

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 182

NOVEMBER 2023

Career Quest

Gilbert Chiropractic

Hundley Chiropractic

Sisters' Night Out

ADHD Advantage

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## The Farmer's Vet

Hannah Varnell  
Wellfarm Veterinary Consultants



**-MARC WILSON**  
Sports Car Clinic in Roanoke

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

We're barreling towards winter, and for a growing number of folks heading indoors, that means Rail Yard Dawgs hockey at the Berglund Center, especially once football season is done. See legendary long time sportswriter Doug Doughty's story on how the SPHL champions have seen a bump in ticket sales and interest. Funny what being a winning team does for you, huh?

There's a number of stories related to health care as well, including one on an intrepid doctor who cares for animals instead of people. Large ones (animals, that is). Breast cancer survivors tell their stories. And a chiropractic husband-wife team that also times foot races and runs the Mountain Junkies trail racing series. There are all sorts of ways to stay healthy. Happy reading.



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor

“ ”

I teach children... the art of being happy...

— Page 15

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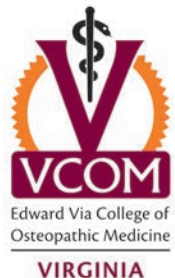


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## THE WELLFARM STORY

*Healthy and productive large animal herd*

By Gene Marrano



“ ”  
Right in the heart of  
Roanoke, there's Brady's. — Page 41

FRONTcover photograph of Hannah Varnell was submitted.



# Thanksgiving Morning!



Go to [DrumstickDASH.net](https://DrumstickDASH.net) to sign up!

## 5k Run and Family Walk

**In-Person:** November 23

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Be sure to sign up to get this year's **Drumstick DASH** Shirt



**QUESTIONS? Contact us at**  
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# NOVEMBER



Aila Boyd



Bonnie Chavez



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



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



**Daniel Colston**



**Jennifer Poff Cooper**



**Shannon Dominguez**



**Mike Leigh**



**Gene Marrano**



**Shawn Nowlin**

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In the beginning... it was more of a hobby.

— Page 19

““

Coming soon... a clinically guided sustainable and ethical meat processing facility.

— Page 13



**Zenith Barrett**  
Goodwill /  
community service



**Neal Cummings**  
Freedom First Credit Union /  
finance – credit unions



**Micah Frain**  
Frain & Cawley CPAs /  
finance - accounting



**Kevin Holt**  
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construction



**David Todd**  
EZ Rampz /  
senior services

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 56.

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Submitted photos

Hannah and Christina Ditmore (right)

# THE WELLFARM STORY

## *Healthy and productive large animal herd*

By Gene Marrano

**A \$125,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture will help a mobile large animal veterinary service based in Roanoke County to expand across Virginia.**

Farmers in southwest and central Virginia have faced a chronic shortage of large animal vets for decades, according to a 2003 National Institute of Food and Agriculture report. These aren't the veterinarians who hang out a shingle to focus on treating cats and dogs from a storefront office. These are the vets who typically travel to farms, to treat cows, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, poultry and other livestock that are the livelihood for the people that need to keep them healthy, before sending them off to market.

The grant for Dr. Hannah Varnell and Wellfarm Veterinary Consultants will allow for Varnell to expand its workload capacity by investing in new equipment (a human livestock handling facility, a portable cattle

chute, and laboratory equipment for a quicker turnaround on diagnostics) and in personnel. Wellfarm already has more than 200 clients, serving thousands of animals in the region. It keeps Varnell on the road most of the time, but she's used to running around: Varnell ran track as an undergrad at Stanford before studying veterinarian sciences at North Carolina State. When she has time, Varnell trains and runs races like the Blue Ridge Marathon events in Roanoke.

Simply put, says Dr. Varnell, "our top priority is animal health and welfare, but we also want to keep costs as low as possible for our clients and maximize their production outputs. Healthy animals are more productive – and profitable."



Varnell grew up in Gloucester County near Chesapeake Bay, with an affinity for being outdoors. She decided that being a part of “the bigger picture,” when it came to animal welfare and science was in her future. Large animal health also impacts the lives of farmers, their families and clients, which made Varnell feel she could really make a difference.

“Productivity is a big part of being a farm animal vet. Many regional producers have been on their own without veterinary support for so long they end up doctoring their own animals with reduced resources and training,” notes Varnell; “that could lead to further morbidity and fatality in their herds.” It’s about cows for example, that don’t only produce milk, but at a higher volume and quality. That means more profits for the producers – part of her sales pitch perhaps for Wellfarm Veterinary Consultants. It’s more than just medications, says Varnell, it involves reproduction, genetics, nutrition and other herd management disciplines.

Varnell graduated from the veterinarian program at NC State in 2020 and interned at Virginia Tech (working with students in the large animal clinical sciences program, taking them out to farms to witness production animal medicine) before starting her Wellfarm practice last summer. Large animal veterinary practice is a world many don’t know

““”

It’s more than just medications, says Varnell, it involves reproduction, genetics, nutrition and other herd management disciplines.











Hannah Varnell and Andrejz Burkat perform surgery

exists unless they grew up in that environment – she grew up on a farm – and in veterinary school, very few of the other students were interested in taking care of large animals. Making sure that animals “enter the food chain ... healthy, reproducing and making the farmer money [while] continuing on the farming tradition. They depend on these animals for their income.”

Now as Wellfarm Veterinary Consultants, Varnell is still taking students out with her when she hits the road. She is looking to add an associate vet which would allow her to grow the business even further. Even close to home, Roanoke, Botetourt, Bedford and Franklin Counties are designated as shortage areas by the USDA in terms of the livestock-to-large-animal ratio, and the veterinarian services available. That designation helped Varnell land the \$125,000 Rural Practice Enhancement

“ ”

Wellfarm already has more than 200 clients, serving thousands of animals in the region.





“

We have a lot of livestock – but not a lot of large animal veterinarians here.

Grant, which in turn will help the Wellfarm team (her and a vet technician at this time) to chip away at that shortage. “We have a lot of livestock – but not a lot of large animal veterinarians here. The government recognizes this as a problem.” The grant is split on a 50-50 basis, half towards support staff, the other half ticketed for new equipment.

“I just got lucky with the grant and being in a shortage area, capitalizing on that opportunity. With Wellfarm I’m trying to do things a little bit differently – focus more on herd, health and productivity. How can I help the client maximize [that?].” Helping to keep farmers in the business is part of the motivation behind the USDA grant program, notes Varnell: “my business model fits that.”



On the horizon: Wellfarm Meats, where Varnell and an expanded workforce supplemented by that USDA grant will consult with producers on ethical, humane and medically guided treatment for their animals. Sustainable meat production practices also reduce the ecological footprint of livestock farming when it comes to land use, water consumption and no-waste byproducts. Coming soon promises Hannah Varnell and Wellfarm Meats, “a clinically guided sustainable and ethical meat processing facility.” Sounds like Dr. Varnell will just keep on running. 







Shawn Nowlin photos

JOI NEURON CEO Carol Joy explaining to students how their brains work.

# Career Quest creates clearer path for Roanoke Valley students

By Shawn Nowlin

**Arguably the best way for young people to fully grasp something is for them to attentively listen to those who know.**

In theory, every child should reside in a healthy home and have access to the same resources. In reality, the difference between students who thrive versus those who don't often comes down to the surrounding adults taking a vested interest, having their curiosity sparked and exposure to different opportunities.

At Career Quest, an annual gathering event and marketing campaign created a few years ago to increase awareness of local career opportunities for middle and high school students, all three are emphasized.

In late September dozens of businesses across various career clusters made connections with seventh-graders at the Berglund Center in Roanoke. Representatives from mental health education, healthcare, wholesale and various other industries

were present for the approximately 3,500 students who attended.

Skills that students learn each year include, but are not limited to:

- Character development
- Business etiquette
- Conflict resolution skills and teamwork
- Financial literacy
- Resume and application preparation
- Goal setting
- Workplace ethics

At the encouragement of their teachers, the students asked plenty of questions and walked away with employer business cards. Today, every seventh grader in Virginia must pick a career path as a guide for the remainder of their schooling. A primary objective of Career Quest is to provide students with as

much information and resources as possible before they make that decision.

September's Career Quest went exactly as Douglas Pitzer, the Educational Director at Strokes of Genius LLC., expected. "It's never too early for teens to learn transferable life skills. Had people not invested in me when I was their age, I wouldn't enjoy the career that I have today. If I had my way, every Roanoke Valley teen would experience Career Quest at least once," he said.

Possessing a strong work ethic and being dependable is something that every company is looking for, something Jaleesa Young stressed to the students. As a Youth Employment Specialist with Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, Young is fully aware that sustaining the region's talent pipeline is crucial to her company's future success.

"Several students stood out to me. I don't remember all of their names, but many of them reminded me of my younger self. It's not often that the youth get to ask questions and get immediate feedback from local employers in such a professional setting," she said. "Identifying the exact career that you want to pursue before graduating high school is rare. When asked, a social worker, licensed practical nurse, police officer, writer, elementary school teacher and electrical plumber were the most common responses I heard. With Career Quest, I see limitless possibilities."

Carol Joy is an accomplished author, motivational speaker, CEO and artist. She also happens to be a mother to two sons, Josue and Jakobe. When the JOI NEURON founder was asked to participate, she viewed it as an opportunity to continue her company's mission.

"As a mother, I deeply care about young people and their well-being. I teach children from elementary school the art of being happy beyond unhappy and difficult circumstances with scientifically proven techniques. I also use my nerdy brain, creativity, stories and music to try to take care of their mental well-being and emotions, as my parent, grandparents and great-grandmother did for me. Career Quest provided me with an amazing platform," she said.




Carolina Smales, known professional as Carol Joy, playing an interactive game with local students.

Numerous storybooks have been written or co-written by Joy. Typically sold in bulks of 100's to different organizations, they offer education through numerous, fictional content in both English and Spanish.

Accompanying the majority of her books are music albums. She added, "These include similar wellness learning objectives offered in the magical realism narrative in the books, but with different 'feel good songs' that inspire children and adults to practice healthy habits with educational lyrics."

Today's youth endure more unique hardships than ever before. Social media, as just one example, has a way of eroding a teen's mental health. Sherrie Boccock, the Assistant Director of Education at the Science Museum of Western Virginia, says telling teens how they should feel instead of creating an atmosphere where they feel comfortable is counterproductive.

"One of my biggest takeaways from September's event was just how much creativity and talent resides here in the Roanoke Valley. I will continue to do my part to make a difference in the community. I hope more adults do the same," she said.

Strengthening today's local talent pipeline is a responsibility the Greater Roanoke Workforce Development, the organization behind Career Quest, takes very seriously. Sponsors and community partners make this annual event possible. *For more information, visit [careerquestva.com](http://careerquestva.com).* 



## FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

**Executive Summary:**  
*Healthcare expenses can be a significant part of your annual spending. Knowing which healthcare expenses you can and cannot deduct on your taxes is essential for maximizing your potential savings.*

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

# Understanding tax-deductible healthcare expenses

Let's explore the ins and outs of tax-deductible healthcare expenses to help you navigate this complex area of tax planning.

## Tax-Deductible Healthcare Expenses

- You can generally deduct medical and dental expenses that are not reimbursed by insurance, and that exceed 7.5% of your adjusted gross income (AGI) for the 2021 and 2022 tax years. Qualified expenses include doctor's visits, prescription medications, dental work, vision care, and necessary medical procedures.
- If you pay health insurance premiums out of pocket, these expenses may be tax-deductible, as long as your employer does not cover these premiums. In order for the premium to be deductible, it must come out of your bank account.
- Premiums for long-term care insurance are usually tax-deductible, subject to certain limits based on your age.
- You can deduct expenses related to transportation to receive medical care, such as mileage, parking, and tolls. Standard mileage for medical purposes for 2023 is 22 cents. If you're looking at previous years, you'll want to visit: [www.irs.gov/tax-professionals/standard-mileage-rates](http://www.irs.gov/tax-professionals/standard-mileage-rates)
- Costs related to medically necessary special diets, equipment, or appliances prescribed by a medical professional can also be deducted.
- If you make modifications to your home for medical purposes, such as installing ramps or widening doorways for a wheelchair, these expenses can be tax-deductible.


