

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 176

MAY 2023

Commercial Real Estate  
Auction Houses

NRV Real Estate

Villa Heights Restored

Design-Builders

MemberOne's  
Community Service


Special Olympics

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

This month we look at some of the real estate auction houses in the region, and the real estate market outlook in the New River Valley. There's also a story on the construction, architecture and design companies behind the development going on locally. Stepping away from that there's a snapshot of several local non-profits – and the institutions supporting them.

A commentary on maternal health in the U.S. may surprise you and offers a glimpse into the lack of affordable health care for mothers that is holding some businesses back from having the best talent available on their staff. Other countries are ahead of us in this respect, and on the availability of affordable health care for all. Dr. Jaclyn Nunziato weighs in there with her thoughtful Guest Commentary. Plenty of good stuff this month as we head towards summer. We hope you learn a thing or two along the way. Happy reading.



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor

““  
We always want to keep as part  
of our mission the affordability  
component. — Page 23

““  
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like-minded people. — Page 27



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By Jessica Britton



“Election years tend to be tricky. — Page 17

FRONTcover photo of James Woltz by Tom Field.





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Jessica Britton



Daniel Colston



Mike Leigh



Nanette Levin



Michael Shelton



Nicholas Vaassen

## Advisory Board

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

# 2023 CONTRIBUTORS



**Jennifer Poff Cooper**



**Dan Dowdy**



**Tom Field**



**Gene Marrano**



**Shawn Nowlin**



**Jaclyn Nunziato**



Special Olympics supports 100,000 competitions and five million athletes.

— Page 59



**Zenith Barrett**  
Goodwill /  
community service



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



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# Real Estate Sales and the Spirit of Competition

By Jessica Britton

**Competition always exists in real estate sales; large commercial auction houses have always acknowledged and leverage that—to the sellers' or buyers' advantage—or both.**

Property is constantly being bought and sold, no matter what the economic climate is. Four auction companies in our region are standing out with their big deals, innovative changes, and experienced employees.

Instead of putting a steady price on a property, the auction industry allows properties to be sold at auction and adds a level of competition. After going on the

market, buyers compete against each other to see who is willing to pay the most for land, commercial and industrial properties, homes, and estates. Times are changing and online auctions are becoming more and more prevalent. They are here to stay. They do not have the excitement and energy like in person auctions, but the competition of an auction will never change.

## WHY AUCTION?

Woltz & Associates says there are at least four good reasons to consider an auction when selling your property:

- Auctions provides high exposure
- Auctions reduce time on market
- Auctions motivate buyer competition
- Auctions are a better option for many sellers:
  - if you have a high-demand property (competition can increase price)
  - if you want to convert to cash quickly (sales cycle is shorter with auctions)
  - if you're purchasing another property and have a bridge loan (subject to sale of existing property)
  - if you're selling an estate or surplus property
  - if your listing has become inactive and you need a fresh marketing approach



## Tech Engagement

### *Walker Commercial Services*

With nearly 25 years of experience, Walker Commercial Services assists and serves clients from investors to financial institutions. They specialize in Real Estate Auctions, Commercial Real Estate Sales and leasing, property evaluations, and more.

To better serve their customers, Walker Commercial Services created an app and distributes a formidable email to show listings and provide a more unique way of getting real estate information out.

Bringing a tech and data driven approach to the firm, the company continues to enhance value by constantly refining internal systems, while utilizing technology to engage with new audiences.

**Walker Commercial Services**  
101 Albemarle Avenue SE  
Roanoke, VA 24013  
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## Landing Zone

### *Torrence, Read, and Forehand Auctions*

Torrence, Read and Forehand (TRF) Auctions have been in the auction business for over 30 years. They specialize in land, farms, commercial and residential real estate. Their clients include buyers, investors and investment groups.

Mike Torrence, formed TRF Auctions and has served a client

“ ”

On its website, Walker reminds sellers that auctions sell properties “as is”—eliminating the need for repairs and contract uncertainties. That could be a major benefit for many sellers.





Submitted



Submitted

Mike Torrence

base of banks, attorneys, corporations, estates and private individuals. Since last year, the market is not as robust and less people are buying because of high interest rates, but that doesn't stop TFR Auctions from selling lots of land and farms.

"Land has always been one of the best investments; it's a limited commodity, which makes it competitive," Torrence of TRF Auctions says.

With 14 employees total, TFR Auctions expects to increase their land and farm sales because they are becoming more and more attractive to buyers.

**Owned by: Mike Torrence, Rick Read**

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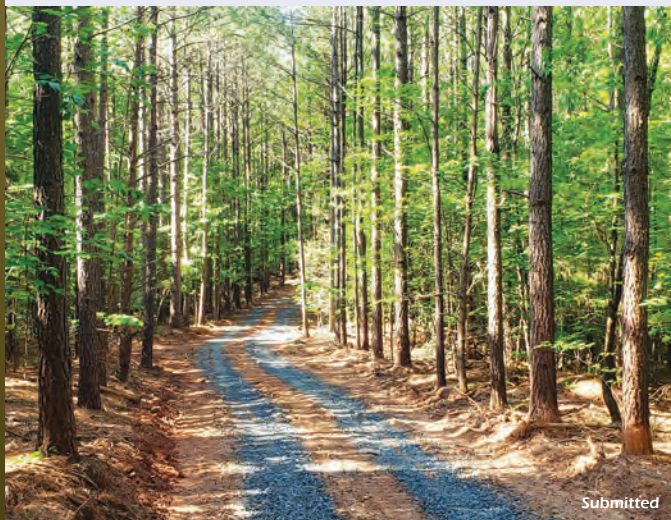
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Land has always been one of the best investments.

- Mike Torrence



Submitted



# Notable Dealings

## *The Counts Realty and Auction Group*

The Counts Realty and Auction Group was founded in 1963 by Ted Counts. They conduct real estate across the mid-Atlantic and southeast, with some international auctions in the mix. The Counts focus on business liquidations and construction and farming equipment.

Some of their clients include the banking and legal community, but also the public. When COVID shut down the world, it also shut down conventional auctions; The Counts had to adjust by conducting business online.

“The online auctions don’t have the energy and excitement that comes with in-person auctions; however, you still see the competition.” says Bill Bryant, president of The Counts.

Some of the business’s most notable deals have been the high selling auctions, some reaching over \$5 million. The Counts sold an oceanfront property in Belize in an online only auction, which was very exciting to all involved in the process.

The Counts expects to see more auctions as the public begin to recognize that it is a good way to sell properties in a concentrated period while adding competition. Their 15 employees work tirelessly to bring buyers and sellers together and help both accomplish their goals.

**Founder: Ted Counts, President: Bill Bryant**

### **The Counts**

828 Main Street, 15th Floor

Lynchburg, VA 24504

Lynchburg Office: (434) 525-2991

[Countsauction.com](http://Countsauction.com)



Bill Bryant

““”

The Counts Realty & Auction Group says “dividing property into varying-size pieces appeals to more different buyers.” This approach elevates demand and means you “get more dollars for your property than offering it as a whole.”





Tom Field

One of the conference rooms at Woltz & Associates downtown Roanoke office

## Serve and Preserve

### *Woltz and Associates*

One of the most interesting deals made by Woltz and Associates Auction Inc was the sale of Timberneck Farm in Gloucester, Virginia, a natural preserve that was to be turned into a development.

The auction company states on its website that it is one of the only real estate companies to promote conservation easement, a permanent protection that a landowner places on his or her property to limit future subdivision and development.

Woltz and Associates specializes in the buying and selling of large timberline tracks, farmlands, industrial and commercial properties, and large estates. Their success can be accredited to the computer software they created, allowing properties to be divided and sold individually or in groupings.

Woltz and Associates addresses the future by continuing to come up with creative and innovative marketing approaches.





Tom Field

An oversized gavel greets visitors at one of the entrances

"We have different ways we can present our properties; and we are doing a lot of research to expand our computer software and present our properties to a large audience," says Jim Woltz, president of Woltz and Associates.

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Tom Field

The office suite is full of artifacts and mementos collected from auctions; and much of decor features nautical themes



Tom Field

"More people should know..."

That's what Jim Woltz says—about the option of using auctions for real estate sales—and about his own company. Woltz & Associates holds licenses in 18 states, Jim says, citing many major deals from all over, including our region. He was on the board of directors for the National Association of Realtors and served as the Auction Committee Chair—and this year (August) marks 50 years in the business.





Submitted

Kelly Griffin

# Real Estate in the NRV: fallout from interest rate hikes

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

---

**The more things change, the more they stay the same. Sort of.**

We last talked with Kelly Griffin, President of the New River Valley Association of Realtors, in August, was before interest rates skyrocketed (due in large part to the Federal Reserve hikes designed to cool historic inflation.) So, we asked Griffin for an update on market conditions in the NRV over a half-year later.

The basic trend is that sales are down, but prices are at or slightly higher than where they were at this time last year.

The initial shock of the hike in interest rates has worn off, Griffin said. Still, the higher rates have affected affordability. The same



Sarah Cramer

buyer will have a much larger mortgage payment than at this time last year, which has dampened buyer demand.

Meanwhile, there is less competition than last year, but inventory is historically low so “we are not seeing price drops,” said Griffin.

Because there are fewer buyers than last year but still not enough listings, “great homes still have competing offers,” she said.

Griffin said that in the first quarter of 2023, the median sales price of detached homes in the New River Valley was \$251,000; in the same period last year, it was \$247,500. In Q1 of this year, the NRV saw 310 closings, compared to 370 last year.

In Montgomery County, the median home price now is \$330,000 compared to \$312,000 the first quarter last year. Closings in Q1 this year totaled 113, while last year saw 152.



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Submitted

The New River is an attraction for homebuyers

Christiansburg, in particular, has become a hotter market, Griffin said.

The frenzy of 2022 included “opportunistic buyers,” those who did not have to move but chose to because market conditions were favorable – low interest rates for buying and top dollar for selling. Today’s buyer, in Griffin’s experience, is often looking to relocate by necessity for work; she has also seen numerous clients who are downsizing and/or moving closer to grandkids, or who need to move due to a change in family size.

