

Valley Business **FRONT**

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

**ISSUE 191
AUGUST 2024**

**Big Bank Building
Makeover**

**Roanoke County
Economic Development**

**Botetourt County
Parks & Rec**

Blacksburg Housing

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**Taylor Spellman
RBTC**



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Are you familiar with microcredentials? There's been a notion lately that for many good paying jobs, especially in the tech field, a two-year degree may be enough, at least initially, to get ahead. One can also find gainful employment or get to the next level perhaps with short, concise courses that demonstrate proficiency in a specific skill or subject area. We explore this new attention on microcredentials in our FRONTcover story.

Once again, we tackle the subject of affordable housing (or the lack of it) in the region, an impediment to economic growth. If people, especially the younger demos, can't afford to live here or buy a home, they may not relocate here. It's a problem many parts of the country are now facing. No, we're not Tampa or Denver, but housing prices have spiked over the past few years locally; and the high interest rates caused in large part by the Fed's fight to tame inflation has led to much higher mortgage payments that price some out of the market.

On a more upbeat note, meet a few leaders in our executive profiles. And check out the new makeover plans for an iconic bank building in downtown Roanoke. Good reading during these dog days of summer.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor



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“Late nights and early mornings are required to complete a project of this magnitude. — Page 15

LEAD STORY PAGE 8

Snacks, Stacks and Badges: Microcredentials

by Kathie Dickenson





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AUGUST



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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.

2024 CONTRIBUTORS



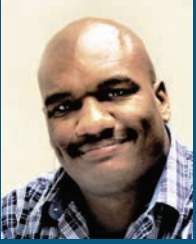
Carrie Cousins



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Shawn Nowlin



Michael Shelton



Sam Sokolove

“ “
We have a group of leaders on our EDA that are very civic-minded.
— Page 36



Linda Balentine
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“ “
A lot of the work... is really helping put this area on the map.
— Page 21



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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 50.



Alicia Smith
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“ “
Recreation can change the world. — Page 25

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Taylor Spellman

Snacks, Stacks and Badges: Microcredentials

By Kathie Dickenson

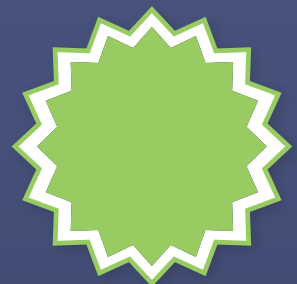
Although microcredentials are not new, over the last few years they have become increasingly valued among workers, job seekers, employers, and workforce developers.

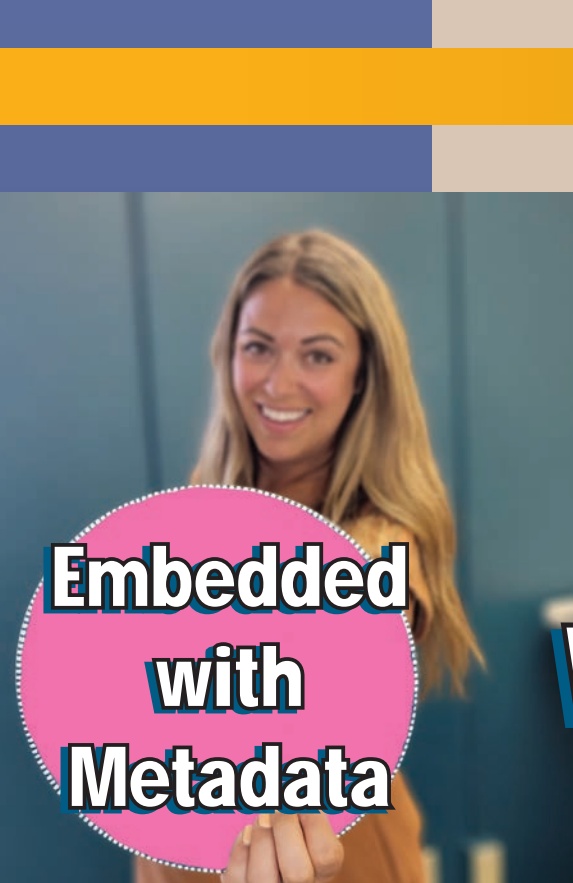
What are microcredentials?

Think snackable. If a degree program is an all-inclusive buffet and a semester-long course is a nice luncheon, a microcredential might be a snack that you can carry with you and eat when you're ready. Many definitions call them "bite-size" chunks of learning. Microcredential learning is usually online, self-paced and focused on a specific skill. The time frame for completion is relatively short. Depending on the depth to which a topic is covered, a course could take less than an hour or several months; the length of time needed to complete an in-depth credential may depend on the number of hours you're able to devote each week. The cost can be somewhat less than a traditional course or degree and can provide an immediate boost to your skill set and resume. You may earn continuing education units, professional development units or academic credits. If you're seeking a professional certification, such as Project Management Professional or Professional Engineer, you may take a series of microcredential courses to prepare and qualify for the certification exam.

Think stackable. Depending on the credential provider, you may be able to "stack" microcredentials and eventually earn a traditional degree. Some providers allow transfer of credentials from one institution to another.

And as for badges: If you've been hearing about microcredentials, you've likely heard the term badges tossed around as well. Many microcredential providers issue a verified digital badge once you've completed a course successfully. You can display a digital badge on your LinkedIn and social media pages and digital resume, add it to your email signature and embed it in your website. Besides being visible proof that you completed a course, there's more: a digital badge is embedded with metadata that includes details about the course and what skills and competencies you've demonstrated. Some providers issue a shareable certificate, another form of digital verification. Although digital badges and certificates offer a dynamic method of showing employers your knowledge, skills and abilities, companies that use applicant tracking systems may not have systems that recognize them, so it's advisable to include details in your resume and be prepared to talk about what you learned.





Embedded
with
Metadata



Digital
Verification



Kay Dunkley

What Do Employers Think?

Some careers, such as education and the medical field, require a degree, even an advanced degree, but not all careers, says Kay Dunkley, Executive Director of the Roanoke Higher Education Center. "What we're hearing from the workplace is that employers are not necessarily looking for an additional degree. They may be looking for a bachelor's degree and stackable credentials, or an associate degree with stackable credentials, or not even an associate degree." Employers want workers to upgrade their skills, she says, and when a skilled worker in any profession does that, "you're helping your company be as productive as possible, and that means economic growth."

The Society of Human Resources Management conducted a 2022 study that revealed a majority of both employers and employees think alternative credentials bring value to the workplace. Introducing the study results, SHRM Foundation President Wendi Safstrom states, "Alternative credentials are key to uncovering untapped talent, especially when it comes to those job seekers who may not have the opportunity to build skills in a traditional way but have the competencies they need to succeed." She continues, "A majority of executives, supervisors and HR professionals believe that including alternative credentials in hiring decisions can actually improve overall workplace diversity."



Submitted



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Stackable Credential

A 2023 study by UPCEA and Collegis Education found that 95 percent of leaders from 500 organizations said they value microcredentials. Among their reasons were that microcredentials show employees' willingness to develop their skills; demonstrate initiative; and are an easy way to communicate an employee's competencies and skills. Some employers indicated concerns about standardization of alternative credentials and how to assess their validity and applicability.

Taylor Spellman, Director of the Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC), says in her experience employers in the region are willing to invest money and work hours in upskilling their employees. She adds that members of RBTC offer valuable one-on-one and team workshops and trainings, training for executive leaders and on-site skills trainings in which a company can invest for multiple layers of its team.

How to Choose Microcredentials

"First, understand the goal of what you're seeking to learn, understand or improve," says Spellman.

Are you looking to add a specific skill that would increase your job effectiveness? Do you want to advance in your current job or career? Do you want to start a career or make a career change?





RAMP program coordinator
Jessie Dunn reviews credentials.

If you're a job seeker, Dunkley suggests you look at employment ads for the type of job you want and pay attention to the required skills as well as the preferred skills. Adding a credential or certification that employers express as preferred can increase your chances of getting an interview.

If you want to upskill or advance in your current job, talk with your manager or HR director for guidance as to what additional skills would be useful. If you already have something in mind, tell them. Ask them whether the company would consider paying for training and/or allowing you to use some work hours to complete it.

Where to Find the Microcredentials You Need

When looking for microcredential programs, determine whether they will meet your goals, whether employers will recognize them and what your financial and time investment will be. A whitepaper on microcredentials by Express Employment Professionals recommends several questions to ask when considering a program: whether the program was designed with the job market in mind; whether the coursework allows the time and location flexibility you need; whether the




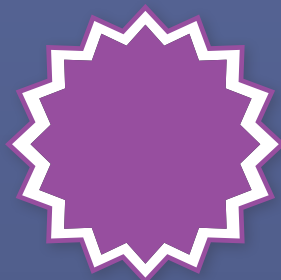
credentials are stackable (whether, if you choose, they could meet the requirements of a traditional degree); whether credentials can be transferred to other institutions; whether the institution is credible and viewed as trustworthy by employers; and how credentials are verified—will you receive a digital badge or competency-based transcript that employers will recognize?

Look at the websites of relevant professional organizations. You'll find information about what you need to learn and in some cases where to find it, which might be from the organization itself. Many colleges and universities offer microcredentials that are online, self-paced and stackable. Programs from higher education institutions and professional organizations ensure the validation of quality that employers want. Websites like LinkedIn Learning and Coursera host a wide range of offerings. Most programs entail a cost, although there may be limited free options.

According to Spellman, "resources are available through state and federal funding streams to create opportunities for free or discounted credentialing." For example, the Greater Roanoke Workforce Development Board partnered with RBTC to offer a free technology training and certification program funded by a federal grant through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The program focuses on employees in manufacturing, technology and healthcare. Participants choose a technology certification to pursue through LinkedIn Learning, and the program pays for their LinkedIn Learning license as well as their certification exam. The program runs through September 2024.

Spellman says Workforce Development Board Executive Director Morgan Romeo and her team "continuously look for opportunities to support accessibility to upskilling programs. Marty Holliday [Executive Director] at the New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Investment Area does the same." Such programs, she says, show current and prospective employers that "we're dedicated to growing a strong and capable region of talent and that the region works well together to grow existing sectors and to introduce new programs and credentials" to meet the needs of new companies coming in.

John Hull, Executive Director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, says access to microcredentials is valuable on multiple levels. "Talent being one of the key challenges of our time, any program that assists in the training of workforce is good. A fast, nimble program that meets people where they are and provides meaningful skills that are in demand is important to individuals and important to employers as well." 



John Hull





A New Community Hub from Roanoke's Iconic Bank Building

By Shawn Nowlin

From the early parts of the 20th Century to 2019, the First National Exchange building at Jefferson Street and Campbell Avenue served as a staple in the community. While the institution changed drastically over the years, a strong connection with the Roanoke Valley remained intact.

Five years ago, the iconic columned and stately building was purchased for \$500,000 by Carilion Clinic. Said spokesperson Mike Dame at the time, "We've had a vested interest in this building for decades because we're the next-door neighbors. This was a natural thing for us to be interested in." Now those plans for the building have changed.

