's critical for all organizations to understand what their customers value and to set clear standards for service outcomes. Too little service causes dissatisfaction. Too much service adds cost and reduces profit. When service standards are not clear, front-line team members must figure it out themselves, leading to mistakes.

Do you know what your clients value? 

“”
Set clear standards
for service outcomes.

Adjusting to the gig economy

A recent report claimed eight out of ten people were doing side businesses. Given how much job security has changed, that's not a surprise. Many small businesses who were just getting by with 2-3 staffers have closed permanently after temporary pandemic mandates stopped commerce. This is a sad reality that affects the business owners and everyone they employ.

As a result of closures and work-from-home shifts, many are now doing 1099 income reporting instead prior W-2s. When you no longer have an employer contributing to your income taxes, Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment, it's important to shift focus.

1099 workers need to track things: If you're now a contract worker or have started a side business, it's now also your job to track income and expenses. That's in addition to what you might be doing for your employer or clients. Knowing what to track can reduce your income tax bill substantially. Keep records of everything you use for the business, whether it's 100% related, or split with personal needs. Your tax preparer can let you know what's deductible, but it's better to track any possible expense until you know. Asking your tax preparer what you can claim, in what proportions, puts the risk on them. That's what you pay them for, at least in part.

Mileage, liability insurance, cyber insurance, home office, utilities, software subscriptions, and classes & training should all be things you consider as the cost of doing business. The IRS expects you to claim these things.

Professional liability and cyber insurance don't cost that much and can be a relief to have when things go wrong. This is particularly important if you work in an industry where protecting client information is critical. You don't always have control of what others do, so it pays to protect yourself even if you're careful.

When you work from home, you're entitled to write off a percentage of your utilities. In most cases, you can depreciate a portion of your home too.

Saving money in the gig economy starts with knowing your numbers. Keeping track of what you're spending on your business can reduce your tax bill by a lot. You can't track your calories at the end of the year. It's a daily process. The sooner you recognize you're now a business owner too, the better equipped you'll be to realize maximum profit. Part of that process means monthly and quarterly reviews. 



FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:
Life has changed a lot recently. We were already in a gig economy before the pandemic forced many into a different way of doing business.

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



Southern Trust Home Services

Ted Puzio

Need a better pipeline to skilled workers? Help build one.

By Gene Marrano

With fewer young people exposed to the trades as a way to make a good living, one local company did something about that.

Southern Trust Home Services, based in Roanoke County, has an on-staff recruiter constantly on the lookout for potential candidates to join the company, “doing an amazing job, keeping our trucks filled,” but with skilled laborers, often older and retiring, it can still be a challenge at

times to find people that want to enter the plumbing-HVAC field says owner Ted Puzio. Several years ago when he was doing the hiring himself, he spoke with administrators from local school systems in Roanoke City, Roanoke County and Franklin County, proposing

a training program for students.

"[Some] children were coming out of school with no direction. If they're not college material – I wasn't – there was no other option. They weren't aware of the trades." Now in Roanoke County Southern Trust Home Services (you have probably seen their yellow and blue trucks) has been hiring 11th and 12th graders during the B block schedule that leaves free time for them to venture out to the field to learn and earn a paycheck at the same time. "They get school credit, and they get paid," notes Puzio, a New Jersey native who has made southwest Virginia his home for decades. During the summer students can work full-time for Southern Trust.

If they join the company after graduation Southern Trust will pay for additional night school training that can take up to four years. "We're giving them an option. After four years they don't come out with a \$100,000 bill from a college, they come out with a \$100,000 paycheck. Roanoke County loved it and they built a great internship program for the students." At an open house four years ago when the company moved into its new southwest Roanoke County building Puzio said parents thanked him for providing a direction for their high school graduates who in some cases didn't know where they were headed – if not to college. "They didn't know there was anything else out there."

With some school funding based in part on how many students are headed off

to college – and not to the trades – says Puzio, he found that "rather disappointing." Some can even work their way through college at night or online if they so choose, by earning a good paycheck during the day. One student trainee vowed to come back and work for Southern Trust once his hitch in the Marines was over. "That was pretty cool."

Still its something Puzio has to stay on top of all the time, keeping the employee pipeline filled in order to grow the company. "People don't see the opportunity in the trades. Its dirty work, some of it is messy [at times]. But its rewarding when you go in a person's home ... and are able to either fix the system or replace it. It's rewarding to serve people. Our guys make a nice living."

Virginia Western also has programs geared towards trades like plumbing-HVAC-electrical where certificates can be earned as a credential. Patrick Henry High School has a night apprenticeship program for students who are sponsored by businesses like Southern Trust. The company also has ground level positions as a parts runner for those young people who want to see if that type of work fits for them.

With skilled tradespeople aging and retiring Puzio, "doesn't see it getting any better at all. It's not the prettiest of jobs." Even with the promise of a secure position that pays above average wages, "people don't necessarily want to work hard any more for a paycheck." 

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BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:
Where on YOUR website do your candidates go to see if you're hiring?

Jennifer Leake CMC® is a workplace consultant, podcaster, and certified assessment expert. Visit [AssessmentPros.com](https://www.AssessmentPros.com) to learn how you can build a culture where your employees feel they have the BEST JOB EVER.

Candidate experience – what it is and why it's important

Great candidate experience attracts the best talent. PeopleScout recently shared 27% of candidates with a bad experience “actively discourage others to apply” and 77% of candidates are “likely to share positive experiences with others in their network.” Because this is such a key topic these days, I interviewed long-time friend and expert on the subject, Ira Wolfe, for a recent Sales Hiring Straight Talk podcast. Here are some key points of our interview.

What is Candidate Experience? It's how candidates feel when they apply for a job with your company. In the past there were more people applying for your job than there were jobs available. That is not the case today.

Did 2020 cause this ... and why is it so important now? 2020 didn't cause this ... it just ripped the Band-Aid off the situation. Candidate experience matters now more than ever because people have choices. It's an employee market.

Job Shortage Trends that have converged at one time:

- 4.4 million people quit their jobs in February 2022, up from 4.2 million in January 2022
- An all-time record high number of job openings
- A 3.2% unemployment rate in Virginia
- Lowest number of people applying for unemployment claims in 20 years

Does Candidate Experience start with the job application?

No, it starts even before that. It's important to consider:

- What does your job description look like?
- How long does it take to complete a job application?
- Did anyone ever contact or call the candidate back after they've applied?
- What are your interviews like?

In today's market, Candidate Experience means more. It starts when someone is first thinking about getting a job or changing jobs. Candidates look at your website to see what the company is all about. They look at the company's page on Facebook or LinkedIn. What are people saying about your company as they read Glassdoor or Indeed ratings? What is the first impression they get of your company?

Critical in this process is how candidates find your job openings and apply for them online. I recently spoke to three companies that were hiring and found their job buried in their website. Even they were shocked to discover they couldn't find it, a scenario echoed by Ira in our interview.