Medical expenses deductions can be tricky to determine exactly what can and cannot be considered during tax time. It's a good idea to speak with a professional tax strategist to help you decipher, as well as how to plan ahead.

## Non-Deductible Healthcare Expenses

- Unless deemed by your insurance company as medically necessary, cosmetic surgeries and procedure are not tax-deductible.
- Over-the-counter medications and supplements, even if recommended by a healthcare provider, are typically not deductible.



- While physical fitness is important for health, gym memberships and fitness programs are generally not considered tax-deductible medical expenses.
- Health Spa Expenses incurred at health spas, wellness centers, or recreational facilities are not deductible.
- Health Savings Account (HSA) Distributions from an HSA that are not used for qualified medical expenses are subject to taxation and penalties.

Understanding what healthcare expenses you can and cannot deduct on your taxes is vital for effective tax planning. It can help you lower your tax liability and make the most of available deductions. Keep accurate records of your healthcare expenses, consult with a tax professional, and stay updated on tax laws to ensure you are maximizing your potential tax savings. By doing so, you can maintain both your financial health and your physical health. 



Understanding healthcare expenses... can help your tax liability.



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Submitted photos

Gina and Josh Gilbert

# Running a business... And running.

By Aila Boyd

**While Josh Gilbert was content to simply run his successful chiropractic office and pursue his passion for trails and running on the side, he ended up combining the two when he and his wife, Gina, started Mountain Junkies, LLC.**

The Illinois natives moved to the Roanoke Valley in 1998 after Josh graduated with a chiropractic degree from a Missouri school. Upon arriving in the area, they opened Gilbert Chiropractic, a family-based office that also sees athletes, in Salem.

Josh's interest in becoming a chiropractor dates back to when he experienced a back issue while playing football in high school. The solution involved seeing a chiropractor. "Once that problem was solved, I had convinced myself that's what I wanted to do," he said.

He decided to place a focus on helping athletes at his office because of his own time as an athlete and his active lifestyle, including working out at a gym.

At the time, the Gilberts didn't know anyone in the area. To get the practice off the ground, Josh went door-to-door introducing himself to Salem residents. He used those interactions to learn what the community was looking for in a chiropractor.

A few years later, the Gilberts discovered their passion for running in 2001. Their involvement with various races grew throughout the years, including helping organize them. Josh even became a race director and co-race director of several events.

In 2007, several of the races the Gilberts had participated in were at risk of ending if someone didn't step up and take them

over. That posed a unique opportunity for the couple, so they decided to assume oversight of the races and established Mountain Junkies. In the beginning, it was more of a hobby for the couple, but they started to realize the potential once they saw just how many people were interested in running.

Josh describes Mountain Junkies as “a way to provide information and events for people that want to be on trails and be introduced to new locations.”

In the beginning, they organized two races but later expanded to have as many as 10 on their schedule. The company’s growth was aided by the fact that it was tapping into an unmet need in the trail event space.

Josh said they plan to continue offering the main events runners have come to

anticipate each year, while also adding some new trails in the future. Introducing runners to new locations is a guiding vision for the company, so they often try to shake things up.

Trail maintenance is also central to the company. Trails often fall into disarray if not regularly maintained, Josh noted. The trail maintenance work also signals to participants that the company prioritizes their safety.

“We like to do things in groups and be surrounded by people that enjoy things we enjoy. We get a benefit by putting on these events and helping people achieve things and see things they wouldn’t normally,” Josh said.

The Gilbert’s didn’t keep Mountain Junkies separate from the chiropractic practice but rather married the two,

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which turned out to be an adept move.

“It was a way to market the chiropractic office,” Josh explained. “It was a way to engage people in healthy activities. Those people are sometimes going to have problems or can’t do the activity because of an issue, so therefore they need chiropractic care. They kind of go hand in hand. They were created for the purpose of trying to help each other out.”

As partners in both life and business, Josh and Gina divide the workload amongst themselves. At the practice, he sees patients while she handles administrative tasks. For Mountain Junkies, he develops the courses and does trail work and she deals with the logistics for participants.

“It’s a huge benefit to have a spouse who wants to do the things you want to do,” Josh said. “We’ve enjoyed the fact that both businesses have provided not only an opportunity to be a business and make money but to spend time with each other while doing it. Most people don’t have that opportunity or that luxury.”


The endurance of Mountain Junkies is a testament to the region’s embrace of outdoor activities in recent years.

“Some of my first sponsorship paperwork I sent out was geared at all the opportunities Roanoke had.

I remember hearing about other cities, like Asheville, that were getting all the accolades for being an outdoor community and thinking Roanoke had the same potential,” Josh said. “Seeing the change that has occurred in the last 15 years has been fantastic and really part of the vision we had hoped for.”

Due to stress and health issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Josh observed, the popularity of outdoor activities has only continued to grow.

Pete Eshelman, director of the Roanoke Outside Foundation, explained that an emphasis on the outdoors is part of the Roanoke Valley’s DNA and is part of the collective story being told about why it’s a good place to work, live and play.

“Groups like Mountain Junkies play a truly integral role in building outdoor culture. By hosting trail running races that showcase the region’s different trail systems, they keep trail runners engaged throughout the year and have become the heart of the trail running community,” he said. The region’s trails and rivers, he added, are more than just dirt and water; they’re also tools for economic growth. “They build vibrant communities which in turn attract business investment and talent to the region. Mountain Junkies is helping build a place where people want to live, where businesses want to locate, and where people want to visit.” 



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## BUSINESS OPERATIONS

By Mike Leigh

**Executive Summary:**

*For the past several years as my business has grown, I've considered offering healthcare insurance to my employees. Unfortunately, I can't do it.*

Send your questions or comments to [Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com](mailto:Mike@OpXSolutionsllc.com)

## Healthcare Benefits: a tough decision

It's no secret that businesses are facing higher and higher healthcare costs for their employees. Many have had to greatly raise premiums or reduce benefits. It's not a simple decision since leaders must consider profits, financial risk, and employee attraction and retention. For a small business like mine, reducing the financial risk and staying price competitive outweigh the employee insurance option.


Normally in this article, I like to offer suggestions to business leaders on how to improve their business operations. I wish I had a simple strategy on how to handle rising healthcare costs. But on this topic, there are no easy answers. Each company must make their own decisions.

Ideally, healthcare would be universally available without company involvement. But since that probably won't happen anytime soon in the United States, how do we best take care of an employee's health?

First and foremost, a company must remain financially stable and earn a reasonable profit. It's great if a company can surpass this level of success and offer healthcare benefits, but what if a business can't risk the additional overhead of healthcare insurance?

In previous articles, I've emphasized the importance of understanding the needs of each employee. By fulfilling those needs, employee retention, motivation, and engagement increase. Healthcare needs are no different. What does each employee need?

For some, healthcare may not be needed at all if the employee has a spouse with company healthcare coverage. For others, getting healthcare through the federal marketplace may be needed. Does the employee know how to navigate this system? Does the employee need a small bump in pay to help cover the premium?

Although I don't offer healthcare to my employees, I know exactly how each of them get their healthcare coverage, and I've made it a priority to ensure their needs are met. A company may not be able to provide healthcare coverage to their employees, but they can help ensure each employee has it. 

“On this topic, there are no easy answers.”


## Employee retention, broken bones, and... softball? A true story.

My partner Kim and I registered. On our way to the first practice, she said, "I have a bad feeling about this." I should have listened, turned around, and gone to brunch. Practice ensued. It was my turn to hit. A solid line drive, on route to first base, I heard a crack and was looking up at the sky. I felt pain and panic. A kind group of humans came to my aid and got me off the field. My partner drove me to the Urgent Care. I wasn't sure what happened.

I broke my right leg and left arm. Neither in places for a cast, I couldn't use crutches or a wheelchair (broken arm, remember), and luckily, no surgery was needed. At home, we figured out systems. Kim cared for me, our kids, our dogs, and our life. I am so thankful for her help and patience. Slowly, I recovered; it's harder after 40. Next challenge: how do I handle work? First, I had a team. I was able to delegate things and postpone some work. A big thank you to Shannon Dominguez, our Director of Business Development. It also made me realize we needed to grow; and enter Sam Sokolove, our new Director of Government Contracts.

Following my injury, I required months of physical therapy and regular doctor follow-ups. Without insurance, the costs would have been astronomical. But with my insurance plan, I paid a reasonable deductible and co-pays. I was able to focus on healing without financial anxiety. Too many in our community lack this privilege and security. Though I avoided economic hardship, the journey gave me new empathy for those with limited healthcare access. Countless people in the Roanoke Valley must ignore injuries, forgo treatment, and live in pain. One year later, I officially paid off the bill.

Businesses have the power to make a difference through the health plans they offer employees. This is especially critical for small businesses, which employ nearly half of Virginia's private workforce. While expanded coverage adds costs, it pays dividends through increased loyalty, productivity, and retention. Healthy, supported workers are better workers. Providing insurance also levels the playing field (see what I did there?) so a medical issue doesn't jeopardize someone's economic stability.

Investing in well-being makes fiscal sense in the long run. My recovery taught me that. I now see healthcare through an expanded lens of empathy and social justice. Insure your people - it makes a real difference in their lives. Will I ever play softball again? No. But I am happy to cheer folks on from the stands. 



## SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By **Bonnie Chavez**

**Executive Summary:**  
*Blue Ridge Pride Sports is a program offered by PLAY Roanoke and the Roanoke Diversity Center geared toward LGBTQIA and our allies. I was excited to see how I could participate. Turns out, it was softball season.*

# “Where to and where not to adjust”

## A chiropractor describes his art

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Architecture was on the career horizon for Mark Hundley, now Doctor of Chiropractic and owner of Hundley Chiropractic and Sports Medicine in Christiansburg.

But constantly looking down over drawings in college perpetuated his migraine headaches. He sought out the medical community, which had him try everything from food diaries to medications, but with no relief. When his chiropractor began adjusting his neck and back, the frequency and severity of the headaches was “drastically reduced.”

And his interest in the discipline was piqued. He switched his major to sports medicine

and, after graduation, attended chiropractic school. On top of an undergraduate degree, chiropractic school is a ten-semester program. Students rotate through different clinics and disciplines. The program also includes internships and externships, where students go into the field to work with a practicing chiropractor. Continuing education is also required.

Chiropractors, then, are highly trained. One of the biggest challenges they face is that “people think we just go to a weekend college,” said Hundley.

Chiropractic care, Hundley explained, is “correcting misalignments and muscular movement patterns.” More conservative than traditional medical care, it is about allowing the body to heal itself. It looks for the cause of problems versus treating the symptoms. In fact, Hundley said chiropractic care works best as a preventative treatment. Pain is often the last thing to show up and the first to go away, but there are still underlying conditions.

He said, “Pain is the tip of the iceberg.”

Hundley likened chiropractic care to a car hitting a pothole, knocking it out of alignment and thus wearing out the tires. But alignment is the core issue, and until it is corrected no number of new tires will solve the problem.

He said the best part of his job is the “joy of helping people eliminate pain and discomfort.”





There is no typical patient for Hundley, who has treated everyone from a 21-day-old baby to people well into their 90s.

“Chiropractic care is safe and effective for people of all ages,” said Hundley.

The 21-day-old was the colicky baby of a patient, Hundley said. The parents were worried and exhausted. The night he treated the baby, it slept for stretches of over four hours, waking only for feeding. Hundley added that he is treating five generations of that family.

One interesting new area of practice is expectant mothers. Hundley said that research shows chiropractic care reduces the time and intensity of labor.

The number one complaint that brings people in is lower back pain, which Hundley said 80% of the population will experience. People seek out chiropractic care for myriad other maladies, including headaches and pain in shoulders, knees, hips, feet, and ankles – there is a successful treatment protocol for any extremity, he said.