Thanks to a \$9.5 million rehabilitation project, this time next year, the vacant downtown Roanoke building is expected to be transformed into a boutique hotel, concert hall and restaurant. Once complete, bands will be able to display their talents on a 35-foot-wide stage in the former lobby. Additionally, the restaurant will have four bars and the hotel will feature 27 rooms.

Remaining in the building will be the original bank's chandeliers and vaults. (The Liberty Trust Bank building on South Jefferson underwent a similar transformation a few years ago and was actually featured on NBC's Today Show as a unique place to stay while visiting Roanoke.)

Among those heavily involved with the First National project are Hist: Re Partners General Contractor Gary Russell, Roanoke Real Estate Developer Lucus Thornton and JP Powell, a local restaurateur and singer-songwriter. Collectively, the three men have been involved in a number of local projects since the turn of the century.

Lucky and Fortunato are two popular Roanoke



Shawn Nowlin

Gary Worrell (left) supervises cleanup

restaurants that Powell co-owns. Along with managing the day-to-day operations at the construction site, Russell is also responsible for ensuring that the project timeline stays the course. Late nights and

early mornings are required to complete a project of this magnitude. Thornton couldn't be prouder of the team he helped assemble. Wesley Worrell, one of the valued members on the construction team, can't wait until

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the community hub has its grand opening.

“No matter how old you are or what you do for a living, certain memories last for a lifetime. It should come as no surprise that many are excited about this opportunity. I am proud to play a small role, and I can’t wait until everything is done,” Worrell said.

Designed to accommodate 750 people at a single performance, when all is said and

done, the community hub will be larger than both the Harvest Performance Center in Rocky Mount and 5 Points Music Sanctuary in downtown Roanoke. There is a chance that the venue will offer some additional services as well.

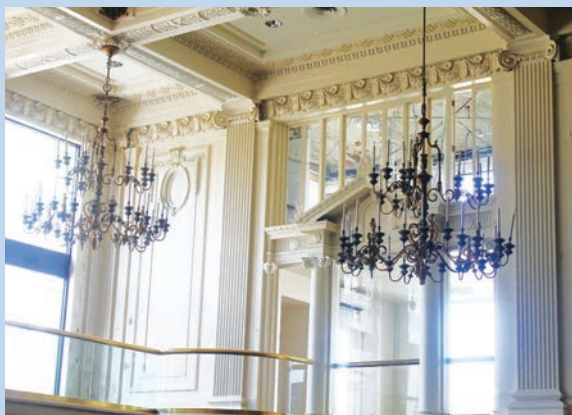
My Radio, JP Powell’s band, consists of drummer Hunter Johnson, guitarist Brett Lemon, guitarist Jake Zuckerman and Jeff Hofmann on bass. Powell is committed to



“bringing more music here. There are so many talented musicians that are deserving of a platform to share their talents. We will be able to provide that here.” Investing in the community is something that Powell, Russell and Thornton all take tremendous pride in.

As per alleghenypartners.com, a property management firm based in Roanoke states, “Mr. Thornton manages a massive portfolio. While focusing on multi-family residential communities, Allegheny Partners, fully licensed as both a real estate brokerage firm and a class A commercial builder, does offer comprehensive, leasing, property management and construction management services. Mr. Thornton has over fifteen years of commercial real estate experience in development, construction, leasing and property management.” Lucas Thornton co-founded Allegheny Partners LLC in 2013.

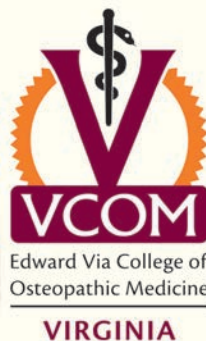
Because he is a realist, Worrell understands that everything with the community hub



isn't going to go perfectly. “We are dealing with so many factors here. In business, knowing when to be patient and when to push through is very important. When news of the community hub became public, I had conversations with different people, and they were all encouraging. I have a message for those wondering about this amazing opportunity: mark your calendars for late summer 2025.”

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FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

As we enter the second half of the year, businesses should evaluate current investments and explore new growth opportunities. A balanced approach to investment strategies ensures financial stability and positions businesses for long-term success.

Michael Shelton is a financial retirement counselor. Reach him at Michael@360WealthConsulting.com

Smart money moves: savvy investment and growth strategies for thriving businesses

Let's cover some key areas to consider - evaluating investments, the importance of diversification, and reinvesting profits for sustainable growth.

Evaluating Current Investments

The first step in refining your investment strategy is to review your existing investments. Assess each investment's performance against expected returns and identify underperforming assets. This evaluation helps decide whether to hold, sell, or reinvest. Regular reviews ensure alignment with business goals and market conditions, allowing timely adjustments to optimize returns.

Additionally, consider external factors like market trends, economic conditions, and industry developments to gain insights into potential risks and opportunities.

Importance of Diversifying Investment Portfolios

Diversification is essential in investment strategy, spreading investments across asset classes to mitigate risks. This reduces the impact of any single investment's poor performance and balances potential high returns from riskier assets with the stability of conservative ones.


Businesses should diversify with a mix of equities, bonds, real estate, and alternative investments. Additionally, diversify within asset classes by investing in different industries and regions to protect against localized downturns and seize growth opportunities in emerging markets.

Strategies for Reinvesting Profits into the Business

Reinvesting profits back into the business is a powerful strategy for sustainable growth. Instead of distributing all profits to shareholders, allocating a portion to internal projects can drive innovation, improve operational efficiency, and expand market reach. Here are a few strategies for effective reinvestment:

- 1. Research and Development (R&D):** Investing in R&D can lead to new products or services, keeping your business competitive and innovative.
- 2. Technology Upgrades:** Implementing advanced technologies can streamline operations, reduce costs, and enhance customer experiences.

3. **Talent Acquisition:** Attracting and retaining top talent is essential for growth. Invest in training and development programs to build a skilled and motivated workforce.
4. **Market Expansion:** Use profits to enter new markets or increase market share in existing ones. This could involve opening new locations, launching marketing campaigns, or forming strategic partnerships.
5. **Debt Reduction:** Paying down debt can improve your business's financial health and free up cash flow for future investments.

A well-thought-out investment and growth strategy is vital for business success. By regularly evaluating your investments, diversifying your portfolio, and strategically reinvesting profits, you can ensure your business remains resilient and poised for long-term growth. Consulting with financial experts can also provide additional insights and tailored strategies to meet your specific business needs. 



Diversification is essential in investment strategy.



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RoCo's Economic Development Director Bullish

By Gene Marrano

Roanoke County's Director of Economic Development is taking stock of gains made over the past year on her watch—and she says, "stay tuned."

Recruited to Roanoke County from Georgia less than two years ago, Megan Baker says the last twelve months have been good ones for Roanoke County: 177 million dollars in new investments over the past year, major expansion projects and openings - Wells Fargo, Mack Trucks, Carilion Mental Health and other announcements - like the YMCA at Tanglewood that is coming

soon. Baker says around 1650 new jobs will be created by projects like the \$87 million major expansion at the Wells Fargo service center in northeast Roanoke County. "A lot of positive momentum." The Mack Trucks expansion at its mid-size truck plant in western Roanoke County was a \$15 million investment. The plant will start producing more electric vehicles as part of the ramp-up.



Courtesy Roanoke County

Megan Baker

Baker says even with unemployment low in the valley, there is room for further economic development. "We have a regional labor pool; it isn't hard to get from one [locality] to another. If you're somewhere like Atlanta the commute is much longer." Baker says her staff is "very engaged," with job training providers like the Burton Center for high school students, and the industry insight tours that bring county teachers and guidance into local businesses so they can see for themselves the job opportunities available, messages they can relate to students thinking about their futures.

The announcement that the YMCA will open a branch inside Tanglewood Mall perhaps late this year could mean more interest from certain sectors of the retail market that might consider opening a storefront there. "We're bringing more people to Tanglewood - that will help drive the demand there. We have a lot of prospects [from] retailers that want to be in the Tanglewood area."



Carilion Clinic Mental Health at Tanglewood (South County)



Mack Trucks Roanoke Valley Operations / RVO ("Glenvar" West County)



Publix "coming soon" announcement ("Brambleton Ave" Southwest County)




Wells Fargo Ops expansion ("Hollins" North County)

Not necessarily inside the Mall, but there has been a number of out parcels developed in the parking lot over the past few years, mainly eateries, with Chili's joining the lineup with the past year. The new Y could attract a different type of retailer – a smoothie bar for example, or a workout apparel store. "Once you have people there, working out; I think it's a really positive addition [to the Mall]," says Baker. VDOT has plans in the works to facilitate traffic flow in the Tanglewood/Route 419 corridor, including another travel lane in one stretch, additional bike lanes and reconfiguring the 419/Starkey Road intersection near the Holiday Inn-Tanglewood to keep vehicle traffic on 419/Electric Road moving for longer periods with more green light time. Down the road the US220/419 interchange will undergo a transformation, turning it into the "Diverging Diamond" design like those employed at Valley View Mall and at the Southgate entrance to Virginia Tech.

Baker is also bullish, especially in this market, on the Publix announced to be built across from a Kroger on Brambleton Avenue - plans are being drawn up now - and she "loves"

Publix, no doubt from her time in Georgia. "We know they've been doing work out there; [but] we haven't yet gotten plans yet."

Housing starts in Roanoke County have ticked up again in response to the demand she notes. "Housing is critical [for] your workforce, to bring in young people. The Board of Supervisors is very supportive – they understand the need for housing. Nationwide this is a challenge, it's not unique to Roanoke. Everyone is trying to figure out the housing problem."

Baker says there are other announcements in the works, and she sees more recognition when attending trade shows from booth visitors who now know where the Roanoke Valley is - and what amenities it features. "People say they want to invest in Roanoke, they want to invest in southwest Virginia. We are really gaining traction. A lot of the work the Regional Partnership is doing, Virginia's Blue Ridge [as well], is really helping put this area on the map. People are seeing the beauty and the quality of life. Also, the job opportunities. Just within the last year I've seen the momentum for this area." 



SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Sam Sokolove

Executive Summary:

As summer fades, parents and caregivers can adopt a "manager's mindset" to smoothly navigate the back-to-school transition. This approach, inspired by organizational management principles, emphasizes inclusivity, structure, and mindfulness.

Sam Sokolove is a Senior Consultant for Building Beloved Communities LLC.

Back-to-school season: mastering the transition with a manager's mindset

Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement:

Begin with a comprehensive assessment of your family's back-to-school needs. Hold a family meeting to involve everyone in planning, ensuring all voices are heard. This inclusive approach can reduce anxiety and build excitement.

Create a detailed checklist of required items, considering each child's needs. Engage family members by assigning age-appropriate tasks. Younger children might choose their backpacks, while older ones could research school supply deals or create a family calendar.

Strategic Planning and Equitable Practices: Develop a detailed plan for the weeks leading up to and following school start. Break down tasks, assign responsibilities, and set deadlines. Ensure fair distribution of tasks among caregivers, considering work schedules and other commitments.

To keep everyone on track, create a visual timeline or use a shared digital calendar. Include key dates like supply shopping trips and teacher meet-and-greets.