Candidate experience is the message you send to job seekers. It's the first impression when someone is thinking about a job - and continues all the way through the hiring process. It's never been more important than today. Learn more about Candidate Experience in our interview with Ira Wolfe at SalesHiringStraightTalk.com 

Why digital matters in the service industry

One of the questions we always are asked in our business is, "How do I reach more customers effectively without spending thousands of dollars in advertising a month?"

One way that we have discovered that we can deliver results in a cost effective and efficient way is digital. So, what makes a digital presence effective? It's a mixture of a strong social media presence with concise messaging, a well-designed web presence with multiple contact points and other touch points like a monthly newsletter, etc.

The first step in a successful digital is to allow your clients to conduct business with you and learn about you as efficiently as possible. This means you need to be transparent, when possible, about your experience, services offered and pricing. It also means that messaging on social media and the website needs to be aligned. Non-congruent messaging can confuse potential customers about your expertise and what services your best aligned to help them with. The last place a potential customer is going to call, is a place they aren't sure can help them out.

The second step is to be responsive. If you get a request from your website, a message through social media, or an email that comes through, try to give an immediate response. Ensure that the response addresses them personally, answers any questions that they have and include any additional information based off their request that you would think they may like to have. Forethought in providing information to a potential customer shows them that you understand their situation and that you have experience in ensuring they get what they need. Also, being attentive at the very beginning of the interaction makes the customer feel like they can count on you to follow through.

Lastly, just as important as it is to get right, it's equally important to not get wrong. Every step of the way in digital is often an early impression that you are giving to a potential customer. Misspelled words, poor grammar, and non-high-resolution pictures decrease your brand's value to a potential customer and could potentially appear to be non-detail oriented or show a lack of follow through.

Professional management is always best if you are ever unsure of your abilities to execute correctly. As a firm that specializes in digital management for small to micro businesses, we have many different pricing points that are surprisingly affordable. If we can ever help, or you would like to get a complimentary opinion feel free to reach out to me and I'll be glad to help. 



AshleyEaglesonPhotography

BEST PRACTICES

By Will Hall

Executive Summary:

Having a solid digital presence maybe the best form of advertising says the author.

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



Do quality work and grow profitably - a winning formula for Wisler

By Gene Marrano

You've probably heard those radio spots for the company based in Franklin County that strives to follow its mission statement every day.

Rocky Mount-based Wisler Plumbing and Air got its start in 1986, with a little bit of "everything" says company President James Wisler, a second-generation leader who always thanks his dad in the radio commercials that are often in high rotation. After a while "we niched into plumbing," for new construction and commercial, but for almost the past two decades "dedicated solely to the residential homeowner." His brother Brian is a company shareholder and the Wisler company training manager. Their father still works part time.

Heating and cooling (HVAC) installation and service was added a few years ago; Wisler also installs water treatment systems, a nod to the "hard water" many in the area seem to experience. Roanoke and Franklin Counties are the primary focus. Wisler Plumbing and Air employs about 80 people.

Finding experienced people to join the Wisler workforce is a challenge these days, as older tradespeople age out, but finding others who want to learn the plumbing/HVAC business has helped fill the pipeline. "By and large that's the path that we go," says James Wisler. With low demands on incoming credentials and the willingness to teach those skills, the trades can become "very attractive from a compensation point."

Wisler's Christian faith is quite evident in some of their radio commercials, and for the last few years the "Do Good Days" event has seen company employees teaming up with the Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs hockey team to volunteer at local non-profits, pitching in with painting, landscaping, cleanup and other chores. "It was great for our staff to participate in the community," says Wisler, of Do

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Good Days, “good for the people that volunteered and the non-profits.”

Getting through COVID at its height as an “essential” business meant carrying on many of the company protocols that were already in place – including the use of PPE’s - personal protective equipment – since employees often worked in potentially unhealthy environments, including

around residential sewage systems. There’s also mold in HVAC systems, so “we continued to do the same things we were doing before.” Staffing levels were impacted as some employees came down with COVID.

With much of the housing stock in the region aging and slow turnover with few large-scale residential communities being



built nowadays, it's a bull market for plumbing and HVAC companies. "Very much so," says James Wisler, "with a high need for the trades."

About those commercials, which feature, yes, someone whistling in the background: "it's a brand, and brand awareness" says Wisler, leading he says to the company's mission statement to grow profitably.

"Obviously, you have to get your name out [there]. Establish your brand. That's why we do it. It's also important for recruitment as well as our clients to hear our story, what we stand for and who we are." The company's full mission statement is to Honor God, Serve People, Be Diligent, Do Quality Work and Grow Profitably. "That's what we strive for every day. To carry that legacy on is very important." 



Winning in Retail with Business-Grade WiFi

Jeff Merritt | Technology Advisor, Valley Business Front

Small businesses play a critical role in our economy. But the past few years have been difficult for many small businesses, and retail – which is already a competitive business – is no exception. That's why every May, the Small Business Administration celebrates the entrepreneurs and small business owners that make our communities vibrant.

With many stores trying to stand out, having strong business wifi provides an opportunity to give owners the upper hand by helping improve daily operations, customer service and employee satisfaction. Keep these factors in mind before choosing an Internet provider:

Business-Grade Security Features

Safeguard your business and protect customers with a retail wifi solution that includes advanced security features, like firewalls, URL blocking and breach reports.

High-Speed Bandwidth

Between processing payments and offering free in-store wifi, high-speed bandwidth is critical. Get a business Internet plan with enough bandwidth to support multiple users, devices and transactions during peak business hours.

IT Support

If your retail business doesn't have its own IT staff, you'll need access to 24/7 customer support. Get help when you need it with an Internet service provider that offers around-the-clock help from experienced professionals.

Guest Networks

Over the years, customers have come to expect free in-store wifi. Shopping in person while browsing online from a mobile device is common practice. Keep your private network safe from the open Internet and your customers happy with a separate guest network.

Choosing the right business Internet plan for a retail space can seem overwhelming. But with the right technology partner supporting you every step of the way, it's actually quite simple. See what Cox Business can do for you and your business at CoxBusiness.com/SmallBusiness.

When you are on a team, varying projects may require you to adapt and fill different roles. Sometimes you take the lead—even center stage. Often, these talented leaders can inspire others to step up to take a leadership role, thus building new strengths and foundation.

Talented leaders are like the redbuds now in bloom. Once a year, these inspirational leaders literally light up the forest and remind all of us that spring is here.

However, for much of the year

Redbud leaders

they simply blend in while doing all the things that we need to sustain life. They produce oxygen and hold the soil in place. They provide shade and branches for birds. They do their job and ask for little credit and get little notice. They are willing to allow others to have their turn.

Throughout the pandemic, many individuals have been called to step up in leadership roles. We have all benefitted from these redbuds in health care, education, transportation, and food and beverage. They are a constant reminder that, from time to time, we all may be called to step up and take the spotlight. Sometimes you plan for your entrance and role, but sometimes it is thrust on you. The real work and the real impact is often done day to day with little noise or applause.

At RAMP, we prepare aspiring entrepreneurs for whichever role that's required in that season, helping them build an ecosystem that thrives year-round.

