

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 190
JULY 2024

Roanoke Mountain
Adventures

TXTUR furnishings

The Well-Being Officer

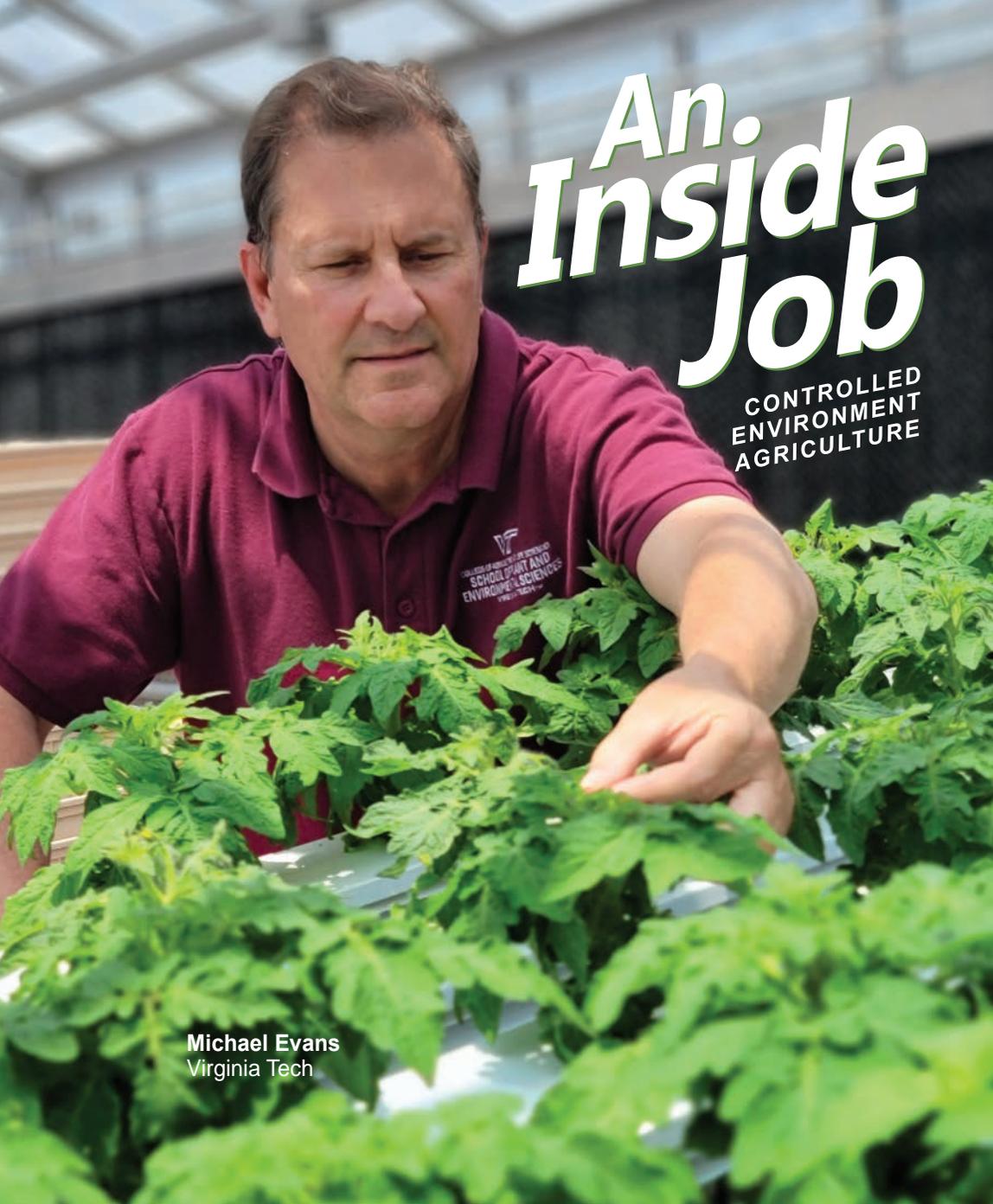
Schaal's Catering

Tinaglia the Trainer

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An. Inside Job

CONTROLLED
ENVIRONMENT
AGRICULTURE

A photograph of Michael Evans, a man in a maroon polo shirt, working in a greenhouse. He is leaning over a tray of green plants, possibly tomatoes, and appears to be inspecting them. The background shows the structure of the greenhouse with translucent panels.

Michael Evans
Virginia Tech



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

As the world looks ahead to a tightening of the food supply needed to feed all of us—with overall population numbers climbing, and climate changes impacting production—we offer a thought-provoking story on a more scientific approach through “controlled environment agriculture.” Welcome to the future?

We are pleased to welcome back as a columnist Sheri Winesett, with her new Women Who Lead column. Winesett recently released her book *Transparency in Leadership*, geared towards women in those roles and recently profiled here in Valley Business FRONT.

Homegrown Roanoke businesses from TXTUR – the eclectic furniture manufacturer, to new ventures for Schaal’s Catering (always yummy), a second life as a dog trainer for one woman, and Roanoke Mountain Adventures – now owned by a former attorney – may inspire some to follow their own passions. And we’ll introduce you to a Chief Well-Being Officer from Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. All in all, some good summer reading.

Tom Field
Publisher

Gene Marrano
Editor

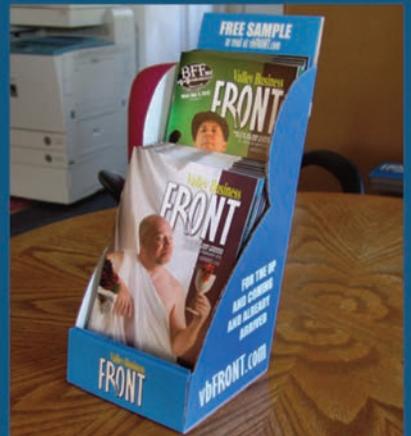
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The Future of Farming is Now

Jennifer Poff Cooper



“ ”
Your multiple hats are actually a superpower.
— Page 24



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JULY



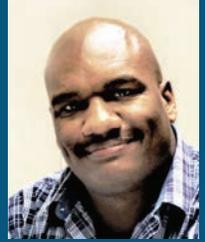
Aila Boyd



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Gene Marrano



Shawn Nowlin



Taylor Spellman



Nicholas Vaassen

Advisory Board

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

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construction

“”
We wanted a place that had a direct connection to the outdoors.

— Page 14

“”
The vision of what we're creating keeps me energized.

— Page 36

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

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“”
We have a lot of synergy. — Page 17



Submitted photos

Research being conducted on controlled environment production of strawberry gutters and Dutch bucket systems in greenhouses at the Controlled Environment Agriculture Innovation Center (CEA-IC).

The Future of Farming is Now

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

By 2050, it is estimated that there will be nine billion people on earth. Innovations will be needed to feed the world's population. Climate change only adds to the pressure of food scarcity. And, more people are concerned about where their food comes from.

One tool for dealing with these issues is controlled environment agriculture (CEA). CEA uses technology to enable growers to manipulate a crop's environment to create favorable conditions.

According to Michael Evans, Virginia Tech's Director of the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Professor of Controlled Environment Agriculture, and Associate Director for the Controlled Environment Agriculture Innovation Center, CEA is not new. It goes "far, far back," Evans said, to early Italian and British use of orangeries, where orange and other fruit trees are protected in the winter.

Said Evans, "Simple versions of CEA actually go way back in history and have been continually advanced as new technologies have come along."

The new twist driving the trend's growth is, indeed, technology, such as advances in LED lighting and automation.

CEA is a "broad umbrella term," said Evans. The primary types of structural facilities in which CEA is commonly conducted are greenhouses and indoor vertical farming (crop production that uses supplemental lighting in a vertical space). Within a crop production environment, plants can be grown using different methods, depending on what the crop is. One example is hydroponics, the process of growing plants in sand, gravel, or liquid, with added nutrients but without soil. All types of greens and herbs, including tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers, are grown in CEA, with research being done to expand the list of viable crops to include berries. The key, Evans said, is to determine what crops can be grown efficiently and profitably.

One benefit of CEA is enhanced productivity with increased efficiencies and yield: "When done correctly, CEA can grow more food in a given area than a traditional field," said Evans.

CEA can help meet demand for local foods by allowing farmers to grow year-round and to grow anywhere, regardless of local conditions. It also prevents damage from weather, pests, and diseases. CEA provides long-term



Michael Evans, Virginia Tech's Director of the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Professor of Controlled Environment Agriculture, and Associate Director for the Controlled Environment Agriculture Innovation Center

“

CEA can grow more food in a given area than a traditional field.



CEA supports both big food businesses and local food sources.

cost savings, and it increases sustainability by conserving resources as it uses less water, fertilizer, and pesticides.

Added Evans, “CEA is a mechanism for adapting to climate change.”

CEA supports both big food businesses and local food sources. A CEA facility has the ability for controlled, year-round growth, and has the advantage of being close to markets. It offers predictable and scheduled production plus consistent quality to the customer. CEA takes out disruptive hiccups in the supply chain, said Evans.

Looking at a world view, where land is often not as available as it is in the United States, CEA helps

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BrightFarms
Culpepper County, VA
Fresh-Arrival Grocery Produce



Capital Produce
Fairfax County, VA
Local (NOVA) Produce Supplier



DeShong's Gift Back
Loudoun County, VA
Nonprofit Produce for Food Banks



Fresh Impact Farms
Arlington County, VA
Indoor Hydroponic Local Herbs

non-arable land be productive, Evans continued.

Controlled environment agriculture requires trained personnel.

"Because of its unique intersection of advanced technology and agriculture, the CEA industry provides opportunities for graduates with a variety of fields of study, including agri-business, biotech, engineering, environmental science, industry technology, manufacturing, and others," wrote Nicole Hansen, Senior Communications Manager at the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, in an email.

Virginia Tech offers horticulture degrees (undergraduate

It's Not Sideways

That photo of Plenty Unlimited (below) is correctly positioned. Yes, that's a farmer walking beside the vertical crop.