In the workplace, advocate for family-friendly policies like flexible hours or back-to-school leave. Such policies can significantly reduce work-family conflict and improve overall job satisfaction.

Performance Measures and Positive Culture: Set clear, achievable goals for the school year. Foster a positive atmosphere at home by celebrating the start of the school year with special traditions and open communication.

Create a "Vision Board" with your children to visualize their goals and aspirations. This visual representation can enhance motivation and goal achievement.

Establish a "First Day of School" tradition your family anticipates yearly, such as a special breakfast or after-school outing.

Continuous Improvement and Work-Life Integration: Regularly assess your strategies and adjust as needed. Schedule monthly family check-ins to discuss progress and address challenges. This ongoing evaluation is crucial for effective family management.

Incorporating Mindfulness: To manage back-to-school stress, incorporate mindfulness practices into your family

routine. Christopher Willard, a psychologist and educational consultant, suggests two simple yet effective techniques:

1. The "Silent Sigh" technique:
 - Take a deep breath in.
 - Exhale slowly and silently.
 - Focus on bodily sensations as you breathe out completely.
 - Check-in with your mind and body, deciding if another sigh is needed.

2. The "7-11 Breath":
 - Breathe in for a count of seven and out for eleven.

These practices can help calm anxiety and manage stress during transition times like the morning rush or homework sessions.

By adopting a manager's mindset, incorporating principles of inclusivity and equity, and integrating mindfulness practices, you can create a more structured, positive, and enjoyable back-to-school experience. Success stems from careful planning, stakeholder engagement, commitment to continuous improvement, and stress management tools.

Remember that flexibility is key. Be open to adjusting routines or expectations as needed. Regular communication with your children about their experiences and challenges will help you fine-tune your approach throughout the school year. 📖



By adopting a manager's mindset... you can create a more positive back-to-school experience.

“” Advocate for family-friendly policies.

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Botetourt County

Victor Morales

The Transformative Power of Recreation

By Aila Boyd

"Recreation can change the world." With this bold philosophy, Victor Morales embarks on his new role as the director of parks and recreation for Botetourt County, promising to transform the community's approach to recreational activities.

Victor Morales, who began his tenure in early June, brings a wealth of experience to Botetourt County from Berry College in Georgia, and a passion for making outdoor experiences accessible and impactful for all.

Morales' journey to this role is rooted in his early experiences in Maryland, where he developed a passion for the outdoors during his high school years. "Around my senior year of high school, I fell in love with backpacking and the outdoor recreation space," Morales recalled. His newfound passion led him to pursue related studies in college, which set the stage for his career in recreation.

During college, Morales worked as a zipline tour guide in Colorado, where he realized the significant impact that recreational activities could have on people of all ages. "I created memorable, fun experiences for people from ages 4 to 94," he said. This realization inspired him to pursue a full-time career in recreation, beginning with a position as director of an adventure resort in West Virginia, where he managed zipline and aerial attractions.

He joined Berry College in 2017 as the assistant director of recreation. His initial responsibilities included overseeing a challenge course and facilitating outdoor

activities. Over time, his role expanded to include managing intramural sports, fitness programs and serving as the department's risk manager. "I managed the Berry Outdoor Leadership Development Program and the operations for outdoor recreation, trip management and rental programs," Morales explained.

Eventually becoming director of recreation at the college, Morales gained additional experience in budgeting, policies and procedures. "I managed about 100 employees and delivered programming that set the department as a leader in recreation across the country," he noted.

The opportunity to join Botetourt County's Parks and Recreation Department was appealing to Morales for several reasons. Primarily, the role offers him a chance to serve a broader community beyond the college environment. "Working with Virginia's Blue Ridge on tourism and bringing people into the area is very exciting to me," he shared. "I missed the community engagement aspect that comes with serving an entire county, as opposed to focusing solely on college students." Additionally, the position allows Morales to be closer to his family in Maryland, reducing his travel time significantly.

The department is responsible for maintaining and enhancing the county's green spaces, parks and sports facilities. It also organizes a wide range of recreational programs and events, from youth sports and fitness classes to community events, like BOCO WILD, and senior citizen transport services. Morales feels that his extensive background in recreation management, coupled with his MBA, equips him with the skills needed to efficiently manage the department's budget, streamline operations and foster strategic partnerships. His business acumen, he said, is particularly beneficial in vendor negotiations and ensuring that each dollar is spent wisely.

In looking ahead, Morales plans to focus on community engagement, enhancing existing programs and introducing new initiatives. "I want to improve the quality of life through recreational activities," he emphasized. He is particularly interested


in expanding services for young adults, a demographic he feels has been underserved. "Right now, we have services that cater to the 4 to 16-year-old population and our 55 years and older population. Targeting the 18 to 35 demographic is a major growth area," he explained. That's also a prime demo when looking to attract new residents to live, work and play in Botetourt County.

Morales said he's also committed to ensuring a consistent experience across all programs. "In the next six months, it's really about seeing where we can adapt and adjust. As we enter our busy season, it's about really streamlining our processes," he said. His hope is to maintain high standards of quality and organization for all events and programs delivered by the Parks and Recreation Department.

Deputy County Administrator David Moorman expressed enthusiasm for Morales' appointment. "Parks and Recreation plays a crucial role in shaping how residents and visitors perceive and experience Botetourt County. This department fosters our sense of community and strengthens relationships," Moorman said. "Victor will spearhead our initiatives to offer enjoyable and impactful recreational activities for people of all ages, abilities, and interests, supporting our community's growth and connection."

His philosophy on recreation underscores his belief in its transformative power. "Recreation can change the world. It creates firm bonds and unique relationships," he asserted. His excitement about joining the county staff is palpable. "I just want to serve and having that spirit makes it easy for me to learn. The more I know, the better I can serve the community," he said.

In addition to his professional aspirations, Morales is eager to connect with the community on a personal level. "I'm happy if anybody has ideas, reach out to me," he stressed.

While settling into Botetourt County, Morales signed a short-term lease in Daleville with the goal of buying a home in the Daleville, Fincastle or Troutville area soon. 



LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Carrie Cousins

Executive Summary:
Facebook is dead!
Long live Facebook!

Does your next customer lead originate on facebook?

Regardless of age demographic or what you may be selling, social media is undeniably one of the best ways to get information about your product or service out there. Admit it, you've probably clicked a link in the TikTok shop or on Instagram and had a product show up at your door a few days later. From fast fashion to home services and products, social media is giant part of the consumer buying cycle.

The average person spends more than 2.5 hours a day on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. For teens, that time on social media explodes to more than 5 hours a day. Is your brand in front of them? This shift has been especially dramatic for LeadPoint Digital clients on Facebook and Instagram. A couple of years ago, the focus was solely on news, events, and engagement. Social media was more of an entertainment and things to do platform for almost all of our clients.

Fast forward to 2024, and these social channels are less about likes and shares and much more about product research and purchases. Surprisingly, the top growth area has been in home services. From contracting to pest control to purchasing a generator or deck cleaning, social media users are engaging directly with companies that offer these services without every visiting their website. Many are providing contact information so that the services providers can reach out and schedule a consultation.

Service providers are closing sales with leads from Facebook and Instagram, in particular, at a high rate when they respond promptly.

Here's why it works:

- Social media has again shifted in usage and rapidly becoming a research tool
- Offers on social media that are easy to snag – your mobile device often fills in the info for you – appeals in an immediate gratification world
- There are two basic marketing principles in play – sense of urgency (the offer may not be there later) and social



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proof (you can see if your friends or neighbors like/follow the company doing the advertising)

- Specific and unique ad targeting helps your product or service show to the people who need it when they need it (thanks, artificial intelligence)
- Social media users have come to use these platforms for product and service discovery

Don't be fooled. This isn't a magic bullet and user preferences could shift again, but with a solid plan, social media advertising can be a solid way to help boost sales.

You must be ready before you jump into advertising on social media. These leads require immediate attention. For the same reason someone asked for information about your business (to fill an immediate need), they will go elsewhere. Your window to act is small.

It could be a great opportunity though. When you think about consumer behavior and how we engage online, it really starts to make sense. With a solid plan, you can boost your business with social media.

Long live Twitter! (Well ... maybe not.) 



The average person spends more than 2.5 hours a day on social media.

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Town of Blacksburg

Leslie Hager Smith

Blacksburg Housing

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Affordable housing is not a new conundrum in the New River Valley, but rather one that continues to present itself. According to Leslie Hager-Smith, mayor of Blacksburg, the nexus of the local housing crunch, “We are making real progress.”

The housing crisis is nationwide. It is a result of low supply / high demand. There are, however, special challenges in Blacksburg and surrounding areas, says Mayor Leslie Hager-Smith. Virginia Tech, being a large

school in a small town, dominates the housing market. (No secret there.) Students, often being from more urban areas with higher parental salaries, can have more buying power than local households, and



they outnumber residents two to one. Increasingly those students are moving into single-family neighborhoods, often with their parents buying the homes – which makes financial sense and establishes residency for in-state tuition – then renting the additional bedrooms to other students.

Virginia Tech has never committed to housing more than 30% of its students, said Hager-Smith. There is a new initiative underway for collaboration between the university and local government officials to jointly plan for the future of the region using a third-party consultant paid for by a private foundation of the university.

“We invite them to participate in housing solutions,” said the mayor.

From a regional perspective, nearly all students live in Blacksburg, according to

a study by Virginia Tech. As the number of students increases, this pushes other residents to outlying areas, and the housing crunch spreads.

One method of addressing the need for additional residential development is with zoning policies, which is also a nationwide phenomenon. Hager-Smith said Blacksburg is not at the forefront of zoning reform, but neither is it lagging.

Small lot housing, as currently proposed, would be a tool available for 335-plus acres in town boundaries, mostly on the north end of town, said Hager-Smith. By using the new regulations, a developer could achieve three or four times the density of an ordinary suburban style neighborhood. She said it particularly addresses the “missing middle,” meaning housing in between single-family homes and mid-rise apartments, housing such as townhomes

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and duplexes. (Here, duplexes and townhomes will only be allowed if an alley serves them.) Missing middle housing increases the availability of less expensive housing types.

Another zoning vehicle is accessory apartments, such as converted garages, converted basements, and detached or attached accessory dwelling units. They create a different kind of rental housing option for young professionals, single parents, and older adults and at a lower price point. Mayor Hager-Smith, who championed this idea, said accessory apartments stabilize neighborhoods because home owners choose quality tenants to live in such close proximity to them.

New zoning ordinances are a way to “encode good ideas,” said Hager-Smith. Blacksburg’s Planning Commission, Town Council, and planning staff agree on this. They have wish lists, and a third-party consultant will be helping them refine the ideas for how the town can update zoning ordinances to “make things easier.”

Hager-Smith said, “We want the development community to be able to build faster and cheaper. Developers can be our allies.” (See examples of recent Blacksburg housing projects in photos)

The mayor named the planned residential development of Glade Spring Crossing as “something special.” It combines affordable housing, environmental sensitivity, and a mix of income levels. However, it will look less traditionally suburban and require 14 variances from zoning ordinances.