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

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

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

Good leaders don't need the spotlight 24/7. They are happy to watch others develop and have a voice. We are grateful to be in a community of so many that know how to be a redbud when called upon.

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

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Roanoke developers branch out to Southside >

Not content with redeveloping older properties in downtown Roanoke and in the Wasena neighborhood, **John Garland** has set his sights on Southside Virginia. In conjunction with **Cherney Development** - which recently turned the old Happy's Flea Market on Williamson Road in Roanoke into office and storage space - two former schools and a shuttered Winn-Dixie supermarket - the former John Redd Smith School in Collinsville, the former Fieldale High School in Fieldale and the vacant supermarket property in uptown Martinsville) will become living spaces with nearly 100 apartments for local residents.

"We can't do them all and there's certainly many more buildings in Martinsville and

Henry County that can be historically preserved," says Garland, "they need more buildings to do that. That's actually what happened in the Roanoke area, once one developer started and others how worked and how it was successful. Other developers got on the bandwagon." Construction on two of the Southside properties is underway; the third in Martinsville, a mixed-used development, is slated to start this summer.

A growing need for mid-market housing in Martinsville and Henry County as the industrial employment base there grows enticed the two developers; more than 12 million dollars will be spent on project construction for the three properties. Some of that cost will be reimbursed through the historic tax credits. Garland has also purchased a handful of older properties in Pulaski and is keeping an eye out for any new opportunities in Roanoke, where he has rehabbed several older properties, converting them into mixed use spaces.

Liberty Trust Hotel open for business >

A project about five years in the making is open for business - the **Liberty Trust Hotel**, in the former bank and office building on South Jefferson Street in downtown Roanoke. The upscale "boutique" hotel features 54 rooms, many with sweeping views of the city. **Vishal Savani** is managing director for the development company: "the response has been fantastic. Our guests loved the décor, the design; they loved the location."

Room rates range from 160 to 500 dollars a night. Features in the 113-year-old Liberty Bank Building including the original copper door framing and marble columns in the grand entrance were left in place with other features to qualify for historic tax credits. "The lobby has a grandeur that dates back to the original bank lobby that it was," notes Savani. The original bank vault on the ground floor will be employed as a tasting room. The building was also used as office space for decades before Richmond-based Savara Hospitality purchased the property.



Gene Marrano photos





SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Shannon Dominguez

Executive Summary:
Downtime can look a lot different for each person. Plan downtime in your schedule and honor it to increase your level of productivity.

Shannon Dominguez is the Director of Operations for Building Beloved Communities. Shannon@buildingbelovedcommunities.com. Connect with her on LinkedIn

Let's get back to the basics...

Does your world ever feel overwhelming and chaotic? In conversation with other business owners, friends, and colleagues I realize most of us are seeking to find that ever illusive balance. It's amazing how revisiting the basics of nutrition, sleep, and downtime can bring a flow and balance back into life.

Many of us are showing up in various roles as professionals, family, friends and so on. Life gets a certain flow to it, an ease, then something happens and everything changes. There's a consistent ebb and flow and sometimes we just need to get back to the basics of self-care. If that's you, take this as your sign to get back to the basics with me.

Nutrition - We know it's important to regularly provide our bodies and brains with good nutrition; it keeps us functioning at our best. Harvard Health published, "Put simply, what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood."

What does good nutrition look like for you? For me, it looks like keeping water with me at my desk and at meetings, eating regular meals (it's easy to get caught up in work and miss meals), taking daily vitamins, and having fruit smoothies in the mornings to get my fruits & veggies in first thing.

Sleep - The amount of sleep each person needs varies. Some people can function at an optimal level with only 5-6 hours; others need at least 8-9 hours of sleep. 7.5 hours is my lucky number.

Forbes magazine says, "According to neuroscientists, sleep is restorative, whereas sleep deprivation lowers your resistance to stress and harms your brain. Lack of sleep interferes with memory and learning. Your brain moves slower. You're more forgetful, and your attention is short-circuited."

Establishing regular sleep habits means that sometimes you have to say no to staying out late. Don't let the fear of missing out compromise the benefits of sleep your brain needs. Prioritizing sleep is essential to showing up as your best self.

Downtime - It's easy to get caught up in the daily to-dos of work, home life and forget about downtime. The truth is that our brains need a break; it needs rest to function at its best.

Harvard Business Review states, "For one, creating the space for downtime increases productivity. Subject to heavy workloads and never-ending to-do lists, it's easy to put our heads down and charge through tasks, thinking we have no time for days off, free evenings, or weeklong vacations. But driving too hard without breaks can make us less productive and less focused... As Tony Schwartz has written, 'human beings perform best and are most productive when they alternate between periods of intense focus and intermittent renewal.'" Let go of any self-imposed beliefs of perfection and let's get back to the basics together! Onward and upwards. 

Saving history

The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation (RVPF) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization established in 1988 to preserve the historic, natural, and cultural resources of the Roanoke Valley (City of Roanoke, City of Salem, Town of Vinton, Roanoke County, Botetourt County, and Franklin County, Virginia). It was founded as—and continues to be—a grassroots, volunteer-driven organization. Since its inception, the RVPF has been active in a variety of preservation efforts. Consistent involvement and advocacy has resulted in increased public awareness and successful preservation projects. Although the Foundation’s focus is on the past, its major accomplishments are the result of planning for the future.

History comes alive when people are able to not only read about their past, but actually visit the places and examine the artifacts that make up the community’s history. Preserving our history and telling our story is a vital link to our cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, and economic legacies—all of the things that quite literally make us who we are today.

Each year in May, the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation announces its Annual Endangered Sites List to call attention to local history, special places, and the possibility that these significant sites are in danger of being lost unless efforts are made to preserve them.

You can see the lists at roanokepreservation.org and get more information, including how to support the mission. 

“Preserving our history is a vital link to our cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, and economic legacies.”

GOOD WORK

Executive Summary:
Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation protects properties and sites important to our communities and region.



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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
As employees gather back, some might want to rush back to their protective caves.

Annoyed all over again

"Tom, you've got to do something. Stan burned the popcorn again in the microwave. We can't stand it."

As the pandemic scales down, more of us are getting the pleasure of reuniting with annoying workmates as we come off our hiatus from working remotely. I'm just going to say it: when you worked at home, you were most definitely annoying. It's just nobody was there to take note of it.

But yeah, particularly if you work at an inside office, when a coworker annoys you, he or she really annoys you. As a manager, I got to hear all the complaints. Typically, they went down like this:

Susan pokes her head through the doorway of my office.

"Tom, do you have a minute?"

This is followed by an almost tiptoe entrance, whereupon dear Susan sits in the chair across from my desk, gingerly folds her hands in her lap, and exclaims in a breathy voice:

"We've got to do something about Stan. People are upset."

Over the years, I've often wanted to respond right away with a directive I usually end up giving. Because I usually don't even need to hear the problem described to me. I could immediately blurt out, "Susan, have you talked to Stan about it?" But I don't. I politely entertain the seriousness of the infraction.