[AND THEIR PRIMARY OFFERING]



Gotham Greens
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Greenswell Growers
Goochland County, VA
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Plenty Unlimited
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120-acre Indoor, Vertical
Farming Produce Supplier



Red Sun Farms
Pulaski County, VA
45-acre Smart Greenhouse
Campus for Tomatoes



Schuyler Greens
Albemarle County, VA
Year-Round Produce,
Climate-Controlled Greenhouse



Soli Organic
Rockingham County, VA
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Sunny Farms
Virginia Beach, VA
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Thorvin
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Vegg Inc
Pulaski County, VA
Repurposed School Building,
Carbon Cycling Lettuce



Micro-tomato research growing in an indoor vertical production system



Butter head lettuce growing in an indoor vertical production system

“

CEA helps non-arable land be productive.

“

Virginia advantage for CEA: favorable location within a one-day drive of nearly half of US consumers.

and graduate) with specialization in CEA, but not all situations require a four-year degree. Virginia Tech is “quietly cranking up” workforce development initiatives, said Evans. Educational materials are being developed for certificates and badges to support CEA companies in Virginia. This helps the companies which have expressed such a need, as well as potential employees.

Virginia is “nicely positioned” with respect to CEA, Evans said. It incorporates different climate zones, as well as an appreciation for the importance of agriculture.

The state’s mid-Atlantic location with transportation routes mean economic opportunities. As Hansen wrote, “The Virginia advantage for CEA companies starts with a favorable location within a one-day drive of nearly half of U.S. consumers — far closer than traditional American farming hotspots in the Midwest and California’s Central Valley. Virginia’s central East Coast location enables companies to efficiently access major U.S. economic hubs east of the Mississippi and across the continental U.S.”

Virginia also offers a business climate regularly ranked as one of the nation’s best, buoyed by strong economic incentives, including specific CEA tax exemptions, and a tech-savvy talent pool.

Not only have companies involved in crop production moved into Virginia, but, because CEA is a “technologically intense form of agriculture,” said Evans, companies that make the technology which goes into facilities also provide jobs.

A disadvantage of CEA is high upfront and capital costs. Setting up and maintaining a large-scale CEA facility requires significant investment into advanced



Indoor vertical plant production racks at the CEA-IC



Hydroponic lettuce research at the CEA-IC using nutrient film technique systems

technology for lighting, climate control, and automated systems. The lack of variety of crops is also drawback; there is “not a lot of breeding and genetics for CEA” yet, said Evans. Another challenge is being energy efficient.

“Every photon of energy needs to go into the plant,” he said.

Evans’ School of Plant and Environmental Sciences is partnering with the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR) and the Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center to launch a Controlled Environment Agriculture Innovation Center on IALR’s campus in Danville. The Innovation Center will leverage technology and research to accelerate advancements, economic development, and regional participation in the developing industry of indoor farming.

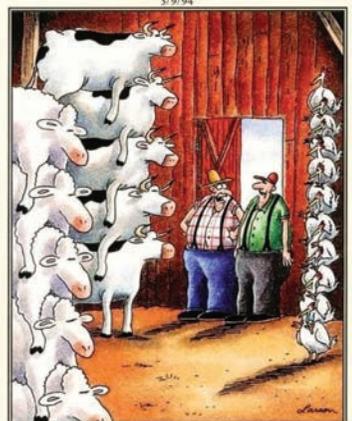
They “work hand in glove,” said Evans. “It’s a great relationship.”

Evans thinks the future of CEA will be more targeted: matching the right facilities, with the right technology, with the right crop, in the right situation.

With the value of global indoor farming expected to reach \$122.3 billion by 2030, according to a study by Grand View Research, Inc., per Virginia Tech, there has been a rapid increase in this method of farming. This is music to the ears of a lot of farmers, as the weather and seasonal disruptions were always viewed as treacherous threats to old-school farming that relied solely on nature season to season.

Farming is far more high-tech than many realize. These are not your grandfather’s farms. 

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Building Community Around the Outdoors in Wasena

By Aila Boyd

Despite a rocky start when he took over Roanoke Mountain Adventures in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, owner Jeff Todd reports that the business is now as strong as ever and primed for future growth.

Jeff Todd was perhaps an unusual candidate to become an outdoor entrepreneur given that he was an attorney turned baseball writer from Northern Virginia. He later started to connect with nature and mountains while living in Denver, Colorado. When it came time to move back east to be closer to family, Todd found Roanoke to be the perfect place to call home. “We wanted a place that had a direct connection to the outdoors,” he remembered of 2016. “We chose to live in Wasena because it has the greenway and river right here.”

Throughout his first four years of living in the neighborhood, Todd and his family were frequent patrons of Roanoke Mountain Adventures, which at the time was an outdoor adventure, rental and consignment operation. When the opportunity to buy the business presented itself, Todd jumped on it.

His acquisition of the business came after it had been closed for two months because

of COVID shutdowns, but Todd reopened it in early June 2020. “We just opened the doors to see what would happen,” he said. “We found a lot of interest in the outdoors.” He’s also involved with the VOICe citizens group Valley Business FRONT wrote about last month, which has organized recently to help promote and fund local outdoor assets.

Learning to run the business has been a journey for Todd. Having been a litigator and baseball writer, he was used to analyzing decisions, not actually making them. “When I bought the business, I didn’t really know what I wanted it to be. I knew that I loved it for what it was, and I love what it was for our community, but I didn’t have a cohesive vision for what I was going to make it into beyond that,” he said.

His goal now is to lower the barrier of entry for people who are interested in the outdoors, especially among groups that are historically underrepresented in the outdoor



Bethany and Jeff Todd

space, while also providing jobs to those who want to work in the outdoor industry.

As the years have gone by, Todd has continued to push the business forward without taking on debt, going from two full-time employees to five full-time employees now, along with a range of seasonal part-time employees. He's also expanded the offerings, including additional

retail and the assumption of now defunct bike shop Downshift Bike's assets.

The business currently has three prongs: a full-service bike shop, outdoor gear shop, and outdoor adventures, which includes things like the popular e-bike tours.

One of the essential parts of the business Todd has leaned into is the idea of fostering

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a sense of community, which can be difficult in an age when online retail dominates. “The business would have fizzled if we didn’t have a community,” he said. “It’s a homebase for people. They know they can chat with someone. It’s sort of a central meeting place. I view it as something we need to foster. It’s a very personal business. If you know us, we know your name and we know what you’re into.”

By establishing a community around the business, Todd said, he’s developed a group

of core customers or “apostles” in the area who recommend the business to others. This, he noted, helps establish a personal connection before someone even walks through the door.

Although Todd views the business as being “mature” at this point, he still sees potential opportunities, especially neighborhood-based ones. He pointed to the Wasena Bridge project, new bike and skate park and proposed in-river park as being potential developments the business can lean into



by expanding its river adventure and bike offerings. “We have a lot of synergy happening,” he said. “I think we have the chance to build something really special and unique here.”

The shop is invaluable to the larger Roanoke community because of its deep reach into so many sectors of the local economy, according to Marc Nelson, director of the city of Roanoke’s Department of Economic Development. “Whether you’re renting gear, planning a tour, selling on consignment or in the market for outdoor items, RMA has an approachable, knowledgeable staff that understands your needs, and, better yet, can help you afford them,” he said.

Pete Eshelman, director of Roanoke Outside, agreed, noting that Roanoke Mountain Adventures helps the region leverage two of its greatest outdoor assets—the Roanoke River and Roanoke River Greenway. He said, “RMA has become much more than just an outdoor store; they’re a community staple and gathering place for the community, an advocate for growing the outdoor economy, and their commitment to providing unique experiences for residents and visitors is unparalleled. We’re lucky to have them.”

Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge also views it as being beneficial to the work it’s doing to attract visitors to the region. “As a destination known for our outdoor amenities, it’s important for visitors to have a reliable outfitter for their paddling, tubing and/or cycling adventures,” Kathryn Lucas, director of public relations, said. “RMA has been that outfitter for Roanoke for several years. Roanoke Mountain Adventures is an incredible asset for our region. When Visit VBR hosts travel writers, we often send them to RMA for an e-bike tour. They always come back raving about their experience and it has resulted in several positive travel articles highlighting Roanoke.”

However, Todd doesn’t want to grow the business simply for the sake of growth. “The goal is not for me to be able to suck dollars out to pad my own pocket, but to build out so people that work for the business have an opportunity to grow into a bigger role and earn more money,” he said.

The business, he said, will be aided if Roanoke continues to promote human-powered transportation. “There’s a huge opportunity for Roanoke to be a forward-thinking city in a way that not only is business-positive but also serves everyone that already lives here.” 





FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

Executive Summary:

As we reach the midpoint of the year, now is the ideal time for a thorough mid-year financial review. This ensures alignment with your financial goals and facilitates necessary adjustments to optimize your financial well-being. Here are key strategies for the second half of the year.

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

Mid-year money tune-up: strategies to hit your financial goals by year's end

Review Your Financial Goals - Start by revisiting your initial financial goals for the year. Assess your progress towards major purchases, debt reduction, or specific investment milestones. Determine if adjustments are needed to stay on track. Use this mid-year review to reset your goals to ensure they are realistic and aligned with your long-term objectives.

Assess Your Investment Portfolio - Market conditions can change significantly over six months, so review your investment portfolio's performance. Ensure your assets align with your risk tolerance and investment horizon. Consider rebalancing to maintain your desired asset allocation. Monitor market trends and economic indicators that may impact your investments in the coming months.

Reevaluate Your Budget and Spending - Much can change in six months, including your income and expenses. Review your monthly budget to identify areas for cost-cutting or fund reallocation. Track your spending habits and seek opportunities to save. Even small adjustments can significantly enhance your overall financial picture.

Tax Planning Strategies - Mid-year is also an excellent time for tax planning. Assess your tax withholdings to ensure you're not overpaying or underpaying. Maximize contributions to tax-advantaged accounts like IRAs and 401(k)s. Stay informed about any changes in tax laws that may affect you and take advantage of deductions and credits that can reduce your tax liability.