Melodee Wade of Blacksburg, a patient of Dr. Stewart Rawnsley in Narrows, said she “carries” her stress in her neck area and used to have neck spasms. Chiropractic care has been able to release the tension there.

The goal is not to allow the pain to become a chronic problem, Hundley said, adding that he has relationships with local medical doctors to whom he will refer someone if a problem is not responding to chiropractic treatment.

Hundley has been practicing since 1998, and in that time the discipline has evolved. The art of chiropractic care, he said, is knowing where to adjust and where not to adjust. Hands-on palpation and manipulation are still a huge part of care. Hundley has added a mechanical option: an advanced technical adjustment device which has a sensor that measures resistance. It gives an analysis beforehand, to tell the doctor where to adjust, and a post analysis on movement in each joint segment. The machine eliminates people’s biggest fear about chiropractic care, the “popping and cracking,” Hundley said.

He observed that, post-COVID, people are more concerned about staying healthy.

The field is growing as people seek out drug-free options, especially with the fight against opioids being prevalent, according to The Foundation for Chiropractic Progress website.

Wade said, “I did not want to rely on pain medications or muscle relaxants. I have periodically used those as a ‘rapid fix’ when desperate. But those come with a host of side effects, and using chiropractic care leads me to be more aware of taking care of my issues on a daily bases, as in exercising and stretching.”

Added Wade, chiropractic care helps her with better posture and release of tension from sitting, especially after travel.


She said, “I believe in the chiropractic way of care for body issues.”

Another reason people are turning to chiropractic care is the financial benefit, according to The Foundation for Chiropractic Progress website. Most health insurance plans cover some form of care, and research is showing that chiropractic care can be cheaper than prescription drugs or other medical interventions. On average, a session of chiropractic care costs \$65.

Hundley confirmed there is room for growth. Only 10-15% of the population is currently treated, he said. There are 70,000 chiropractors in the United States compared to over a million medical doctors.

“It is an open field for advancement,” Hundley said.

Doctors do not have the reputation of being the best business people, said Hundley. The business side is only touched upon in school. Hundley said it is up to doctors to “do their homework and learn that portion on your own.” He also belongs to a practice management group that surrounds him with other practitioners who can support one another in that area.

Hundley said, “You have to keep the business running to be able to help people.” 



## BUSINESS CENTS

By Daniel Colston

### Executive Summary:

*Trying to find a financial advisor or investment manager whom you can trust is difficult enough. Add to that, the presence of bad actors in the industry, and it becomes even more difficult.*

*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).*

## 10 telltale signs of a Ponzi scheme

I have been a financial advisor for six years now and have seen more than a handful of advisors who push bad products, give bad advice, sell a financial product without informing the client of the costs or tax implications, and many other bad practices. I have even seen a real Ponzi scheme play out right in front of me with friends falling victim to it.


In an effort to help spread awareness and to protect investors, here are some Ponzi scheme red flags

1. Promises of unlimited wealth. A skilled Ponzi-scheme artist promises infinite amounts of wealth available to investors.
2. Unrealistic rates of investment returns. Warren Buffet tells investors that they can expect to receive 6-7% rates of return on investment. He is arguably the best investor in the world so anyone promising outlandish rates of return such as 700% annual returns, is making a promise that they cannot keep. The bottom will fall out and the Ponzi scheme will collapse. It is a matter of “when” and not “if.”
3. Mystery surrounding how the company actually makes money. If the company has to use big words or multiple pages to explain how they actually make money, then it’s a possibility that they are actually using newer investors money to pay out the former investors—the definition of a Ponzi scheme. Eventually the company will run out of new investors and will start defaulting on its payments to former investors, and then comes the rug pull. If the company claims to make money through complex areas such as international finance, crypto, or AI, then they may be attempting to confuse investors with the added layers of complexing and misunderstanding.
4. A huge push to bring in new investors. Ponzi schemes make money by bringing in new investors so they push this by bringing on more salesman and incentivizing them with fat bonuses for bringing in friends and family. This fuels the returns of the company. If the company is so good at making money by themselves, then it doesn’t make sense why they are so desperate to bring on more investors. If they were good at business, then they would want to keep those outlandish investment returns for themselves and not give them away to as many new investors as possible. If they really have found a gold factory, then they would keep that for themselves instead of giving it away to others.
5. Barriers to getting your money back. If the company creates barriers to getting your money back, then it may at some point block those barriers and you could lose all your money. Sending money via wire to an unsecure platform or multiple platforms or a proprietary network which the company controls is a telltale sign of a Ponzi scheme.



6. Not regulated by any regulatory authority. If the company is not regulated by a governing or regulatory authority, and it claims to be an investment company, then that is a very bad sign. If its salesman are not required to pass any sort of investment exam or license, that is even a worse sign. Buying products or investing with someone who claims they are an investment advisor or have access to investments that perform better than any other investments in the world, may not be a prudent decision and should be considered with extreme caution.
7. Leadership in the company has a bad reputation. If the company is led by individuals or companies that have a bad track record or even a reputation for being involved in previous Ponzi schemes, that is a telltale sign.
8. Your friends and family and people on google are concerned about the company. If you tell your friends about it and they tell you it sounds dangerous, it may be a Ponzi scheme. If you google the company and most of the results that come up use the words "Ponzi scheme", then it may be a Ponzi scheme.
9. Flashy sales presentations. A common sales trick used in today's world is to impress you with tailored suits, gold watches, beautiful people, yachts, etc. to show you how rich you can be and seek to sucker you into investing. This "selling the dream" tactic may include TikTok videos, sales presentations, trips abroad, fancy dinners, and promises of life-changing results. They promise you that your life will be so much better, wealthier, and happier—all you have to do is everything they tell you to do.
10. An explanation for everything. Yes they can explain why they were formerly called Ponzi artists, but that they actually aren't. They explain with much verbosity and confusing language how they make money and how you will get rich. They take 15 minutes to explain in great complexity how their easiest product works. They have an explanation as to why former customers left bad google reviews and why former customers never got their money back.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to fall victim to one of these Ponzi scheme scams. They promise so much, and it seems like you could really get life-changing results, however in the end, these schemes always fall and investors could lose some or all of their money. The only thing worse than losing your own money would be your friends, family, or acquaintances losing their money as well and then come knocking on your door crying and begging for their money back.

Investing in confusing, complex, and unregulated products is a very risky practice and should be considered with extreme caution. There is plenty of money to be made in the regulated markets such as working with a licensed financial advisor who can help you make the most prudent decisions for your financial future. 



Warren Buffet tells investors that they can expect to receive 6–7% rates of return on investments.



They promise so much... in the end, these schemes always fail.



If the company is so good at making money by themselves... they would want to keep those outlandish returns for themselves...



Shawn Nowlin

Left to right, Dr. Seyi White, Danielle Alexander, Temeca Maddox, Dr. Karanita Ojomo and Lutheria Smith.

# A rally for breast cancer awareness

By Shawn Nowlin

**Sisters' Night Out addresses breast cancer in a personal, caring way.**

Individuals who have dealt with a serious diagnosis will tell you that no matter what it is, being able to strategize and discuss it freely with trusted individuals can make all the difference in the world.

The number of women nationwide who are diagnosed with breast cancer every year is higher than one may think. According to cancer.org, "The average woman has about a 15 percent chance of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. Common symptoms include bloody discharge from the nipple, a lump in the breast or changes in the texture of the nipple."

Since becoming part of the Roanoke community's consciousness in 2011, Sisters' Night Out, a movement dedicated to celebrating breast cancer survivors and

other extraordinary women, has helped innumerable individuals. Women of different ethnicities, upbringings and backgrounds are all part of the organization.

Its tenth anniversary took place at St. John's Episcopal Church on Jefferson Street in September. A night full of love, stories and laughter, attendees were treated to a catered meal, courtesy of Gina's Food with Flavor. This year's presenters, Karanita M. Ojomo, MD, a Radiation Oncologist at Blue Ridge Cancer Care and Dr. Seyi White, DNP, a nurse practitioner at the Carilion Clinic Breast Survivorship, successfully balanced the seriousness of the reality and made sure that the sisterhood remains as strong as ever.

"When you are younger, oftentimes there is pushback when you notice a change in



your body. It is so important to speak up if you feel like something is different. So many times, we ignore the signs that our body is telling us. I strongly encourage everyone to reframe from doing that," Dr. White said.

There are plenty of misconceptions about breast cancer exist. Here are just a few.

- Myth, if one doesn't have a family history of it that means they won't be diagnosed either
- Fact, the vast majority of individuals diagnosed with breast cancer have no known family history
- Myth, wearing a bra causes breast cancer
- Fact, no such evidence exists
- Myth, a person who maintains a healthy weight and exercises regularly doesn't have to concern themselves with breast cancer
- Fact, while both behaviors can significantly lower the risk, it doesn't fully eliminate the possibility

Opening up about her journey as a survivor at the Sept. gathering, Danielle Alexander said, "I had pain in my right breast one day and after an exam, a lump was found. I was told that I had Triple Positive Breast Cancer and needed chemo, first to shrink the tumor before having a double mastectomy. Six rounds of chemo and surgeries later, my body was far from what it had been. I had no feeling in my breasts, no hair and a complete lack of self-confidence. Today, I am healthy, however, the fear of cancer coming back is very real."


Temeca Maddox said, "Years ago, my husband and I were faced with reality, and I had a moment of, 'What do I do?' Without the help of outstanding doctors, family and close friends, there's no way I would have gotten through all of the grueling treatments,

immense pain, multiple surgeries and lengthy recovery."

Lutheria Smith's life changed forever in April 2016 when she strolled into the Carilion Breast Care Center for a routine mammogram and received news that no one wants to hear. "When I was called back, I was not ready to hear the words, 'You have breast cancer.' I didn't hear anything else that was said as I was in complete shock," she said. "Thanks to the Oncotype DX test, we learned that chemotherapy provided no benefit. So, treatment consisted of surgeries, Tamoxifen for two years and Arimidex for another eight years. I celebrated seven years of being cancer-free on June 9."

In the toughest of times, none of the survivors who spoke said they never once considered themselves victims. Safe spaces specifically for women, they noted, serve as an outlet to process discomfort and build community. Before the event concluded, a moment of silence was observed to recognize all of the breast cancer survivors who have since passed.

Providing the closing remarks, Manns, a master's in nursing science, explained, "I specifically chose this year's speakers and brought back three of our survivors to share their journey with us. I hope that the impact of their words serves as a reminder as to what is possible."

Sisters' Night Out has a long-established relationship with the Roanoke Valley community. Funding from New Horizons Healthcare, American Cancer Society, Carilion Clinic and Loudon Avenue Christian Church allows the movement to continue its mission in providing resources and helping in the fight to find a cure for breast cancer. 



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# INNOVATION

By RBTC staff

**Executive Summary:**  
*The Roanoke-Blacksburg region is driving significant advancements with a strong focus on health-tech.*



VT-CRC is building world class infrastructure for cutting-edge tech and biotech companies.

## Piloting the way: multi-organizational partnership advancing health-tech

From research and commercialization to developing worldclass infrastructure and a pipeline for technology talent, the region is modeling a strategic collaboration to ultimately drive the tech-based economy forward with sustainable strategies.

**Carilion Clinic** is a leader in healthcare digital transformation to improve healthcare outcomes. Carilion is scaling services through various virtual options, digital tools for urgent care, prescriptions and mental health visits. Carilion's Institute for Simulation and Human Factors (Sim Lab for short) is a national model for addressing quality care and safety. Carilion works to commercialize employees' innovative ideas through its in-house technology incubator **Carilion Clinic Innovations** which has established partnerships with start-ups and existing businesses to improve clinical and administrative services. As the nation's top-enrolling site for research to improve treatment for stroke and heart attacks, Carilion continues to pioneer new, more personalized cancer treatments. The health system's numerous collaborations with spinoffs from the **Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (FBRI) at VTC** are a critical part of its research efforts.