Griffin said that some sellers are ready to sell but “have nowhere to go, so it feeds on itself; it snowballs.”

Housing starts are down somewhat nationally from this time last year, Griffin said, affected by the tip toward recession as well as the cost of materials and labor. This “might be giving some builders pause; they may be hesitant to invest in new builds.”

Said Griffin, “We need more inventory but the economy is not being kind to new construction projects.”

Locally, though, Griffin said, “There are new construction projects that are ongoing across the NRV, with new developments (or expansions of existing developments) in Christiansburg, Blacksburg, Riner, Radford, Pembroke, and Dublin.”

She also quoted a local builder who cited sales contracts for new homes in the NRV: last year, 45; year-to-date, 18; planned for 2023, 63.

Housing starts will also improve as we come out of the typical winter doldrums, she said. This will address the inventory challenge but not the affordability issue.

Affordable housing continues to be a big conversation in the NRV, especially now with elevated interest rates, and Griffin said there is a real effort to address it. Community Housing Partners has a new project for affordable rental housing with an apartment complex of 56 units in Blacksburg. There is an income cap where renters must earn less than 80% of the median income of \$63,000. The idea, Griffin said, is to provide housing for people who work in Blacksburg but can’t afford to live there, such as public servants (including teachers) and Virginia Tech’s non-faculty employees.

Regarding the housing forecast for the coming year, Griffin said home sales at the state level are predicted to go down in volume, with prices level or slightly increasing – 2% versus 7% in 2022

Griffin said, “Prices are elevated. They are still as high as last year across the board.”

She noted that 2023 is an election year in





Sarah Cramer

Virginia, with every seat in the legislature up for grabs.

“Election years tend to be tricky,” Griffin said. “People are more cautious about big expenses.”

She also said experts hope to see rates drop from the current 6.8% to about 6% by the end of this year.

Griffin said she advises clients to keep in close touch with their lenders about mortgage options, including adjustable-

rate mortgages and the possibility of refinancing later.

“You are not locked into this rate forever,” she said.

Griffin continued, “The trend of rates going down is good,” adding that the economy as a whole is the biggest factor affecting the housing market, and that in turn real estate is a big sector of that economy.

“I don’t foresee anything terrible,” Griffin concluded. “I’m optimistic.” 🏠

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## Can we lay off the layoffs?

I'm very pro-business. I used to accept the premise that layoffs were necessary for a company to stay competitive. Not anymore.


There are situations where a company is failing and without drastic cost cuts can become insolvent. But does anyone think Amazon, Google, Salesforce or Microsoft are about to go under?

There was a recent article in the Washington Post that described how CEOs and their companies communicate to their employees when they lay off workers. You would think that every CEO would apologize and take full blame for the decision, but often they don't. Even if there is an apology, companies will try to shift blame to outside forces, such as an unforeseen economic downturn. These announcements offend me. I believe companies are doing more damage than good when workers are laid off.

I've gotten to know many small business owners in the past decade. Every one of them would feel personally responsible if they had to downsize and would only lay off workers as a last resort. So why do larger companies quickly lay off workers to be "more efficient" or to "restructure," and sometimes get rewarded by investors for doing so? Are CEOs too far removed from their employees and too focused on short-term results?

Unless the short-term survival of the company is in question, laying off employees is a losing strategy. Lost is trained talent. Lost is the feeling of job security with remaining employees. Lost is trust between employees and management. Companies that lay off their employees no longer have the right to say their employees are their most important asset.

Layoffs are leadership failures. CEOs can blame outside factors, but the CEO is responsible for managing risk to ensure their folks are not adversely impacted.

Half of my current employees came to me after being let go by their previous employer. Maybe I should be thankful that when short-sighted companies lay off employees, winning companies that care more for their employees can hire them. 

## BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

**Executive Summary:**  
*There has been a lot of news the past few months about layoffs. Although mostly confined to the tech industry, and not relative to the overall job market, the layoffs are still painful for those directly affected.*

Send your questions  
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“Are CEOs too far removed from their employees and too focused on short-term results?”

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This is an attorney advertisement. | Responsible Attorney, Peter M. Pearl





Submitted photos

Villa Heights Recreation Center ribbon cutting

# Restoration Housing looking for funds to keep Villa Heights maintained

By Gene Marrano

It's big, very old, and sits on a large wooded parcel. Now the non-profit that rescued it from demolition is asking for a little help from the community at large.

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Most of the projects that Restoration Housing has undertaken under the guidance of executive director Isabel Thornton have been dilapidated, century old (or older) residential properties that with the help of tax credits and grants have been transformed into affordable duplexes with reasonable rents. Southeast Roanoke, where Thornton says about twenty percent of the homes in that quadrant of the city are vacant, has been a particular area of focus recently.

One project of the half dozen or so undertaken to date was the 200 year old former mansion in northwest Roanoke known as Villa Heights. Close to demolition, instead Restoration Housing undertook a \$900,000 remake that included fixing a hole in the roof that led to significant water damage. Since cutting the ribbon in 2019 it has housed a number of non-profits. Kingdom Life Ministries is the current tenant and sublets some of the space to other non-profit organizations. LEAP, the group that runs farmer's markets and promotes healthy, locally grown foods, was a tenant before purchasing and rehabbing their own building on Patterson Avenue SW, where Restoration Housing also transformed another residential property.

Roanoke City used it as a recreation and community center for a while

before leaving the property in 2007. It then sat empty for ten years and was heavily damaged by a fire. In 2017, Villa Heights was awarded to Restoration Housing and after a successful nomination to both the National and State Historic Registers, an 11-month restoration commenced.

Villa Heights was originally constructed circa 1820 for War of 1812 veteran, Lieutenant Colonel Elijah McClanahan and his wife Agatha Strother Lewis as a two-story, one room deep home in the Federal style. The McClanahan's were a prominent family with Elijah helping to establish the Presbyterian Church in the Roanoke Valley and serving as representative for Botetourt County in Virginia's General Assembly.

Now Restoration Housing has launched a short term fundraising campaign through the end of May, looking for donations totaling at least \$12,000 and as much as \$55,000, to create a property maintenance fund that Thornton says should suffice for a number of years. The non-profit owns the properties it renovates and then becomes the landlord. 100% of gifts made to Restoration Housing between now and May 31 "will go to this significant piece of Roanoke's history." Thornton says they may have underestimated the funding needed for upkeep when first applying for grants to help cover the property's







makeover. This campaign will help make up the difference.

The fundraising campaign “was something we started to focus on a year ago,” says Thornton, and is separate from other efforts to raise donations for their work. All donations made this spring will go towards keeping the Villa Heights property in tip-top shape. “We want [Villa Heights] to be able to operate [independently] from our non-profit.” That will also keep her organization from having to lend money for upkeep to the tenants every year.

Donations of \$500 or more will be celebrated on a recognition plaque installed in the grand entrance hall at Villa Heights with all donors receiving a ‘Villa Heights Steward’ decal. Complete campaign details including a before and after video may be found



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at [www.restorationhousing.org/villaheights](http://www.restorationhousing.org/villaheights). A 5000 square foot mansion with more than three acres of park land around it does require some upkeep she notes: "it's a 200 year old house." Raising that maintenance fund will also "help keep rents really low."

Meanwhile Isabel Thornton's husband Lucas and Hist:RE Partners are focused on creating additional more upscale living spaces in downtown Roanoke,

at the former Campbell Court bus depot, and at another property on Campbell Avenue. "We always want to keep as part of our mission the affordability component," says Isabel Thornton of Restoration Housing, but [Villa Heights] does require a lot of upkeep and maintenance. It's a big, beautiful building." If they can hit the \$55,000 fundraising target by the end of this month, "we anticipate this will get us through many years of operating this house." 

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## FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

**Executive Summary:**  
*Managing real estate investments to maximize tax savings includes creating cost segregation reports. Do the work.*

*Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at [Michael@360WealthConsulting.com](mailto:Michael@360WealthConsulting.com)*

## Do you really know how to make real estate work for you?

I work with a lot of clients who have rental or investment properties. These aren't necessarily wealthy people who have extra money to lose. They're mostly hard-working folks like you and me trying to be smart about how they invest the little extra money they earn.

They're pursuing the dream of reaching a place in their life of financial security. If this comes before retirement age, even better. When these people come to me, most are paying more in taxes than required. Some so much it could slow their progress to their financial goals by years, or longer.


It's not surprising. Even many who make their living in the financial industry don't think of cost segregating and other tax-saving strategies when reporting income for real estate investments. Doing so can save you tons in taxes.

## How does cost segregating work?

Most people who rent out a house depreciate the dwelling. They're not segregating the pieces that comprise the house. The flooring, the cabinets, the roof. Start to think of other high-cost items too, like an HVAC system you had to replace, appliances and furniture provided for tenants.

When you start to break out these items, you need to implement depreciation management. This can include all home improvements but also assets within the building. Items will likely depreciate over 5, 7 or 15 years. Sometimes you can take the tax savings up front in the tax year the expense occurs.

This works with multiple properties too, but requires a more detailed depreciation management strategy. If you're not sure how to do this, reach out and I'll help get you started. I talked in another column about expensing items you buy to maintain a rental property. This is another way to stretch your real estate investment dollars.

Managing real estate investments to maximize tax savings includes creating cost segregation reports. It includes expensing related purchases. It includes tracking property-related mileage on your car. These are all smart, legal ways to stretch your investment money further. One of the most effective ways to do so can be by valuing items within the dwelling individually. This often results in the parts adding up to more than the value of the whole. Why would you want to pay more to Uncle Sam than required? Talking to someone who keeps current with changing tax laws can help you ensure you don't. 



# Remove the Mess and Stress by Moving to the Cloud

By Russell Decker, Cox Business Account Manager

The adoption of cloud computing continues to soar in popularity. With its low upfront cost — and benefits that can include, anywhere access, improved redundancy and back-up, and enhanced data security — it's easy to understand why.