Emergency Fund Check-Up - A robust emergency fund is vital for financial stability. Assess your savings status; experts advise having three to six months' living expenses saved. If your fund is insufficient, prioritize building it to guard against unforeseen financial challenges.

Insurance Review - Life changes such as marriage, the birth of a child, or purchasing a home can affect your insurance needs. Review your health, life, property, and disability insurance policies to ensure you have adequate coverage. Adjust your policies as necessary to address any gaps.

Update Your Estate Plan - Ensure your estate planning documents, such as wills and trusts, are current. Verify that your beneficiary designations are current and accurately reflect your intentions. Proper estate planning safeguards your assets and ensures peace of mind for you and your loved ones.

Set New Goals for the Second Half of the Year - Finally, use this mid-year check-up to set or refine financial goals for the remainder of the year. Make sure your goals are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Having clear goals helps maintain focus and motivation.

Conducting a mid-year financial review is a proactive measure toward securing your financial success. Take decisive steps to review, adjust, and strategize for a prosperous second half of the year. For expert guidance through this process, consider consulting with a financial advisor. 

“
” Consider rebalancing to maintain your desired asset allocation.



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TXTUR photos

TXTUR: the art of building furniture with a dedication to craftsmanship

By Gene Marrano

Making eclectic, customized furniture creates a unique niche for this three-generation family-owned company.



Greg Terrill grew up in the institutional furniture manufacturing business his family founded, Chervan, Inc., located in southeast Roanoke City after the company started in Bedford almost 90 years ago. Before that, his grandfather made chair frames in Ohio. Then at some point he decided he wanted to take furniture to the next level – upscale, customized, sustainable. That led to the founding of TXTUR, also located in southeast, this time not on the edge of Vinton but in the 9th Street Southeast

industrial park, which is slated to become the Riverdale mixed use development project by Ed Walker and his partners, a process that could take up to several decades according to Walker.

TXTUR branched out to open a retail showroom last year inside the old Fire Station#1 in downtown Roanoke on Church Avenue, where it also opened an upscale eatery. Stock Bistro & Bar, and a top-floor 7-room boutique hotel furnished by – naturally – TXTUR. Now Terrill, the



Greg Terrill at center

CEO, has taken the brand to Richmond, in a restored building that once housed the Seaboard Air Line railroad station, complete with an 8,400 square foot showroom.

“While Roanoke is home, we love Richmond,” says Terrill, whose brother Steve (also a TXTUR partner) is the location manager in Richmond. “I have been looking at the 604 Hull Street building for years,” says Greg Terrill, “and this Richmond project perfectly fits our values.”

Greg Terrill says they wanted to “be

closer to the customer,” and TXTUR fit the bill. The pandemic had something to do with its birth as well in 2020; as the commercial business slowed down, he wanted to keep “the 200 great craftspeople,” working. Taking the middle man out of the loop – which tends to cheapen the final product he contends – meant a better product and more satisfied customers. Sustaining the art of fine furniture manufacturing in the U.S. is another part of the TXTUR mission.

Like with clothing, furniture fashions change quickly – Terrill says Americans discard 120 million tons of their



furnishings every year. “It’s rough on the planet and it’s not very sustainable.” Creating more timeless designs that people will hold on to longer can slow that trend. That means they can choose colors and fabrics for example. “We try to give [customers] a clean palate.” Between 55,000 and 60,000 pieces of furniture were produced at the Roanoke Chervan plant last year, where everything is crafted – all of the TXTUR pieces are customized to an extent.

The head of product development is a young industrial designer named Alex Monroe, who came from California to study at Virginia Tech and stayed. Other Tech students helped launch two successful product launches. “It’s been a great partnership.” TXTUR is vertically integrated (hence running Stock and a hotel) and recycles foam and other materials for furniture, even foam-filled ottomans.

Terrill took a pause from Chervan and moved to New York to enter the banking business, but realized that, “there’s something beautiful about making something that’s real and tangible. I love working with the craftspeople.” He came back to Roanoke. Many employees stay for over a decade, some have been there for decades. Adding TXTUR to the product mix, besides the institutional furniture made for banks, hotel lobbies, etc. has attracted “bright young people,” to Chervan/TXTUR.

At first Terrill thought TXTUR might be an online-only spinoff, but he realized it would be difficult for people to appreciate the craftsmanship involved while browsing on their laptop or phone screen. The reaction of people who came to the plant and sat in the pieces produced – which usually led to a sale – convinced the TXTUR team that a showroom was the best option, as he puts it, “face to face.”

They looked at Richmond first for but then the old Fire Station came along. Even the table utensils at Stock come from what he calls the last remaining U.S. manufacturer of those products. The Stock kitchens are open style right



in the middle of restaurants; he wants people to appreciate the craftsmanship of those making their meals.

TXTUR says local partners like Fink’s Jewelers and Ed Walker (at a Danville development project) have made him grateful, “that the community has really reached out to TXTUR.” Terrill is excited about Walker’s Riverdale project, saying he walks the sprawling property and can already feel “what the place can become,” with a mix of apartments, artists’ lofts and retail. “I think its great plan ... great for Roanoke. There’s a beauty in an industrial space.”

That describes the new Richmond location, which is also under redevelopment as well says Terrill: “I think they can become amazing spaces.” He thinks cities the size of Richmond are the “sweet spot,” and a key to future growth. After five years, TXTUR appears to be on the right trajectory. “I think we’ve learned a lot [about] making people feel at home.” 



WOMEN WHO LEAD

By Sherri Winesett

Executive Summary:
Everybody want to rule the world, as the song goes. Can women do it better?

Sheri Winesett is Chief Operating Officer of John Mattone Global and the author of "Transparent Leadership for Women Who Mean Business." Reach her at sheri@sheriwinesett.com

The transparent leader - part one

Attention female rockstars and empire builders: research shows that there are certain traits that women possess that contribute to the effectiveness of women in leading teams: empathy and emotional intelligence, communication skills, collaborative leadership style, resilience and adaptability, diverse perspectives, empowerment of others, integrity, and ethics. I have observed it, and there are studies out there that prove it. So, why do most women temper their unique abilities to lead instead of unleashing their full potential?

The fact is that women have many hats they wear, and most do it well even if they feel like they are drowning. Your multiple hats are actually a superpower, and you can leverage them in your professional career to lead others. Instead of letting all the hats you wear weigh you down, this series will show you how they accelerate your ability to lead and may shift your perspective on your impact as a woman in leadership, a leader of champions who will leave a lasting legacy. You have what it takes. You are more powerful than you know.

You see, women naturally possess all the qualities of a transparent leader, and being a transparent leader in any business, whether your own or someone else's, is a huge responsibility that can sometimes feel heavy. However, you'll find the rewards extraordinary by learning and executing the seven keys: 360-degree Accountability & Awareness, Integrity, Transparency, Vision, Congruence, Alignment, and Measurement.

- Challenges are solved much faster.
- Work relationships are more authentic.
- Team members trust their leader and are more loyal to the company.
- The team becomes a high-performing, predictable engine.

People want transparency in leadership. Have you ever thought about what it would be like for everyone to be as excited to go to work on Monday morning as they were to go to happy hour on Friday night? Amazing, right? Who doesn't want that? It is possible. We just need some guidance on how to obtain that. I am excited to share with you this series on the 7 Keys to Unlock Your Leadership Potential as a Transparent Leader. I hope you'll join me on the journey and pay it forward.

You were born with leadership greatness in you, and I want to help you empower others to achieve their highest potential while becoming the best version of yourself. If you've lost your mojo, you can get it back! If you're lacking direction, stay tuned. If you're just curious about the 7 Keys and want to learn something new, you're in the right place. Whether you are the CEO, an entrepreneur, a business owner, a seasoned executive, or a stay-at-home mom with a side hustle, you can step into your power and be the influential leader the world needs you to be. The next generation and the future of work depend on us. 

RBTC announces launch of National Emerging Technology Conference

In November, the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council will host the first Disrupt UP Conference. The two-day event (Nov. 14-15) will bring brightest minds in tech together to explore the biggest ideas in innovation. The start of the annual conference is big and bold with all things AI. The reason? RBTC sees limitless potential of AI across industries and is ready to position the region at the forefront of innovation and application in the tech and life science sectors.

The conference is a continuation of our mission to promote the growth of the Roanoke-Blacksburg technology community. Our innovation, entrepreneurship, and talent assets are world-class and Disrupt Up will provide another meaningful opportunity to lead the national and even global innovation conversation.

RBTC is a driving force behind innovation in technology and life science and the new conference reflects that commitment. The conference will present the most innovative thinkers in AI and offer an intensive dive into the latest advancements, trends, and applications shaping the future of AI across industries. Attendees will have the opportunity to learn from visionary speakers, participate in thought-provoking panels and connect with fellow innovators leveraging AI in their industries.

AI has profound potential to accelerate progress. We've considered a wide range of topics while designing this conference from cutting-edge AI technologies to ethical considerations and real-world applications.

Hundreds of interested innovators and entrepreneurs are expected to attend to gain insights ranging from generative AI, precision medicine, startup innovation and more. Participants will be able to connect with like-minded professionals, explore new partnership and collaboration possibilities and gain valuable expertise that could shape the future of their careers.

The conference is the latest in the growth trend putting Roanoke and Blacksburg on the US innovation map. The region is home to over 4,000 tech workers; academic universities; and a thriving research, healthcare, and technology culture. In the past 5 years, 3.5 times more technology patents have come from the area over the national average. The conference, paired with RBTC's robust talent development program, positions Roanoke-Blacksburg as a top place to develop talent and lead innovation on a national scale.

Disrupt Up is November 14-15 and registration is open. Early-bird pricing is available through July 31, so don't wait. Visit RBTC to register and join the conversation. 



INNOVATION

By Taylor Spellman,
RBTC Director

Executive Summary:

AI is a hot topic. You can't open your computer without encountering an opinion. From your cousin on social media to experts in Silicon Valley, everyone's talking about artificial intelligence. And this year, we are amplifying the conversation with a groundbreaking national technology conference.