FBRI at Virginia Tech is dedicated to translational research, bridging the gap between scientific discoveries and practical applications in healthcare. FBRI's research encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from molecular-level studies to clinical trials. The institute's spinoff companies, such as BEAM Diagnostics, The Tiny Cargo Co., and Kernyll, exemplify the power of academic research translated into real-world implementation. By collaborating with organizations focused on strengthening the ecosystem like **Verge**, the **Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council**, and **Johnson & Johnson's JLABS** program, FBRI is transforming breakthroughs into life-changing realities.

To support the demand of integrating research with commercialization, the **Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center** is building worldclass infrastructure for cutting-edge emerging tech and biotech companies. This regional infrastructure is dedicated to attracting and nurturing scientific breakthroughs and fostering the development of cutting-edge medical solutions.


As the life science sector grows so does the demand for all levels of healthcare workers. **Virginia Western Community College (VWCC)** has introduced a Specialization in Biotechnology under its existing Associate of Science in Science degree to support the future workforce needs. This program aims to produce a skilled workforce capable of



supporting startup companies in the region while also attracting larger prospective companies. Upon completion, students become eligible to test for an industry-level credential, which enhances employability. VWCC is also developing articulation agreements with bachelor's degree awarding institutions to facilitate seamless transfer for those pursuing further education.

The **City of Roanoke** plays a crucial role supporting and building the regional ecosystem. In 2022, the City helped to lead a \$25 million project to launch new infrastructure for biotech and life science startups. By providing strategic support and resources, the city is committed to fostering a future for innovation.

The regional tech alliance **Verge**, which includes the **Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC)** and the **Regional Accelerator and Mentor Program (RAMP)**, exists to advance the region's innovative landscape forward through various strategic partnerships, elevating the Roanoke-Blacksburg region as a vibrant hub for innovation along the East Coast. Driving a model that will produce broader statewide support in the future.

Together, these regional organizations are strategically aligned and commitment to driving innovation in healthcare – each playing a significant role in two major initiatives: the Johnson & Johnson Advancing Oncology InnoVation QuickFire Challenge and the Roanoke Biotech Project. Through these collective efforts, the region is surely poised to significantly benefit from the impact of revolutionizing healthcare through the power of partnerships. 



Verge exists to advance the region's innovative landscape...



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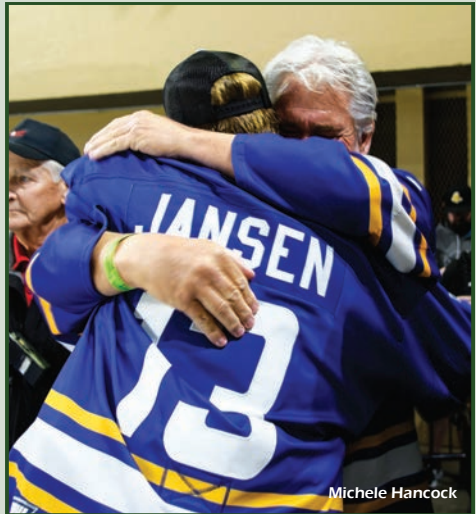
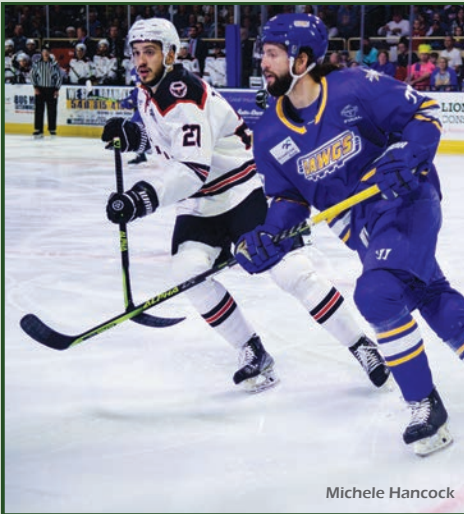
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## Rail Yard Dawgs expect bigger crowds as league champions >

It was no surprise that **Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs** ticket sales for the 2023-2024 season saw a bump after they won a league title and raised the first-ever pro team championship banner at the Berglund Center (formerly the Roanoke Civic Center.) Coming off a President's Cup in 2022-23, when the Dawgs won the Southern Professional Hockey League championship, they already had 1,280 season ticketholders who were ready to claim their purchase as of mid-October.

"Last year, we were over 1,000 for the first

time," team president **Mickey Gray** said earlier this week, "and we grew another 20-25 percent on the season ticket front, which is great. Our support is unmatched."

Head coach **Dan Bremner** saw interest in the sport rise off the ice as well with the youth hockey program he is involved with. "After we won there was a big bump in signups for learn to play, learn to skate. Hopefully we can just keep that rolling."

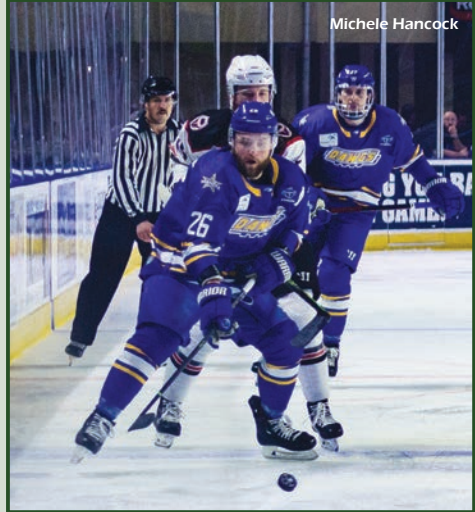
"It's going to be really exciting on the 20th," Gray said before the season opener last month. "We have a bunch of our team returning for this year, so that's very exciting—getting another season up and running." Many of the players return home over the summer but that hasn't hindered their preparation. "A couple of



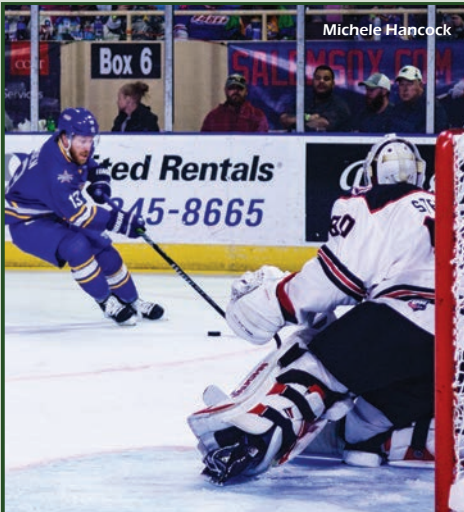
# SPOTLIGHT FRONT 'N ABOUT



Bryar Turner



Michele Hancock



Michele Hancock



Bryar Turner

weeks after the season ends, everybody just scatters into the wind and heads home."

By early October, "Everybody's been making their way back and we've got the full team here now. Our team is going to look very similar to what it did last year." Nick Devito from last year's title squad has decided to retire but he will be with the organization as an assistant coach. Defenseman Roshen Jaswall also retired but almost everybody else will be returning. Finals MVP goaltender Austyn Roudebush is back as well.

The Southern Professional Hockey League [SPHL], is "a strong, 10-team league," Gray said. As for a repeat, "everybody gets better every year, so it's certainly going to be a tough year."

One franchise did bite the dust. "We did lose a team in the middle of season last year but the 10 teams that ended the season are all coming back this year." That was a reference to the now-defunct Vermillion County Bobcats, located in Danville, Ill. Based on the strong following the Dawgs have built (crowds over 5000 in the playoffs for example) they won't have that problem in the Star City.

Team captain **Mac Jansen** scored the game winning goal in overtime in May to clinch the President's Trophy for the Dawgs: "Been here a long time, it means the world. I love this program, I bleed blue. Hopefully we can put in the work ... and be there at the end of the year to do it again."

—Doug Doughty



## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
*Make it a point to get back out and support live theater more in 2024. Or eateries. Shop at more local stores. Run more races to support good causes. Sounds like a good New Year's resolution.*

## Where have all the people gone?

The Barter Theatre in Abingdon, which bills itself as the nation's longest running professional live theater venue (on two stages, in repertory fashion with two casts each handling two shows during the same run) was mentioned in recent stories by AP and The Washington Post as being something of an anomaly. Unlike many other regional theaters, The Barter seems to have weathered the COVID lockdown years and has seen the crowds come back.

It's something Ginger Poole, the producing artistic director at Mill Mountain Theatre is dealing with. On the MMT website right up front it proclaims, "we're working hard to keep you safe," a subtle message to those still hesitant perhaps to sit in a packed theater, still nervous about contracting the coronavirus from a sniffing person in the next seat. Keep in mind that like at many other cultural events, these audiences tend to be older and perhaps are more vulnerable to getting COVID or the flu or some other virus.

"This is not Roanoke-centric, this is nationwide," says Poole, coming off a 2023 "Season of Song" in which every Trinkle Main Stage play was a musical that ran for an extra week – musicals are typically the most crowd-pleasing shows. No dramas – unlike the just announced 2024 season, which will include the classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. "Theaters with much larger budgets than Mill Mountain are struggling with the same issues. [Some] have even had to close."

Many saw their dining, moviegoing, shopping and other public habits change during the COVID lockdown and have still not returned to their pre-pandemic ways. It's easier to sit on the couch sometimes, turn on Netflix and order from Door Dash. People are learning to live with COVID says Poole, "but the numbers from 2019, we haven't seen those [yet]. I think it's [more] you get out of practice, you get out of habit, of going to see live entertainment." People have figured out how to keep themselves entertained in other ways that may cost less money, don't require as much planning or even a babysitter.

I'm guilty – not going to the movies nearly as much as I used to. Nor running as many 5K races on the weekend. I discovered during the pandemic that I liked sleeping in a little later on Saturday mornings. "Live theater needs an audience – folks in the door," says Poole, noting that the Steve Martin-Edie Brickell musical *Bright Star* in September was budgeted for 55-60% of seats filled – but only hit at 35-40%. Even the more well known *Jersey Boys* didn't hit the attendance targets it should have. "That tells me its not what we're putting out there – it's just people's habits." 🎭

“”  
Live theater needs an audience.



## Did you mean to do that?

Oh, no he didn't!

Oh, no, she did not just say that!

I'm rather amazed at what some business owners or leaders post online; a number of them, my friends. To be clear, there's a difference between personal and professional. Private and public. I mean, it should be a BIG difference.

The problem is, it's really not.

Most business owners and leaders have customers, patrons, suppliers, shareholders, associated folks, and just plain old outright friends who are following or connected as individuals. We're all aware of that. We're not stupid. But I see an awful lot of instances where we take positions that will clearly alienate a big percentage of the very people who support us.

I accidentally posted something on my business social site that was supposed to be on my personal social media. My pal, Bruce Bryan, a media pro at 5 Points Creative, immediately shot me a one-sentence "did you mean to do that?" note. I appreciated Bruce's attentiveness, and I promptly deleted the post. (I didn't even redirect it to my personal account, because it was just one of those random observations that wasn't even important. Not offensive, just confusing.)

Bruce knows where I'm coming from in my business. We can point things out to one another. That's a good relationship to have.