Stan keeps burning popcorn in the microwave.
Stan wears cologne so strong, it triggers a serious allergy.
Stan took my good chair and replaced it with a bad one.
Stan whistles. It's so distracting, I can't work.
Stan smells. I mean he stinks.
Stan takes people's food from the refrigerator.
Stan open ups cans of tuna and it stinks up the entire office.
Stan keeps messing with the thermostat;
no one wants it that cold/hot.
Stan hogs the copier and he won't replace the paper.
Stan comes in sick and spreads his germs all over.
Stan is dressing inappropriately.

Whether Susan (not likely) or any other employees approached Stan; I know I'm going to. And it's usually about the most simple process. I ask Stan to stop it. Or make a change. Eliminate the complaint.

I don't write up a "rule" to stick on the microwave. I don't draft a departmental memo, policy, handbook entry. I don't schedule an intervention or HR meeting or employee feedback session.

THAT—would be annoying.

Sure, some complaints escalate. Most can be addressed pretty much on the spot.

In any case, welcome back. Try not to be annoying. 🍷

The Summer of Gorge

With the worst of the pandemic behind us people want to get out this year. In fact there are a record number of outdoor events going on at Elmwood Park and on nearby Franklin Road, so many in fact that the folks behind Roanoke's Festival in the Park, First Fridays and the Berglund Center's Vinyl Vault Series of outdoor concerts at the Elmwood Park put their heads together recently, working on a strategy to minimize stepping on each other's concerts, looking for ways to find the live music that First Fridays offers from early May through October from bleeding over to the live shows at Elmwood Park and vice versa.

During a press conference last month, Molly Henry, the board president for First Fridays, talked about the new acts and old favorites (The Kings, Fuzzy Logic, the On the Border Eagles tribute band, "a huge favorite,") that will part of the lineup this year. "We're super excited about 2022 and we are ready to rock 'n roll," said Henry. The First Fridays \$5 admission fees collected go to local nonprofits.

"The three [event planners] collectively are bringing 33 shows to Roanoke this summer season," said Skip Brown with Festival in the Park, "and that's more than we've ever done before." Elmwood Park is only about 100 yards from the First Fridays bandshell on Franklin Road he noted. "What that would have done [without cooperation] is ruin her event and hers. The only solution was to come up with some type of an accommodation."

COVID changed the equation said Brown, and now the pent-up demand for live shows has increased. The Atlanta Rhythm Section and Firefall, "great bands with huge legacy acts," are part of the 53rd Festival lineup. 1964-The Tribute is free this year on the Festival's closing night, a way said Brown to say "thank you" for the support over the years. Meanwhile in June the Berglund Center's Budweiser Vinyl Vault Series brings KC & The Sunshine Band and Air Supply to Elmwood. (Elmwood Park got off to a great start this season when Jakob Dylan and The Wallflowers played during the Blue Ridge Marathon weekend.)

Wow. Of course, Dr. Pepper Park at The Bridges is jam packed with its biggest summer ever of national acts and tribute bands. Get out, catch some music, hit a restaurant or a brewpub before or after; enjoy the most normal summer since 2019. It's a feast for the eyes and especially the ears. 



The Wallflowers at Elmwood Park



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

With apologies to George Costanza there's plenty going on this summer.



GUEST COMMENTARY

By Valarie Angle

Executive Summary:
The more you consider on the front-end, the less surprises you will have down the road. Our wellness column writer and business owner learned the hard way - and wanted to share those lessons.



Get it
in writing.

Financial wellness for brick & mortar business

Running a brick and mortar business means that you are likely to find yourself with the overwhelming task of renting commercial space. I will share a few lessons that we have learned in our search, negotiations, and rental of commercial property in Roanoke for The WellNest. Nothing in this column is intended to replace the advice of your lawyer or accountant.

Commercial Real Estate vs. Residential Real Estate

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development shares that tenants and landlords have legal protections under the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (VRLTA), which applies to most residential rental properties in Virginia. Still, residential tenants are responsible for reading and understanding terms of their lease and possibly consulting an attorney before signing.

Likewise, tenants signing a commercial lease should thoroughly read, understand, and negotiate terms in their lease to suit their own needs as well as accept the requirements set by the property manager. Melissa Sevier of Briglia Hundley Law Firm shared that “unlike the Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act, which offers substantial guidance on the rights and obligations of residential landlords and tenants, the Code section governing non-residential tenancies leaves many of these determinations to the contracting parties.” Often, property managers email a generic lease template and direct tenants to Docusign with no discussion.

Lease considerations

Some of the common negotiations that we recommend discussing and fully understanding relate to Common Area Maintenance (CAM) Fees; Security Deposit and Refund; Utility Billing; Zoning Approval; Fire Code; Use of Property; Access; Rent Increase; Renewal; Build-Out; Repairs; Provisions for Natural Disaster/Force Majeure (remember COVID).

If CAM, Utilities, and other combined fees leave room for unforeseen charges, ask for a flat fee incorporation into the rent or a combination of fees. You do not have to simply accept the terms of the lease as it is sent. Our best experience was with a property owner who shared an outline back and forth with us before ever drafting the final lease.

In one case, before signing a lease we discovered that the fire marshal had deemed occupancy for the building at only 40 people due to code inadequacies. We were expecting to be able to operate events of over 400 people. We were fortunate that we were able to have a conversation with the fire marshal to answer questions that the building owner couldn't. When

you ask questions and receive vague or glossed over answers, be wary. It's your responsibility to have the facts at hand in order to make solid decisions.

In another case, the property owner wanted to be able to micromanage our activities, times of events, and access to the space. Especially if you are sharing a building with other tenants, beware of these assumptions and restrictions. Ask that your needs are explicitly written into the lease. For example, if you expect 24-hour access to your space and the right to conduct any and all legal activities to the benefit of your business, get it in writing. This same property manager also wanted to be able to drop-in at will, without notice for non-specific reasons.

Unless the property manager is a loyal customer, I'd feel more comfortable having a 24-hour notice requirement in my lease. In one case, the space was advertised as "24-hour access," but later the property manager changed the building hours to close at 5pm. Fortunately, this change was void because of a solid lease agreement, though we could never get the main door to stop automatically locking at 5pm and were required to have extra staff to man the outer door.

Will you pay for repairs and bill the property manager? What is the timeline expectation for maintenance requests? Is there an insurance minimum requirement? What happens if there is another State of Emergency and businesses are forced to close? These questions might be uncomfortable on the front-end, but your peace of mind is priceless.

From the Owner's Perspective

Property owners are regular people. They hold political, religious, and community affiliations

just like anyone. They own property for one reason: financial gain. At the end of the day, most people aren't doing business for the sake of the greater good, but to be successful in their business and societal endeavors. Keep this in mind and understand that you may find yourself negotiating with someone you really resonate with and enjoy working alongside. At the end of the day, business is business. You must look out for your bottom line, just as a property owner must. Don't get romanticized by the notion that common vision or enthusiasm for a project is going to override profit.