“People thought that was scary,” said Hager-Smith, “including some on the Planning Commission. That’s how much distance there is between our old zoning ordinances and present-day good practice.”

Community Housing Partners (CHP) received approval to develop Stroubles Ridge, a subdivision off Merrimac Road which will include a mix of 49 single-family and duplex three bed-two bathroom homes. These for-sale homes will serve families earning between 60 and 100% of the area median income.

Other creative solutions for affordable housing have been implemented. A partnership with Habitat for Humanity resulted in new homes on Church Street. Three entities – Montgomery County, the town of Blacksburg, and CHP – are pursuing a community land trust (CLT), a community-based organization that uses public and private investment to acquire land and provide affordable owner-occupied housing. Dubbed the New River Home Trust, the local CLT is a financial model to keep housing permanently affordable for anyone in Montgomery County by preventing market factors from causing prices to rise significantly.

A Blacksburg affordable housing fund, using \$4 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds, makes money available to people who need it; grants or no-interest loans “incentivize developers who are willing to work with us,” said Hager-Smith.

The mayor said affordable housing is important because a core value of Blacksburg is that it invites people of all types into the town.

"We could just become a community of wealth," she said, referencing local housing purchased as "third or fourth homes" or just for Virginia Tech football games. "But I care [about affordable housing] because having absent owners degrades the quality of life. It doesn't staff the PTO [parent-teacher organization], put people in the [church] pews, or contribute to community identity."


From the business side, it's about recruitment and retention. Virginia Tech, the largest employer in the region, needs its people to be able to live locally and enjoy doing so.

Increased housing density can generate opposition. In March, Roanoke City enacted zoning amendments to expand housing options, allowing for multi-family units to be built where before only single-family homes could be built. In a "last gasp effort"

to stop the change, surmised Hager-Smith, some citizens sued, and now Roanoke is undergoing a "reconsideration" process, according to the city's website.

Blacksburg is "going to get it right" so there is no litigation, said Leslie Hager-Smith. Still, some people will be unhappy about change. The Town Council has been "respectful of the way people feel - but we need to make good choices in land use to improve quality of life."

Hager-Smith sees this as even more important moving forward, as she envisions Appalachia becoming a "climate refuge": given climate change, the area is looking better to people.

She added that, while she doesn't have a crystal ball, "It is a fantasy that people will not move here." 



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City of Salem photos



A hot ticket indeed at the Salem Fair in 2024 >

The **2024 Salem Fair** closed out 12 days of non-stop fun on July 14 and overall, the 36th edition of the annual free gate fair was another success, although the often-oppressive heat affected several outcomes. "In 2023, we had to deal with the wildfire smoke from Canada and this year it was an extended streak of extremely hot days and nights," said **Carey Harveycutter**, Salem Fair Manager. "We experienced several really incredible attendance days this year, but the heat certainly made it tough."

Harveycutter says opening night revenues were up about 20 percent and the first weekend of the fair saw considerable gains over 2023, with July 6 and 7 resulting in jam-packed midways. However, the Independence Day opening was delayed by a rare July rain shower and then thunderstorms forced the fair to close about 3 hours early on July 5. "You cannot control the weather and when it's hot the crowds tend to arrive later, which in turn hurts food sales for our outstanding concessionaires," he said. Donations were also down for the Salem-Roanoke County Food Pantry, the Rescue Mission and Mrs. Dorsey's Community Clothes Closet were off by 500 pairs.

Submitted



Submitted



Cancer center gets closer for Carilion >

A \$100 million cancer treatment and research facility is a major step closer to breaking ground after former Advance Auto CEO **Nicholas Taubman** and his wife **Jenny** announced a \$25 million gift for what will now be known as the **Carilion Taubman Cancer Center** when it opens, perhaps by 2026, on the Virginia Tech Carilion Riverside campus in front of the parking garage. It's been in the works for years and was delayed by the pandemic. The Taubman gift now brings the total raised to more than \$70 million.

Dr. **Bill Fintel** is medical director of the cancer center at Carilion: "we have had an assembly of people who do cancer care for years. We're going to take this amazing assembly of people

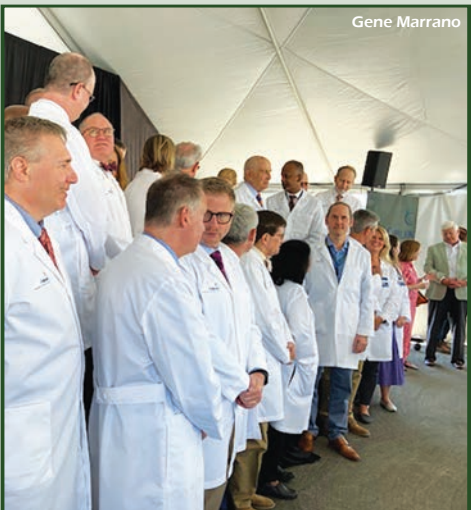
and put them in a state of the art building."

"One in eight women will develop breast cancer [in their lifetime]," noted Carilion CEO **Nancy Howell Agee** as the Taubman gift announcement was made last month with great fanfare on the garage rooftop. "One in eight men in the United States will develop prostate cancer. One in sixteen will develop lung cancer, and one in twenty five will develop colon cancer. Sobering thoughts." Agee's husband Steve had cancer but was cured. "There are new advancements every day and we want to ensure that those advancements are here every day for every patient – right here, [that] exudes hope and healing for every patient." The current Carilion cancer center on South Jefferson Street more than 40 years ago was described as being maxed out capacity-wise. "We will have just that facility with creation of the Carilion Taubman Cancer Center."

Gene Marrano



Gene Marrano





BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:

Today's fast-paced business environment makes effective leadership more important than ever.

Jennifer is a seasoned Certified Management Consultant (CMC®) with over 30 years of business and consulting experience. She is a certified trusted advisor in the areas of employee assessments, engagement, and emotional intelligence. She offers ideas and best practices to help you hire the right people, engage employees, and lead effectively to enhance workplace performance and drive overall business success.

Unlocking the power of leadership: connection, inspiration, and growth

Great leaders stand apart from good ones because they connect deeply with their teams, inspire and motivate those around them, and continually grow and evolve as individuals.

These three pillars of leadership are practical, actionable strategies that can transform any organization.

1. Connecting and Relating to Employees Personally

The foundation of exceptional leadership is a genuine connection with your team. Fostering personal relationships today can be challenging with remote work and virtual communication.

Taking the time to understand employees' aspirations, challenges, and personal lives builds trust and loyalty. This personal connection creates a supportive work environment where employees feel valued and heard, increasing engagement and productivity.

Leaders who care about employees as individuals, not just as workers, cultivate motivated and dedicated teams.

Action Tip: Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with employees. These sessions offer the chance to discuss work-related issues and learn more about employee's personal goals and interests.

2. Inspiring and Motivating Others

Inspirational leaders ignite passion and drive in others because they:

1. Communicate a compelling vision.
2. Align the team's efforts toward achieving common goals.
3. Lead by example, demonstrating the values and behaviors they wish to see in their team.

Action Tip: Articulate a clear and compelling vision for your team.

- Share stories and examples that highlight the impact of their work and the bigger picture.
- Recognize and praise are powerful motivators; celebrate big and small achievements to show appreciation for hard work.
- Invest in professional development opportunities that allow employees to grow and excel in their roles.

When people see their contributions matter and their

leaders believe in their potential, they are more likely to go above and beyond.

3. Growing Personally as a Leader

Great leaders are committed to continuous learning and development. This involves seeking feedback, embracing new challenges, and staying informed about industry trends and best practices.


Action Tip: To grow as a leader:

1. Prioritize self-reflection and seek constructive feedback from peers, mentors, and team members.
2. Attend leadership workshops, read extensively on leadership topics, and stay curious.
3. Embrace a growth mindset, viewing challenges and failures as opportunities for learning and development.

By demonstrating a commitment to your growth, you set a powerful example for your team, encouraging them to adopt a similar approach to their development. Embracing these principles unlocks the full potential of your leadership and drives your organization to new heights.

Remember: the journey to becoming an exceptional leader requires:

- Connecting personally with your employees.
- Inspiring and motivating others towards a shared vision.
- Committing to your continuous growth.

My BEST JOB EVER system offers a blueprint for building a culture where people LOVE what they do, ENJOY who they work with, and RESPECT who they work for. With over 30 years of business and consulting experience, I specialize in using assessments, tools, and best practices to help you hire the right people, engage employees, and lead effectively to enhance workplace performance and drive overall success. 

“This personal connection creates a supportive work environment.”



When people see their contributions matter and their leaders believe in their potential, they are more likely to go above and beyond.



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THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:


As Roanoke chips away at the shortage of affordable housing within the city limits, a fund established to help address that issue gets a shot in the arm.

Affordable Housing in Roanoke gets another funding boost

Last December \$2 million from the American Rescue Plan Act championed by the Biden Administration and narrowly passed by Congress helped establish the Roanoke Workforce Housing Development Fund - administered by a TAP program with the low-interest loans it issues for affordable housing projects that are first approved by the Roanoke Economic Development Authority. Marc Nelson is the city's Economic Development Director: "when you bring people in here, when you recruit – the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, Virginia Transformer, when academics are recruiting, they want to know that there's places for them to be able to afford and to live. It's an economic development issue."

Some relief is on the way: Nelson notes that another 700-plus units of apartment housing within city limits on Peters Creek Road will open soon, with an adjacent major development recently announced also a future possibility. Now the City of Roanoke has committed another \$225,000 to the Workforce Housing Fund to the loan program.

Nelson says the Economic Development Authority is a major player: "in Virginia, governments cannot give money [directly] to private entities. They have to go through an economic development board." The city's EDA is a seven-person panel appointed by city council, they are business owners themselves or work in a business. They really are a great group of people that have a lot of impact on redevelopment in Roanoke. I can't say enough how happy the city was to be able to get this grant." Nelson says the EDA can finance bonds, "they've done that for Carilion," make grants and even purchase property to wait for a suitable development project to come along. "We have a group of leaders on our EDA that are very civic-minded." He says the Authority was "eager to participate," when the city made some of its own funding available.

Roanoke City cites a 2021 Virginia Tech study that showed a lack of 4,500 housing units in Roanoke, which also revealing that more than half the city's renters were cost-burdened, defined as spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Chances are post-covid as housing costs have spiked that number hasn't gotten much better, if at all. "We have 97 square miles; that's all we have, and we are largely built out in a lot of areas," Nelson notes. "If you're not looking at affordable housing there's a whole segment of your population that's going to fall behind – and that's going to further impact your economy." 



Marc Nelson

Clubbing

Ten years ago, we did a feature on clubs, trade organizations, professional associations. We asked the question about why people join various networking groups, and which ones they choose. We worked our cover model over, too—having Jeanne Bollendorf of Roanoke Kiwanis smudge dirt on her face, tussle her hair, throwing on bibs over t-shirt, and posing with “Pete the Pup” in front of the clubhouse in our Little Rascals parody.

If the worldwide pandemic showed us anything (can you believe it’s been four years since the madness first hit?) it showed us the importance of connections. And though virtual transactions happen now more than ever, that technology still has not fully replaced the value of real time, face-to-face.