If I wanted to help out like Bruce, well, I'm afraid I'd be sending out quite a growing number of warning notes. Here are a few, categorized, with names changed to protect the identities:

### SHOP FRUSTRATIONS

To Marty: Hey, pal. Sounds like things are really rough at work. All of your latest videos have been complaints—and you even call out staff or customers you've had issues with. Yeah, they're crazy! I can tell it's a grind; but I'm not sure as a new or returning customer I'd want to drop by with all that negativity. **Did you mean to do that?**

### UNHAPPY RELATIONSHIPS

To Jim, Steve, Sue, Mary (yeah, there's a LOT who do this one): Hey [insert name here]; your ex is a real piece of work. We get it. And the way he/she is with your kids and/or family and in-laws... I don't know how you even deal with it. Terrible person, for sure. But I have to say, it's been going on a long time, and I know the pain isn't leaving... You seem to be saying you are not going to move on. **Did you mean to do that?**

continued on Page 36



## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

### Executive Summary:

*What you post online is attributed to your business if you're in an independent profession.*

## Field / On Tap

from Page 35

### POLITICS & RELIGION


To (another big slew of people): Hey [insert name here], It's clear you've had it up to here with [the Democrats, the Republicans, the Christians, the Muslims]; but your posts have gotten completely predictable. Pointing out the wrongs you see is fine; I understand that. But when they always focus on one direction, and more of an insult than observation (a rhetorical technique the other side could use in the same way), I don't think it's advancing your cause. If you look at your posts, you might see that they're just attacks against beliefs you don't hold. Rather than exposing the problem or suggesting a solution, it reads as if you're just not allowing different ideas or approaches. **Did you mean to do that?**

I actually prefer real life thoughts. Shared online, yes? Even there. I despise sanitized communications. I like reading diverse ideas; and am happy to entertain the ones that differ from my own. I like individuals who take a stand and are not wishy-washy. If a business owner or leader doesn't mind offending half or more of the audience (which includes existing and potential customers) then post on. I don't know what percentage of the population I represent on this specific matter, but I happen to support and patronize businesses I don't personally align with—all the time.

But here's something to consider. If the posts just keep piling on, I might avoid the business or think about using another for the first time. (This has actually happened.) AND if I know someone who is clearly on the other side of a position, I'm much less likely to refer and recommend that business. Why would I intentionally place two opposing parties together if and when there are other options? (This has happened, too.)

Your place with work frustrations, unhappy and unhealthy relationships, and political and religious inclinations and ideologies is a place you need to address, hold tightly, and navigate the way you need and serves you best.

The public airing of every one of them may not always be the best way to do that if you run a business. That's all I'm saying.

"Open for business" often requires one to be a little more open minded. 



If I know someone who is clearly on the other side of a position, I'm much less likely to refer and recommend that business.



I despise sanitized communications.

## The ADHD advantage: How to make your unicorn brain your secret weapon

If you have or work with someone with ADHD, you'll want to read this.

ADHD gets a bad rap, and it's time to reframe it as an advantage. Our wildly creative, outside-the-box unicorn brains have immense untapped potential. Let's look at how to embrace the upsides of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and make it your secret weapon at work.

First, ADHD isn't some imaginary disorder. It's real, yet often undiagnosed. An estimated 11 million American adults have ADHD without knowing it. A 2021 study titled, "ADHD in the United States: Persistence and workplace impairments in adulthood" shows that an estimated 8 million U.S. workers have ADHD, which can impair workplace performance. This represented 4.5% of the total employed civilian population at the time.

The most common occupations held by workers with ADHD include office and administrative roles (16%), management (11%), business and finance (10%), and education/training (8%). Adults with ADHD are more likely to be self-employed or entrepreneurs compared to the general population (14% vs 6%). Workers with ADHD are more likely to have positions requiring creative, independent, or flexible work compared to those without ADHD. Scan the QR code to do a quick assessment to see if you may have symptoms being overlooked.

Now, let's talk superpowers. ADHD brains are like energetic ponies - sometimes scattered yet full of magic. We may struggle with time management (always running late)



## GUEST COMMENTARY

By **Shannon Dominguez**

**Executive Summary:**  
*A FRONTcorrespondent shares insight on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.*

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and focus (squirrel); but harness our creativity, and you have a secret weapon.

While we get distracted easily, we can hyperfocus with laser intensity on things we're passionate about. We have the ability to unleash that power on projects that fascinate us. Our outside-the-box thinking can conjure up solutions no one else sees.


Sure, we interrupt colleagues occasionally in our enthusiasm. But with reminders to wait our turn, we bring a fun energy to team discussions. Our conversational tendencies make work more collaborative and innovative. And all those planners and reminders that help keep us on track? They provide the structure every magical pony needs to maximize their talents.

Sara Blakely, who founded Spanx in 2000 and became a self-made billionaire, has been open about her ADHD diagnosis, which came later in life. She channels the energy, innovation, and creativity it brings her into building a game-changing brand while managing the challenges through daily habits. Blakely shares how supportive environments allow people with ADHD to play to their strengths, which drove her unconventional success story. She's a role model for harnessing gifts like passion despite difficulties focusing and advocates for adjustments that help those with ADHD thrive at work.

So don't suppress the spirit of the ADHD unicorn. With the right support, we can stop apologizing and start succeeding. In supportive work cultures, we bring color, passion, and ideas to the workplace. Understanding how we tick and supporting our unique challenges enables us to proudly showcase our talents instead of hiding them in shame.

Lastly, there are many tips and tricks that can help people work with their ADHD (or its less hyper cousin, ADD). For example, implementing consistent routines, minimizing distractions, using productivity tools, and leveraging your hyperfocus on tasks you enjoy can help provide the structure an ADHD brain needs. Regular exercise, adequate sleep, fidget items, and reminders help to support focus and organization. The Pomodoro technique is a method that breaks work into 25-minute focus sessions followed by 5-minute breaks. This method of managing time helps maintain focus and productivity while allowing regular recovery periods for the brain. The built-in frequent breaks and task focus provided by the Pomodoro technique can be particularly beneficial for people with ADHD by reducing distractions and procrastination.

Remember to embrace the passion, creativity, and outside-the-box thinking ADHD can bring. Be open with managers and teammates about your needs - most want to help you thrive. With the right adaptations and by playing to your strengths, you can tap into the gifts of your unique ADHD brain and find success. Small changes make a big difference, so be patient with yourself as you learn what works best.

In summary, ADHD brains are key players in innovative, collaborative teams, especially when given the environment to unlock our potential. Keep educating yourself on ADHD and make your unicorn brain your secret weapon, not a weakness to flip the script on ADHD at work. (Scan the QR Code to learn more about a self-assessment) 

*Shannon Thibodeau Dominguez resides in Roanoke, is a mother of two daughters, and is actively working on two books. She has been invited to speak at the upcoming Roanoke Regional Writers' Conference, where she will address the intersection of AI and marketing. Please note: Generative AI tools were used in developing and refining this document; however, human judgment and oversight were also utilized to ensure its accuracy and appropriateness.*

## ADHD

is...

- ✓ An abbreviation for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, sometimes also called ADD (attention-deficit disorder).
- ✓ A common disorder that impacts focus, impulse control and emotional responses.
- ✓ Often diagnosed in childhood but sometimes in teen or adult years.

## ADHD

is not...

- ✗ NOT only hyperactivity. There are hyperactive types, but also inattentive and impulsive too.
- ✗ NOT a problem of laziness. ADHD is due to differences in the brain and the way it sends messages.
- ✗ NOT something to outgrow. Many kids with ADHD have symptoms their whole adult lives.



### ADHD Success Stories

	Channing Tatum is a talented actor and dancer with ADHD and dyslexia.		Actor Ryan Gosling was bullied in school for reading issues related to ADHD.
	Glenn Beck is a popular political talk show host who has ADD.		Audra McDonald has ADHD and holds the record for the most Tony's won by an actress (six).



## 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.

### *Last charge for an American icon*

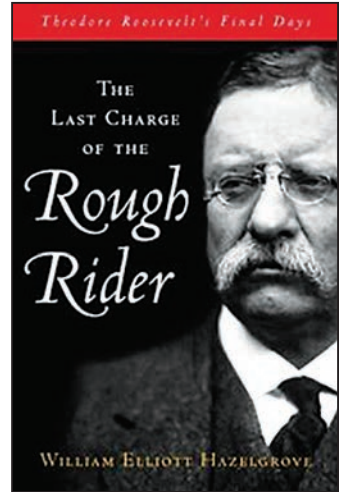
I've read a number of books on Theodore Roosevelt; his early days out west after the death of his first wife. Becoming President when William McKinley was assassinated. Running as a third party Bull Moose candidate, which then handed the presidency to Democrat Woodrow Wilson, a constant target of TR's barbs. *The Last Charge of the Rough Rider* by William Elliott Hazelgrove (Lyons Press 2023) was a bit of an eye opener however.

Two decades after he led a charge up San Juan Hill that helped end the Spanish-American War in Cuba, Teddy Roosevelt, nearing 60 and ailing from a lifetime of arduous physical activity and maladies brought on by broken bones, bullet wounds and jungle-induced conditions, wanted to lead a mounted cavalry charge on horseback with his old Rough Riders (and other younger recruits) into battle during the early days of World War 1. The "Great War" as it was known then was much different than what TR had experienced in 1898: highly mechanized, with chemical weapons, repeating rifles, tanks, airplanes dropping bombs, etc. In short it would have most likely been a suicide mission for Teddy—who seemed resigned to going out in a blaze of glory. An interesting twist to the TR saga for his many fans.

—Gene Marrano

### *Riveting, blow by blow account*

"Charlottesville" has come a one-word phrase even for media outlets that would have been hard-pressed to know where the smallish Virginia city and home to the University of Virginia really is before the



fateful United the Right rally in 2017. *24 Hours in Charlottesville: An Oral History of The Stand Against White Supremacy* by Nora Neus (Beacon Press, 2023), a CNN producer and former local TV reporter in Charlottesville, is not written where the interviews with those involved are woven into her story—it's just verbatim testimony from counter protesters and bystanders who fought back or were just caught in the path when White Supremacists paraded and rallied on or near the UVA campus.

We here from Susan Bro, the mother of Heather Heyer, mowed down on 4th Street by James Fields, one of the rally organizers. City officials weigh in and one thing is crystal clear: Charlottesville was not ready for what became a bloody and ultimately fatal encounter during that fateful 24 hours. "Where are the police?" is heard over and over again. For those who really want to understand what the word "Charlottesville" has come to mean for many the testimonies in Neus's book are worth going through.

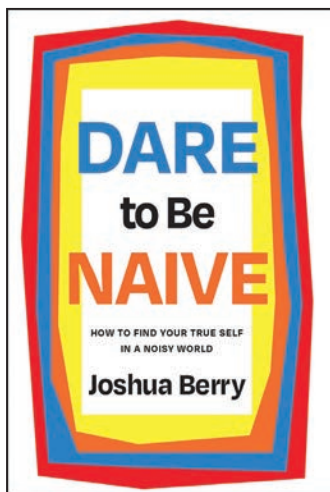
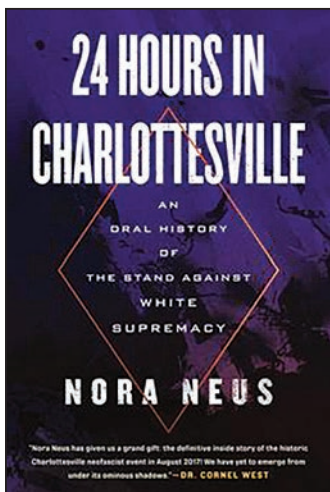
—Gene Marrano

### *Naivete for the win*

In leadership circles today we often hear about using vulnerability as a strength in terms of how we communicate with one another in the workplace, but we rarely hear about being naive, or not knowing something, as being a positive leadership trait.

Joshua Berry, the Managing Director and





Co-Founder of Eonic, an innovation and strategy consulting company, says being a truly successful, impactful leader takes an intentional leadership approach that includes curiosity, courage, and authenticity—a type of “chosen naivete.”

In *Dare to be Naive: How to Find Yourself in a Noisy World* (soon to release; Jan. 2024), the author explores the intersection between the desire many leaders have to use their roles as business leaders for good, and what keeps some of them from acting on those beliefs.

Topics include: steps for becoming an intentional leader and gaining actionable insight; principles and steps for truly finding yourself as a leader; regenerative business practices for teams; how extreme workplace cultures like toxic positivity and toxic negativity impact organizations; how leaders can learn just as much from their losses as they do from their successes; and creating a “new ROI” (Ripple of Impact).