One example of this is the loss of rental income tax deduction. You might have an opportunity to lease a space for less than market value. But property owners with more than 10% ownership can actually take a \$25,000 rental income loss deduction on their income taxes for unoccupied properties. If this becomes more attractive for property owners than the amount you are paying for the lease, guess what's going to happen next? The property owners will make the decision to either raise your rent or not renew your lease. You'll be forced out and they will be taxed on up to \$25,000 less than their reported income per owner.

We all want to live in a friendly, collaborative community. However, business is meant to help you prosper and enjoy your work life. Taking responsibility for careful planning in your lease negotiations may be time consuming, frustrating, and difficult at times. The more you consider on the front-end, the less surprises you will have down the road. Remember, Virginia commercial tenants rely heavily on the written agreement. Make it work for you. We are taking a break from brick and mortar for the time-being, but you can continue to find The WellNest Roanoke online, connecting our community with Roanoke's top wellness professionals. 



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CONTRIBUTORS

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

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. [cooperjpp1@gmail.com]

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

Michelle Darby is Vice President, Marketing & Communications at Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. A graduate of Roanoke College, she previously served in executive roles at United Way of Roanoke Valley and the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce. She has developed marketing and communication strategies for over 15 years, emphasizing productivity and measurable results.

Shannon Dominguez is Virginia Director of Operations for Building Beloved Communities, a business consulting firm focused on community-centered solutions. [shannon@buildingbelovedcommunities.com]

Dan Dowdy is the business development

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

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

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

Micah Fram 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.fram.cpa/blog and is frequently interviewed as a business financial expert in national media channels. [micahfram@framcpa.com]

Will 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).

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

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

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

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

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

Mary Ann L. Miller is vice president of business banking and community relations at Bank of Botetourt. A graduate of Bridgewater

College, she has been in the banking industry for more than fifteen years and currently serves on the board and executive committee as past-president with the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce, a board member with the Daleville Institute, and is vice chair of the board of 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]

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

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

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

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.

Brit satire formula, indeed

I didn't see the movie; but when I finally got around to reading the classic, *Cold Comfort Farm* (Must Have Books; 2019—original: 1932) by Stella Gibbons, it most certainly felt like watching a movie—thus, it was a natural to produce as a film from the BBC in 1995. The British satire was a hoot when released and still today.

Young Flora Poste goes to the "estate" of her rather rough relatives. Unlike those other orphan themes in English literature, our protagonist here hardly waddles or suffers her way through the experience. She takes charge and runs our whole story.

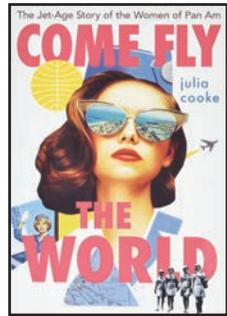
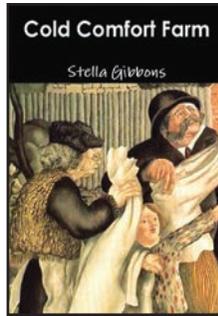
I picked this copy up, because it showed up on a "most humorous books" list; and though I questioned that bestowment as I devoured it (funny, but not side-splitting funny), I have since discovered this version to be abridged, although I don't know to what degree. I may have been cheated. Nevertheless, it's a trippy sidekick to the Bronte sisters, Austen, DH Lawrence, Mary Webb creations we've come to expect from this timeline and setting. Not Dickens, though.

Funny or not, I experienced the strangest phenomenon with this novel. I kept expecting a twist, a surprise development, and frankly, some kind of demise of our protagonist. Instead, every setup we get ends in the appropriate fashion as we have been led. Another way this story is classically British Century 19. An Americanized script with a cast of characters like this one would have flipped us over more than once.

—Tom Field

When Pan Am women saw the world

Yes, there were restrictions no longer in place, some due to court actions, and "stewardesses" are now flight attendants – not exclusively female or single either. In *Come Fly The World: The Jet-Age Story of the Women of Pan Am* (Houghton Mifflin



Harcourt, 2021), author Julia Cooke – the daughter of a Pan Am executive (the airline which at one point held a stranglehold on flights to international markets from the U.S.) details the "golden age" of service through the testimony of a handful of women who were flying for the now-defunct airline from 1966 to 1975.

These stewardesses in the era of *Coffee, Tea or Me?* and the *Fly Me* ads (which they finally jettisoned) had to speak two languages, be between 5'3" and 5'9", between 105 and 140 pounds, and under 26 at the time of hire. They also had to be single – at one point getting married was cause for termination. Some married anyway and took off their wedding bands while in the air. Happily, those Mad Men era and sexist restrictions are gone. The tradeoff? Many of these women saw the world via Pan Am, ventured into new lives after flying or rose to management ranks within the industry.

Pan Am also worked with the US government to shuttle American soldiers back and forth between Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) and R&R trips during the Vietnam War. As things unraveled, Pan Am also evacuated US citizens and associates from Saigon before the fall of the government there in 1975 – including planeloads of babies fathered by U.S. soldiers with Vietnamese women. The Pan Am jets were shot at and sometimes those bullets pierced the fuselage. *Come Fly The World* will give readers a new appreciation for these stewardesses, who came of age with the Women's Liberation movement and ultimately forced Pan Am - other airlines as well - to change their hiring practices. In the meantime, many seemed, at least for a while, to have the time of their lives as they traveled the world and saw cities on layovers they most likely would have never visited in some cases.

—Gene Marrano

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



Submitted

Trucking-Warehouse company open for business in Roanoke >

It didn't take long after an announcement in March - **A. Duie Pyle**, a transportation company that offers direct trucking and warehousing services, has opened its new facility in Roanoke on Salem Turnpike. The Pennsylvania-based company is opening two other locations in Virginia, where it will also warehouse products and then ship direct from those facilities to retail and end-user customers. Those shipments are less-than-truckload in the industry parlance.

John Luciani is the chief operating officer for Pyle. "We'll handle shipments that will come from other Pyle service centers that are located throughout the Northeast. We have 26 other centers that will load shipments; they could be located in Bangor, Maine, Boston, or Buffalo. For shipments going into the Roanoke Valley. [They] will be delivered from that local service center." The Roanoke Regional Partnership worked the Luciani to establish the new transportation and warehousing hub in Roanoke.