Submitted photos

Dr Lisa Uherick VTCSOM

Making health care employee mental health a priority

By Shawn Nowlin

It is normal for adults to experience burnout, stress and job dissatisfaction at work. Some fields experience those conditions more than others. Research indicates that physicians are severely overworked and often prioritize the needs of others, even at their own expense.

In years past, the conventional thinking was that if people suppressed their emotions and didn't think too much about it, said issue would eventually go away. The value of a mentally, healthy workplace cannot be overstated. Nearly one in five employees, according to a recent National Gallup Survey, say their workplace environment is toxic.

Today, workplace well-being, an environment that actively promotes contentment that benefits both the employees and employer, has never been more emphasized. Whenever a solution is required to fix a problem, Dr. Lisa Uherick likes to think outside of the box. Four years ago, she was hired as the Carilion Clinic's Pediatric Emergency Physician. While observing the emergency department

during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, she realized just how much the care team was grappling with certain realities.

With the backing of leadership, Uherick was able to construct a program to encourage individuals to take better care of themselves, both personally and professionally. In a matter of weeks, a number of staff personnel began getting acknowledged for their efforts and given opportunities for valuable community connections.

"The further along that I got in my profession, the more I could see the people who worked in healthcare needed more support. As rewarding as the career is, it is also difficult in ways that it shouldn't be. Anything that

I can do to help more people do this job effectively is really meaningful," said Uherick who in January was promoted to a position as the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) Chief Well-Being Officer.

"Our motto is, 'We take care of ourselves and each other, maximizing our capacity to heal others.' If you don't put your healthcare workforce first, there is probably not going to be the right people to carry out patient-focused care. With the right mindset, I truly believe that anyone can be happy in any career," she added.

A native of the Badger State, Uherick is an alumna of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Medical College of Wisconsin. After medical school, she moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, for her pediatric residency. Uherick then returned to Milwaukee for her Pediatric ER Fellowship before accepting a job at the Carilion Clinic in 2007 as a faculty member of the emergency medicine residency training program.

When leading a culture of well-being at a medical school, Uherick noted, you really have to put the primary focus on making sure that the atmosphere is healthy. "You have to weave well-being into the culture of an organization for it to have any real impact. There is no way that a couple of people can make a difference without any system changes."

Unsurprisingly, employee mental health services have become a billion-dollar industry. Uherick is confident that if people practice workplace wellbeing, they will see results. VTCSOM Communications Director Josh Meyer says, "Lisa has a proven track record



of helping patients as a physician and with the many other hats she wears. Because we are training the physicians of tomorrow at the medical school, having someone like Lisa is so important because she can talk to them about the challenges they will certainly face trying to help others, such as regularly being underappreciated."

The oldest of Uherick's three teenage children is a first-year student at Virginia Tech student. Explaining why she ultimately chose the healthcare field over other professions, Uherick said, "there are a few reasons. I've always been a high achiever, and I'm a naturally nurturing person. I was an athlete all through school, so many thought that I would go the Orthopedics route. In the back of my mind though, I always knew that I had more to offer. I love what I do because I get to impact the lives of so many individuals." 

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LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Carrie Cousins

Executive Summary:

Is your company being marketed to its full potential?

Where's the exit (plan)?

When you get on a plane, one of the first things the flight attendant does is make you aware of the exits, including the emergency exit. Whether you know what to do in the case of said emergency or not, you do know the way out.

This is an important lesson in business and marketing as well. We all expect smooth sailing, but it's smart strategy to think about contingencies. No matter how great your marketing plan was, and no matter how amazing the initial strategy looked, you need an exit plan. This plan will help you determine when a strategy isn't working and if you need to pivot.

How do you know when your marketing plan is not working?

I've worked on an in-house marketing team and worked with agency partners. Now I work with marketing teams as the agency partner. One thing is the same – all these signs point toward the exit.

- Your return on investment is undefined. It's important to understand how marketing and advertising spend is impacting your business. You should have a target return on investment goal to help manage spending and ensure you know if the plan is working in the way you hoped.
- The goal-to-results ratio is out of whack. Whether you are trying to generate leads, sell widgets, or get more people to read your blog, consistent marketing efforts will generate consistent results over time. Sharp spikes or dips in results can happen periodically, but continued oddities are a definite red flag.
- Changes in technology create a need to try something new. There are two elements of technology that can impact your marketing strategy – changes in technology at your business or in your industry and changes to marketing tools or software (Google, social media, email, privacy regulations, etc.). Staying on top of these changes can ensure that you keep things running smoothly, efficiently, and in a way that looks and feels modern for your customers.
- There's been an overhaul of business unit or changes in company leadership. Whenever there are major personnel changes, marketing philosophy may also change. What may have been a smooth ride before could start to feel bumpy. This is somewhat natural, but can be troublesome if it lasts for an extended period.
- You've tried to communicate the need for a new strategy/direction and don't feel heard.

- The relationship isn't working. There are some instances when you just don't connect, or things don't feel right; your marketing partner should be just that – a partner. You should be connected in a way that benefits both of your businesses.

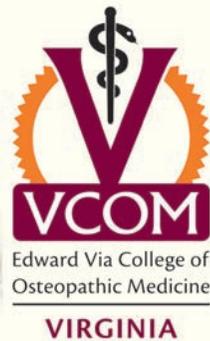
At the end of the day, we all want to work with people we know and trust. We want to surround ourselves with others who make us better and create amazing things. I have clients that I just want to be around because they are good people. (And I hope that feeling is mutual.)

It can be hard to quantify, but when these relationships are in place, you never even glance toward the exit row. 🚪

“Sharp spikes or dips... can happen... but continued oddities are a definite red flag.”

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Submitted photos

Jim Schaal



Long time caterer finds his recipe for success

By Shawn Nowlin

There is something truly admirable about someone who sets out to accomplish a lofty goal and, through a tireless work ethic and the help of others, ends up exceeding his own expectations.

In 1990, Jim Schaal first entered the catering business, promising himself that he would not get outworked. Today, more than three decades later, that objective remains the same. Schaal has spent nearly 35 years doing what he loves as a profession: delivering as a caterer for different clients throughout the Roanoke Valley. The owner of Schaal's Catering & Events loves it when he gets asked, "Can you tell me more about your company?"

"Some caterers just roll in and roll out. They place the food down and that's it. What I do is full service," he said. "Whether you are part of a wedding, business meeting, celebration of life or something else, at the end of the day, I tell people there are five points of view. Number one is the client's point of

view, followed by financial, venue, my point of view, which means nothing, and most importantly, the guests."

Rental costs for the Train Station Event Venue at 1402 S Jefferson Street (the old and restored Virginia Railway Station) vary depending on the month. With the ability to comfortably serve at least 150 people, a breakdown from April through August is as follows: \$250 (Monday to Thursday, daytime), \$500 (Monday to Thursday, evening), \$1,250 (Friday evening), \$2,500 (Saturday, all day) and \$1,250 (Sunday, all day). There's also a tricked-out Airstream trailer available for smaller parties as a rental.

"It's three pieces to the puzzle. The passenger



station is on the right-hand side, the breezeway is in the middle and the building to the left is the museum where we've attached a whiskey lounge to it," he said. The Kyle House in Fincastle, another venue that Schaal runs, does about 80 weddings a year.

Born in Milwaukee, Schaal's family moved to Salem when he was in the third grade. Being able to share his talents with others has always made the Salem High alumnus happy. At an early age, it was clear that he had a bright future in the hospitality industry. Schaal credits two people – former Director of Food Services at Hollins University Bill Wrobel and longtime Roanoke caterer Lib Wilhelm – for providing great mentorship at a time when he needed it the most.

"Bill was my first mentor. He taught me quite a bit when I first got into the industry," he said. "When I met Lib, she was in her 70s. She took me from institutional catering, which I was initially doing, to the home. She made everything from scratch, which really had a lasting impact on me." Schaal previously was employed through Corporate Catering and Creative Cuisine Catering. When he left to start his own company, he knew he had to create something that would truly resonate with people. (It starts with often very creative, eclectic and tasty offerings.)

"Twenty years ago, I hired an outstanding

marketing guy. I quickly realized that it wasn't about 'me.' It's truly about 'we,' which is why we changed the name from Jim Schaal Catering to Schaal's Catering & Events," he said. Continuing, "we were a corporate caterer for 25 years. We had Metamorphosis in downtown Roanoke, we were at Hunting Hills Country Club for years, and we had a place called 'Schaal's on Campbell.' Having been around for so long, we have cultivated some great relationships in the community."

If one is in business long enough, chances are they will experience several highs and lows. Overcoming professional adversity is a lot easier when one is surrounded by supportive individuals. At times throughout the year, Schaal's requests are endless. In other instances, the calls are de minimis. "Sacrifices are not always easy, but are often required when you have lofty goals and dreams," he said.

Schaal says he employs about 20 part-time people and six full-time individuals. On average, 700 people are served weekly. Asked what he loves most about his business, he said, "Easily, the smiles. You have different kinds of bookings. It's not really about how many events you book per se, it's truly about how many people you are feeding." More information can be found at schaalsevents.com and thetrainstationeventvenue.com. 



Submitted Photos



Carilion drone project >

Carilion Clinic and a company called DroneUp have completed the second phase of a partnership that could help streamline the delivery of medical supplies to frontline care teams in the Carilion network. Paul Davenport is Vice-President of Emergency Services at Carilion Clinic: “we’re constantly seeking ways to support frontline teams, allowing them to maximize time at the bedside and prioritize the critical work of caring for our patients,” said Paul Davenport, vice president of Emergency Services for Carilion.

During Phase 2 teams assessed ways to

streamline the drone delivery process for Carilion Clinic. The drones will launch from the Carilion warehouse on Franklin Road, pick up packages at the Riverside campus, and deliver them to about eight locations within the healthcare system. During Carilion’s proof-of-concept installation, staff were able to send and retrieve drone-delivered items from the secured box at their convenience. The drone flew from a remote location and autonomously secured the package before flying to its destination. This deployment marks a significant advancement for inter-campus medical delivery, benefitting patient care through improvements to the speed and efficiency of both medical supply and prescription transport across a 10-mile zone.