Maybe we should revisit the topic. Have you stayed involved with organizations at the same level throughout your professional development? Probably not. But it depends on the group, right? The more specific the mission, the tighter the demographic—whether it’s young, mid-career, senior, or based on activities related to skills, trades, market, or service. There’s certainly something for everyone; and I don’t think we’re missing a lot when it comes to opportunities to get together for common cause.

Some of the strongest organizations in our region include the various chambers of commerce (for general business development); Kiwanis (for community service); and for trade-specific, SHRM (human resources), RBTC (technology), and the dual AAF Roanoke / PRSA-Blue Ridge (communications) clubs.

Our tech council (Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council) featured in our FRONTcover story this month gets an extra nod from me, because it strikes me that, as far as I know, there isn’t a single business in operation today that doesn’t



depend on technology to some degree. You don’t have to analyze chemicals or write enterprise code or fabricate AI systems to benefit from technology. The old man down the road making bird houses one at a time could use online publicity or the ability to accept a credit card.

Let us know what you’re up to with the group you’re in. We’re happy to share the news—and do so all the time. For the little rascals who let us in the club, that is. 



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
Networking groups in our market are as viable as ever.

FRONTReviews >

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



Muy especial

Though not intentional, some of us have a tendency to lump ethnic restaurants together. When traveling, even in our own hometowns, we may say, "Let's do Mexican" with a generalization that any popular Mexican restaurant will suffice. THAT is not smart. Or fair. I have a few favorites "in town;" but let me tell you why I'm especially enamored with Rodeo Chico in the Daleville Town Center of Botetourt County.

The staff is superb. The food is fantastic. The beverages are a bargain—and diverse. The menu is abundant. The venue itself... is my new favorite; from the inside/outside bar—to the main dining area—to the outside seating, which turns out to be an eco-architectural marvel as the breezeway provides the perfect respite for our one-caliente-summer! (It sits perfectly for patrons.)

I try to work all around the menu—I really do. Everything's great. But I keep digging my spurs in the street tacos (tan bueno!), my favorite Texana margarita, the bargain daily specials, and the...get this... 22-ounce draft Modela for only \$4.50 (during the most generous happy hour). The Arellano family knows how to trip my trigger. See ya' there.

—Tom Field

Ramblin' man

In the movie *Sling Blade*, there's a young

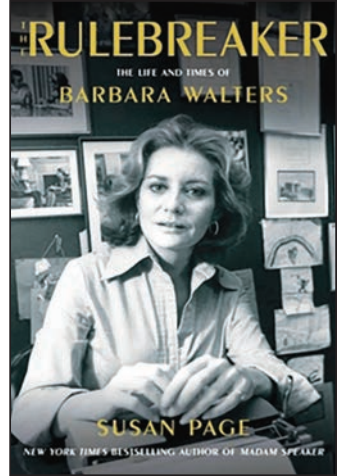
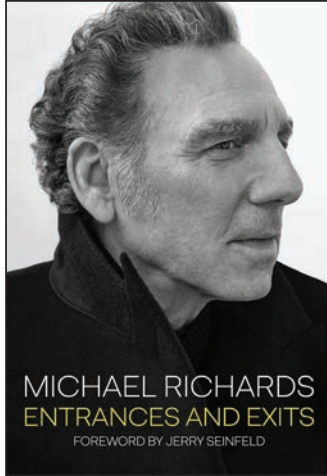
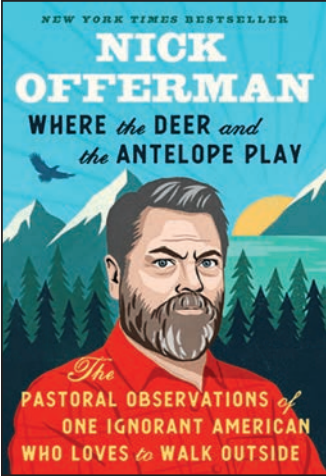
boy who tells a man who's become his friend, "I like the way you talk." That's pretty much the grand summation of my review of Nick Offerman's *Where the Deer and the Antelope Play* (Penguin; 2021). Here's a narrator (and tv celebrity) who's the kind of guy I'd enjoy having a Scotch with, sitting out on the front porch. I just like the way he talks and can see having an enjoyable conversation with him.

This book, however, became sluggish—even with his eloquent expressions. I guess it would be like overstaying your welcome on that front porch. After a while, you get to the point where you know the best has been shared, and it's time to call it a night—even as you'll look forward to the next time we get together. *Deer and Antelope* is too much like linear field notes that should have been edited to keep the best engagement. His political invectives become tiresome, too. (By the way, I never watched Offerman in "Parks & Rec" where the script manages a memorable character, I suspect; but I just recently saw a standup clip, where he did the same thing—nearly losing the audience as he rambled far too long to get to the punch line. Oh well, like me, he's probably just out of bounds for today's fast-paced blurb audience.)

—Tom Field

I, Cosmo

For many of those of a certain age or a certain way of considering what's really



funny, *Seinfeld* was the pinnacle, especially by its third season and going forward as it really found its footing as an anchor of NBC's formidable Thursday comedy lineup in the 1990's. Everyone had a favorite character and for some it was Kramer – the gangly, clumsy, goofy neighbor who seemed to be able to afford a New York City apartment in a fashionable upper West Side neighborhood despite having no discernable steady job.

Now in his 70's, the man who played Kramer (based on a character of the same name that series co-creator Larry David knew) has written a thoughtful autobiography, *Michael Richards: Entrances And Exits* (Permuted Press, 2024), with a foreword by none other than Jerry Seinfeld, the other series co-creator and Kramer's next door neighbor of course. Richards was a serious stage actor early on, and a standup comedian who first came to national attention on ABC's late night SNL knockoff, *Fridays*. Richards ruminates at times, talks about the rare books he collects and describes in great detail episodes during the *Seinfeld* run. A true treat for fans of the series. Giddyup!

—Gene Marrano

Ahead of her time

The late Barbara Walters was a groundbreaking reporter for women in the 1960's, for NBC and then later on ABC, where her short-lived stint as the evening news host with Harry Reasoner did not go well. So, Walters set her

own path through the interview specials she did, with everyone from presidents to movie stars, from criminals to despots. She rubbed some people the wrong way and once she ruled the roost Walters would often wrest interviews away from other reporters right under their nose. She was jealous when a younger Diane Sawyer arrived on the scene, and they often battled for stories.

Rulebreaker: The Life And Times of Barbara Walters by Susan Page (2024 Simon & Schuster) offers a fascinating look at the person behind the legend. Her marriages, the rocky relationship with her only (adopted) child, how she often worked to keep her family intact when her famous father, the impresario Lou Walters, saw his fortunes as a nightclub owner ebb and flow, from fortune to destitute and back again, on a cyclical basis. He even attempted suicide. Walters' lasting legacy is *The View* TV gabfest that she founded almost three decades ago and appeared on as a panelist well into her 80's. A worthwhile read about a media star that often mixed entertainment with hard news – much to the chagrin of some of her colleagues – especially the men who were dismissive of her early on. Boy, were they wrong.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Tom Field** is a creative director and a publisher (including FRONT); **Gene Marrano** is a news reporter and editor of FRONT.



Gene Marrano

Historical former clinic gets plaque >

A piece of Virginia History from here in Roanoke has just been honored and recognized - a story dating back 117 years. One of the first black-owned medical practices in Virginia, **Claytor Memorial Clinic**, received recognition with a historic marker last month adjacent to the Gainsboro Library. Those in attendance included Claytor family members and former Roanoke Mayor and Historian Nelson Harris, who spoke at the ceremony and did much of the background research before the state-approved marker went forward.

The Claytor family still owns the clinic and are trying to find suitable proposals for redevelopment; however, the family was involved in a controversy when Roanoke City attempted to buy the former clinic at one point as part of efforts to revitalize the Gainsboro neighborhood, before backing off from that proposal.

The Claytor Memorial Clinic first opened in 1948 by Dr. **John B. Claytor Sr.** as the first Black-owned, full-service medical clinic in Virginia. Dr. **Conrad Claytor** joined in recognizing their



families' clinic at the marker unveiling: "When I think of my grandparents, I think of the enormous obstacles they faced, trying to carve out a living while raising a family in a segregated Roanoke, under the Jim Crow laws of the South." Claytor hailed "their never-ending perseverance." During the time of Jim Crow laws and segregation, African Americans from all over Virginia received medical attention at the clinic in northwest Roanoke after being denied service elsewhere.



City of Salem



Gene Marrano



Gene Marrano



Gene Marrano

Moyer Complex redo on time, on budget >

The **Moyer Sports Complex** hosted a renovation project completion ribbon cutting ceremony last month in Salem. Seats with backs, four softball fields, awnings for shade, larger dugouts with restrooms in each, and sideline warmup/bullpen areas now using a turf field were part of the 27.9 million dollar upgrade, which came in on budget according to Salem Parks and Recreation Director **John Shaner**. He credited much of that to **G&H Contracting**, a local firm. "They are the heart and soul of this project," said Shaner. "There were so many moving parts with the construction of this facility, and G&H really knocked it out of the park." It was time says Shaner, who was emotional at times when speaking at the ribbon cutting. "We needed to update it, we needed to get rid of the chain link fence, we have the suspended netting [for safety] now – we have what all the other major [softball] facilities have – plus more. It makes us very competitive in the world of sports marketing." The more includes 13 new pickleball courts, a special needs compatible playground and additional parking for major events at Moyer, which has often hosted NCAA Division 2 and 3 softball championships in the past.

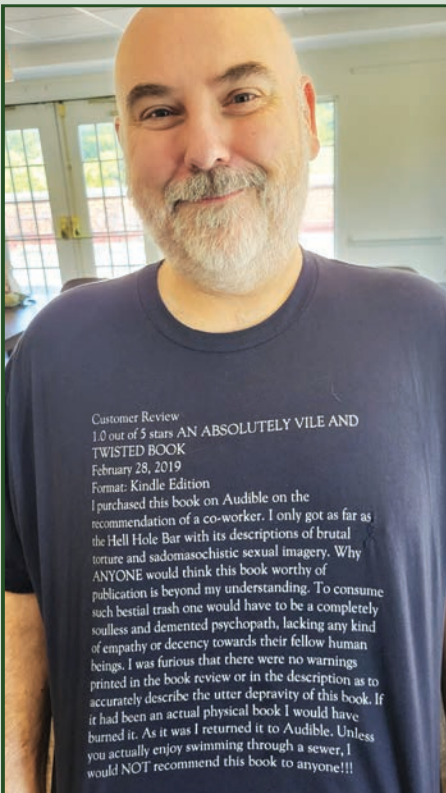
ODAC commissioner **Brad Bankston** (conference member Roanoke College plays there and the end of season ODAC tournament has been held at Moyer as well) likes what he sees: "I'm amazed it's still in the same footprint, because it looks a whole lot larger. The amenities, the larger dugouts, the bullpens, [new] batting cages, a step up from where Moyer was always first class."