## The Cloud is Scalable, Cost-Effective, and Flexible

With an on-site data solution, you need to invest in physical servers, networking equipment, and software licenses to support your business. Once that investment is made, it's hard to scale back.

Many businesses leverage the cloud to manage their bandwidth requirements, because services can easily scale up or down based on user requirements. And by moving to the cloud, you virtually eliminate the investment that's required for on-site redundant infrastructure.

Cloud services are also exceptionally flexible. They don't tie your people to one location. Any internet-enabled device, including laptops and smartphones, can access and share critical information and documents for strategic business decision-making.

## The Cloud Enhances Data Security

A major concern for every business, regardless of size and industry, is the security of its data. Data breaches and other cybercrimes can devastate a company's revenue, customer loyalty and brand reputation.

The cloud offers many advanced security features that ensure your data is securely stored and managed. Features like permission-only access and specified log-on protocols can restrict sensitive data to specific employees, reducing the chance of a breach by malicious actors.

## The Cloud Offers Proven Technology

Cloud computing technology has been around nearly 20 years, and it's estimated that over 60% of all corporate data is currently stored in the cloud. By 2025, it's estimated half of all business IT spending will be for cloud computing. Clearly, both big and small businesses recognize the benefits of cloud computing, and how it positively impacts production, collaboration, security, and revenue.



For more information about how Cox Business Cloud Solutions can be a game-changer for your company, email me at [Russell.Decker@cox.com](mailto:Russell.Decker@cox.com). We'll meet to assess your needs and create a custom-designed cloud strategy to remove the mess and stress of on-site data storage for your business.





Submitted

Byron Dickson

# Roanoke creatives reimagine the concept of architecture

By Shawn Nowlin

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**Ever seen a building or structure in the Roanoke Valley and thought, “I wonder who the individuals responsible for bringing this idea to life are?”**

Some might be unaware of just how many established construction, design and architect companies there are throughout the Roanoke Valley. Dickson Architects & Associates, Blue Ridge Restoration & Construction, Balzer & Associates, John Fulton Associates, Burns & McDonnell, Lionberger Construction and Hughes Associates are just some of the respected brands in a class of their own.

To understand Byron Dickson’s passion for architecture, one must first understand his back story. A self-described “student of life,” Dickson grew up in Salem. After graduating from Andrew Lewis High School, he furthered his education at Roanoke College and then the University of Virginia, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree from the UVA School of Architecture in 1963.

“When I graduated in ‘63, there was a draft, and my number was coming up. I had a student deferment, and once that was negated, I was fortunate enough to land a commission with the Surgeon General in the Army,” he said. Back then, he explained,

you needed experience to get a job, but you could only get a job if you had experience.

Dickson always knew that it was just a matter of time before he turned his passion into a full-time profession. “The stars sort of aligned for me in 1971 when I founded Dickson Architects & Associates. We got to the point where we employed over a dozen people full-time. We are the oldest firm under continuous management in the area,” Dickson, a member of the Roanoke Architectural Review Board, said. “One project we are known for is the design of the D-Day Memorial in Vinton.”

Added his wife, Edwina, “It all started with an idea in Byron’s head. It took approximately 11 years to finish, but we were more than satisfied with how it turned out.” Byron and his soulmate, both in their 80s, still have a passion for architecture and have no intentions of slowing down anytime soon.

For more than five decades, Balzer & Associates, with offices in Roanoke, the Shenandoah

Valley and New River Valley, has served clients throughout the Commonwealth. From Vice President Mark Beall to Survey Crew Chief Kevin Allgood, the company employs more than 50 people. Last November, Balzer & Associates celebrated its annual Community Day Celebration where employees from all the area offices came together to make a difference in the community.

"Probably the largest project we have going on right now is the expansion of Carilion Hospital. We are the engineers for that project, not the architects," Marketing Manager Megan McBroom said. "We try to be really active throughout the area. We emphasize to our employees the importance of knowing the community."

Waiting for permission to accomplish his goals is something Brent Andrew has never done. Some of the best advice he ever received came from his family at an early age, "No one accomplishes anything solely by themselves, but at the end of the day, you are responsible for putting in the work required to achieve your goals."

Prior to establishing Blue Ridge Restoration & Construction in 2016, Andrew ran two successful pizza shops. Everything that he learned as a restaurant owner – customer relationships, professional delivery, community outreach and more – made his transition into construction seamless. As CEO, Andrew, a 1989 graduate of Averett University, oversees everything that has to do with




Dickson Architects

D-Day Memorial

the company, including placing his full-time employees in positions to succeed.

"Working with other people inspired me to start my own company. Once I got a first-hand look at everything, I didn't need much convincing to jump in with both feet," he said. "We have an A+ rating with the Better Business Bureau, something we are extremely proud of. We offer a variety of services but are perhaps best known for our work on remodeling basements, decks and houses."

Because of their contributions to the Roanoke Valley community and surrounding areas, each of the aforementioned companies have won numerous awards and earned acclaimed recognition.

If Byron Dickson could give his younger self any life perspective, he says it would be short and to the point – surround yourself with like-minded people, don't be afraid to take chances and always be willing to go the extra mile to achieve your goals. 



Submitted

Brent Andrew, Blue Ridge Restoration & Construction



## BUSINESS CENTS

By Daniel Colston

**Executive Summary:**

*if you're running a successful business in Virginia, odds are you've had to navigate the Workers Compensation Insurance Requirements.*

*Daniel Colston, CFP®, CEPA runs a tax and investing firm in Roanoke, Upward Financial Planning, specializing in helping business owners and retirees. He can be reached at [daniel@upwardfp.com](mailto:daniel@upwardfp.com).*

# Navigating Virginia's workers' compensation insurance requirements

In Virginia, as is in most states, workers' compensation plays a vital role in the successful operation of a business. This insurance, that sounds mundane initially, provides essential benefits to employees who experience work-related injuries or illnesses, while also shielding employers from the risk of potential lawsuits. Pretty important! As a small business owner, you can save yourself from incurring substantial penalties by gaining a thorough understanding of Virginia's specific requirements and maintaining compliance. Here's a short guide!

This insurance likely affects you as, regardless of employee's status as full or part time, workers' compensation is mandatory for businesses employing three or more workers. Certain exceptions apply to specific categories of workers. To learn more about these exceptions, we recommend consulting the Virginia Workers' Compensation Commission resources to ensure compliance and obtain accurate information.


If you're thinking "I'll just wing it," we recommend reconsidering. Being out of compliance can result in penalties including fines of up to \$250 per day, a temporary cessation of business operations, and even potential criminal charges. To avert these negative outcomes, it is crucial for businesses to obtain the appropriate coverage.

Once you've identified the coverage you need, selecting the right provider and policy is a critical step in this process. Business owners should request quotes from multiple providers, taking into account factors such as premium costs, coverage limits, and the insurer's overall reputation. Additionally, it's essential to understand the intricacies of a policy, including claim procedures and any exclusions that may apply.

Here are some of our best tips for reducing your premiums. It sounds simple, creating and maintaining a safe work environment is an effective way to reduce workers' compensation claims and subsequently lower premiums. One of the most effective ways business owners can do this is by establishing a comprehensive safety program that encompasses regular employee training sessions, thorough hazard assessments, and transparent reporting procedures for injuries and incidents that may occur. These programs ensure that employees understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining a safe work environment, are made



aware of potential hazards, remember to use personal protective equipment when necessary, and report unsafe conditions or incidents promptly. Regular safety meetings and continuous training can reinforce these practices and keep safety at the forefront of employees' minds.

For business owners, understanding and complying with workers' compensation requirements is of paramount importance! Securing suitable coverage and fostering a safe work environment protects employees, safeguards business interests, and, simply put, is the right thing to do. By being proactive and diligent, you can create a secure and thriving workplace for all. 

“ This insurance likely affects you... workers' compensation is mandatory for businesses employing three or more...



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## “There’s Still Adventure Out There” campaign focuses on NoVA >

Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge (VBR) has unveiled its spring strategic marketing running April through June, which will target the Northern Virginia/Washington market. This is the first time the destination marketing organization has implemented a comprehensive, completely in-house campaign says VBR. The campaign was announced in late March at Hotel Roanoke.

Visit VBR will target individuals that live in the Northern Virginia area of the Washington, D.C. metro who display interests in travel, outdoor recreation and road trips. The campaign aims to build brand awareness for Virginia’s Blue Ridge as a vacation destination and showcase the rich opportunities for outdoor recreation that sets the region apart as a unique, metro

mountain destination. It will also position Virginia’s Blue Ridge as an accessible and convenient vacation destination for travelers from the Northern Virginia and greater DMV area, offering close proximity via Interstate 81, passenger train service via Amtrak, and direct air service via Dulles International Airport.

Visit VBR will also utilize spaces in the Northern Virginia/D.C. market to host special functions and events, like group bike rides with local cycling organizations, socials with alumni organizations connected to universities within the VBR footprint, media activations targeting key publications & travel writers, and connecting with in-market meeting and sports planners.

**Landon Howard**, President of Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge, said at the launch that, “this brand awareness campaign is the first of many future campaigns and an increased presence in this crucial market. We look forward to seeing increases in visitation and visitor spending from the Washington, D.C. metro area as a result of this initiative.”





## Daisy Art Parade >

Modeled after those Mardi Gras “Krewes” parades that take place in New Orleans every year, the **Daisy Art Parade** in April through downtown Roanoke was the brainchild of artist and Community High School teacher **Brian Counihan**, who helped participants create oversized paper mâché sculptures at his Art Rat studio located inside the 9th Street Southeast industrial park that will soon undergo its own transformation into a mixed use development under the auspices of **Ed Walker** and his project partners. Counihan, a native of Ireland, says the Daisy Art Parade was also about building community; he hopes to see it become an annual event. Counihan also created the

Marginal Arts Festival that took place for several years.