The Y coming to Tanglewood >

The YMCA of Virginia's Blue Ridge has announced the opening of the YMCA at Tanglewood, which is projected to open in late 2024 at Tanglewood Mall in Roanoke County. The new space, located on the upper level of Tanglewood Mall, will have over 47,000 square feet of space, including eight pickleball courts, a state-of-the-art Wellness Center, a hot yoga studio, two group exercise studios, two saunas, a children's programming space, a "Stay

and Play" area for kids, and a community gathering area.

"By partnering with Tanglewood Mall, we can live true to our mission to focus on youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility in an area we don't currently serve," said **Mark Johnson**, President and CEO of the YMCA of Virginia's Blue Ridge. "The YMCA's investment in Tanglewood aligns with the County's strategy to reimagine the Route 419 corridor by focusing on redevelopment, enhancing the quality of life, transportation improvements, and supporting community health and well-being," said **Phil North**, Chair of the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors.



SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

**By Sam Sokolove,
Senior Consultant,
Building Beloved
Communities LLC.**

Executive Summary:
*A diverse workforce
enables companies
to connect with the
consumers they serve
authentically.*

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

Why DEI still matters for Virginia's businesses

In recent months, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts have faced increased scrutiny and backlash in Virginia's political sphere. Governor Glenn Youngkin controversially removed "equity" from the title of the Commonwealth's diversity office, while current diversity chief Martin Brown has denounced DEI as "dead." These developments have caused some business owners and HR managers to question whether prioritizing DEI is prudent amid the contentious climate.

While the political climate may be contentious, dismissing or deprioritizing DEI would be a shortsighted decision. DEI is both a socially responsible commitment and a strategic choice that can enhance a company's ability to attract top talent, understand its customer base, and foster an innovative workplace culture. As Bloomberg Opinion's Claire Suddath stated, "Eliminating the programs and teams that focus on [DEI] may make it even harder [for companies] to cultivate diverse workplaces."

Extensive research underscores the compelling business case for diversity. McKinsey's 2023 report found that companies ranking in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 39% more likely to outperform industry peers on profitability. An identical 39% likelihood of outperformance was observed for racial and ethnic diversity. The report affirms, "There have been far-reaching changes in the business environment over the past few years, yet companies with diverse leadership teams continue to be associated with higher financial returns."

Beyond the bottom line, a diverse workforce enables companies to connect with the consumers they serve authentically. As Suddath explains, "The easiest way [for companies] to know who their customers are is to hire people who resemble those customers." Conversely, a lack of diversity has repeatedly led to product failures when companies overlook the perspectives of key demographics, such as Amazon's AI recruiting tool that had to be abandoned after it exhibited bias against female job candidates because the system was trained primarily on male resumes.

While it's true that addressing DEI requires navigating shifting landscapes, abandoning such initiatives is not just an unwise overreaction but a potential risk. As Axios' Emily Peck cautioned in January, "The danger is that DEI becomes so watered down that you can't actually do the work." Entrepreneur contributor Murali Nethi echoed this sentiment, asserting that DEI efforts "are good for business and even better for society. The communities that we serve are not homogenous. The marketing material that we create should be an accurate reflection of that world."

Forward-thinking companies are exploring creative avenues to uphold DEI, such as reframing it under banners like "employee wellness" or making DEI a foundational principle from day one. Others are fostering inclusion through employee resource groups, mentorship opportunities, and representative marketing strategies.

Ultimately, DEI transcends metrics or symbolism—it is a vital imperative for understanding customers, unleashing innovative potential within teams, and demonstrating corporate values that positively impact society. While Virginia's political currents have created uncertainty, businesses and HR professionals would be wise to persist in prioritizing DEI. The long-term viability of their organizations may hinge on it. 

“DEI transcends metrics or symbolism.”



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THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary: *Downtown Roanoke has not had a community theatre for years – NOT the professional equity theater that is Mill Mountain (where actors brought in from out of town are paid), which I enjoy immensely, but volunteer community theatre where no one gets paid; actors, directors, stage managers, costumers, set builders, ushers etc. who do it for the love of staging live plays.*

Getting a non-profit off the ground can be a BEAR at times

Exit, Pursued By A Bear – the Bear Theatre for short – launches this month with Pulitzer prize-winning Crimes of the Heart July 19-20, and July 26-28. It started as an idea a year or so ago, long before I became involved as a board member, and comes to fruition this month. Launching a non-profit 501c3 is a tough slog and Bear President Angela McNeil, an actor herself and a Missouri transplant whom I've been in productions with, has put in many, many hours over the past months to do the paperwork. Other board members have been tasked with various duties they often juggle with day jobs – the ones that pay the mortgage.

"Starting a nonprofit is tedious," McNeil says candidly. "There are so many interlocking parts that I never expected. You do one thing only to discover there's something else that needs to be completed first. But all that said, non-profits are passion projects. You learn what you have to, and you plow ahead because you believe in your mission. The vision of what we're creating keeps me energized. And just when I've started to get tired, some stranger or old acquaintance pops in with encouraging words or financial support. It's like fuel to a fire."

There was figuring out which 501c3 category the IRS would allow The Bear to be classified as, getting a Roanoke City business license, seeking a sales tax exemption, launching a website, Facebook and Instagram. Creating the graphics and assembling our first program (kudos to Angela's husband Patrick for his skills there), getting quotes on liability insurance (a must have) and storage units for sets/props, crafting a Manual of Operating Procedures handbook, drawing up pitch letters to potential sponsors and program advertisers, creating contracts for new works not yet published (The Bear seeks to do at least one new play every year by a Virginia playwright).

Assembling a list of volunteers, putting on a successful first fundraiser/awareness event, marching as a theatre company in several parades; putting out news releases and getting several spots on TV/radio to promote The Bear. Selling a vision as "Downtown Roanoke's Community Theatre," the first such venue in almost a decade (based at Community High School on Campbell Avenue, which is collaborating with Exit, Pursued By A Bear), reaching out to downtown businesses and residents that this is a quality of life asset from which they can benefit. As in, make it a day (or night) downtown, cap off or begin your downtown adventure (if seeing a matinee) at The Bear.

continued on Page 38

How 'bout CEB?

Our FRONTcover story on CEA (controlled environment agriculture) is fascinating to me, because in a sense, it is “playing Mother Nature.” For centuries and since the dawn of time, farmers (and back when many societies were purely agrarian) relied on the weather and natural environment for crop production. Growing seasons were either good or bad—and there just wasn’t much you could do if it was a bad season due to too much or too little water and sunshine, or if a natural disaster, such as drought, flooding, tornados, and hurricanes hit the farmland. Add to that pests, insect infestations, blights, and diseases—and you were pretty much at the mercy of Demeter (goddess of agriculture and harvest) or other deity, chance, fate, or luck, whether your crops would yield from season to season.

With advancements in science, biology, chemistry, engineering, and technology, CEA helps us skirt past some natural elements as we manage our food sourcing in smaller and protected spaces, with faster distribution, and all year long. The “Farmer’s Almanac” is not just retro; it’s been replaced by apps and relegated to pure nostalgia (unless you’re just a hobbyist or back-yard-gardener, of course).

So, what if you could control your business at this level? Controlled Environment Business.

Well, we do try.

Though we can’t ensure success nearly at the level CEA does (and even it’s not completely foolproof); there are some basic controls that are accessible to business owner/operators. Some protective and sustainable measures that fortify a business to a much better degree than having none.

With CEB, your harvest may not be assured at the level of lettuce in an automated greenhouse; but the percentage of likelihood of success can be improved. We have records (call it a business almanac) that show this.

The two main types of CEB are operational and strategic. I was going to write out the list and describe examples; but there is a super old set of guidelines that are as valid today as they were when first introduced. Whether you recall the little business mantra or not, every business owner/operator should have top awareness of the “Three P’s” (or even better, the more expanded “Five P’s”). These are necessary fertilizing principles to have in place in order to keep your crops (product or service) a’growin.’

continued on Page 39



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

Think of your business like a farmer, your product or service like your crop.



Angela McNeil

Actors in Crimes of the Heart at a mid-June rehearsal

Marrano / There's something

from Page 36

"One special thing about The Bear is how diverse the backgrounds and skills are of our board members," adds McNeil. "We each bring something unique to the table, so there's depth to our conversations and ideas. We have a great team."

Those who come out to see Crimes of the Heart this month, or maybe Arsenic and Old Lace in October, or two other plays early next year (see beartheatre.com), will hopefully enjoy what they experience and will come back to support this venture. Behind the scenes is a realization that launching a non-profit or any other small business venture for that matter requires a good team leader, teamwork, lots of due diligence, work arounds and course corrections – but above all passion and a vision as to where you are headed. Now, enjoy the show ... and please turn off those cell phones. 📵

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Field / On Tap

from Page 37

PRODUCT, PRICE, PROMOTION, PLACE, AND PEOPLE.

And yes, to a great extent, all of these are “controls” that you can manage.

You can “let nature take its course” and hope for the best. But one competitive storm—or supply chain drought—or technology replacement tornado—or regulatory flood—or internal blight—or global pandemic—can wipe it all away and destroy your business. In one tragedy or in little bit-by-bit increments, eating away your efforts.

So, at the very least, revisit the “Five P’s” and check how much control you have in those areas. If any of them are fluttering out there in the wild with no regard or your attention, your crop is threatened and susceptible to fail, my friend.

Bring your little processes inside where it’s a little safer. Feed and nourish them. Give them light, adequate water, and the best soil you can manage. Be smart with your farm.

It’s tough out there. 

“Your harvest may not be assured at the level of lettuce in an automated greenhouse; but the percentage of likelihood of success can be improved.”



July 13



The Worx

July 19



Glen Shelton

Aug 3



Big Daddy Ray

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.