Bankston says the expanded seating – with seat backs, not just bleachers - and the additional shade via new awnings will help make game days a better experience. The media tower has also been updated. The 22-acre complex, first opened in 1992, hosts a variety of events and is in use an average of 230 days a year. The Moyer Complex hosts an average of 26 weekend tournaments per year and is home to the ASA/USA Girls Class "A" Fast Pitch National Championships. The Salem High School Spartans also use one of the fields at Moyer as their home field.



Latest VTC-SOM art exhibit >

The VTC's summer exhibit: *Son's of the Village; The Art of Fatherhood*, will run through August 30th at the **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine** in the VTCSOM hallways. Featured artist, photographer and former Patrick Henry High School Fletcher Nichols is joined by other regional artists. The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine holds three themed art exhibits every year. Dave Trinkle is the Associate Dean for Community Engagement: "the goal was to be a different type of show but really try to show the meaningful relationship between father and children."



Self-deprecating shirt says it all >

Roanoke sci-fi writer sensation **Rod Belcher** (R.S. Belcher) entertained the Persiflage writers group in Salem on July 3. He's the author of *The Six-Gun Tarot*, *The Shotgun Arcana*, *The Queen's Road*, *King of the Road* (*The Brotherhood of the Wheel* urban fantasy series; *Nightwise* series; *Golgotha* series)... just a few of his prolific assemblage of books (that includes nonfiction, too, for the record). Belcher was also a previous contributor to our business journal—and he owned a comic book store.



Gene Marrano

Mountain bikes are coming >

Virginia's Blue Ridge will host the 2025 and 2026 **USA Cycling Endurance Mountain Bike National Championships**, a collaboration between the City of Roanoke, Roanoke County, and Hollins University, consisting of seven days of racing events with over 1,500 athletes competing for national titles. "We're still buzzing from the experience of hosting the 2022 and 2023 Amateur Road National Championships [in Roanoke] there," said **Brendan Quirk**, USA Cycling's President and CEO. "With this announcement of the Endurance Mountain Bike National Championships, it's evident why Virginia's Blue Ridge is one of America's foremost cycling destinations," Quirk said during the late June announcement at Explore Park.

Athletes will compete on the trails at Explore Park, Elmwood Park, and Carvins Cove. The multi-day event will combine Cross-Country and Marathon Mountain Bike events. "With an estimated \$2.2 million in direct visitor spending, this event will ... contribute significantly to our local economy. We are excited to welcome USA Cycling and its athletes, from enthusiasts to professionals, for this historic week-long championship," said **Rita McClenney**, President and CEO of Virginia Tourism Corporation at the June reveal.

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Gene Marrano

#7 for local NPO >

Restoration Housing has completed an historic rehabilitation of their seventh home in Roanoke and their fourth within the Belmont neighborhood of Southeast Roanoke. The circa 1903 structure located on the corner of 10th Street and Stewart Avenue was vacant for several years before undergoing a major renovation that began in the Fall of 2023. Prior to the rehab, the property was owned by the same family for several decades and had been well-maintained by them for generations. After this major restoration, it will serve as affordable rental housing for a family of four making approximately 50% of the area median income.

Thanks in large part to public and private partnerships, Restoration Housing was able to subsidize most of the construction costs in order to keep the rent affordable. They received funding from Carter Bank – that was after a cold call to them - and Trust, an affordable housing program from the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (in partnership with Virginia Housing) as well as Community Development Block Grant funds through the City of Roanoke's HUD office. Executive director **Isabel Thornton** says they worked to bring the house back to its original look. "It's our fourth in Southeast and [in the] Belmont [neighborhood]." It's the second single family rental that Restoration Housing has restored; the other five were converted into multi-family living spaces. "It has all the comforts of home, she notes, including a front porch and a backyard," notes Thornton.

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



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EDUCATIONAL FRONT

Jason Bohm has been named the new dean of the Helms School of Government at Liberty University. He most recently served as the inspector general of the U.S. Marine Corps before retiring earlier this year. He has also served as chief of staff for the Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO, as commanding general of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command and Marine Corps Training Command, as director of the Marine Corps Legislative Liaison Office for the U.S. House of Representatives and as a strategic planner for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Bohm holds a bachelor's degree from the Illinois Institute of Technology, a master's degree in military studies from the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and a master's degree in national security strategy from the National War College at the National Defense University.



Stewart

Nathan "Nate" Stewart has been appointed vice president for Advancement at Roanoke College. He was associate vice president and chief operating officer for development at Centre College in Danville, KY. Stewart is a Roanoke College alumnus (BS in health and human performance) and was on the men's basketball team. He has an MS in health and physical education from Marshall University. He will serve on strategic leadership and engage data-driven, agile fundraising for donors in the rapidly changing higher education environment.

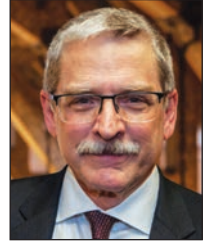
Tanya LeRoith DVM '99, director of the Virginia Tech Animal Laboratory Service (ViTALS), is the new



LeRoith

director of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine. LeRoith (profiled previously in Valley Business Front) began her role on May 10, alongside retiring director William A. "Terry" Swecker '80 DVM '84, who was LeRoith's faculty advisor when she was a veterinary student at Virginia Tech in the late 1990s.

Jay Ellison will serve as Roanoke College's new vice president for Student Success and the Roanoke Experience. Ellison brings with him more than two decades of experience fostering transformative educational experiences for students through programs, initiatives, policies, and a focus on



Ellison

organizational and professional excellence. Ellison, who most recently served as the interim special assistant to the vice president for Student Success and Enrollment at Trinity College, was selected from a pool of more than 150 candidates following a national search.



Quigley

Paul Quigley, who has served as the James I. Robertson, Jr. Associate Professor of Civil War Studies and director of the Virginia Center for Civil War

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Studies since 2013, has taken on another role as director of Virginia Tech's Center for Humanities. Established in 2017, the center's purpose is to advance research based on human methods of scholarship among faculty and students and to work across the university.



Julien

Christine Julien has been appointed head of the Department of Computer Science, effective Aug. 12. Julien comes to Virginia Tech from the University of Texas at Austin, where she has served as the Annis and Jack Bowen Professor of Engineering in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and as associate dean for broadening participation in engineering for the

Cockrell School of Engineering.



White

Elizabeth White has been named chief of staff for the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. White will collaborate with Virginia Tech Transportation Institute's (VTTI) Road to Inclusion Diversity and Equity Committee to promote an environment that fosters open communication, inclusivity, accessibility, empathy, and understanding. Before joining the institute,

White served in multiple industrial engineering roles at PepsiCo, most recently as quality manager of the New River Valley manufacturing facility.



Timney

Trista Timney has been named director of communications for the Virginia Tech College of Architecture, Arts, and Design (AAD). Timney will develop a comprehensive, digital-first communications plan for the college. Timney joined Virginia Tech in January 2018 as

the director of communications for the College of Natural Resources and Environment, where she built a comprehensive communications program. Prior to joining Virginia Tech, Timney served as senior associate director of marketing and communications for the Office of Admissions at Indiana University-Bloomington.



Nolan

Dennis Nolan is the new executive director for Environmental

Valinda Hayes

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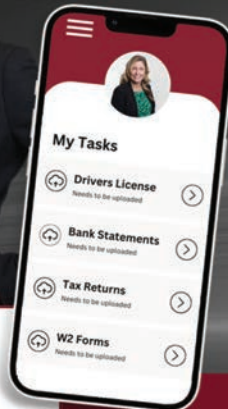
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Health and Safety at Virginia Tech. Nolan previously served as assistant vice president of environmental health and safety at Baylor University, focused on education, research, and safety programs.

FINANCIAL FRONT



Harris

Pam Harris has been promoted to Assistant Vice President, Bank Secrecy Act and Fraud Officer at the Bank of Botetourt, and will continue to work at the Bank's Care Center. She has been with the Bank for over 20 years and in her new role she will be responsible for coordinating and managing the day-to-day Bank Secrecy Act (BSA) compliance and overseeing the Bank's Fraud Program.



McClure

Shannon McClure was promoted to Assistant Vice President, Enterprise Risk Management Officer at the Bank of Botetourt, and is based at the Bank's Care Center. She graduated from

Liberty University in 2023 with a Bachelor of Science degree in History and is currently working towards earning her Master of Business Administration degree at Western Governors University.



Rose

Blair Rose has been promoted to Loan Operations Officer at the Bank of Botetourt, working at the Bank's Care Center. Rose was raised in Botetourt County and graduated from James River High School.



Shoemaker

Christina Shoemaker was promoted to Business Banking Officer at the Bank of Botetourt and works at the Bank's Bonsack location. Shoemaker was born in Bluefield, Virginia, and grew up in Giles County where she went on to graduate from Bluefield College with a bachelor's degree in business management.

Ridge View Bank has announced the hiring of **Tiphonie Rasnik** as Vice President, Commercial Office



Rasnik

Manager of the Bank's Headquarters located on Franklin Road in Roanoke, which is still under construction. She brings over two decades of banking experience within the Roanoke Valley, most recently serving as Vice President and Financial Sales Manager at First Citizens Bank. During 10 years at First Citizens Bank, Rasnik managed the flagship branch in Roanoke, and in nearly 15 years at SunTrust Bank, holding multiple positions including branch manager.

LEGAL FRONT



Bryant

Jake Bryant has joined the Roanoke office of Gentry Locke as an associate in the General Commercial group focusing on intellectual property and business law. He assists clients with intellectual property, trademark and copyright registrations, IP and software licensing, artificial

intelligence, data privacy, as well as federal litigation, ADA claims, mergers and acquisitions. Bryant earned his JD from Liberty University, and his credentials include a LU Law Review editor, vice president of Liberty Law IP Clinic, executive chair of Business & Transactional Law Society, and national finalist in International Trademark Assoc. 2023 tournament.



Beck

Roanoke-based Gentry Locke has announced **Nicholas A. Beck** has joined the firm's Roanoke office as an associate. Beck is joining the firm's Plaintiff group where he will focus his practice on medical malpractice, personal injury, and wrongful death matters. Prior to joining the firm as an attorney, Nicholas spent two summers working as a summer associate with Gentry Locke.

CREATIVE FRONT

Angie Martz was recognized as club President of the Year and **Jamal Millner** as district Governor of the Year at the Admerica 2024 National Conference for advertising. Both

are board members of AAF Roanoke ad club.

MEDIA FRONT

Nick Yee will join WVTF Public Radio and RADIO IQ this summer as the station's first director of content and distribution. Yee will be responsible for the daily operational functions of WVTF and Radio IQ and all its programming. He will



Yee

ensure an audience-centered focus both on air and online while working with station staff and the community to make programming decisions and being the main point-person for

community connection. For the past 11 years, Yee has been with Hawaii Public Radio.

COMMUNITY SERVICE FRONT

Megan Parks has been hired as the new executive director for United Way of Southwest Virginia, which also has a new board of directors. She has

a decade's worth of experience designing and leading community-based programming and nonprofit strategy to the nonprofit, which is based in Abingdon. Most recently, she directed strategy and impact initiatives for the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee, according to a news release announcing her hiring.