Photographer **Greg Vaughn** (Greg Vaughn Photography) took these pictures and helped build the giant bug-themed entry from Roanoke City’s Stormwater Department, designed to put a spotlight on what they do to help minimize flooding issues. Southwest Virginia Ballet and Roanoke Valley Sister Cities were among the dozen or so krewes involved. The **Roanoke Arts Commission** help support the Daisy Art Parade with a grant. “A lot of arts organizations and artists like to check that box that says they’re doing something that’s community engaged,” notes Counihan, “I’d like to see if there’s a way I can measure how much it engages the community.”





# Member One supports impoverished community

By Nanette Levin

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Community roots run deep with Member One.

When twenty Norfolk and Western Railroad employees pooled \$50 in savings in 1940 to request recognition as a cooperative

financial institution, they probably didn't imagine today's Member One Federal Credit Union. It now has more than





TAP

140,000 members and \$1.5 billion in assets. Daleville's opening in 2020 marked its 15th branch.

Last year the organization contributed almost \$360,000 to nonprofits and local charities in Southwest and Central Virginia. Employees chipped in too, providing quarterly donations to Healing Strides, Meals on Wheels, Montgomery County Emergency Assistance Center and Botetourt Resource Center. Other recent gifts went to Micah's Backpack program and the Soup for Seniors program

through relationships with Virginia Tech basketball and Warm Hearth Foundation in Blacksburg.

### **TAP gets \$100,000**

In November Member One provided the largest gift in its 83-year history to TAP (Total Action for Progress). This \$100,000 will be used to help buy a bus to transport TAP Head Start students. The other part is earmarked to go to affordable housing for career-focused homeless families.



Janine Underwood, Bradley Free Clinic

“We have three families that are going to be placed in housing as a result of Member One’s financial contribution, and that is only the beginning,” says Annette Lewis, TAP President & CEO. Member One also became a top-level sponsor of the Bringing Hope Home fundraising campaign this year.

“Some of the organizations we’re giving to now, we’re working toward a particular kind of alignment,” says Alex Lucas, Vice President of Community Impact at Member One.

“We’re about people helping people. How can we best do that?” Lucas cites the various levels of poverty, noting Ruby Payne’s book and her assertion that employment, education and relationships are critical issues to address for financial stability help. “TAP

falls right into that,” he states. “In the fall, when leadership was considering these donations [we recognized] TAP has a long history and reputation of helping people who are in that target area with money.”

TAP is a community action agency serving Alleghany, Bath, Botetourt, Craig, Roanoke, and Rockbridge counties along with the cities of Buena Vista, Covington, Lexington, Roanoke and Salem. It is a private, non-profit corporation.

## Bradley Free Clinic recognized

Another big beneficiary of Member One’s recent donations was Bradley Free Clinic, receiving \$50,000 to put toward their healthcare focus. “When Member One approached us, first of all we were honored to even be interviewed to apply for this funding,” says Janine Underwood, Executive Director of Bradley Free Clinic. “Immediately I knew that that funding should be earmarked for our community outreach.”

The timing was fortunate. Bradley had just agreed to help TAP with required Head Start dental assessments. “We didn’t hesitate,” states Underwood. “We were going to figure out a way to have our dentists go out to the Head Start program and also reach out to the dental providers in the community and ask them if they would volunteer to be a partner in this effort and help these children. The result of that was phenomenal.” Four hundred children received dental assessments



Annette Lewis





TAP

in the first two months. New Horizons Healthcare and Carilion Children's Dental have since offered to treat serious dental needs discovered during these checkups.

"They have this start to finish kind of healthcare situation going on," says Lucas. "If you're struggling to pay for medical care that results in financial instability, then it's going to be difficult to succeed." He also notes their work with local colleges, where residents or other professionals learn skills through Bradley program work.


## Fostering community awareness

"Credit unions do a lot of financial education," says Lucas. "That can also be job training, employment training; TAP does a good job with that. Member One wants to be in positive relationships with our members, with our community; be that person in another person's corner. . . We look at not-for-profits who do things like that."

"We're all part of the community," says Lucas. "I'm noticing since I've been in this role that people know each other and they care about each other." He says he's trying to learn about what's out there so Member One leadership can help as best as possible.

Lucas switched from education to finance in the last decade. Some may remember him as a Hidden Valley Middle School English

teacher. "I still teach, but I teach financial education," he says. This can include budgeting and credit reports. "Sometimes you don't get it from schools or forget it; simple things about money so we can be more stable and eventually grow to help other people."

"Member One is a leader in giving back to the community that it serves, for which TAP is very grateful," says TAP's Annette Lewis. Underwood adds "It supports the critical work we're all doing in the community as safety net agencies. A big thank you from the Bradley free clinic and the community to Member One." 



Submitted

Alex Lucas




## 100 years and going strong

CEO Sam Lionberger III on how the general contracting company based in Southwest Roanoke County remains a major player in the regional construction industry - the answer is not that complex he says: "we try to put others in front of ourselves and make sure that we make the best decisions for our clients." The last few years have been more challenging says Lionberger, now overseeing a company launched in 1923. Starting with a scarcity of subcontractors the company needs to complete its projects: "because of the COVID pandemic a number of firms across all spectrums sort of faded away. Those that survived are covered up with work. Especially in the construction market. The money has sort of become a non-factor. It's really who has the availability ... and the manpower."

Lionberger says its more than just a bidding war when trying to hire subs - there just aren't enough of them out there. "Great firms, great talent – but more work than they can handle. The top of the funnel is pretty full right now for most subcontractors. Trying to time a project where they have the capacity to get it done is really difficult right now." A deficit of skilled workers also has Lionberger applauding efforts like Build Smart Institute in Roanoke, which offers short term courses in a number of construction skills and project management disciplines.

Sam Lionberger III's heir apparent in about 9-10 years he says is younger brother Greg, who returned to Roanoke last year after 24 years in the Atlanta area, most of that working for a hedge fund, to work for Lionberger Construction. He had dabbled on construction projects during the summer months while in college. Ironically when he returned last year Greg took a project management course from Build Smart Institute in order to get up to speed on the industry. "Sam and I have always been very, very close. The company means the world to me. I've always been very proud [of it]. Ultimately, I decided this was the right step, to come back to the company and to come back to the Roanoke Valley."

Hotel Roanoke and Roanoke City's E-911 dispatch center, Brandon Oaks, the Freedom First headquarters in downtown Roanoke, Springhill Suites hotel, the Carter Cat building – and the remodeled Pine Room at Hotel Roanoke - all are the handiwork of general contractor Lionberger Construction. There are plenty more examples on the company website. Here's to the next 100 years. 

THERE'S  
SOMETHING  
HAPPENING  
HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
*April marked a major milestone for a company that has made an impact all over the valley and the region - Lionberger Construction turned 100 years old.*

“  
”  
We try to put others  
in front of ourselves.

## Formatting follies

I follow a legal reporting service. It's one of those daily emails that reports the latest news in the legal industry. Get this—you may not know it—but I'm not a lawyer. This particular email is so good, I follow it anyway. Mostly because of the format.

It's simple. It's categorized. Short heading and one-to-two-sentence summary. Even better: running down the right margin is a "leaderboard" of sorts, with just three categories: the companies, the government agencies, and the law firms that are mentioned in the news blurbs. The overall format is already succinct; however, if you don't even want to take thirty seconds to read the headlines and summaries because you just want to know if certain entities are being reported, you can take five seconds and just scroll down the list.

We like our blurbs, our snippets, our brevity—"the soul of wit"—don't we? That's the latest game: see who can give us information in the shortest and quickest format ever. There are endless up-and-coming media outlets that do nothing else than scrape content to be pitched with clever efficiency.

I recently attended a workshop (okay, a brief lunch-and-learn) entitled "Just Tell Me What I Want To Know." Virtually all of the trainers and coaches and gurus and experts on all things digital are broadcasting the same message: be quick, be slick, wham-bam-and-thank-you-ma'am. The quest and craving and most desirable user experience is whatever is compact.

I like it too. The simple format works for me—even if it doesn't inspire loyalty. I—and everyone else—are not beholden to those deliverers of media, any more than we would insist on selecting a specific Door Dash deliverer. We'll consume the quick; but we'll also jump just as quickly to the next service when their format or system beats the current one.

And it will. It always does.

Which brings me to our business journal format. We haven't changed it in 35 years. All the experts would advise against that. Our readers tell us otherwise; but we do watch and wonder about the trend toward fast-formatting. Our model is not long form; but... well, it ain't quite short form either (certainly not in comparison to the new operators). In our own local market, we have a rather new digital news outlet (who migrated from an old news outlet) that posts long-form reporting. Now that IS bold. And our access to the quick blurbs remains plentiful. So you have your choices.

You always do.

Heck, this very opinion column is too long for many. All I can say is—thank you for reading.

I hope I haven't wasted your time. 



## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:**  
*In today's media—well, it's always been the case—there's a battle in formatting; and who's providing the best user experience.*





## GUEST COMMENTARY

By **Jaclyn  
Nunziato, MD**

### Executive Summary:

*America is the worst industrialized nation in the world when it comes to maternal health.*

*Jaclyn Nunziato, MD, MS, IBCLC is an Assistant Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and the Co-Founder of Huddle Up Moms. [jnunz24.hum@gmail.com](mailto:jnunz24.hum@gmail.com)*

## Save a mother's life: the biggest return on investment for your business

In 2021, the maternal death rate of American women reached its highest point since 1965. In plain language, this means that women today have a higher chance of dying of pregnancy-related causes than they did nearly 60 years ago. Think about the innovation since 1965. The internet, computers, cellphones, DNA fingerprinting, Kevlar, etc., all revolutionized the way we do business. Yet, when it comes to the four million women who give birth each year in the U.S, we have failed to advance.

Federal data shows that men are entering the job market in droves post-pandemic. Data also shows that the women are not. Of the 2.4 million women who left the work force during the pandemic, less than 10% have returned. The Wall Street Journal estimates the pandemic's impact will set the "working woman" back 50 years.

What does maternal mortality have to do with our female workforce? As a women's health physician, a wife of a supportive husband, a mother who gave birth during the height of the pandemic, and the founder of Roanoke-based non-profit support group Huddle Up Moms, I look at these numbers and I know exactly how they relate. It's the 5-letter word that every successful business owner knows all too well - VALUE.