—Emily Willette

## *Distill my beating heart*

In the adult beverage world, in our local market, we have three main ways to imbibe. You can go retail (purchase wine, beer at a store; spirits at a state-run ABC store); you can have it distributed (like Blue Ridge Beverage or PA Short does for events); or you can go right to the manufactured source (namely, breweries, wineries, and distilleries). On the distillation of spirits (namely, whiskey,

rum, gin, vodka, tequila/mezcal, brandy) there are fewer choices than breweries/brewpubs and wineries/vineyards. There are about six in a one-hour drive radius of Roanoke.

But right in the heart of Roanoke, there’s Brady’s.

The Brady brothers (Tim, Brian, Andy) just opened in the past three years; but the place has become a favorite for relaxation and entertainment—often drawing study crowds, joining the regulars.

One neat fact about **Brady’s Distillery** is that they “brought something to their hometown that had not been done in over 100 years,” as they put it. Indeed, that was quite a long, dry stretch for the Star City. Right now, Brady’s staple includes blended and aged craft spirits like the most popular Accomplice bourbon, double oaked, and toasted rye whiskeys; the Lazy Jack Rum, Brady’s Vodka; and Prohibition Gin. You can sample any, grab a bottle, ask for Brady’s by name at our regional restaurants, or visit the tasting room (highly recommended) for a cocktail made with careful attention to detail.

Sláinte!

—Tom Field

*The reviewers:* **Gene Marrano** is a veteran news reporter and editor of FRONT; **Emily Willette** is a publicist with Smith Publicity in Chery Hill, NJ; **Tom Field** is a creative director and publisher of FRONT.



## Salem bot bash >

**Roanoke College** and its Cregger Center hosted the **Blue Ridge Brawl** on Sept. 30, a "FIRST Charged Up" games and Robotics Competition that included teams from Virginia and Tennessee, as well as local, like Copperhead Robotics (Blacksburg), The STAGS (Martinsville), Botetourt 4-H Robotics (Troutville), and Cometbots (South Boston). Local team and competitor **Spartan Robotics** (Salem) hosted the event.

## Big boost for BEAM >

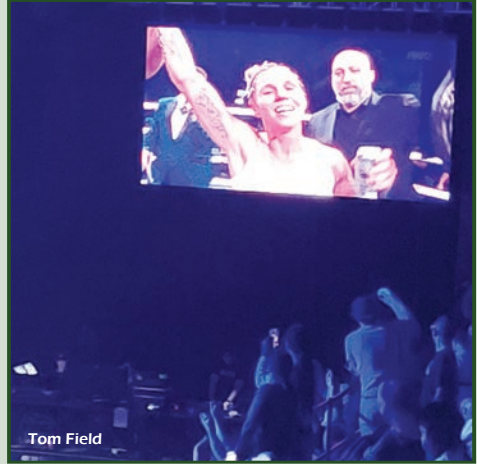
**BEAM Diagnostics Inc.**, a behavioral health company that sprung from research from Virginia Tech's Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC — has been awarded a \$1.84 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to commercialize its technology to improve assessment of opioid use disorder (OUD) in outpatient medical clinics. BEAM's proprietary technology (profiled previously in VBF), Beacon-OUD, is a digital screening tool that quickly and accurately determines a patient's risk of opioid use disorder without asking stigmatizing questions. The 24-month Phase II Small Business Innovation Research grant from the NIH's National Institute on Drug Abuse builds upon ongoing validation work with Carilion Clinic, allowing BEAM to finalize the development and implementation of Beacon-OUD into primary care clinics as a digital assessment for providers.



## Donning their aprons >

Local musician and songwriter **Leslie Brooks**, shown here with an intimate three-member acoustic ensemble at **Solstice Farm Brewery** in Catawba on Sept. 30, still continues to crusade for a new state song for Virginia, offering her long-time suggestion of "Virginia—Where Heaven Touches Earth" that was submitted to the House of Delegates. The state song "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia" (1940—1997) was considered insensitive and demoted to "emeritus" status, and the lyrics were changed to remove references to slavery. In 2015, the General Assembly named "Our Great Virginia" as the Commonwealth's traditional song, based on the folk song "Oh, Shenandoah" and "Sweet Virginia Breeze" as the popular song. Other musicians who join Brooks in submitting bills in the past, include Susan Greenbaum ("Virginia, the Home of My Heart), John Wayland and Will Ruebush ("Old Virginia—New"), and Jimmy and Donna Dean ("Virginia").





Tom Field

## No Gloves >

**Bare Knuckle Fighting Championship 51** was held at Salem Civic Center on Sept. 29, featuring ten fights—nine men and concluding with the main event, local favorite Britain Hart (Bedford, Danville) defending her women's championship by defeating Melanie Shah (England). The bout went all five rounds, with Hart winning unanimously. Only five weeks later, Hart goes to Thailand next (Nov. 4) in another main event, where she'll not have the "home square-ring advantage" as she faces the Thai challenger for the world title.



Courtesy Photo

## Medical School repeat honors >

INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine has awarded the **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine** (VTC SOM) the Health Professions Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award for the sixth straight year. The 64 schools earning 2023 awards were announced October 11 and will be featured in the December issue of the magazine. The HEED Award recognizes U.S. health colleges and universities that demonstrate an outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion.





Courtesy of Roanoke College.

## 2023 “Kendigs” >

The 2023 **Perry F. Kendig Awards**, celebrating excellence in the arts in our region, were presented at Roanoke College on Oct. 2. Winners included **Michael Mansfield**, director, actor, guest artist, designer, teacher for Individual Artist; **Virginia Jarrett** and her late husband **Shields**, co-founder of Roanoke Women’s Foundation and **Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge** for Arts Supporter. Left to right: Frank Shushok Jr. (Roanoke College), Landon Howard (VVBR), Virginia Jarrett, Michael Mansfield, Mary Dana Hinton (Hollins University).



## New hotel boasts impressive art collection >

The works of Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso, Dorothy Gillespie (Roanoke’s own and a former Radford professor), Adolf Dehn, Jay Milder and more adorn the halls of Radford’s newest landmark hotel - The **Highlander Hotel Radford** opened in April of this year, “bringing a casually elegant experience to the region.” Upon entry, guests will find Pablo Picasso’s 1958 “La Femme Aux Des (Jacqueline)” and Andy Warhol’s 1985 work “Reigning Queens: Queen Ntfombi Twala of Swaziland” in the first-floor entrance. Throughout the hotel, inside restaurants and meeting spaces, they’ll find notable portraits, abstract paintings, lithographs, nature scenes and other works.



Tom Field

## Whoa, now! Hold On... >

The world's not going to end... (or is it?). BOCO Talks (by **Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce**) at Stoney Brook Vineyards On Sept. 21 featured a presentation on Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing by **Robert Turcotte** of Entre Computer Systems. Turcotte's setup that either we see AI as good or bad was confirmed by the lively audience Q&A at the end. Even as he shared some timelines and how AI is being deployed, much of the news he shared supported one grand theorem: "We'll have to wait and see." For the record, Turcotte has a general positive perspective of the technology.



Gene Marrano

## Promoting mass transit through literature and art >

A collaboration among **Roanoke City, Ride Solutions, and Valley Metro** intended to inform the community about what it's like using the Star City's bus system has just wrapped up its 6th year. Writer By Bus places a creative person on the Valley Metro for a month or more, traveling the transit system to see what it is like. **Eva Lynch-Comer**, a creative writing student at Hollins University had the honors this year and then released her impressions in *Sonder*, a slender volume of poetry and prose.

Lucy Addison Middle School art teacher **JC Stallings** illustrated *Sonder*, and some of his work (a self portrait) has been wrapped around a Valley Metro bus. At an event celebrating *Sonder* and Stallings work in September, Roanoke Vice Mayor **Joe Cobb** noted that ridership has increased steadily in recent months – up 15%. "I didn't expect people to be so nice to me," says Lynch-Comer, "because we're all strangers, but I found community in ways that I didn't think I would. People just looked out for me. I'm so grateful for it."





## Sunflower Superhero >

**Candace Monaghan**, founder of the **Beaver Dam Farm Sunflower Festival** in Botetourt County was recognized at the opening ceremonies of the Virginia State Fair in September as an "Ag Superhero." The Virginia state fair since 1854 has featured animal and agriculture exhibits, shows, music, fine arts and crafts and more. Each September, the Beaver Dam Farm Sunflower festival has become the largest sunflower festival and vendor show on the East Coast, providing over 600,000 black oil sunflowers and 115 food and craft vendors for visitors. "I was thrilled to be included in this group of amazing businesses and individuals," said Monaghan; "to be recognized for our hard work by the state is a huge honor." As part of the 2023 State Fair of Virginia Ed Expo, they launched "Superhero" trading cards featuring 15 Virginia's super individuals in Ag and Natural Resources.



## RVB HQ OTW >

**Ridge View Bank's** new corporate headquarters is on the way. The company held a groundbreaking ceremony on Oct. 5 at the new site—3531 Franklin Road (where the Red Lobster used to be). The two-story, 16,300-square-foot building will feature the Bank's SMART Center and house 50+ employees. Roanoke companies Balzer and Associates architects and G&H Contracting are building the facility. The HQ follows the distinctive style of other Ridge View Banks such as the ones in Salem and Smith Mountain Lake and is expected to be completed in the fall of 2024.





RBTC

## An ELITE grant indeed >

In the past three years, 62 students at 17 different companies completed internships thanks to \$94,000 in funding from **GO Virginia**. The effort was facilitated by the **Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council** as part of the **ELITE** (Experiential Learning in Technology Employment) Grant. Employers in Pulaski, Lynchburg, Roanoke, Blacksburg, and other communities built their talent pipelines while strengthening the regional technology ecosystem thanks to funding that supported intern employment. The grant also included a partnership with Exelation, a software development company with a nationally recognized internship program, who supported the connection and mentor oversight of 19 interns to multiple employers.

"The ELITE Grant enabled more regional businesses to be competitive when working with regional technology students," said **Erin Burcham**, President of Verge and Executive Director of RBTC. "After graduating from the region's world-class universities, those joining the workforce often leave the area in search of nationally known employers. By introducing talented students to local companies and allowing them to foster a connection to the community, they are more likely to remain in the area upon graduation. That's a win for the students and the local economy." The ELITE Grant, which concluded at the end of September, underscores the importance of solving the region's technology challenges both in the near- and long-term according to the RBTC - especially critical when addressing the local technology deficit companies face. In addition to offering wage support, the grant supported training and professional development activities to further students' career readiness.

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## Healing arts event will be permanent part of new Carilion addition >

As the Crystal Spring tower at **Carilion Clinic** gets closer to completion, young patients and families at **Carilion Children's Tanglewood Center** spent some time recently painting designs on a large steel beam that will be added to one of the top floors of the new addition. **Carli Holtzhauer** is a childhood life specialist at Carilion Children's Hospital - she works with the health system's Healing Arts Program: "we work with the healing arts program at the children's hospital by coming to events like this. Opportunities for creative expression – to be able to use the power of art to heal, [to] relieve really big emotions they may be dealing with, illness or things going on in their life."

The Carilion's Healing Arts program also includes an annual employee art show and local school children who paint designs on ceiling panels that are then installed in the children's hospital wing. The new Crystal Spring tower at Carilion Clinic is scheduled for completion in early 2025.



## More affordable homes with help from ARPA >

American Rescue Plan Act federal funding (2.6 million dollars) is helping to leverage the work by **Habitat for Humanity**, which rebuilds older homes and builds new affordable housing, often with the help of largely-volunteer crews. At a 100-year-old house being renovated on Mountain Avenue Southeast, Roanoke Vice-Mayor **Joe Cobb** and other city officials took a tour in late September as the interior of the house was still under construction "I'd live to see us amplify this and multiply it throughout the city." Habitat has built new or rehabbed 300 homes in Roanoke over the past 37 years, Cobb noted. Habitat for Humanity-Roanoke has also launched a workforce development program with assistance from the **Build Smart Institute** that includes on-the-job paid internship training which ends with journeyman certification.