Compiled by Tom Field and Gene Marrano

“” Knowing when to be patient and when to push through is very important. — Page 17



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CONTRIBUTORS

Linda Balentine is a Roanoke entrepreneur, founder, and owner of Crowning Touch Senior Moving Services as well as its transport, consignment, auction, and real estate portfolio. The business caters to the high growth senior citizen demographic and has been serving our regional market since 1996. [linda@crowningtouchusa.com]

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.

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperj991@gmail.com]

Carrie Cousins is the Director of Digital Marketing at LeadPoint Digital in Roanoke. For 15+ years, she has helped businesses tell their stories and get better results online with practical digital marketing strategies. She also an active leader in AAF, serving on the local and district boards, and is an adjunct professor at Virginia Tech.

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]

Tom Field is a creative director, marketing executive and owner of Berryfield, Inc. in Salem, and owner of Valley

Business FRONT magazine. He has written and produced programs and materials for local and international organizations for 40 years. [tfield@berryfield.com]

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

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

Jennifer Leake is a seasoned Certified Management Consultant (CMC®) with over 30 years of business and consulting experience. She is a certified trusted advisor in employee assessments, engagement, and emotional intelligence. She offers ideas and best practices to help you hire the right people, engage employees, and lead effectively to enhance workplace performance and drive overall business success.

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]

Meg Reed is the vice president of business banking at Freedom First Credit Union. With 25 years of banking experience, she ensures present and future Business Members are equipped to grow their business while helping them financially succeed; catering a financial plan to take the business to the next level. Reed views every business "like a zebra—no two businesses have the same stripes. What may work for one, may not work for the next." [mareed@

freedomfirst.com]

Michael Shelton is a Registered Financial Consultant, tax specialist, and owner of 360 Wealth Consultants. His firm specializes in providing retirement planning and wealth preservation strategies for business owners and astute individuals. What really has the locals excited, though, is his groundbreaking, proprietary software, designed to streamline accounting and wealth planning for business owners of medical practices, real estate properties, and construction industry businesses. [Michael@360WealthConsulting.com]

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.

Sam Sokolove is the Senior Consultant and Director of Government Contracting for Building Beloved Communities, which works to help non-profit organizations grow. [sam@buildingbelovedcommunities.com]

Emma Thomas is a Roanoke native and 2022 Hollins University Graduate. She works for WFIR News Talk Radio as a reporter. [thomasek432@gmail.com]

Nicholas Vaassen is a graphic design specialist with over 27 years experience. His design projects include logos, magazines, web design, signs, newsletters, postcards, business cards, and any other marketing materials you can think of. [nicholasvaassen@gmail.com]

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VT research grant

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has awarded **Virginia Tech** a \$300,000 grant for allergy, immunology and transplantation research related to *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. difficile*) infection. This bacterium causes inflammation of the colon, diarrhea, colitis, etc. U.S. Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA) issued a statement: “*C. difficile* is a germ that affects the colon and can cause serious illness. This grant helps Virginia Tech explore treatments for a harmful metabolic disease.”

Honors for Pulaski tourism

Pulaski County Tourism has received two creative awards recognizing their work for promoting tourism and enhancing visitor experience. The county’s Experiential Center signage has been honored with a Communicator Award of Excellence,

and the Pulaski County SRX ESPN Commercial earned a Bronze Telly Award. The Communicator Awards acknowledge creative excellence for marketing and communication professionals, and entries are judged to evaluate distinction in creative work. The Experiential Center signage highlights Pulaski County Tourism’s commitment to providing visitors with an immersive and informative experience, underscoring the organization’s dedication to enhancing the visibility and appeal of Pulaski County’s attractions through effective communication.

Tech engineering programs score well

Virginia Tech’s College of Engineering graduate programs were rated highly in the latest U.S. News & World Report’s annual graduate school rankings. The university’s top 100 global effort, named Virginia Tech Global Distinction, “seeks to make the

university a destination for the best faculty, students, and partners from the commonwealth, the nation, and the world.” Overall, U.S. News & World Report ranked Virginia Tech’s engineering graduate programs at tied for No. 31. U.S. News & World Report ranked four of Virginia Tech’s College of Engineering individual graduate programs in the top 10:

- Environmental: Tied for No. 5
- Industrial and systems: No. 5, up from No. 6
- Civil: No. 9
- Biological/agricultural: Tied for No. 10, up from No. 12

In addition, four other individual graduate programs were rated in the top 20:

- Aerospace: Tie for No. 11, up from No. 14
- Computer: No. 15, up from No. 23
- Mechanical: No. 17
- Electrical: No. 20

Other engineering graduate programs to receive top-50 marks included materials at No. 34, computer science

tied for No. 36, biomedical at No. 36, and chemical at No. 42.

Small nuclear reactors in VA gets a boost

Governor **Glenn Youngkin** has signed SB 454, which will accelerate the development, testing, and deployment of small modular nuclear reactors. “Increasing energy resources requires investment in innovation,” said Director of Virginia Department of Energy **Glenn Davis**. “This legislation creates the path toward adding more nuclear energy to the grid, the most innovative resource for Virginia’s future. Small Modular Reactors are vital to meeting the growing energy needs of the Commonwealth’s citizens and for industries creating new jobs that require an abundance of reliable clean power.” The bill would permit Dominion Energy Virginia to petition the State Corporation Commission at any time for the approval of a rate

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adjustment clause for the recovery of small modular reactor project development costs for up to one small modular reactor facility.

More board appointments by the Governor

Virginia Tourism Authority: Lisa Meriwether of Danville, Tourism Manager, City of Danville; Advisory Board on Occupational Therapy: Leah Savelyev of Roanoke, Professor and Program Director, Virginia Western Community College; Board of Nursing: Lila Peake, RN, of Lynchburg, Travel Nurse and Case Manager, Capital Caring Hospice; Apprenticeship Council: Doris Crouse-Mays of Vinton, President, Virginia, and AFL-CIO Michelle Ramaker of Bedford County, Vice President, Build Smart Institute

Also, Board of Visitors of Radford University: Callie Dalton of Roanoke, Realtor, Callie Dalton & Associates, Long & Foster, William C.

Davis of Blacksburg, retired Historian, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Jonathan Sweet of Pulaski County, County Administrator, Pulaski County; Board of Visitors of Virginia Polytechnic Institute And State University: Jeanne H. Stosser of Blacksburg, President, President and CEO, CMG Leasing/SAS Construction; Board of Visitors of Virginia State University: Dr. Robert E. Denton, Jr., of Blacksburg, W. Thomas Rice Chair Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Communication, Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

ARC grant recommendations

Governor Glenn Youngkin announced that he is recommending 13 projects for funding by the **Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)**, totaling \$7.4 million in grants. ARC will finalize approval of these project awards later this year. "These projects represent the innovation and strong entrepreneurial spirit of the Appalachian

Have an announcement about your business?

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

region," said Youngkin. "ARC plays a pivotal role in empowering our Appalachian communities to address their unique challenges, capitalize on their unique assets and drive positive change throughout the region." Included is a \$700,000 recommendation for the Town of Pulaski Calfee Community and Cultural Center, for expansion of a training school and for an adaptive reuse community kitchen.

Main Street grants

\$690,000 in Virginia Main Street (VMS) and Community Business Launch (CBL) grants have been awarded for 16 projects across the Commonwealth. The funded projects will help revitalize historic commercial districts and create and expand

small businesses. The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) administers all three programs, and the funding is utilized to support small business creation and expansion, as well as the revitalization of historic downtown and Virginia Main Street districts. Among the recipients are **Clifton Forge Main Street** (\$15,000 for wayfaring signs), and **Olde Town Covington** (\$6000) for the Alley Gallery.

Awards will support local farm producers

Grant awards totaling more than \$280,000 to support and strengthen went to local food and farming operations in ten Virginia counties and cities. The

Notable Transactions

sponsored by covenantreal.com

- **Shrewd Outdoors** moving into old Easter Seals bldg on Main St Salem, a 12,000 sq-ft facility with retail and archery range
- **New Retail Co-Op & Business Incubator** moving into old Cook's Cleaners bldg at 414 N Main St Blacksburg (by 2026)
- **Against All Odds Therapy** leased 1,050 sq-ft office space at Glen Heather Square on Electric Rd SW Roanoke County
- **Pipewell Plumbing** leased 4,266 sq-ft industrial space on 11th St NE Roanoke
- **New Restaurant, Performance Venue, 27-room Boutique Hotel** to be built from former First National Exchange Bank building in downtown Roanoke
- **Delta Dental** office building on Starkey Rd in Roanoke purchased by EDA of Roanoke County for \$1,900,000

SOURCES: commercial real estate firms; municipal records; FRONTnews feeds

announcement was made during Virginia Agriculture Week. Included are **Franklin County**, \$50,000, to fund essential equipment upgrades and facility repairs at Callaway Community Cannery and Glade Hill Community Cannery. The **City of Buena Vista** received \$50,000 to fund equipment purchases for the Virginia Innovation Accelerator Commercial Kitchen, a new shared-use kitchen facility that will serve as a business incubator focused on agricultural innovation. The project is in partnership with the Vinton-based Advancement Foundation and will allow small to mid-sized agricultural producers in the southern Shenandoah Valley to create and sustain their value-added product companies.

Global marketing program grads

Eleven more companies have graduated from the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's (VEDP) Virginia Leaders in Export Trade (VALET) two-year program. VALET, which now has 402 graduated companies, assists Virginia exporters that have firmly established domestic operations and are committed to international exporting as a growth strategy. Among them are **Harkness Screens USA Ltd** (Botetourt County) and **Inorganic Ventures** (Montgomery County). **VPT, Inc**

(Montgomery County) is among the newest VALET enrollees.

More 5Points honors

Roanoke-based **5Points Creative** has been recognized, on behalf of three clients, for outstanding video production during the recent 45th Annual Telly Awards. The agency received a Silver Award for the Good Samaritan Hospice "Where Love Gathers" campaign, another Silver Telly for the Friendship "Friendship for Life" campaign, and a Bronze Award for the Pulaski County Tourism "SRX Race" commercial. These accolades mark the 11th, 12th, and 13th Telly Awards the firm has secured, continuing a seven-year streak of recognition for video production. "This year's bundle of three is particularly satisfying," said Bruce C. Bryan, founder and president of 5Points Creative. "The recognition is great for us and our clients for sure, but what I think I love most is the mix of approaches our creative team demonstrated in producing these videos."

Workforce funds used to increase affordable housing in the City of Roanoke

The City of Roanoke Economic Development Authority (EDA) has committed \$225,000 of its operating funds to the **Roanoke Workforce Housing Development Fund** in an effort to increase the availability of affordable

housing in the City. Established in December 2023 with an initial \$2 million from the American Rescue Plan Act funds, the Roanoke Workforce Housing Development Fund will provide low-interest loans to housing developers, with the condition that at least 20 percent of the units in the new developments must be affordable for families earning no more than 60 percent of the area's median income. Additionally, these housing units must remain affordable for 20 years.