The connection is the value we place on mothers. Or perhaps it's the lack of value we place on mothers in society and in our work force. The culture of devaluing motherhood directly contributes to our overall worsening of maternal health outcomes.

When these most recent maternal mortality statistics made headlines in March, news stories fell short of why things are worse. Reports blame obesity, older mothers and heart disease as the top three reasons for maternal death. Rarely did they mention lack of health insurance, food insecurity, violence against women, lack of education, affordable childcare options and lack of a safe living environment as contributing factors. If a mother doesn't have basic needs to care for her family, is it a surprise that health falls low on the priority list?

Let's investigate one of those forgotten factors, lack of childcare. 85% of the healthcare workforce and 73% of teachers are women - most of reproductive age. Both occupations are struggling to recoup loss of staff since the pandemic, but not every business within these sectors has faltered. Businesses offering on-site childcare and expanded childcare services saw the highest retention rates, spent less on recruitment, and reported better

overall employee happiness. We can look to our northern neighbors in Canada for inspiration. The Harvard Business Review reports that since Quebec's incorporation of universal childcare, the province has generated an increase in tax revenue and economic benefits of almost \$2.00 for every dollar spent. Quebec has doubled its return on investment by changing where it placed its value – a potential panacea for moving the needle on maternal health.

While drafting this article, I bumped into a local mother who was just over three months pregnant. She was just wrapping up her third visit to local daycares. She'd taken the day off to try to get her UNBORN child placed on the ever-growing wait list for a daycare in Roanoke Valley.

There is hope. Here are the top five things our businesses and community can do to VALUE mothers and receive a hefty return on investment.

1. Consider giving tax breaks or incentives for on-site childcare, paid parental leave, and retention from maternity leave.
2. Know, review, and be willing to change your parental leave policies and breastfeeding/pumping policies.
3. Offset the cost of childcare. On average, families spend 35% of their income on childcare, resulting in less spending power to impact local businesses.
4. Support community organizations with missions to supply families' basic needs.
5. Analyze your numbers - what is the gender pay equity in your company?

Melinda Gates recently stated, "If we treat women and childcare as essential infrastructure, just as worthy as funding roads and fiber optic cables, it means more inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development." For our businesses and communities, mothers are worth our investment.

“The culture of devaluing motherhood directly contributes to our overall worsening of maternal health outcomes.



Women today have a higher chance of dying of pregnancy-related causes than they did nearly 60 years ago.





## FRONTReviews >

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

### *Changing the game of paying for long-term care*

Families across the country are experiencing financial challenges as they attempt to tackle the overwhelmingly high costs of long-term care. Thousands of Americans each day are turning 65 years old and an estimated 53 million family members or close friends are helping them age as healthy as possible. A new book, *Hacks for Long-term Care: Ideas for tackling the overwhelming costs of elder care* (2023), lays out the fractures and failures of our current long-term care systems to meet the needs of most American families. Author Kimberly Whiter, Ed.D., (an occasional *Valley Business FRONT* contributor) wrote the book after helping families navigate the long-term care system. "So many families wonder if they failed to plan well enough. But the support they need just to access and pay

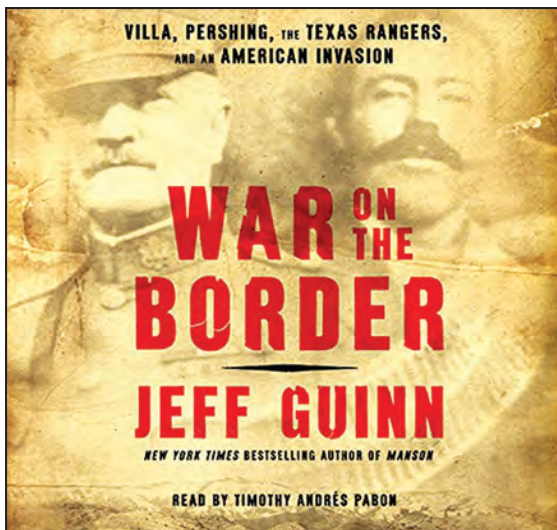
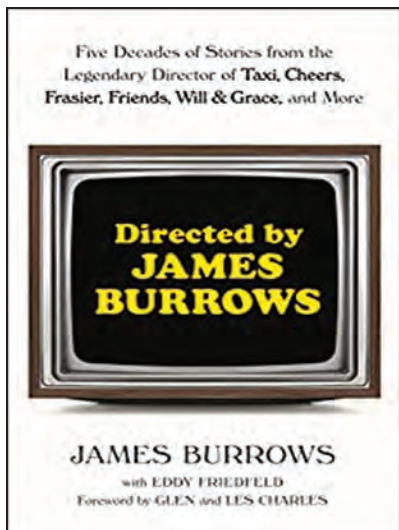
for the minimal amount of care their aging loved ones need, exists in fragments and silos, impossible for anyone to navigate alone. This is a failure of long-term care support in this country, NOT the families."

*Hacks for Long-term Care* dives into why families are facing financial hardship just to access elder care. Whiter lays out the current methodologies families have available to them to find long-term care support and how even together, they're not enough. She follows with a section of hacks - concrete, easy-to-understand, often unknown tactics for finding unique solutions for paying for long-term care. Each hack comes with an example case and identifies the professional that a family would need to connect with to make that hack a reality. Whiter views her business Elder Care Solutions and this book as a connection device, to match families to financial solutions often unshared with them.

—Gene Marrano

### *Lincoln and Booth connection – in the spirit world*

The famous Booth theatrical family of the mid 1800's included John Wilkes Booth, who assassinated the 16th President of the United States as he (Abraham Lincoln) sat watching a play at the Ford Theatre. Both the Booths and the Lincolns (especially Mary Todd Lincoln, the President's wife) has a fascination with spiritualism, connecting



with the dead through mediums, which was all the rage back then. *In the Houses of the Dead: The Lincolns, The Booths and The Spirits* (Liveright Publishing, 2022) is a window into the star-crossed Booth family, and the close connections to Lincoln – they sometimes employed the services of the same medium, most of whom were exposed as being frauds in the end. Mary Todd Lincoln often tried to contact the couple’s dead sons; the President tolerated it because it seemed to help her. For those who can’t get enough of Lincoln in their lives (guilty) Terry Alford’s tale is an interesting read.

—Gene Marrano

## Where everybody knows his name

The son of famed Broadway producer Abe Burrows, James Brooks is also a household name – if you stuck around to watch the end credits for TV sitcoms like *Taxi, Cheers, Frasier, The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Will & Grace, Friends* and countless others. *Directed by James Burrows* (Placid Productions 2022) is his personal trip down 50-plus years of memory lane from a man who helped launch the careers of television stars like Ted Danson, Jennifer Aniston, Kelsey Grammar, Melissa McCarthy (Mike & Molly), Debra Messing etc. Burrows, like his dad came from a stage play background and treated each sitcom taping in front of a live audience like a play; he also pioneered the use of four cameras

so he wouldn’t miss a reaction. Along the way he also gives some acting tips for those so inclined. A good read for those that value good sitcoms – you know the ones that were witty and just plain funny.

—Gene Marrano

## The war on the border – 100 years ago

Think all the strife and controversy about illegal crossings into America from the Mexican border is a recent phenomenon? Not so. *War on the Border: Villa, Pershing, The Texas Rangers and An American Invasion* (Simon & Schuster, 2021) by Jeff Guinn details strife along the Mexican borderlands and times when both our neighbors to the south and the U.S. made incursions into each other’s territory, illegally most of the time, in the early 1900’s. It describes in great detail the wily Mexican folk hero Pancho Villa, who often escaped the clutches of American soldiers looking for him after his raids into Texas, and Mexicans that were loyal to other leaders in that fractured country. Invaluable insight into some of the same troubles both countries face in today’s “border wars.” The more things change ...

—Gene Marrano

*The reviewers:* Gene Marrano is a veteran local news journalist and editor of FRONT.



## Young Funeral Director >

**Dylan Taylor of Flora Funeral Service and Cremation Center** in Rocky Mount was one of 30 funeral directors nationwide selected to participate in the National Funeral Directors Association's (NFDA) Meet the Mentors program. He's no wizened old-timer: Taylor is 22 years old. Meet the Mentors, which took place in March in Atlanta, brought new funeral service professionals together to learn from some of the country's leading funeral directors and network with like-minded peers. At the age of 16, Dylan Taylor began working part-time and night visitations while finishing high school. He attended John Tyler Community College, now Brightpoint, to earn his associates degree in funeral services.

Following graduation, Taylor passed the National Board Exam for funeral services to become a fully licensed funeral director. "Meet the Mentors was a very informative conference that I think every young funeral director should try to be a part of. The knowledge that I took away from the phenomenal mentors can't only be applied to funeral service, but also everyday life," Taylor said. "The knowledge he gained from experienced leaders in the funeral profession will carry him far in his career as he relates to families he is privileged to serve, said **Lee Flora**, President and Manager of Flora Funeral Service.



## Freedom First branches out >

Roanoke-based **Freedom First Credit Union** held a grand opening celebration at its newest location last month in Lynchburg, at 2102 Langhorne Road. The event was hosted by the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance. "We're thrilled to expand our presence in Lynchburg and provide the community with a local, not-for-profit credit union option for their financial needs," said **Brent Jenkins** – Lynchburg. Pictured: **Ryan Bell** (Branch Manager), **Bradley Butler** (VP Private Banking), **Courtney Woody** (VP Mortgage Loan Originator), and **Brent Jenkins** (Market Executive – Lynchburg).



## CoGro shared lab space open >

**CoGro Labs** at the **Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center** is now open. The addition of shared and flexible lab space at 2200 Kraft Drive in Blacksburg was announced in late 2021 as a collaboration between multiple partners to create lab space for short- or long-term use. The facility is designed to help companies and researchers work on projects that include anything from drones or battery testing to medical technologies. It can offer shared space to 15-20 startups.