Submitted

VWCC professor receives statewide honor >

Dr. Richard L. "Rick" Clark Jr., Engineering professor at Virginia Western Community College, received the Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence last month during the VCCS New Horizons Conference at the Hotel Roanoke. The award is given annually to one teaching faculty member in the Virginia Community College System who distinctly represents teaching excellence. Award criteria are instructional effectiveness, student focus, discipline competence and personal attributes. The recipient receives a stole and a \$5,000 award. In her nominating letter, Virginia Western STEM Dean Amy White praised Clark's student-centered approach, his energy in seeking federal grant funding and his embrace of new technologies such as the electron microscope, water jet cutters and robotics – all to enrich the classroom environment. (from left to right: Virginia Western President Dr. Robert H. Sandel, STEM Dean Amy White, Julie Clark, Rick Clark)



Submitted

Goodwill opens job training center in Pulaski >

Goodwill Industries® of the Valleys has opened its first Donation & Employment Services Center in the Town of Pulaski. The center will serve as a donation drop off location as well as offering Mission Services employment programs and is located at 641 East Main Street in Pulaski. Services available include GoodCare Healthcare, GoodStart Reentry, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) and Supported Employment. **Stephanie Hoer** is Vice President of Mission Services for Goodwill; she says the new center fills a niche: "the programs certainly have a direct benefit and provide a pipeline in terms of trained employees that will be able to meet the needs of employers in the region. We certainly believe so." Training for healthcare jobs will be one major focus.



Grace ... and plenty of grit >

After a record-breaking season last year Dr. Pepper Park president **Waynette Anderson** says 2022 promises to be bigger and better than ever. But that's not the only thing on her plate these days. Anderson has also launched "Grace & Grit," a motivational speech program that she says was booked through the end of last month. "Right now, I've written three of my signature speeches; I'm really excited, I'm getting a lot of positive feedback." She hopes those who come hear her speak find it "inspiration, informational or entertaining."

Anderson says her message to others during Grace & Grit is about executing their vision and overcoming adversity - often relating stories about getting Dr. Pepper Park off the ground more than seven years ago. Anderson says that "vision" may not entail owning four businesses like she does - it might just be planning a trip to Paris for example. "You can execute your vision and achieve success in the face of any adversity. I have a lot of different stories and methods that I teach people - and plug it into what their vision is."



Submitted

Second location in region for repair shop franchise owner >

Tech repair provider **uBreakiFix®** by Asurion has opened its 800th location in Christiansburg at 2611 Market St. NE. The store offers professional repair services for anything with a power button, from smartphones, tablets, and computers to game consoles, smart speakers, and drones—and everything in between. While common repairs include cracked screens, battery issues, and water damage, uBreakiFix repair experts have fixed more than 14 million devices and can help with most any tech mishaps, with most basic repairs completed in two hours or less. uBreakiFix Christiansburg is owned by **Greg Lee** and managed by **Kyle Mills**, who are both local to the area. Their first store is in Roanoke on Valley View Blvd NW. “We’ve been looking forward to bringing this service to Christiansburg for some time,” and were incredibly honored to learn this store,” said Lee.



New Tech lab space >

A new partner facility to the Classroom Building on Virginia Tech’s Blacksburg campus will soon be under construction. The **Undergraduate Science Laboratory Building** will provide critical teaching laboratory and general-use classroom space. The approximately 102,000-gross-square-foot building will be located on the current site of the Perry Street Parking Lot 1. The four-story facility will house 26 wet, dry, and specialty laboratories, adaptable to current and future instructional needs for the College of Science, College of Engineering, College of Natural Resources and Environment, and College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Graduate teaching assistant workspaces, classrooms, collaboration spaces, offices, informal study areas, and 24/7 student space also will be incorporated.



LewisGale Alleghany honors couple as they leave for other posts >

Troy and Lori Barbour, husband and wife employees at LewisGale Hospital Alleghany, are leaving the facility after nearly 50 years of combined service for job promotions within the HCA Virginia Health System. LewisGale Hospital Alleghany colleagues honored the couple with a reception recently. Troy, who served as director of plant operations for LewisGale Hospital Alleghany for nearly 20 years, has accepted a role as director of facilities at Henrico Doctors' Hospital's Forest, a 340-bed community hospital campus in Richmond. "Leaving is bittersweet, but I know I've positively impacted the infrastructure and aesthetics of LewisGale Hospital Alleghany," said Troy.

Lori Barbour, who has worked at the facility close to 30 years and currently serves as assistant administrator, has accepted a leadership position in human resources at Retreat Doctors' Hospital, a 226-bed HCA Virginia Health System-owned acute care hospital in Richmond's Historic Fan District. "The main change I've witnessed is a shift to keeping patients out of the inpatient setting," said Lori. "When I first began my career, everything required an inpatient stay of multiple days. Now, most everything is an outpatient or observation visit."



Greenway bridge replacement >

Hopes were raised perhaps that **Senator Mark Warner's** appearance recently to talk about infrastructure funding at the Wiley Drive low water bridge on the **Roanoke River Greenway** – often closed due to flooding – would be funded by the bi-partisan bill signed into law by Congress. But any replacement won't come from that pot of money since the bridge is not in major disrepair said Warner, who had never visited that part of the greenway before as a Senator or Governor. He walked the low water bridge with Roanoke City Council members, other local officials – and met several people fishing from the bridge.

The greenway system in Roanoke is touted as an economic development driver that helps attract people to the valley. "This bridge, because it's not in disrepair, but is more really a victim of climate change and resilience issues, the place where I really think [the funds] will be found is out of the resiliency project," said Warner, who was joined at the podium by Roanoke City Mayor **Sherman Lea**. That pot of money is contained in the infrastructure bill passed by Congress last year and signed into law.

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

FINANCIAL FRONT



Stevens

Bank of Botetourt has announced that **R. Scott Stevens** has joined the Bank as Vice President - Commercial and Agricultural Loan Officer. Scott most recently was a loan officer with Farm Credit of the Virginias. Prior to that, he was the General Manager for Rockingham Cooperative, previously known as Southern States, where he oversaw in-store financing for more than 25 years.

Three experienced financial services professionals have joined Pinnacle Financial Partners' Campbell Avenue and Salem offices. Financial advisor assistant **Mikki Barranco** and financial



Barranco



Boyd



Stallard

specialist **Amber Boyd** have joined the Campbell Avenue office, along with financial specialist **Helen Stallard**, who joined Pinnacle's office in Salem. Barranco brings 10 years of financial services experience and comes to Pinnacle from First

Bank & Trust Company. Boyd has nine years of experience, most recently at Wells Fargo, where she served as ADCC sig fraud financial crimes analyst. Stallard joins Pinnacle from InFirst/FedStar Federal Credit Union, where she was a senior loan officer.

Clinton, New York. She has worked in private and public liberal arts institutions, community colleges and the American Association of Colleges and Universities. Wolfe will assume the dean's position in July, replacing Dr. Richard Smith, who retired in the summer of 2021 after 12 years in the position.

EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Wolfe

Roanoke College has selected a new dean of the college: **Dr. Kathy J. Wolfe** has been named vice president of academic affairs and dean of the college. Wolfe has 28 years of teaching experience and 12 years in administrative leadership roles, most recently as dean of engaged education at Hamilton College in

WELLNESS FRONT



Fabian

HCA Virginia has named **Alan Fabian**, who was the chief executive officer of LewisGale Hospital Montgomery, to lead the LewisGale Regional Health System as market president and LewisGale Medical Center (Salem) chief executive officer.

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Fabian has been with HCA Healthcare since 1995. Outgoing market president Lance Jones has resigned and is pursuing a career outside of the acute care industry, according to a LewisGale spokesman.