More healthy food access

The **Roanoke Foodshed Network** (RFN) granted \$17,000 to area nonprofits and schools to support food access work in the Roanoke region. The following organizations received funding: Virginia Cooperative Extension, One Valley Inc., Feeding Southwest Virginia, Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP), Cave Spring Elementary School PTA, Roanoke Refugee Partnership, New Horizons Healthcare and the Salem Farmers Market. The Roanoke Foodshed Network began as a series of conversations among farmers, planners, and local food advocates in 2014 and was formalized in 2020 through funding provided by a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) planning grant. Over the past four years,

the RFN has created four Working Groups to support food systems priorities within the region, including healthy food access, economic development, farming and food production, and network development.

Another downtown re-do announced

Local developer, **Lucas Thornton**, is "partnering with some of Roanoke's most creative minds," to redevelop the former **First National Exchange Bank** building in downtown Roanoke at the corner of Church Avenue and First Street. The project will utilize historic tax credits to create a concert hall, restaurant, and boutique hotel. The building was formerly purchased by Carilion but plans for that makeover never materialized. Thornton and partners have built new apartment spaces in downtown Roanoke and are currently working on the Campbell Court project where the Valley Metro bus depot used to be. (See our FRONT story in this edition).

RoCo business grants available

The Roanoke County Economic Development Authority has announced a new **Business Equipment Acquisition Program (BEAP)** grant aimed at helping businesses in Roanoke County and the Town of Vinton. The grant will offer funding opportunities for eligible for-profit businesses looking to enhance

OUR FUTURE IS OUR LEGACY: CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

VISION > ZERO WASTE TO LANDFILL




Driving positive environmental change — inside our company and within the communities we serve — is one of the most important things we do here at Cox.

Cox Conserves, our national sustainability program, was launched in 2007 and since then, we've made meaningful progress in our journey to become a more sustainable company through our operations, partnerships and grants to nonprofits. With \$165 million invested in more than 500 sustainability and conservation projects, we've just achieved our first sustainability goal: to be Zero Waste to Landfill by 2024. The zero waste achievement of 92% diversion is nearly triple the national average of 32%.

"The path to zero waste would not have been possible without the dedication of our employees making major shifts to positively impact our communities and our world," said Jeff Merritt, Roanoke Market Vice President and regional Cox Conserves sponsor. "We've come a long way since the project began in 2013 and our Virginia employees have embraced multiple changes big and small along the way to make this goal a reality."

IMPACT > WHY IT MATTERS

Since accepting the Zero Waste to Landfill challenge in 2013, Cox employees have kept more than 750 million pounds of waste out of landfills. The equivalent of:

-  10 million reams of copy paper
-  organic waste equal to 60 million apples
-  the same amount of metal used to build more than 4,000 vehicles



ACTION > WHAT WE'RE DOING

Here are just some of the initiatives we've undertaken to contribute to the zero waste achievement:

- On-site community recycling trailers at our Fallowater Ln office in partnership with Roanoke County
- Cox's Investment Recovery program ensures electronic waste finds a second life through refurbishment, reuse, and responsible recycling
- Provide environmental stations in our facilities to collect hard to recycle materials (batteries, light bulbs, etc.) which are separated and sent for safe recycling
- Water bottle filling stations in all facilities
- "Green"-ing our consumer packaging, transitioning to recycled content, soy-based ink, and curbside recyclable packaging

To learn more, visit www.coxenterprises.com/our-impact.

their operations through the acquisition of new capital. On a competitive basis, the Authority will award grants of up to 50% of capital acquisition costs in amounts up to \$20,000 per award. Eligible acquisitions must be taxable as business personal property or business machinery or tools. Some examples include furniture, fixtures, office and business machines, tools and equipment, and computer equipment.

To be eligible, businesses must: Employ more than three full-time employees at a physical location in Roanoke County, have operated as a for-profit business in Roanoke County for at least one year and hold a current Roanoke County or Town of Vinton business license and be in good standing with all local requirements and taxes. Applications will be accepted through September 1, 2024. Funding is limited and competitive, and grants are awarded at the sole discretion of the Authority. Recipients will be notified in the fall of 2024 and must complete their proposed acquisitions within one year of award notification. For more information on the grant program and to apply, visit www.yesroanoke.com/BEAP

We all scream for this

Homestead Creamery is expanding its facility in Franklin County, citing increased demand, particularly for its churned ice cream products. The dairy

supplier and retail business will invest more than \$2.5 million, including a new ice cream production room, additional manufacturing and refrigeration equipment and freezer.

From school to housing

The Town Council of **Blacksburg** has approved development of a higher-end housing plan at the old Blacksburg High School site. The plan shows 73 townhomes.

Champ City gets its complex back

The **City of Salem** celebrated its re-opening of the 22-acre **Moyer Sports Complex**, after an extensive renovation that took the recreational facility offline for nearly two years.

Homebuyer downpayment help

Freedom First Credit Union now offers the **Chenoa Fund**—a home buying down payment assistance program for qualified FHA loan applicants. It's a secondary mortgage loan that provides 3.5% or 5% of the home's sale price or appraised value (whichever is lower) and can be forgiven after on-time payment terms are met.

Carilion billing outsourced

Carilion Clinic has contracted **Ensemble Health Partners**—a third party “revenue

cycle management” business for accounts receivable, citing the strategic partnership will “optimize process” with “advanced technologies.”

We're a top trainer

Business Facilities ranked Virginia as the top state for customized workforce training in their 20th Annual Rankings Report, citing the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's Talent Access Program as a contributor.

Truckin' in big grant

The **Volvo Group** has been awarded a \$208 million federal grant to be used for upgrades at its Dublin manufacturing plant in Pulaski County (and plants in Maryland and Pennsylvania). The Dublin manufacturing facility employs over 3,500 people.

Moving buses around B'burg

Blacksburg Transit is using a new hub and Virginia Tech campus shuttle to service more bus loops.

Tell William, and others

Shrewd Outdoors—a venture by Salem-based Shrewd Archery—is opening on Main Street in Salem (the old Easter Seals building) that will feature archery equipment and gear, as well as an indoor range and other outdoor experiential

activities, from the 12,000-square-foot facility. The business is owned and operated by the Newsom family.

Parental break

The Pink Flamingo Play Café has opened in Forest—a combined coffee shop and indoor play area, designed for parents to relax while their children play.

Favorite grocer coming

Publix is building a 50,736-square-foot grocery store in southwest Roanoke County. The popular grocery store's plans include terrazzo flooring, large parking lot, pharmacy drive-thru, and loading dock.

New school in RoCo

Plans reveal a new private **Montessori** school is coming to Roanoke County; designed for 70 youth and a half-day preschool.

Also number 1

Virginia was ranked Number 1 in **CNBC's** annual Top States for Business. Our education and having business-ready sites were cited as major advantages for the poll, among the ten categories analyzed. The recognition is especially notable because Virginia has won the top spot six times—making our state the most decorated

(since the rankings began in 2007).

Jefferson Center releases 2024-25 lineup so far; tops annual fundraising goal

The **Jefferson Center** has released its schedule for the 2024-25 season. The new season includes Emmylou Harris, The Wood Brothers and Rickie Lee Jones as well as standup and storytelling from Garrison Keillor. Jamie Cheatwood is in charge of programming at the

Jefferson Center. She says to expect more announcements as the season draws near. The schedule also includes Kathy Mattea, The Wood Brothers and The Steel Drivers. The schedule is online and more will be added. Jamie Cheatwood is in charge of programming at Jefferson Center: "our supporters have been so loyal for so long. They're music lovers and their tastes are varied. We're just honored to present to a community that loves music so much." Jeff Center also topped its

annual fundraising goal of \$203,000 by about \$10,000.

Agee adieu

Nancy Howell Agee, the president and CEO of Carilion Clinic, announced her retirement that will be effective Sept. 30. Steve Arner, who was promoted to president in May 2023, will succeed Agee on Oct. 1. Agee (who is the only business leader to make the FRONTcover of this

business journal twice) led the hospital and healthcare organization through decades of transformative change. She started at the hospital in 1973 as a nurse. Agee was the organization's seventh top executive, the first female in that role, and recognized with many successes and leadership by numerous trade and other entities.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field

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Submitted

Emma Thomas

Marketing the Market

By Emma Thomas

A career pivot for this former TV reporter and anchor lands her in the heart of downtown Roanoke.



Jennie Marie Photographie

Izzy Post Ruhland is a Connecticut native who has spent the past decade of her life pursuing journalism and local news. She graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor's degree in Multimedia Journalism and a Minor in Sports Media and Communications in 2017, and moved back north for a time. It was there that she really cut her teeth in broadcast television, becoming a fill-in news and sports reporter in Connecticut, before moving to West Virginia to become a full-time anchor. Post Ruhland says, "I also hosted a football show in West Virginia, and hosted a true crime podcast...a little bit of everything."

That little bit of everything helped prepare her to wear the many hats she would

eventually need for her position as the Director of Marketing and Communications for Downtown Roanoke Inc. "Journalists have a lot of transferable skills. To be a really good journalist you have to [be] the right combination of creative and deadline-oriented, and kind of an adrenaline junkie at the same time, because you are working on a timetable. So, by having all three of those skills, you can really translate them into just about anything you want. Being able to have that is what really drew me to this new career path, and I think is what ultimately helped me make the switch."

Although the new job took her out of her comfort zone in broadcasting, she says at its core, the new position still maintains

FIRST FRIDAYS



AUGUST 2



SEPTEMBER 6





some of the same principles and challenges that she's faced in the past, "When you think about television and news, you have ninety seconds to capture someone's attention – or less. The same thing goes in marketing. You have a very split-second, small amount of time to grab people's attention and say, "Why do I care?"

According to DRI's most recent annual report, Post Ruhland's messages are reaching many eyes. Across Facebook, Instagram, and X, Downtown Roanoke Inc. has a combined following of nearly 60,000. In addition to that, the weekly newsletter

she writes reaches just under 15,000 people. (Communicating is a family thing – her husband Clark Ruhland, also a Virginia Tech graduate, works for the City of Salem in that role).


Post Ruhland says the attention she and her work partner, Joya Garris, are able to draw people to Downtown Roanoke through marketing materials, helps to foster DRI's ultimate goal: to make Downtown the premier place to live, work, and play. As she frames it, "You think... [at] the Brantley Gilbert concert [in late June] we had thousands of



Jennie Marie Photographie

people in Elmwood Park and they all had to go eat somewhere before the concert, or grab something to drink, do something with their family...or find a place to stay if they were from out of town. You think about St. Patrick's Day - you couldn't move, there were so many people. Those are things that not only bring our community together in Roanoke, and the county and beyond, but it also brings people into Roanoke." While it's hard to translate that engagement into hard numbers, Post Ruhland notes, "All of our business leaders that we talk to on a regular basis always come to us

and say, "That was a great night," or "Having this here really helped."

There's more on the horizon. Preparations are already underway for this year's Dickens of a Christmas, and Post Ruhland says soon there will be even more to do downtown. "We have a lot of new businesses coming into the area, we've had a bunch open in 2024, and we've got word of a couple more coming. I can't say what they are yet, we want to let them announce themselves—but there's a lot of new things coming," she teases – just like a good TV anchor would. 

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