"Having lab space capacity in the region provides an opportunity for a company to further develop and test their research or product development with access to resources and equipment that might otherwise be out of reach," said **Brett Malone**, President and CEO of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. "This space is designed for early- to mid-stage companies to help them find the resources they need for success." The "much larger," shared wet/dry lab space in Roanoke that is also in partnership with Johnson & Johnson Innovation, Carilion and the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute is under construction Malone notes.

The Roanoke shared lab space scheduled to debut in an old IBM office building is maybe ten times larger in fact. But they may learn valuable lessons: "the Roanoke building is going to be a big undertaking. We're modeling, piloting, in working out how this thing is going to work in our Blacksburg facility on a much smaller scale." A Go Virginia Grant paid for about half of the \$1.2 million investment in the Corporate Research Center shared

## New health center is school based >

The **Community Health Center of the New River Valley** has opened a **School Based Health Center** (SBHC) inside Pulaski County High School in Dublin. The School Based Health Center medical providers offer sick visits, well-child visits, annual physicals, routine lab work, and chronic disease management. Dentists and hygienists provide preventative dental services, which include dental cleanings, exams, x-rays, fluoride treatments, and sealants. The service is available to students, staff, and faculty of Pulaski County Schools.

"We are pleased to offer this service at Pulaski County High School and are grateful for the assistance and guidance that administrators have provided in launching this program," said **Michelle Brauns**, CEO of the Community Health Center. *Pictured: Jean R. Duetsch, MSN, CPNP-PC, IBCLC, is the medical provider at the School Based Health Center.*







## Robo surgery milestone >

Eight months after performing the first robot-guided joint replacement surgery, the **LewisGale Medical Center** robotic surgery team in Salem has successfully conducted its 100th case utilizing its robotic-arm assisted technology. LewisGale says they remain the only hospital in the Roanoke Valley offering a platform that provides 3D CT-based planning software so surgeons can learn more about patient's anatomy while creating a personalized joint replacement surgical plan.

Dr. **Phillip Patterson** successfully performed the 100th robotic-assisted surgery utilizing the platform for partial knee replacement, total hip replacement, and total knee replacement procedures. "Our robotic arm assisted technology is a game changer and has exceeded my expectation for patients after knee and hip replacements," said Patterson. "Following surgery, most patients have reported significantly less pain and have earlier motion and returned back to an active lifestyle faster than more traditional surgery."

## MontCo museum recognized >

The **Montgomery Museum of Art & History** has garnered state-wide recognition as it received the 2023 Innovation Award presented by the Virginia Association of Museums (VAM). The museum's brand-new mental health series, "The Art of Happiness," was awarded the Innovation Award for its contributions to Community Engagement, Diversity and Inclusion, and Audience Expansion. The Innovation Award is given each year at the annual VAM conference to one museum across the Commonwealth that demonstrates a commitment to use their platform as a trusted source of information to build relationships with its community and create long-term positive impacts for community members.



Montgomery Museum Executive Director, **Casey Jenkins** says, "this award validates our important charge and mission to be a community-wide museum for everyone to be a part of and we are very grateful for the generous support given to us by LewisGale Hospital Montgomery."

*Pictured L to R: **John Long**, Virginia Association of Museums Representative, **Casey Jenkins**, Director of the Montgomery Museum, **Lauren Dudley**, CEO of LewisGale Hospital Montgomery.*

## A Warm Hearth and Millstone >

**Warm Hearth Village** has partnered with **Millstone Kitchen** since 2020 to provide prepared meals to seniors in need on campus. Each year, Warm Hearth with the help of the Foundation provides more than \$500,000 in support to seniors in the form of meals, housing, healthcare, emergency assistance and more.

"I love the meals," said **Sandy Zheng**, resident. "I enjoy them immensely and they help me financially." Millstone Kitchen (profiled previously in VBF) is a shared-use commercial kitchen operated by the nonprofit Live, Work, Eat, Grow. Their goal is to provide fresh, made-from-scratch meals to as many food insecure individuals as possible. The kitchen started partnering with WHV in 2020 and has been able to continue the partnership with funding from the Town of Blacksburg's American Rescue Plan Act.



## Bedford factory to be repurposed >

A grant is helping the **Town of Bedford** repurpose a steel foundry into a training facility teaching metal fabrication skills. The **Bedford Regional Metal Workforce Retention Center** project repurposes the 60,000 square feet former Winoia steel shot foundry. The GO Virginia board awarded state funds for the project which **Mary Zirkel**, director of planning and community development for the Town of Bedford says will have a regional impact. Another \$200,000 in non-state funds will be used to purchase the Winoia plant.

"We do still have the workforce that is trained in metal [working skills], the biggest thing is by joining the region [including Roanoke and Lynchburg] we're able to bring those companies together in this facility that need the training. In looking at this region metal skills are lacking." Zirkel says the \$99,000 coming from GO Virginia will be used to pay for a consultant to develop master plan for how to connect the center with metal working businesses. It will be a year or more before the center is up and running. Also in the works is a Town of Bedford hotel. "We hope to have it close to the 460 Bypass and other things that would be beneficial in order to attract people to come downtown."





## Highlander Hotel cuts ribbon >

After two years of construction a 124-room hotel across from the **Radford University** campus has cut the ribbon. The **Highlander Radford** also features a rooftop restaurant with mountain views, conference space, a coffee shop and visitor center. **Rachel Pegues** is the general manager: "It's going to have local community people staying with us, as well as alumni, parents of Radford University students. We will definitely be a destination hotel with a variety of different guests coming through." The hotel actually has two restaurants: Red Provisions, and the signature rooftop restaurant and bar, Bee & Butter, which is led by Executive Chef **James Kirby**, Sous Chef **Amy Murray**, and Director of Food and Beverage **John O'Conner**. Bee & Butter will offer seasonal menus and signature drinks that feature local ingredients. Photo by Kristina Rose. L-R: *Andrew Caspersan, State Senator Travis Hackworth, Ginger Clark, Dan McKinney, Rachel Pegues, Bret Danilowicz, Ramiro Albarran, Radford Mayor David Horton.*



## Capps in BOCO >

**Capps Home Building Center** has opened a new location, this one in **Botetourt County**. Capps has been in business for 45 years, with its flagship store at Smith Mountain Lake and another outlet in Southwest Roanoke County. The new location in Botetourt County is right off Interstate 81 in Troutville, which Capps Marketing Coordinator **Allison Szuba** says will help better serve clients they have in that area and attract new ones. "We felt that having a store that was focused on our contractors and builders and homeowners would be a great asset along that I-81 corridor," noting she says they have customers in Botetourt, Montgomery and Roanoke County. The new Capps store is in **Troutville** on Lee Highway/US 11 next to Cracker Barrel in the old Cash building. Capps HBC offers free next day delivery. Szuba says this location will focus on building supplies for contractors and homeowners.





Gene Marrano

## Carilion rebranding >

A new name, but the same mission - Carilion Clinic's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine is now "**Carilion Mental Health.**" Dr. **Robert Trestman** is chair of the department. "Part of the challenge is referring to us in the way that makes people feel comfortable. That is an enormous opportunity." Trestman spoke recently at Tanglewood Mall, where two former retail stores are being converted into the new home for Carilion Mental Health outpatient services, slated to open by this Fall.

First there was Carilion Children's in the former JC Penney Store and by this fall Carilion Mental Health will expand the Carilion footprint at Tanglewood Mall, which was recently sold to a new owner (Hackney Real Estate Partners.) Trestman says more may be on the way: "many of the other storefronts are still empty. We are looking over time to continue to grow Carilion's footprint here, really to help create a health village." As for Carilion Mental Health, "Trestman says that new branding helps de-stigmatize those seeking help for emotional distress.





## E&H elevates >

Members of the Board of Trustees at **Emory & Henry College** reviewed and approved the new 2023-2026 strategic plan “Elevate in Excellence” at its March 25, 2023, meeting that included a status change to move from a college to a private regional comprehensive university to be fully implemented as Emory & Henry University by Fall 2024.

Over the past decade, Emory & Henry (E&H) has added new master’s and doctoral programs in health sciences, education and now business, to its liberal arts bachelor’s degree offerings. Comprehensive universities are defined by Carnegie Classification, for those offering degrees at the master’s level and a few at the doctoral level. Just this year, E&H was categorized in the U.S. News & World Report rankings in Best Regional Universities (South) and ranked #20 with peers like Rollins, The Citadel, Berry, Stetson, Christopher Newport, Appalachian State, Tuskegee, Florida Southern, Charleston, Queens, Savannah College of Art & Design and Milligan.

“This transition is a huge milestone for Emory & Henry and all that it has accomplished for almost two centuries with its visionary leaders, talented faculty and staff, and a purpose to support the region and world with its resilient and well-rounded graduates,” said Dr. **Michael Puglisi**, Provost and Executive Vice President for the College.







Gene Marrano

## Low water bridge to rise >

The Wiley Drive low water bridge that is often closed after heavy rain along the **Roanoke River Greenway** is one step closer to being replaced with a bridge that sits up higher. US Senator **Mark Warner** returned to the site a year to the day after vowing to deliver federal infrastructure funds for the project: "we made this a priority because the city made it a priority. This is part of Roanoke's incredible charm. Having this greenway right through the center of the city is remarkable."

Warner was joined by fellow US Senator **Tim Kaine** and members of **Roanoke City Council** last month, when a ceremonial "big check" for \$2.5 million dollars was unveiled. It may still be about two years to replace the low water bridge with a higher structure - less prone to being closed after heavy rains. "You've branded yourself as one of the best outdoor towns in the country and the work that we're doing to elevate this low water bridge will enable [the greenway] it to be used by even more people."



Gene Marrano

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



## EDUCATION FRONT



**Mastracci**

**Tony Mastracci** has been named the assistant dean for finance and administration for the College of Architecture, Arts, and Design (AAD) at Virginia Tech. He joins Virginia Tech with nearly 30 years of experience in higher education, nonprofit organization management, and as an analyst for state and local government agencies. Mastracci was with the Office of Strategic Budgeting and Planning at George Mason University before accepting the assistant dean position at Virginia Tech.