## New store connection >

Cox held a ribbon-cutting on Oct. 6 for its new retail store location at Roanoke's Town Square shopping area. City Mayor **Sherman Lea** and Cox Roanoke president **Jeff Merritt** reminded the crowd how Cox has served Roanoke for nearly 50 years (1976); and the progress to a fully global technology services company from its initial start as a newspaper. The mayor also recognized how much the company has contributed to our area with employment and charitable giving. The store—offering robust mobile devices, connectivity and internet for existing Cox customers—also unveiled to the public on the following day, with entertainment and a presentation of the Virginia Tech NCAA 2023 Final Four Women's Basketball Team.

## CCAP success stories >

**Virginia Western Community College** had 15 reasons for a campus-wide celebration Saturday, Sept. 23: the 15th anniversary of the Community College Access Program, often referred to as CCAP. Founded in 2008, CCAP is one of the Commonwealth's largest "free college" programs and is nationally recognized for its unique private-public funding model. CCAP is one of most transformational programs offered through the Virginia Western Community College Educational Foundation.

Since its inception, CCAP has provided more than \$10.5 million in tuition assistance. That investment has helped alleviate debt for 4,221 students. In addition, CCAP recipients have volunteered 30,837 hours of community service. Alumni returning to campus expressed thanks for the role CCAP held in their lives. **Roger Basham** graduated from Virginia Western in 2021 and transferred to Radford University, where he graduated three weeks ago. Basham gave thanks for CCAP and Virginia Western mentors. "CCAP definitely helped college seem more feasible. It wasn't just CCAP — it was TRIO, financial aid — that made my educational journey a reality," Basham said.

Basham is now marketing coordinator at Magnets USA. CCAP was designed to make college possible at Virginia Western for Roanoke Valley students from all backgrounds, and to address the student debt crisis. Localities in the Virginia Western service region contribute to CCAP funding. Those include the counties of Botetourt, Craig, Franklin and Roanoke and the cities of Roanoke and Salem. In addition to these localities, CCAP funding draws on support from individuals, businesses, foundations, community groups, alumni and friends.







## Carilion Mental Health now open at Tanglewood >

After a year of construction **Carilion** has opened its new Mental Health hub at Tanglewood, where some 300 employees will be based at the new office space, designed to be a less intimidating and more accessible space for those seeking treatment for mental health issues. The 37,000 sq. ft. facility takes up two floors of what used to be retail spaces – right next door to Carilion Children’s outpatient center at was once JC Penney. Women’s Mental Health, The **Center for Healthy Aging** and the **Center for Grief and Healing** are all based there now. **Dr. Robert Trestman** is chair of Carilion Clinic’s Mental Health department: “it’s on a bus line, we accept all insurance, and we care for those who need care, going from the youngest of children all the way through the life span.” Carilion estimates around 800 patients a week will seek help there.



## Carilion takes the lead on new cancer treatment >

**Carilion Clinic** is taking part in a trial of “theranostics” – developed in Australia with a special imaging agent from Canada that is used during a PET scan to diagnose cancers. It can also identify tumors in the body and direct a more focused treatment – with less “collateral damage” than chemotherapy for example. Carilion Clinic – working with **Blue Ridge Cancer Care** – is looking for local people that have exhausted all standard treatments for Cancer to be involved in the STARBURST study.

**Dr. Bill Kiser** is the director of molecular imaging and principal investigator for the “STARBURST” trial in the U.S.; he says the new treatment is not FDA approved as of now but says they can seek a “compassionate care,” waiver during these procedures. “If you can identify these specific receptors on these tumors, you can take that imaging agent off ... and put something on that will actually treat it. What we want to do is collect all the data [from trials] and see what the efficacy of this particular imaging agent is. They’re excited.”

## Cancer Center gets big check >

A check for two million dollars from the **Life Ring Foundation** was donated last month to **Carilion Children's**, the local **Children's Miracle Network Hospital**, and is targeted for pediatric oncology and hematology at the new Cancer Center that Carilion intends to build on the Riverside campus. Carilion Clinic is still raising money for the Cancer Center, which may cost upwards of 100 million dollars or more for new construction and equipment. The "big check" for Carilion was funded in part by this summer's Darius Rucker concert at Elmwood Park and a celebrity golf tournament at Ballyhack.

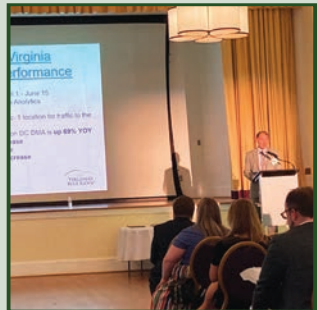
**Kelly Woolwine** is president of the non-profit Life Ring Foundation; Kelly and Jessica Woolwine's 8 year old daughter Charlotte is a liver cancer survivor. Life Ring was founded in 2005 to support families in the region facing financial crisis due to childhood cancer. "The revenue is not there in pediatric oncology and hematology," hematology like it is with adults," said Woolwine, whose young daughter has survived a long battle with cancer. "When we treat adults, the resources are more readily available because quite frankly there's a return on the investment. In pediatrics it's not like that. We have to find another way to cover the costs."



Ian Price



Gene Marrano



## Visitors are returning to Virginia's Blue Ridge >

Visitor spending in the Roanoke region reached a new high in 2022, exceeding levels reached before the pandemic brought so much to a halt. **Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge** coordinates efforts to bring visitors to the region. It all took a big hit, of course, when COVID arrived in 2020, but the travel-related expenditures for last year are in, and they are the most ever, topping \$872 million in direct spending — for conventions, hotels, restaurants, retail, outdoor recreation and much more. The future appears promising — VBR reports close to two million unique visitors to its website last year — also a new record. President **Landon Howard** said at the VBR annual meeting that bed tax revenues in the region (from hotels and homestays) also set another record — nearly ten million dollars from July 2022 through June 2023: "that's extremely exciting. What it does is create jobs for people that need a paycheck and that's what our focus is every day."

*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



Barrett

The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTC SOM) has named **Sharon Barrett** as assistant dean for finance and administration. After working 11 years in industry, she spent 12 years at Virginia Tech (her alma mater) working in the Controller's Office and as business manager in the College of Engineering. In 2017, she moved to Radford University, where in her most recent position as assistant vice president for planning, budget, and reporting.

**Matthew Paul Cowley** is the new executive director of Career and Professional Development, a position he began in



Cowley

July. He succeeded Donna Cassell Ratcliffe, who retired in June after 20 years in the role. Most recently, he served as director of Career Development Services at Old Dominion University.



Roberts

Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences named **Stefan Roberts** as head of the Department of Biochemistry. Before coming to Virginia Tech, Roberts served as interim department head and professor of cellular and molecular medicine at the

University of Bristol, England, where he managed departmental and leadership responsibilities and conducted research.



Hinton

The Hollins University Board of Trustees has voted unanimously to extend the contract of President **Mary Dana Hinton** through June 30, 2030. Hinton is Hollins' 13th president and its first African American president. She joined Hollins in 2020. Cited were Hinton's vision to create and fund an Imagination Campaign that led to updated facilities, new academic programs, and enhanced access, including the HOPE scholars program for students in the greater Roanoke region. Hinton's fundraising success has led to more than

\$100 million in gifts to the university in her first three years, including the single largest gift in the history of women's colleges.

## FINANCIAL FRONT



McClure

Bank of Botetourt has announced the promotion of **Shannon McClure** to the position of Senior Risk Administration Officer. McClure is based at the Bank's Care Center and has been a member of the team since February 2022, bringing 14 years of experience in the financial industry. She recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in History from Liberty University.

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wealth management, capital markets, and asset management firm, has announced Financial Advisor **Haden Dudley III**, Vice President/Wealth Management, has joined Janney in Roanoke, Virginia. He is joined by Clark LeMaster, Senior Registered Private Client Associate. They were both previously associated with Wells Fargo Advisors. Haden joins Janney with over 44 years of experience in the financial services industry.

## TECH/INDUSTRY FRONT



**Wells**

General Manager **Brian Wells** and The Pine Room & 1882 Lobby Bar Mixologist **Henry Hill, Jr.** of The Hotel Roanoke

## *Have a career announcement?*

Send announcements to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto:news@vbFRONT.com). Photos should be color, 300dpi. A contact / source must be provided. Inclusions are not guaranteed and all submissions are subject to editing.



**Hill**

were both recognized in Richmond at the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association ordinary awards. Wells received Hospitality Hero of the Year (recognizing a business or organization in the tourism or hospitality industry that has gone above and beyond to innovate, support frontline workers, provide assistance in the community, or act philanthropically during the year); and Hill received Bartender of the Year (showing commitment to advancing the art

of bartending and to providing his/her guests with an exemplary experience). The awards were determined through a nomination process and judged by VRLTA members/industry professionals.

**Annette Patterson**, founder of The Advancement Foundation (2007), a small business, entrepreneurial, and community development organization that also runs the Gauntlet business competition and entrepreneur support program, has been selected a 2023-2024 fellow for the fifth annual Appalachian Regional Commission's Appalachian Leadership Institute. Patterson's organization has served around 1,000 entrepreneurs, created

a collaboration of over 300 industry leaders, and captured over \$8 million in support resources. She was one of 40 fellows named from 13 states in the Appalachian region.

## MUNICIPAL FRONT



**Doughty**

Franklin County has appointed long-time economic developer **Beth Doughty** as interim director of economic development. Doughty, who retired in 2021 as executive



# Bank of Botetourt



director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, has an advisory practice in economic and community development serving localities and non-profits. As interim director, Doughty will serve as liaison with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and Roanoke Regional Partnership, engage with existing business, facilitate business

expansions and locations, coordinate development of the Summit View Business Park, and roll out new initiatives.

**Rachel Lower** has been promoted to Deputy County Attorney in Roanoke County. Lower joined the County Attorney's Office in 2015, starting in the Department of Social Services and in



Lower

2020 moving to the main County Attorney's Office as Senior Assistant County Attorney. She is a familiar face to those

who work in the Roanoke County court systems and is involved in the legal community as the current President of the Salem Roanoke County Bar Association and a board member of the Roanoke Valley chapter of the Virginia Women Attorney's Association.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano*

“ ” I hope the impact of their words serves as a reminder to what is possible. — Page 29

# BIGGER. THAN. EVER.



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April Jones is a Life Care Coordinator with over 12 years of experience helping aging adults, caregivers and their families cope with the transitions of aging to age gracefully and LIVE a better LIFE!



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# 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.

**Aila Boyd** serves as the editor of "The Fincastle Herald" and "The Vinton Messenger" and coordinates social media for the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce. She holds an MFA in writing from Lindenwood University.

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

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**Neal Cummings** is senior vice president, commercial lending at Freedom First Credit Union. He brings over 25 years of experience in commercial and retail

banking, commercial real estate lending, and small business development. The Commercial Lending team at FFCU provides local underwriting and personalized services that benefit a variety of individuals, operating businesses, and non-profit organizations.

**Shannon Dominguez** is an active member of the Roanoke Writer's Group and is currently writing a book called, "Cult Life: A Memoir about Growing Up as a Jehovah's Witness." She is passionate about sharing authentic stories and believes there is power in the art of storytelling. [Shannon.Nicole.Dominguez@gmail.com]

**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]

**Gene Marrano** is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. "Best one on one interview" award from Associated Press of the Virginias for his interview with former Roanoke County Chief of Police Howard Hall. [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]

**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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— Page 25

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*Less chaotic*

**Chaos Mountain Brewing**, a popular gathering spot in Franklin County, has closed—rather abruptly (officially announced Sept. 30, closed Oct. 2). Owners **Joseph and Wendy Hallock** stated “the novelty has worn off” now that’s there are 380 breweries in Virginia, and they opened as number 40. Also cited was their retirement after a “good run... many friends... [and thanking] all the people who worked for us over the years [who] made the brewery a great place to be.” FRONT showcased Chaos Mountain [August 2018 edition] as one of our regional breweries having the best graphics in their branding.