Adams

Friendship Retirement Community announces the promotion of **Tashina Adams** from Assistant Director of Nursing to Director of Nursing of Friendship Health & Rehab Center on Hershberger Road. Adams joined the Friendship team in 2018 as the Assistant Director of Nursing for Friendship Health & Rehab Center. She has been a nurse for 22 years, serving in leadership roles across the Roanoke Valley in both the acute care and the post-acute

long-term care settings.



Woods

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem has named **Amy Woods** as chief nursing officer for the 506-bed acute-care medical and surgical facility. Woods began her career as an operating room staff nurse at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery and progressed forward in leadership roles

including director of surgical services, assistant chief nursing officer of LewisGale Medical Center, and then chief nursing officer at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery in Blacksburg.

Warm Hearth Village (WHV) has welcomed **Yvonne Hurt**, as the new Director of Human Resources. She comes with varied experience in human resources, most recently with Meridian Bird Removal where she was the People Operations Manager. Hurt earned a B.S. in Business Management, and a master's in management and leadership from Liberty University.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Lewis

Casey Lewis is now the Communications & Community Engagement Specialist for the City of Roanoke. She comes from a marketing role in the private sector at Fleet Feet Roanoke.

*Compiled by
Gene Marrano*



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Pinnacle again lauded

Pinnacle Financial Partners, which is based in Nashville but has a branch in downtown Roanoke, has been ranked No. 28 among 100 Best Companies to Work For by Great Place to Work®, according to the latest list published by Great Place to Work® and FORTUNE magazine. Pinnacle has been on the list every year since the first year it was eligible in 2017. “Our successes have continued to grow because we made very deliberate investments in people and culture from the start,” said Terry Turner, Pinnacle’s president and CEO. “Even in the ‘Great Resignation,’ Pinnacle has attracted new associates from vulnerable competitors at a record pace, driving growth, and we retained roughly 94 percent of our existing associates, making that growth sustainable.” The 100 Best Companies to Work For rankings are based on analysis of survey responses from more than 4.5 million current U.S. employees. In that survey, 98 percent of Pinnacle’s employees said the firm is a great place to work. This is just the latest of

several rankings that lists Pinnacle as providing a superior working environment.

More solar on the way

The Solarize Virginia program returns to Greater Roanoke and the New River Valley. This grassroots, community-based outreach initiative is managed by the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP) and presented in partnership with the City of Roanoke. Since 2014, 714 contracts have been signed through LEAP’s Solarize program across the state, generating more than 6.3 MW of solar capacity and over \$17 million in value. Through June 30 homeowners and businesses can sign up to receive a free solar satellite assessment, and gain access to discounted prices and vetted installers. Chris Meyer, Executive Director, Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP), says, “more than ever, homeowners are looking to solar as a sustainable energy source, and we are proud to partner with local officials to make solar accessible and affordable to all in

greater Roanoke.”

New biotech degree on the way at Virginia Western

Beginning in the Fall of 2023 Virginia Western Community College will offer a two-year Associate’s Degree in Biotechnology that can be transferred to a four-year school. VWCC Graduates can also step into laboratory jobs that average around 24 dollars an hour instead. The new degree is an upgrade from a 20-credit certificate program established at the school about five years ago. Amy White is the Dean of STEM at VWCC: “we have some agreements in place with our local university partners.” Class size will be limited to 16, due to the amount of hands-on learning needed in a lab environment.

White says a movement in the region to boost the life sciences and biotechnology “ecosystem,” was a principal driver for the new degree program. “We are part of that movement to bring good jobs and industry to the area. White also notes that VWCC is partnering

“very closely” with the Fralin Biomedical Institute at Virginia Tech Carilion in Roanoke, where some of those biotechnology graduates could wind up working. White says biotechnology entails “using biological concepts to solve problems,” in sectors like agriculture and pharmaceutical. “The skill set we’re teaching is transferable to many different fields.”

Roanoke College to offer MBA

Roanoke College is poised to offer its first graduate program in more than a century, pending approval by the regional higher education accreditor, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. If approved, the College will begin administering the degree in summer 2023 - the first time Roanoke College will offer graduate courses since the 1920s. “This is a victory for Roanoke and our students,” President Michael C. Maxey said. “We are grateful to everyone involved in developing this program. It is a great step forward for Roanoke College.” The program will be a four-

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plus-one program, where students will complete their undergraduate degree in four years and their MBA after a fifth year. It will require summer and regular-term courses and will consist of 11 courses taken by yearly cohorts of 20 students.

Grants for local artists

Over the next 3 years, the City of Roanoke will award small grants to local artists for projects that need funding to get off the ground - \$100,000 a year for the next three years, courtesy of the National Endowment for the Arts. Doug Jackson is Roanoke's arts and culture coordinator: "we've got money. How do we keep it together and make

it something really big? We never had this kind of money to do work with individual artists before. We want to advance community goals and integrate artists into community problem solving. The arts are about creativity – and looking at things with a new lens." Roanoke has dubbed 2022-23 the "Year of the Artist." Apply for the 5-\$10,000 grants at roanokearts.org.

Our bad

In our story on former Smith Mountain Lake Chamber of Commerce executive director Vicki Gardner last month, we regrettably misspelled her name, adding an "e" to Vicki. Our sincere

Have an announcement about your business?

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

apologies. We don't like getting things wrong, especially people's names.

New downtown Roanoke business ready to hatch

A new business is "hatching" where Wallstreet Tavern used to be in downtown Roanoke. Jo Jo Soprano has been with Perry Restaurant Group,

now he's transitioning from management to being a partial owner of "The Hatch." Along with those chicken sandwiches, in several styles, they'll have other southern fare including fried catfish, flat-iron steak, shrimp & grits, and meatloaf. The plan is to open "The Hatch" at the Roanoke City Market Building in May. "We do serve a lot of chicken sandwiches



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- 6/17 - Outlaws | 6/18 - Andy Grammer
- 6/24 - Absolute Queen | 6/25 - Kip Moore
- 7/1 - Dylan Scott | 7/8 - Kidd G & Chase Matthew | 7/16 - Quiet Riot | 7/22 - Rumours LA | 7/23 - Aaron Lewis & the Stateliners
- 8/12 - Face 2 Face | 8/13 - JJ Grey & Mofro
- 8/17 - Indigo Girls | 8/27 - The Roanoke Wing Fest
- 9/2 - Bee Gees Gold | 9/23 - US & Floyd

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so if [The Hatch] works better for you think of it that way," says Soprano. They plan to have music on the patio again as Wall Street Tavern did. "Southern food done right," he declares.

Delta adds ROA-NYC flights

Delta Airlines is planning a non-stop service from the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport to New York-LaGuardia starting June 6. Delta will be joining American Airlines in offering nonstop service to New York. Brad Boettcher, the Director of Marketing and Air Service Development of Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport says that if more people use this service, ROA might get more flights. "The best way to hold on to this service is to have people use it and support it. The flight that Delta added was kind of unexpected."