**Frances Keene** has been named vice president for Student



**Keene**

Affairs at Virginia Tech after serving as interim in the position since July 2022. From 2012 to 2020, she served as chief of operations for the senior associate vice president for Student Affairs and then went on to serve as assistant vice president and chief of staff to the vice president for Student Affairs from 2020-2022. She succeeds Frank Shushok, now the President of Roanoke College.

## DEVELOPMENT FRONT

**Tina Hatcher** brings over 25 years of professional practice in the health and medical office space to Hall Associates, Inc. as a sales & leasing specialist. **Kristine**



**Hatcher**

**Davis** also joins the commercial real estate firm in the same capacity from a background in various marketing capacities.

## WELLNESS FRONT



**Johnson**

The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine in Roanoke has promoted **Isaiah M. Johnson** to chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the school and at Carilion Clinic. Johnson has served as interim chair

since 2021, working with faculty, residents, students and staff.



**Alphin**

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem has named **Robert Alphin**, MD, the new chief medical officer for the 506-bed acute-care medical and surgical facility. Prior to joining HCA Healthcare, Alphin served as the chief medical information officer (CMIO) for North American Partners in Anesthesia (NAPA).

## SENIOR FRONT

Friendship has announced the promotion of **Erin Layell** to administrator of Friendship Assisted Living, located on Hershberger Road. She replaces Susan O'Malley, who retired in



- Relationship Banking
- Business Lending
- Merchant Services
- Treasury Management



Layell

March. As administrator, Layell is overseeing Friendship Assisted Living's overall resident care for more than 90 residents. Her responsibilities include optimizing services to enhance residents' lives, supporting the facility's outreach strategy, as well as managing all staffing and operations. The assisted living residence is the first building that was constructed on the Friendship campus in 1966.

## SERVICE FRONT

Flora Funeral Service, Inc. in Rocky Mount has announced that **Ben Clements** has been promoted to Vice President of the company. Clements has been with Flora

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Clements

Funeral Service since 2006 and is a Licensed Funeral Director, a Certified Crematory Operator and an Advance Funeral Planning Insurance Agent. He has previously served as Flora Funeral Service's Assistant Manager since 2010.

## NON-PROFIT FRONT

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys has welcomed **Donna Stucker** as Chief Philanthropy Officer. Stucker joins Goodwill's



Stucker

Executive Leadership Team and will lead a new capital campaign and associated donor development. Stucker had most recently been with the Humane Society of Charlotte for eleven years, where she served as their Chief Philanthropy Officer. She is also a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) and holds additional certifications in leadership and fundraising.

HopeTree Family Services in Salem has appointed **Erik**



Robinson

**Robinson** as Director of Business Development. He is responsible for growing HopeTree's recognition through strategic outreach and relationship development with referring organizations and localities. Most recently, he served as Community Liaison at Intercept Health.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*



# Bank of Botetourt



# CONTRIBUTORS

**Zenith Barrett** is the Vice President of Business and Community Engagement for Goodwill Industries® of the Valleys in Roanoke. She has been with Goodwill for eight years. She holds a Masters in Public Administration from Columbus State University and a Bachelors of Science in Psychology from Virginia State University. Zenith is a native of Massachusetts and lives in Roanoke with her husband, Richard and daughter, Lauren.

**Jessica Britton** is a senior journalism student at Radford University. She is a Brand Ambassador for the Radford University Venture Lab, developing web content and facilitating events. Jessica is an Intern at WVTF Radio in Roanoke. Her career goals are to be a journalist, being a voice for the community and share stories about interesting people. [jessicab5137@gmail.com]

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**Dan Dowdy** is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading services (proofingprof.net).

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]

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

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

**Nanette Levin** is a senior correspondent for FRONT business journal and the Wordsmith of Roanoke. When she's not creating marketing copy for owners of B2B and B2C professional services firms or ghostwriting & editing books for non-fiction authors, she's trying to get

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

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

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

**Shawn Nowlin** is an award-winning writer, photographer and content creator. In addition to the Roanoke Tribune, his byline has also appeared in ColorsVA Magazine and the Salem Times Register, among other publications. Born and raised in Roanoke, Virginia, Shawn is a proud product of the Star City. [shawnnowlin1989@aol.com]

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**Alicia Smith** is vice president of F&S Building Innovations in Roanoke. She grew up in the construction business and has served in multiple capacities, currently managing all sales, design, production and marketing of the residential division. She's also the president of Build Smart Institute and serves on several boards, community and church organizations. Alicia enjoys lake-life living and fun times with her family (husband and two daughters) and friends.

**David Todd** is the owner and president of EZ Rampz / Mobility Solutions, based in Roanoke, and serving Virginia and North Carolina primarily; but also nationally. The business rents, sells, installs, and services products that resolve mobility issues, including walkways, ramps, stair glides, platforms, lifts, chairs, grab bars, etc. He's a graduate of Virginia Tech; married with three children.

**Nicholas Vaassen** is a graphic designer with 20 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]



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*More offerings  
at Explore Park*

Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Explore Park and Twin Creeks Brewpub have partnered to present a new summer music series at Explore Park. The Tavern Stage Summer Music Series takes place the second Friday of each month from May to September at the new Tavern Stage. Twin Creeks is a Vinton-based craft brewer with a second location in the former Brugh Tavern at Explore Park. Alex North is with Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism: "we're looking forward to having a new music series out there that not only draws people to the park but it's a great amenity for folks that may be staying overnight. It's just something else to do."

The Twin Creeks Brewpub lawn will open from 6 PM to 10 PM, with live music from 7 PM to 9 PM. The band lineup includes popular regional artists featuring Southern Rock, R&B, Blues, Country, Funk, Pop and Retro sounds in an outdoor setting. It's the latest addition to the Roanoke County-based 1100 acre park, which has added camping, cabins, ziplines and other attractions over the past few years with the goal of turning the former living history site into a destination attraction.

*Gentry Locke  
looks eastward*

The Roanoke-based law firm Gentry Locke has opened an office

in Norfolk, in the World Trade Center building in downtown Norfolk. It is Gentry Locke's fourth office in the Commonwealth. Said Gentry Locke Managing Partner Brett Marston, "we identified Hampton Roads as an area for development and in the past year we have added two exceptional attorneys who have strong ties to the community, and we look forward to their leadership in growing our presence in Norfolk for the benefit of our clients."

*Third startup for NRW  
business owner*

MELD Printworks Corporation in Christiansburg has cut the ribbon. MELD Printworks Corporation is the third business for local entrepreneur, Nanci Hardwick (Aeroprobe Corporation, MELD Manufacturing Corporation, and now MELD Printworks Corporation). MELD technology is not only innovative, but it is also an industry game-changer. This award-winning technology has garnered local, regional, national and even international recognition. MELD PrintWorks utilizes the MELD® 3D patented printing technology as an additive printing service addressing the needs of multiple industries who struggle to get forgings, castings, and other metal parts. "Our customers need greater access to printed parts," says Hardwick.

*Melrose Center partners*

Roanoke-based Goodwill Industries of the Valleys

welcomes new partnerships for Melrose Plaza's banking services and marketing. Goodwill is partnering with Bank of Botetourt to provide banking services at a new branch that will be a part of the Plaza on Melrose Avenue NW in Roanoke. Wallace360, a local marketing and creative agency, will establish Melrose Plaza's new branding and help strategic marketing and communications efforts prior to its opening. Melrose Plaza will also work with local artists, historians, educators, and Northwest small businesses to incorporate elements of Northwest history into the Plaza. The plaza will also include a grocery store in a part of the city labeled as a "food desert," by the USDA.

*Goodwill career  
services go online*

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys based in Roanoke has launched a new online career development platform. My Career Advisor offers online no-cost career development, training, and community resources, also providing access to a resume and cover letter builder with resume feedback, certification-backed computer training for Microsoft programs, skills training courses and local job postings, and more. "My Career Advisor ... will help the individuals we serve, our communities, and our team members," states Stephanie Hoer, Vice President of Mission Services. "This new platform will help us reach more people and give them access to

free career readiness and training. Which will allow us to help people achieve their fullest potential through the power of work and independence."

*Virtual help for  
biomed startups*

The Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (VTCRC) announced that three companies have been selected to join Johnson & Johnson Innovation – JLABS (JLABS). Under a collaboration between VTCRC and Johnson & Johnson Innovation, LLC, established to support innovators in the Blacksburg-Roanoke region with the aim to accelerate emerging biotech and life science startups, the selected companies will have full access to JLABS programming, resources, and mentorship from experts across The Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies virtually. Acomhal Research, Qentoros, and The Tiny Cargo Company will benefit from the JLABS global life science network and industry connections, along with access privileges to the JLABS @ Washington, DC site, while keeping their businesses located in the region.

*VT, RC join forces*

Roanoke College and Virginia Tech have entered a partnership that will benefit students in technology fields and serve as an engine for economic, workforce, and educational development in Virginia.

The agreements will allow Roanoke College students to pursue graduate programs at Virginia Tech and facilitate an early transition to graduate school. The new Direct to Tech program provides Roanoke College students direct admission into Virginia Tech Master of Engineering programs in either computer science and applications or computer engineering upon graduation from Roanoke College. Direct to Tech is open to all Roanoke College seniors with a 3.0 GPA, regardless of major, who have completed certain required courses. The partnership will reduce the timeline for admission and

give students an early transition into the Virginia Tech graduate program. "We're thrilled that Roanoke is the first college in Virginia to sign on to this program. The ... partnership is about access for our students and opportunities for their incredible futures," said Roanoke College President Frank Shushok Jr.

*Federal bills proposed regarding CBD products*

Salem-based Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA), along with Congresswoman Angie Craig (D-MN), have introduced two pieces of legislation aimed at

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creating potential pathways for regulation of cannabidiol (CBD) products. In the Farm Bill of 2018, Congress removed hemp-derived CBD from the Controlled Substance Act, which legalized the production of hemp and hemp-derived CBD. The Farm Bill still retained the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority to establish a regulatory framework for these products. Since the

passage of the Farm Bill, CBD sellers have proliferated, but FDA has failed to set a regulatory roadmap for CBD products sold on the market.