Fight back

Never Pay the First Bill: And Other Ways to Fight the Health Care System and Win (Portfolio; 2021) by Marshall Allen is one of those books you immediately wish you'd read sooner after you crack into it. It's eye-opening, well-organized, easy-to-follow, and motivating. Not only is this must-read chock full of useful information, it's also well-written. (Written by the recently deceased investigative journalist for ProPublica, Marshall Allen. May he rest in peace.)

At the start, I couldn't tell if the point was just to outrage me or empower me. (I think the answer is both.) Allen incorporates real stories of abuse and trauma inflicted by healthcare providers and health insurance companies. After your blood starts boiling, he then digs into how the victims fought back and reigned victorious. He provides tangible resources and factors not only the individual, but the employers as well. This results in convincing you why you should even muster up the energy to fight the good fight and work together to change our unjust healthcare system.

He clearly explains the business side of healthcare; but more importantly, he equips you to look out for yourself and your loved ones, prevent billing headaches, and resolve them. There are instructions that can be easily applied for every medical bill you receive and more detailed, aggressive instructions for when you detect fraud and are not receiving proper outcomes from your allegations.

I read this book via Kindle, but as a new

“ ”
I couldn't tell if the point was just to outrage me or empower me. (I think... both.)

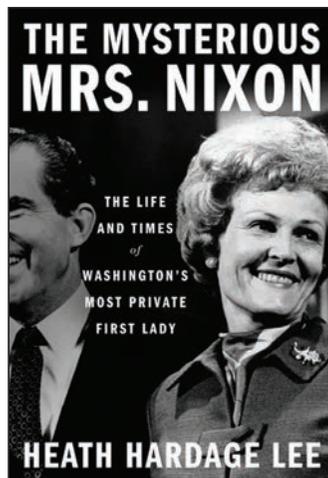
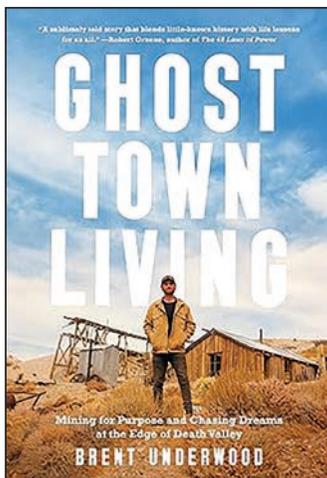
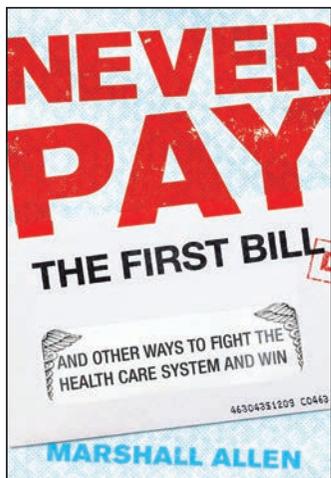
mom, I will be purchasing a physical copy as I have a feeling I'll be referring back to it quite frequently...

—Kelsey Monahan

Who willingly chooses this?

What is the opposite of sitting back in a hammock on a tropical island, enjoying a cocktail, watching the sunset, and thinking about nothing? I tell you what it is: it's Brent Underwood's *Ghost Town Living* (Harmony; 2024). Do you know someone who intentionally chooses the hard road, guaranteed stress, near impossible challenges day-after-day... when he doesn't have to? What a narrative. This dude buys Cerro Gordo—a desolate abandoned mining operation and “cowboy movie town” in the edge of Death Valley—as a—get this—essentially, a “fixer upper.” A dirt project to rebuild and restore. Here's a guy who sticks with a monumental problem that will require years of blood, sweat, tears, money, and hard labor—and it's so overwhelming, I found myself almost unwilling to even stick with the story itself. He tackles all the things I despise: the desert (ok to visit, not to live); mining shafts (if it's under the earth and requires lights and ropes, no thanks); the harshest weather and environments (droughts, floods, winds); and the constant need for repairs and maintenance (making things is fun; always fixing on them... not so much).

The story is so unimaginable to me, I absorbed it. However, I do think in the format it was written that it would be better as one of



those serial podcasts or similar media (which, I think it is also available that way); because the mix between actual reporting on his project development versus philosophizing about it was a bit unbalanced. A challenge like this is certainly going to infiltrate your spirit—and I do want to hear what it does to your soul; but those instances went a little too circular and repetitive at times. The work descriptions (like getting to the water table nearly a thousand feet below surface; and the task of getting concrete up the rough road to the hotel job site) were simply fascinating. I did note Underwood associates with Ryan Holiday, a well-known leader in stoicism... that makes perfect sense.

—Tom Field

Plastic Pat no more

There's no doubt that author Heath Hardage Lee is (or became during her research) a big fan of Patricia Nixon, who some of us older folks remember as the stoic First Lady when her husband Richard Milhous Nixon was President of the United States. It all came crashing down to earth when the Watergate scandal drove him out of office in 1974, with Pat memorably at his side during his farewell speech to the White House staff. There was Patricia Nixon, "Plastic Pat," the media and others derided her as being at times, seen but often not heard. But in *The Mysterious Mrs. Nixon: The Life And Times of Washington's Most Private Lady* (St. Martin's Press, 2024) which is being released August 6, Lee, a Roanoke-based author, uncovers a different Pat Nixon.

In an era when First Ladies were still expected to be seen and not heard most of the time, save for their First Lady "special projects," Pat Nixon, born in a rented miner's shack in hardscrabble Ely, Nevada, raised and college educated in California, found her voice as a politician's wife. In fact, she was often Richard Nixon's best asset on the campaign trail. In the White House she butted heads with the President's palace guard – H.R. "Bob" Haldeman and John Erlichman of later Watergate infamy – who tried to limit her access to the President and the West Wing.

Pat often prevailed however – with support from RMN, who knew that the public had come to admire Mrs. Nixon, as she found her voice. She was his full-fledged partner he often would say. Women finding their voice and realizing the power they possessed was also the theme of Lee's *The League of Wives*, about the women who demanded of the Johnson and Nixon administrations that they do more to bring Vietnam War POW's – their husbands – home. It's being developed as a TV series. For those whose image of Pat Nixon as the stoic, stiff upper lip seldom heard First Lady, *The Mysterious Mrs. Nixon* is a fascinating history lesson.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Kelsey Monohan** is a technology sales representative in Salem; **Tom Field** is a creative director and a publisher (including FRONT); **Gene Marrano** is a news reporter and editor of FRONT.



Clapping for entrepreneurs >

The 10th Anniversary **Gauntlet** (regional business program and competition) awards program and a **Cross-Regional Entrepreneur Expo** was held at the end of May at Roanoke's Berglund Center. The afternoon featured an Alumni Showcase (meet the 2024 Gauntlet participants); Resource Highway (think tradeshow exhibits of organizations that support entrepreneurship); Fireside Chat Profiles (private sessions for business intel sharing); a speed pitch competition (with seven contenders); networking and VIP reception, and of course the concluding awards program—where over \$300,000 was awarded to many Gauntlet participants, in bronze, gold, and platinum levels. Valley Business FRONT was the business media sponsor. See our FRONT Notes for the list of winners.



Another Great Before/After from RH >

Restoration Housing completed another historic rehabilitation—this time a circa 1903 house on the corner of 10th Street and Stewart Avenue in Roanoke. It's the seventh home project in Roanoke and their fourth within the Belmont neighborhood of Southeast Roanoke. Prior to the rehab, the property was owned by the same family for several decades and had been a loving home that was well-maintained by them for generations. Now after this major restoration, it will serve as affordable rental housing for a family of four making approximately 50% of the area median income. The public-private partnership involved collaborations with Carter Bank and Trust, the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (in partnership with Virginia Housing), historic tax credits, and community development block grant funds from Roanoke City HUD office. Restoration Housing held a ribbon-cutting at this property on June 18.

"We've been proud to watch the continued reinvestment occurring all around us both from our neighbors and other nonprofits such as Habitat for Humanity of the Roanoke Valley. There is a strong feeling of community engagement here and a sense that we are all working together to bring more investment to this historic section of Roanoke," said Executive Director **Isabel Thornton**.



Stroke Alert >

LewisGale Medical Center has partnered with the **City of Salem** and other local organizations to spread awareness about the signs and symptoms of a stroke to help improve emergency outcomes. City officials, including Mayor **Renee Turk** and City Council, alongside public safety leadership gathered with LewisGale Medical Center colleagues in June for a proclamation to kick off the **Stroke Smart Salem** initiative. "Stroke volume at our hospital continues to increase year over year, and 1.9 million brain cells die every minute a stroke goes untreated," said **Elizabeth Hart**, LewisGale Medical Center stroke coordinator. "Just like we learn stop, drop, and roll, stroke education is something our entire community should know." The education campaign, with support from the Virginia Department of Health and the Stroke Smart Virginia program, aims to educate people about the importance of knowing how to recognize a stroke, and then to call 911 as soon as possible. The medical emergency affects one in six Americans according to the National Institutes of Health.



VTC grants VIR >

Virginia International Raceway (VIR) in Alton was awarded \$50,500 from three separate tourism grant programs: \$22,500 from the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) Marketing Leverage Program (MLP), \$18,000 from the Virginia Special Events & Festivals Program, and \$10,000 from the inaugural Visit SoSi Regional tourism grant program. Two of these grants will be used for further asset development and special event support, mostly around the flagship IMSA Michelin GT Challenge & Virginia is for Racing Lovers Grand Prix, a three-day action-packed event that draws tens of thousands of visitors across state lines each year. The third grant will be used to promote new corporate retreat and team-building capabilities that further leverage the historic nearly 1,300-acre property and cross-promote the capabilities of several different local businesses that operate out of the onsite business park.