Recent fares show a round trip close to \$300. Airport executives are hopeful that people will be interested in both

the American and Delta flights. Boettcher says several months ago the ROA to NYC flights were considerable higher than from other airports in the region, "so I put a business case together with American and said you're going to make more money by lowering your fares. Lo and behold the traffic more than doubled."

The new Delta flight is planning to be scheduled to leave from Roanoke at about 2:30 and arrive at LaGuardia around 4 PM, starting June 6.

Good Sam honored

Good Samaritan in Roanoke County was recognized recently as a Hospice Honors Award Recipient at the National Hospice and Palliative Care Conference in National Harbor, Maryland. The Hospice Honors Program is a landmark compilation of hospices providing the best patient and caregiver experience. "Of all recognitions given to a hospice, receiving an award based upon the direct experience of

those we serve is one of the highest honors," remarks Aaron Housh, Good Samaritan President and CEO. Good Samaritan says it is the only community based non-profit hospice in southwestern Virginia. Founded in 1992, offices are located in Roanoke and Christiansburg.

Luna spins off lab division

Roanoke-based Luna Innovations Incorporated, a manufacturer of advanced fiber optic-based technology, has divested its Luna Labs division in a transaction valued at approximately \$21 million. Under the terms of the sale, Luna will retain a less than five percent minority equity ownership interest in this new company. "The sale of Luna Labs marks a final step in the simplification of our portfolio; something we announced several years ago when we set our strategy to focus our capital and resources on the fiber optics markets," said Scott Graeff, President and Chief

Executive Officer of Luna. Graeff added, "with this divestiture, Luna is now a pure-play fiber optic-based technology company, and we look forward to leveraging our industry-leading, proprietary fiber optics platform to better serve our customers and to generate long-term growth for our investors and employees."

In addition, Luna Innovations has acquired LIOS Sensing, a division of NKT Photonics. LIOS offers fiber optic monitoring solutions for power cable, pipelines, oilfield services, security, highways, railways and industrial fire detection systems. The acquisition will further expand Luna into those high-growth markets. "The acquisition of LIOS marks an important milestone for Luna. We are bringing together two complementary businesses which will further support our growth trajectory," said Graeff.

Compiled by
Gene Marrano

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Susan Huff: "... devoted to connecting people to the art and soul of cooking foods that are grown with respect, reverence and sourced locally."



Dan Smith

The Soup Shop in Floyd

'Soup' as a Verb in Floyd

By Dan Smith

Susan Huff is sitting on the edge of retirement age, but she's a self-described workaholic and a new restaurant venture is just what the chef ordered.

Susan M Huff is the Soup Lady and she serves bio-dynamic food. That's all self-appointed, anointed and precisely correct. At 60, she's even adventuresome. She has just opened The Soup Shop in rural Floyd County (7360 Floyd Highway at Jack's Mill Road in Copper Hill). She doesn't look at it as much of a stretch because she's been

restaurating for 35 years in Florida, Michigan and Oregon. She and her husband, John, a noted architect, recently moved into an impressive home atop a mountain in Floyd, one overlooking a magnificent gorge. If you think that's rural, it is. So are her soups, broadcast as "farm to table," like the dinners she used to cook.



Dan Smith



Dan Smith

She talks fluently about her new enterprise as if it were an exciting new love interest. She is, “a chef and a local farm follower; a lover of fresh, nourishing, organic food” and is “devoted to connecting people to the art and soul of cooking foods that are grown with respect, reverence and sourced locally.” That seems to fit Floyd, where

hippies, rednecks and millionaires mingle without much of a thought.

For more than three decades, Huff has created her own home garden, purchased from local farms, “in order to bring delicious, nutrition-dense, whole-food meals to clients and the

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Dan Smith

community," she says. That includes three organic cafes.

She learned "biodynamic farming" in New York, Italy and London. She studied with Dr. Bernard Jensen and Berkley, Calif., and chef and food activist Alice Waters. She studied bees with Gunther Hauk,

and holistic management farming with farmer and noted author Joel Salatin.

She and John selected Floyd County as their new home partly because they "believe that the abundant bounty found in Floyd is a rare treat." It has all come together and, she says, "I feel it is the



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right time to share how I truly fell in love with food, not just to share how I developed such a heartfelt appreciation for food, but to inspire a connection to the source of real food. I want to share how I learned to forget about calories, and how I discovered how food really nourishes us."

If she's beginning to sound like a fundamentalist food preacher, that's because she is. She says, "Three of my most memorable experiences in self-discovery ... came over several years and with the most amazing teachers, including Mother Nature herself. When I close my eyes and remember these experiences, I come alive like the day they happened."

She talks of her grandfather and his Louisiana half-acre farm where he "could grow anything." A decade later she milked a cow for the first time and "for the very first time, I got to taste cream ... At first taste, my jaw dropped." Chicken liver pate in Italy made this vegetarian re-think her meat ban.

She has this thoughtful advice for those counting calories and fat content: "Next time you are compelled to look at the calories, please, for the love of food and the love of self, skip on down to the real deal that matters: the farm that grew it, the person who made it, the place it came from. Look at the amount of passion that the food you choose to eat or purchase is prepared with. Choose love over price. Choose nourishment over facts. Choose taste over speed. Choose farmers over factories."

The restaurant business, of course, is difficult and a gamble, regardless of how good your food is, especially these days with so many new obstacles. But, she says, "I love creating with food. It is my art, my medium. I love serving people. It feels right and is mostly always a win-win. I get to create; [customers] get to enjoy. How good is that?"

She doesn't advertise and hasn't found the need. "Word of mouth or the visual content on Facebook" work for her. The proof of the pudding (or the soup, in this case) is in the tasting. Her menu is structured, "for easy transport. It is easy to warm up and great for back-up meals when you need them most. I eat what I cook and that pretty much determines my menu. I don't do food as religion. I keep it real and simple: soup bread, hummus and granola are my staples." And, of course, garlic. Lots of garlic.

She is not concerned about being in a remote location. She says, "I serve Floyd, Copper Hill, Bent Mountain, loads of Blue Ridge Parkway visitors and all of the Roanoke traffic I can attract. It is never about how many; it is about how well the customer is served."

She has used her retirement to finance the opening, scheduled in May (with a grand opening late in the month), and explains that she could "use it on love - or waste it on things I do not need."

The first taste will likely tell you just how much she loves her food. See www.floydsoup.com. Facebook Page-The Soup Shop 



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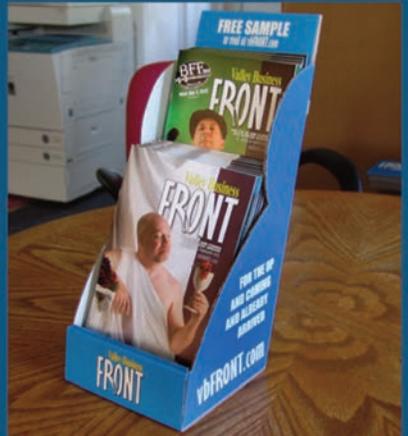
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