*Express employee branches out*

**Express Employment Professionals** has a new franchise office in the Lynchburg market (effective November) after a representative in the Roanoke / New River Valley franchise decided to open her own office. Tracy Brummette says her decision supports her personal mission to “always move forward” and this follows her success with Express Leadership Academy for Managers and Top Sales Rep ranking. She “can’t wait to paint the Lynchburg community Express blue!”

*Statewide and Southwest tourism up*

Visitor spending in Southwest Virginia jumped nearly 10 percent

over 2021: \$1.2 billion. Further stats, from the Virginia Tourism Corporation show tourism in the Commonwealth generated \$30.3 billion in 2022 (an increase of 20.3% from 2021); and 210,721 jobs.

*Ridge View’s HQ*

**Ridge View Bank** is opening its new headquarters (and SMART Center) in Roanoke City at 3531 Franklin Road (where Red Lobster used to be). The 16,300-square-foot building should be completed by the fall of 2024 using local contractors Balzer and Associates architecture and G&H Contracting general contractor.

*Whoa, horsey*

**New Freedom Farm** in Botetourt County temporarily closed in early October and plans to reopen in January 2024. The nonprofit organization—primarily serving veterans—is preparing to “roll out new initiatives, programs, and opportunities for involvement” says Alison Jorgensen, chair of the board of directors.

*Art museum or hotel?*

How would it be to visit great master works at the art museum without leaving your hotel? Now you can—at **The Highlander Hotel in Radford**. The works of Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso, Dorothy Gillespie, Adolf Dehn, Jay Milder and more adorn the halls of

Radford’s newest landmark hotel. Collectively they showcase the creativity and vision of the Radford University Foundation and their partners who spent more than three years planning this new property to serve and support the community’s future growth and expansion. And here’s one suggestion: After you grab your free self-guided walking tour brochure, start with an aperitif or cocktail from the Bee & Butter rooftop bar.

*Print, cut, fold, grow*

**Parkland Direct**, a printing and envelope manufacturing company in Forest (Bedford County) is expanding; a projected \$10 million investment and around 40 new jobs.

*E&H’s School of Business*

**Emory & Henry College** completed its renovation of Carriger Hall to be the new home of the School of Business, a 12,000+ square-foot facility, built with the help of \$5 million in contributions.

*Foodie Frenzy*

There have been noticeable upticks in food-related businesses that have recently opened throughout our region. Here is just a partial list: **2204 Building; Marsh Seafood Company; Golf Park Coffee; Taco Jesus; Bentley’s; Crooked Shoreline Steak & Seafood; Iron & Oar Grill; First XI Coffee; The Fishing**

**Pig; Six & Sky; OTH Chophouse & Oyster Bar; Pollard 107 South; Laughing Bull; Steve & Cork; Brood; The Boardwalk;** and a number of franchises in Christiansburg. Additionally, many existing restaurant and food-service businesses have or are expanding.

And if you’re staying at home or preparing your own meal... US Foods-owned Chef’s Store—a bulk foods and restaurant-grade supplier has opened at Town Square in Roanoke.

*5 Points Creative’s advocacy for women*

Roanoke ad agency **5 Points Creative** provided pro bono creative, design, and marketing direction for Virginia Breast Cancer Foundation and the Virginia Women’s Conference, including promotional materials, logo, digital components, social media, invitations, and conference programs.

*Big money for emergency power*

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has awarded \$4,375,389 to the Town of Bedford for the installation of a new diesel-powered generator system for the Centra Bedford Memorial Hospital. “This new generator system will be able to power all facilities at the site, ensuring that if there is ever a need for back-up electricity, the



hospital will be well prepared," said Congressman Morgan Griffith.

### Broadband expansion

Comcast has announced the completion of a project to expand its Xfinity 10G Network to more than 13,700 additional homes and businesses across 200 miles in Christiansburg. The expansion delivers the full suite of Xfinity and Comcast Business solutions to the Christiansburg community – including residential broadband speeds up to 2 gigabits per second (Gbps) and business speeds up to 100 Gbps.

The milestone is part of Comcast's ongoing expansion in Virginia, where the company has invested more than \$781 million in technology and infrastructure over the last three years – including upgrades to its local network. "We're thrilled to be one of Comcast Business' early customers in the Christiansburg area with a combination of

Internet, mobile and phone services," said Lutz Steindl, President of Lenkes Clamping Tools.

### Big spending in SWVA

Visitor spending in Southwest Virginia reached \$1.2 billion, a nearly 10 percent change over 2021. Tourism-supported jobs in Southwest Virginia totaled 11,499 while local tourism-related taxes were \$59.5 million. According to the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), tourism in Virginia generated \$30.3 billion in visitor spending in 2022, an increase of 20.3% from 2021, exceeding 2019 levels by 4.4%. Statewide the tourism industry in Virginia directly supported 210,721 jobs in 2022, an increase of more than 25,000 jobs relative to 2021, but still down about 30,000 jobs relative to 2019. All data is from Tourism Economics and is based on visitor spending from trips taken 50 miles or more away from home. Southwest Virginia includes 19 counties and four independent

## Have an announcement about your business?

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cities located near the southern and western border of Virginia.

### Virginia's Blue Ridge gets Today show coverage

Roanoke was recently featured as a "fun fall weekend getaway" on the TODAY Show with Hoda Kotb and Jenna Bush. TODAY's nearly 3 million viewers saw clips of fall foliage at its peak in Virginia's Blue Ridge and were encouraged to book accommodations at The Liberty Trust boutique hotel in Downtown Roanoke. Roanoke's annual Go Outside Festival and Kotb's alma mater, Virginia Tech, were also mentioned. "This major national coverage is a direct result of a pitch put together by Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge and submitted by Virginia Tourism Corporation,"

says VVBR spokesperson Kathryn Lucas, "[and] comes on the heels of recent Virginia's Blue Ridge features on CNN & HGTV's websites, also directly generated by the Visit VBR public relations team."

### Asian Fusion comes to Market Building

An Asian-American fusion restaurant is now open in the Roanoke City Market Building. Chef Brandon Stinnett also owns the Lazy Bulldog food truck and bistro on Williamson Road. Now he's partnered with another restaurant at the Lamplighter Mall to create The Laughing Bull. A ramen burger (the ramen replaces the bun) is a specialty. "A fried chicken sandwich – a Japanese chicken cutlet," is another early favorite says Stinnett at

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The Laughing Bull, now open in the downtown Market Building.

## *Friendship and Richfield officially seal the deal*

Friendship and Richfield Living, full-service retirement communities with a combined 160 years of experience in serving southwestern Virginia, have officially merged under the Friendship banner. "Friendship [has] strong leadership and financial positioning to allow us this opportunity," said Joe Hoff, President and Chief Executive Officer. "Combining the strengths of our teams amplifies our abilities to best support the rapidly changing needs of the aging community."

Richfield Living's campus in Salem offers a full continuum of senior living services located on 52 acres and includes a brand-new Town Center, Independent Living, and a Rehab Center, along with two Assisted Living locations with a dedicated Memory Care Unit. This campus will continue to maintain its name and not-profit status under the Friendship umbrella. The newly combined team will serve over 1,500 residents and

employ over 1,000 team members.

## *Funds to address affordable housing*

A new source of funding will assist in the construction of two affordable housing developments in the New River Valley. Since the fall of 2022, the New River Valley Regional Commission has been working closely with public and private stakeholders throughout the region to create the New River Valley Housing Trust Fund (NRVHTF).

In late August, two inaugural NRVHTF funding awards were made: 1) \$850,000 to Landmark Development for the Claremont Apartments project in the Town of Pulaski and 2) \$950,000 to Community Housing Partners for the Legacy on Main project in the Town of Blacksburg. These awards were made as 30-year, 1% interest loans, and the two developments will create a total of 106 units of affordable rental housing in the New River Valley. Funding for the NRVHTF is being piloted with grant funding from Virginia Housing's Planning District Commission

Housing Development program.

## *Biggest grant ever*

**Virginia Tech** has received a record \$80 million grant to help farmers implement climate-smart practices that could significantly reduce greenhouse gasses. With the Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences will distribute more than \$57 million of the largest grant in the university's history to producers to enact climate-friendly practices and serve as a pilot program for a national model.

The grant from the United States Department of Agriculture will pilot a program that pays producers to implement climate-smart practices on farms of all sizes and commodities, an initiative that could have significant impacts on curbing climate-changing gasses. A three-year pilot program will be created in Virginia, Arkansas, Minnesota, and North Dakota that will test the feasibility of rolling out a similar program on a national scale.

If scaled up nationally,

the program could help producers reduce agricultural emissions by 55 percent and total emissions in the United States by 8 percent after 10 years. Tom Thompson is the principal investigator on the project and an associate dean of the college: "this is a watershed program that helps the agricultural industry be a leader in addressing climate change." The pilot program will pay producers \$100 per acre or animal unit (one bovine for example or a number of smaller farm animals) for voluntary adoption of climate-smart practices that deliver more than that amount in public environmental benefits.

Unlike previous cost-sharing programs that shared some of the financial burdens of adopting climate-smart practices on producers, this program pays producers more than the cost of implementation of these practices while also improving their bottom lines. More than 20 state and national organizations will help to implement the Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture.

*Compiled by  
Gene Marrano  
and Tom Field*

Check out additional FRONT Notes from Valley Business FRONT on our Facebook site or social media links at [www.vbFRONT.com](http://www.vbFRONT.com).

““

I should have listened, turned around, and gone to brunch. — Page 23



## Friendly and frictionless: 4 customer experience trends

Exceptional customer service has never been more in style – or more in demand. Nearly three-quarters of consumers point to customer experience as an important factor in their buying decisions, according to research from PwC. Less than half of U.S. consumers say companies provide a good customer experience today, but those same customers - 65% of them - find a positive experience with a brand to be more influential than great advertising.

Friendly and frictionless is the emerging benchmark for a great customer experience. Savvy businesses are turning to technology-enabled solutions to meet rising customer expectations and keep up with the following customer experience trends:

1. **Hyperpersonalization** — Today's customers expect highly personalized experiences tailored to their individual preferences and needs. Businesses are leveraging data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to gather customer insights and deliver personalized communications.
2. **Automation and self-service** — Customer-centric businesses increasingly empower customers to serve themselves through comprehensive knowledge bases, FAQs, online tutorials, and interactive troubleshooting tools, while AI-powered chatbots go further by answering questions or connecting customers to a live agent.
3. **Contactless and touchless experiences** — Mobile payments, QR codes, voice commands and gesture-based interfaces that minimize physical contact and create safer interactions have gained momentum since the pandemic.
4. **Real-time customer feedback and analytics** — Businesses are increasingly leveraging real-time customer feedback and analytics to gather insights and make immediate improvements. In the digital realm, customers are asked for instant feedback on transactions, while conversational AI is enabling feedback in real-time to guide customer service agents' conversations.

Customer expectations are evolving quickly, and businesses must adapt and innovate to remain competitive. By embracing these trends, organizations can find a balance between technology and the human touch to deliver a better customer experience.

*Interested in business technology that can help enable these customer experience trends? Visit [www.coxbusiness.com](http://www.coxbusiness.com) to learn more about our portfolio of business IT solutions, from phone, data, network infrastructure to cloud services and cybersecurity.*



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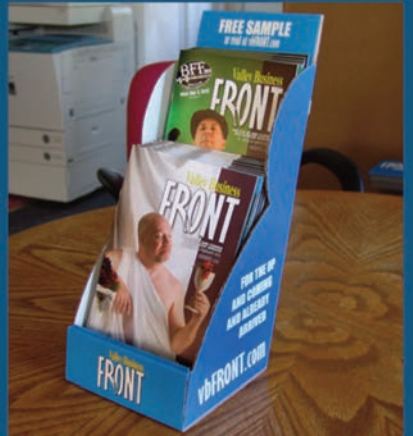
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