In 2023 the Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association recognized VIRginia International Raceway as their "2023 Attraction of the Year." Over the last few years, VIR has been actively involved with helping the City of Danville, Pittsylvania and Halifax Counties collaborate and cross promote tourism to drive economic growth across the region. VIR expects to bring more than one quarter million visitors to the Visit SoSi region this summer, many who are coming for its two biggest upcoming spectator events. SRO GT World Challenge is July 19-21 and IMSA Michelin GT Challenge & Virginia is for Racing Lovers Grand Prix is August 23-25.



VTC grants Salem >

The **City of Salem** has been awarded \$56,278 from the Virginia Tourism Corporation and now received a total of 12 different grants from VTC since 2020 totaling \$186,278. One of the new grants totaling \$20,000 grants will be used to ramp up marketing in areas beyond southwest Virginia for Salem sporting events like CIAA football and various NCAA championships. Another \$18,278 award will be designated to hiking, biking, and enjoying the outdoors in Virginia's Blue Ridge. The marketing will target potential visitors in Hampton Roads, Richmond and Washington D.C. A \$18,000 grant will be used to attract visitors to the Salem Fair and to various historical attractions in the area. "The city feels very fortunate to receive three grants of this magnitude," said **Carey Harveycutter**, Salem's Tourism Director. In all, the Virginia Tourism Corporation awarded more than \$3.27 million to 268 local and regional marketing programs. The goal is to help increase visitation and revenue for Virginia's localities across the state.



Accelerating SW VA >

Governor **Glenn Youngkin** has announced the **Accelerate Southwest Initiative** during an event in late May, which will focus on economic development, lowering the cost of living, infrastructure, and housing projects in the Southwest region. These key focus areas were continually raised during the governor's March Southwest Virginia listening tour, which included discussions with Southwest community leaders.

"Today, I am proud to announce our administration's Accelerate Southwest Virginia initiative. This shared mission means we will unleash the unbounded potential of Southwest Virginia and equip this region with the tools it needs to race forward in this next decade of economic development," said Youngkin at the Southwest Virginia Economic Development Forum.



Branch builds—and gives >

Branch, a full-service commercial construction company based in Roanoke, raised \$60,720 for Habitat for Humanity at its annual golf tournament. The Branch Gives Classic Golf Tournament was held at the Ballyhack Golf Club in Virginia's Blue Ridge on June 10. The tournament featured 18 holes of golf, music, food, drinks, competitions, and live and silent auctions.

The event saw over 260 participants, golfers, and sponsors. "It has been an honor to be a part of this incredible event knowing we are making a valuable difference in the lives of families in our community," said **Leah Kinder**, Branch Community Engagement Manager, [their] generosity will have a lasting impact, empowering us to make this event possible."



In praise of Farmer's Markets >

Farmers' Markets in the region are seeing a resurgence in customers. Shopping at a farmers' market is not only good for your health, but also for the local economy. **Sarah Sharpe** is an agriculture and natural resources Virginia Extension agent. She says farmers' markets (like those in downtown Roanoke that are pictured) and in Blacksburg, Salem, Vinton, etc. are often the only source of income for small local growers and that buying from local growers helps save jobs.

If you want to know where your food comes from, adds Sharpe, then there's no better place to shop than a farmers' market. Shopping at a farmers market could mean fresh produce picked that same morning from a garden just a few miles away. Sharpe says since your food travels less miles to reach your table, it is better for the environment and means the produce is typically a higher quality nutritional food.

Delta Dental funds Boys & Girls Clubs >

The 25th anniversary edition of the **Delta Dental Pro-Am for Kids** golf tournament in late May benefiting Boys and Girls Club of Southwest Virginia raised more than \$140,000. That puts the running total at more than \$2.3 million over the past 25 years. **Rebekah Meadows** is the CEO for the local **Boys & Girls Clubs**; she says the money raised at the annual Pro-Am for Kids is put to good use and is timely – each of the ten local Boys and Girls Club locations are offering summer camps, typically at low or no cost to the campers, based on family income. “It’s one of the most substantial corporate partnerships our organization has ever had. Delta Dental’s involvement in the creation of the Pro-Am really set us on a path to grow our organization [now at 10 locations in the Roanoke and New River Valleys] and be sustainable in this community. The funding goes towards providing summer camps for our kids. It’s had a huge impact.”



VBR takeover in DC/NOVA again >

Visit **Virginia's Blue Ridge** celebrated National Travel and Tourism Week in late May by again launching a campaign in the nation's capital and northern Virginia. Data shared by Virginia Tourism Corporation showed that visitors to Virginia's Blue Ridge were responsible for generating over \$1.2 billion in 2022 – finally topping 2019's pre-pandemic numbers. Visit VBR's five localities also collected record-breaking lodging taxes of over \$10 million during the 2022-23 fiscal year.

The destination marketing organization (representing the Cities of Roanoke and Salem and the Counties of Botetourt, Franklin, and Roanoke) built on the success of a 2023 spring marketing campaign in DC/Northern Virginia (a top visitation market) with a similar campaign in the same area this spring. Last year's marketing campaign saw a 69% YOY increase in traffic to Visit VBR's website from users in the DC-area. Visitation from the DC area grew by 7% and visitors spent 20% more per day in the Roanoke region (compared to 2022).

Last year's campaign and this year's both featured DC metro station advertising takeovers, digital advertising, wrapped buses and in-person activations. Wrapped cars with VBR messaging and imagery were placed at strategic events around DC/Northern Virginia as a new strategy for the 2024 campaign. The cars "swarmed" events including the DC Cherry Blossom Festival, Alexandria Dog Walk, and on May 21, a Washington Nationals game. Visit VBR also sent a team to D.C. on May 21st to host travel media and meeting planners at the Nationals baseball game, promoting the metro mountain appeal of Virginia's Blue Ridge in addition to its easy accessibility.



Hot Yoga and Multi-Sensory >

YogaSix on Electric Road celebrated its grand opening last month with free classes, vendors, and discounts. **Cynthia Edmunds**, Co-Owner of YogaSix Roanoke on Route 419 across from Tanglewood Mall, says they've seen a steady stream of interested people, young and old. "I think our oldest member is 80 years old, a really wide range of ages. We do have a lot of women – we do have some men that come all the time."

Edmunds says YogaSix is a multi-sensory studio which features lights, sounds, and scents for an immersive and relaxing experience, offering offer classes of all difficulty levels – including hot yoga in a very warm room. Edmunds says yoga promotes strength, flexibility, endurance, and energy; and that it relaxes the mind, which is supplemented by their studio. "We have a restorative class, like if someone does a lot of running. Those are great classes for them."



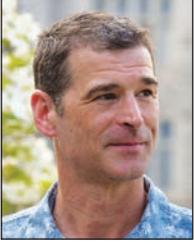
Good Sam's Center for Caring opens >

Good Samaritan Hospice hosted the grand opening of the region's first freestanding hospice house last month. The staff and volunteer office space in the brand new building on Cove Road NW in Roanoke is now open; the heart of the Sheila S. Strauss Hospice House (named for the late wife of major donor and developer Maury Strauss), is a 16-bed inpatient hospice unit with a higher level of around-the-clock care to manage crisis situations that cannot effectively be managed at home. "When a higher level of care is needed [or home hospice care] is not possible, care can now be provided in our home."

The inpatient hospice unit will open later this year after all of the licensing is in place. The hospice house will also be a place of respite to give family members temporary relief from the stresses of caregiving with a common area. "As the only community-based, non-profit hospice, this facility is a tangible example of Good Sam's commitment to our community," says **Aaron Housh**, CEO of Good Sam, who adds that the non-profit is still fundraising to cover the cost of the capital project, which was on the Good Sam wish list for many years.

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

EDUCATIONAL FRONT



Easton

Zachary Easton, professor of biological systems engineering in the College of Engineering and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension specialist, has been named the H.E. and Elizabeth F. Alphin Professor of Agriculture and Life Sciences by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. A member of the Virginia Tech community since 2011, Easton's scholarship focuses on hydrology, water quality, water management, and non-point source pollution. His work has achieved enduring impacts in applications including best management practices for Virginia

agriculture, the enhancement of the Chesapeake Bay, and the protection of the watershed that provides drinking water to New York City. Easton has published more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific articles and more than 200 abstracts, Extension publications, and other scholarly publications. Easton received his bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a master's degree and Ph.D. from Cornell University.

Jimmy Allen ('93) has been selected as the next Head Men's Basketball Coach at Emory & Henry College, Department of Athletics. Allen returns to his alma mater with 31 years of coaching experience and a career head coaching record of 195-182 in 13 seasons. He joins the E&H staff after spending the 2023-24 season as the Associate Head Men's Basketball Coach at the University of New Hampshire alongside head coach Nathan

Davis who was part of Johnson's staff at Emory & Henry in 1997-98. Before his time in Durham, N.H., Allen was the head coach for Army West Point for seven seasons, and Averett University in Danville, Virginia for six years (2004-10).



Terrill

Nicole (Brewer) Terrill has been named a voting member of the Roanoke College Board of Trustees. Terrill holds a B.A. in English and sociology from Roanoke College (Class of 1995) and a Master of Public Health from Columbia University's Mailman School. She has a working background in health care administration, project management and education, and was a visiting instructor in

Roanoke College's Sociology and Public Health Studies Department during the past academic year. She has served on the board of directors for a variety of community organizations, including the Roanoke Adolescent Health Partnership, YMCA of Roanoke Valley, Junior League of the Roanoke Valley and the Roanoke Valley Garden Club. She currently serves on the Pediatric Family Advisory Council for The Johns Hopkins Hospital and is a senior warden at St. John's Episcopal Church in Roanoke.



Fincher

Louise "Lou" Fincher, Emory & Henry University's senior vice president, has been named interim president beginning Aug. 1, as President John W.



Bank of Botetourt

Wells steps down and becomes the school's first chancellor in late July. Fincher, who is also the inaugural dean of the E&H School of Health Sciences, helped launch the health sciences school in Marion, and has led the development of the Southwest Virginia Healthcare Excellence Academy Laboratory School (SWVA-HEALS), which targets the health care worker shortage in Southwest Virginia. Before coming to Emory & Henry, she served as professor and chair of the kinesiology department in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Texas at Arlington, and she was president and CEO of the Joe W. King Orthopedic Institute at the Texas Orthopedic Hospital. Fincher holds a doctor of education degree with a focus on human performance studies from the University of Alabama, a master's degree in education with a focus on athletic training from Indiana State University,

Have a career announcement?