"The Food and Drug Administration has dragged its feet in properly regulating CBD and hemp-derived products on the market, creating confusion about its legal uses," said Griffith. "Americans need better guidance and that

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is why I have introduced these two pieces of legislation, which will create a pathway for regulation in both the food and dietary supplement spaces.” The Hemp and Hemp-Derived CBD Consumer Protection and Market Stabilization Act of 2023 would make hemp, cannabidiol derived from hemp, and other hemp-derived products lawful for use as a dietary supplement unless otherwise directed by the FDA. The CBD Product Safety and Standardization Act directs the FDA to regulate CBD as the agency would for other food ingredients, setting requirements for quality and labeling, among other areas.

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#### *No Floydfest in 2023*

"Permitting and logistical factors" at the new FloydFest site on US 221 - FestivalPark – means it is not currently viable for a 2023 festival. Across the Way Productions explored other options for that same weekend in July but couldn't make it work, so for the second time in four years (including the COVID-related pause in 2020) FloydFest has been canceled. Sam Calhoun is with ATW: "we're not going anywhere. We're still building. It all came down to just timing really. Just not enough time to do the work we wanted to do make it a perfect site." Calhoun also says an issue with "one state agency" over a stormwater permit not yet granted was a sticking point, and the new home for the

Festival just wasn't ready to go for this summer.

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#### *Hoping to announce they "Bought the Farm" soon*

A group called Southwest Virginia Agrarian Farms is raising funds to purchase the 3.5 acre Lick Run Farm in northwest Roanoke on 10th Street. The total cost for the project including property acquisition and improvements is more than \$425,000. Cameron Terry is heading up the fundraising project: "donating now can ensure fresh, local produce will be available to our Roanoke community for decades to come." That part of Roanoke is designated as a "food desert" for a lack of healthy foods by the US Department of Agriculture. Southwest Virginia Agrarian Farms has raised more than half the funds needed to purchase and renovate Lick Run Farm.

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#### *State of the Town in Vinton*

At the State of the Town Address last month, Vinton's Mayor took time to thank the business owners in attendance at the Vinton War Memorial for their role in shaping the prosperity and personality of Vinton. Mayor Brad Grose also highlighted the new businesses just beginning to leave their mark - Pok-E-Joe's in the former Joe Goodpies space and 107 South Pollard getting set to open right across the

street on South Pollard. "I don't think I'm alone when I say this community is beyond excited to have [them] here in Vinton."

Grose also said ground will be breaking this summer on the historic Gish Mill project, which he said "would provide a unique mixed use experience with lodging, restaurant and market opportunities. This will help make Vinton a drive-to place, not a drive-through place." The three story brick mill was built in 1846. Revitalizing it is part of the town's ongoing mission to make the best use of their three square miles. Also on the books is a new downtown Vinton hotel project.

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#### *Record export numbers*

Data by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) values Virginia's 2022 agricultural and forestry exports at more than \$5.1 billion dollars. The 2022 export total eclipses the previous record set in 2021 by 25%, which totaled more than \$4 billion. "I am excited to announce the 2022 agriculture and forestry export data, as it is a clear indication of the strength of the Commonwealth's first and third largest private industries," said Governor Glenn Youngkin, just before he embarked on an international trade mission.

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#### *Pledging to do better by County residents*

Glo Fiber is shifting its

standards on restoration and oversight with its high-speed broadband fiber optic construction projects, as complaints roll in from Roanoke County residents about damage to their lawns. Chris Kyle, Vice President of Programming, Regulatory, and Business Development at Shentel/Glo Fiber, went before the County's Board of Supervisors last month to detail a multi-step action plan to help the company move forward in a more positive direction - first and foremost by committing to faster response times: "we've got a trouble tracking system; our intention is here in the next few months that once they call in and that's logged [we'll be working] those issues ... and drilling those down." Some have been outstanding for several months Kyle told the Board. Kyle says the company is now committed to restoring as they go, locking contractors into reseeding landscapes as they work - and adding additional oversight to their fiber optic projects to ensure that contractors are following through.

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#### *Galen College of Nursing opens*

The Galen College of Nursing has opened its 15th campus nationwide - this one in Roanoke County in the former Allstate building now known as Metis Plaza. A grand opening will come this summer. The campus is open now for arts and science classes and in July the

actual nursing curriculum rolls out. Audria Denker is the executive Vice President of Nursing for Galen College; she says there is room for another nursing college in the region: “we’re going to be about 300,000 nurses short [nationwide] in the next few years.” Denker also says Galen College - which has an affiliation with HCA, the parent company of LewisGale, has nursing students from a different demographic than many schools - in their 30’s as opposed to those in their early 20’s, second

career students or career-switchers.

Galen College of Nursing does not enroll on a traditional semester-based system, which allows it to accept new students more often. “Its first come, first served. We don’t take students in the order of who has the highest grade point average or the highest ACT. We take them in the order of ... they meet the minimum qualifications. That grants opportunities to people that may have been sitting on waiting lists for a while.” The

grand opening right before nursing classes start is set for June 27th.

### *New owners for Salem Sox*

The Salem Red Sox have entered into an agreement to sell the team - previously owned by Fenway Sports for the past 16 years, the Boston Red Sox organization - to Diamond Baseball Holdings, an organization that owns and operates Minor League clubs affiliated with Major League Baseball. Salem

Sox General Manager Allen Lawrence: “the fact that we’re a Red Sox affiliate and they’re interested in staying here in Salem is one of the many things that was appealing to DBH during this whole process.” The Red Sox will remain in Salem as the Single-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox and current staff will continue to be led by Lawrence, according to the Sox and DBH.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*

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Submitted photos

Co-director Brooke Hall (right)

# “We are determined to succeed.”

*Special Olympics Virginia continues to overcome every obstacle in its way*

By Shawn Nowlin

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Special Olympics Virginia uses platform to empower the disabled community.



Established in 1968, the mission of the Special Olympics Virginia organization has remained the same for the last 55 years: to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The world's largest sports organization serving individuals with disabilities, the Special Olympics supports more than 100,000 competitions and five million athletes. In the Roanoke Valley alone, more than 1,500 athletes participated in various competitions last year.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, while in Chicago, Illinois, for the World Games, announced the formation of the Special Olympics organization in July 1968. Shriver not only believed that handicapped people could be happy and live fulfilling lives, but she also wanted to create

an inclusive space where they could thrive too.

So impressed was President John F. Kennedy with Shriver's efforts that years earlier, he appointed her to a national panel to promote the concept of involvement in physical activities and other opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The Kennedy Foundation continues to give grants to community centers and recreation departments to this day.

Brooke Hall is the co-director of Special Olympics Area 8, which consists of the counties Botetourt, Craig, Franklin and Roanoke and the cities of Roanoke and Salem. Twenty years ago, Hall began working with individuals with special needs. That work laid the foundation which led to her current position.





"Back then, my work with individuals with disabilities was in a different capacity. My husband, Bo, has served as the Area 8 Director for nearly two decades. In 2011, I joined the organization in an official capacity," she said.

Brooke added, "We have a variety of sports seasons and offer plenty of opportunities for athletes and volunteers to get involved. We have softball, basketball and swimming, among many others. Bowling, because it is indoors, is a year-round event. Our athletes just want to be around others that respect them and make their lives fun. That's all that matters," she said.

Both Brooke and her husband grew up in Salem. As a child, Bo had a severe stutter. Until the age of 12, he regularly had to be separated from his peers because of the communication barrier. That experience shaped the lens that he views the world through today.

Area 8 events are open to the public year-long. February's Polar Plunge

Showdown, an annual gathering designed to support all Special Olympic athletes across the Commonwealth, raised \$2,700 for Area 8. In attendance for the event was Carter Smith. "It's a memory that I will never forget," Smith said. "Seeing so many people of different backgrounds come together for great cause was just a beautiful thing to experience."

Zach Johnson and David Ogburn, both Virginia Tech Medical School first-year students, got involved with a Roanoke-based Special Olympics basketball team in March. Rather than influencing the outcome of the game by shooting, the two Hokies instead played the role of point guard, directing teammates to where they should go on the floor.

A few weeks later, the Grandin Theatre hosted Special Olympics athletes throughout the Roanoke Valley for a viewing of the acclaimed Woody Harrelson film "Champions."

While some state money helps supplement the organization's



needs, Special Olympics Area 8 is responsible for the heavy lifting. “Most of our fundraising is done locally. Last fall, for example, we had a PumpkinFest which was a co-event sponsored by Q99 and the City of Salem. “We try to regularly do creative events with local businesses,” Brooke said.


One of Courtney Coleman’s most prized possessions is a framed picture of Special Olympic athletes at a baseball field with community members rooting them on in the background. “A lot of preparation and hard work happens behind the scenes that few know about,” he said. “Despite how time-consuming it can be, every organizer says it’s always worth it in the end.”

Approximately half of the world’s population is under the age of 25. Of that number, according to data from the US Census, one in four have some type of long-lasting condition or disability. The Special Olympics logo, which has gone through numerous changes over

the years, is a symbol of confidence and joy for so many.

“In our area, we go with a method called ‘UNIFIED.’ What that means is whenever we have a team sport outing, teams are combined with individuals who have disabilities and volunteers who serve as partners,” said Bo. “During the basketball season, we had people like the Salem Sheriff and other area elected officials to partner with us.”

Reflecting on her Special Olympics experience, Brooke Hall says it’s everything she’d hoped for and more. “So many people have found a sense of community with Area 8. Just to see the looks on the faces of our athletes is an indescribable feeling,” she said. “I couldn’t be prouder to be part of such an amazing organization.”

Additional information about how to volunteer, donate and more can be found by searching for “Special Olympics-Area 8” on Facebook. 





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The auction industry allows properties to be sold at auction and adds a level of competition. — Page 8

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