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

and a bachelor's degree from Stephen F. Austin State University.

FINANCIAL FRONT



Farmer

Katie Farmer has been promoted to Branch Manager of the Salem location of Bank of Botetourt. Farmer has been in the industry for more than 23 years and will be transferring from the Cave Spring location, where she has worked as Head Teller for three years. She attended Hollins

University, earning her history and elementary education degree. Farmer is active in her community, a cheer coach and volunteering for her church.

LEGAL FRONT



Baker

Jennifer Baker has joined the Roanoke office of Spilman Thomas & Battle (Spilman) law firm as counsel. Baker's primary area of practice is litigation, with a focus on business litigation,

family law, local government law, trusts and estates litigation, and bankruptcy and creditors' rights. She has significant experience representing insured commercial and individual clients in multiple states in a variety of legal disputes including premises liability, indemnification, contract disputes, and motor vehicle accidents, among others. She a member of the Federal Bar Association, the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, and the Tennessee Trial Lawyers Association. She earned her undergraduate degree, cum laude, from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and her law degree from Rutgers Law School.

www.BankofBotetourt.com

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DEVELOPMENT FRONT



McGee

Amanda McGee has been named Director of Community Development with the Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission. In her eight years with RVARC, she led efforts with Greenway Planning, the Roanoke River Blueway, and Urban Forestry programs.

Jeremy Holmes, Executive Director of the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, was recently elected to the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Board of Directors for the 2024-2026 term. Holmes represents the East on the 66-member Board. The organization was founded in 1967 to provide training, information, and representation for RDOs throughout the United States.

WELLNESS FRONT

Sarah Tavenner has joined LewisGale Hospital Montgomery as the new chief operating officer. Tavenner had more than six years of experience serving as vice president of operations for South



Tavenner

Shore Hospital, a 138-bed acute care facility in HCA Healthcare's West Florida Division.



Stanton

Rachel Stanton had joined LewisGale Hospital Montgomery as the chief financial officer, bringing more than a decade of finance experience to the team. Stanton previously served the last three years in HCA Healthcare as the assistant chief financial officer of Doctors Hospital of Augusta.

Devin LaPuasa was appointed as the chief nursing officer at LewisGale Montgomery Hospital. LaPuasa brings more than 15 years of professional experience to the role, having served as the hospital's director of emergency services and the assistant director of the emergency department at LewisGale Medical Center.

REAL ESTATE FRONT

Davis Stoneburner has joined the Roanoke



Stoneburner

office of Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer as a vice president, focusing on industrial sales and leasing. Before joining Thalhimer, Stoneburner was Vice President of Operations for Bluestone Resources, Inc., a large private company based in Roanoke, with productive and land interests in mining, agriculture, and hospitality. He worked directly with owners and managed critical projects and daily operations for several business lines throughout the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic United States. He is a native of Richmond and a graduate of James Madison University and played shortstop for their baseball team. After his senior year, Mr. Stoneburner was picked by the Texas Rangers in the ninth round of the 2007 MLB Draft and played professional baseball for six years for the Rangers and the Cleveland Indians.

Court Rosen has joined ABoone Real Estate as director of business and land development. Court will manage all aspects of land and project development, including land acquisition, engineering, design,

site work and zoning. He is a partner in the development of Walnut Creek, a 300+ lot community in Christiansburg, as was a former two-term member of City Council for the City of Roanoke. Rosen is from northwestern Pennsylvania and graduated from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN.

SPORTS FRONT

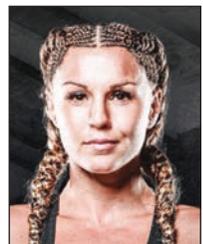


Ehrlich



Valente

Emily Ehrlich and **Jennifer Valente**, with Virginia's Blue Ridge TWENTY24 cycling team, have been selected for the US Paris 2024 Olympic team.



Hart

Britain Hart, of Bedford, was inducted

into the Old & New Warriors Hall of Fame as Female Fighter of the Year—Bare Knuckle Fighting Championship Straw-weight champion.

the Parks Planning and Development manager.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Webb

Lindsay Webb has been appointed Assistant Director of Business Retention and Operations for Roanoke County Economic Development. She currently works in Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department as



Jones

Alexander Jones has been appointed Assistant Director of Marketing and Business Development for Roanoke County Economic Development. He currently serves as the Principal Planner and the Long-Range Planning Division Manager for the County's Planning Department

Botetourt County has announced **Victor Morales** as the new Director of Parks & Recreation. Morales



Morales

brings seven years of experience from Berry College in Georgia, where as Director of Recreation he provided intramural sports, personal fitness, and outdoor adventure experiences. Morales is also a trainer and consultant, traveling nationwide to manage high ropes courses, provide leadership workshops, certify instructors in First Aid/CPR/AED/BLS, and teach undergraduate Kinesiology courses.

With the abrupt departure of Bob Cowell as City Manager



Patton

last month, the City of Roanoke has hired a former city manager in Portsmouth to serve in an interim role. **Dr. Lydia Pettis Patton** will serve as Roanoke's interim city manager while a nationwide search for a permanent replacement is found. Patton currently serves as an executive manager of the Berkley Group, a Hampton Roads-based consulting firm.

Compiled by Tom Field and Gene Marrano

“There's something beautiful about making something that's real and tangible. — Page 23

FIRST FRIDAYS



JULY 12



AUGUST 2



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. [cooperjpp91@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).

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@360

WealthConsulting.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.

Dan Smith is a veteran journalist and member of the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame, a winner of numerous press association awards, the Small Business Journalist of the Year, two Perry F. Kendig Awards and the Arts Council of the Blue Ridge's Literary Award. He is author of eight books, including the recent novels "NEWS!" and "CLOG." [pampadansmith@gmail.com]

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Sheri Winesett is a CEO, business strategist and leadership coach, a speaker and an author. For nearly 20 years, she has coached over 1000 entrepreneurs, CEOs, other executives and their teams, empowering clients to achieve personal growth, ongoing professional development business and organizational success. [sheri@sheriwinesett.com]

“ ”
I couldn't get the dog out of my mind. — Page 61

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Gauntlet and Expo

The 10th Anniversary **Gauntlet** (regional business program and competition) awards program and a **Cross-Regional Entrepreneur Expo** was held at the end of May at Roanoke's Berglund Center. The jam-packed afternoon and evening featured an alumni showcase, resource exhibits, intel sessions, a speed pitch competition, networking and VIP reception, and the awards program—where over \$300,000 was awarded to many Gauntlet participants, in bronze, gold, and platinum levels. Speakers included Sara Dunnigan (Go VA & Economic Development) and Natalie Hodge (Gauntlet alumna and owner of Rudy's Girl Media). Gary Lane, with 410 on Main (a boutique event and performance venue in Covington) won the top prize (nearly \$28,000 in cash and business services).

Gentry "Locked" in citations

The Roanoke-based law firm **Gentry Locke** has been recognized as a leading Virginia firm for general commercial, white collar crime, construction, and employment law by Chambers USA 2024. The firm's Criminal & Government Investigations practice is one of only two in Virginia ranked by Chambers USA in Band 1, making specific mention of Partners Thomas J. Bondurant, Jr. (Band 1) and Erin M.

Harrigan (Band 2), both ranked four years in a row.

Gentry Locke Chairperson Monica Monday was recognized in the top tier (Band 1) in the areas of Litigation: Appellate and Litigation: General Commercial, ranked nine years in a row. Commentators describe Monday as "a true leader in the Virginia Bar and is a trusted resource. She is the dean of appellate lawyers in Virginia." Gentry Locke Managing Partner Brett Marston was recognized in Band 4 in the area of Construction for the second year. Commentators describe Marston as a "great lawyer who gets good results for clients."

FEMA fosters contract

Foster Fuels was awarded a fuel delivery contract for up to \$442 million with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It's a five-year Defense Logistics Agency contract where Foster is a prime contractor for emergency fuel delivery services via truck, rail, or barge. The 103-year old company—based in Brookneal and providing residential, commercial, agricultural, transport and emergency fuel, propane, diesel, heating oil—has held contracts with FEMA since 2006.

Agee again

Nancy Agee, CEO of Carilion Clinic, who has been recognized with numerous high-profile

awards, was honored by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce with a lifetime achievement award. The Chamber cited Agee's "exemplary leadership in healthcare and economic development in the Commonwealth... overseeing a \$2.4 billion health system that employs 14,000 workers, [includes] seven hospitals, a physician group with more than 1,000 doctors, and serves more than one million people across western Virginia and West Virginia."

Reactor just under the wire

BWX Technologies (Lynchburg) just made the Fortune 1000 List—ranked at #999—in the 2024 compilation. The nuclear tech, reactor production business was one of the 39 in Virginia on this year's Fortune 1000. (Twenty-four Virginia-based companies made the Fortune 500.)

More kudos for 5 Points

5Points Creative recently received four Communicator Awards for website and promotional materials. Three projects received an Award of Distinction, including the Habitat for Humanity Franklin County Affordable Housing Leave Behind, the VisitNRV Website, and the Virginia Private College Benefits Consortium website. Pulaski County Tourism was granted an Award of Excellence for the

firm's work on signage in the County's Experiential Center. The Communicator Awards is an international awards program "dedicated to recognizing excellence, effectiveness, and innovation across all areas of communication."

UWRV honors Vinton Mayor

Vinton Mayor **Brad Grose** has been recognized as an unsung hero in the Leadership category of The United Way Roanoke Valley – 100 Heroes Project. Grose served on the Vinton Town Council from 2000 to 2004 and was elected Mayor Vinton in 2004. He was elected for his 5th consecutive term in 2020. Grose has served on numerous boards, including the Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission and the Roanoke Valley Economic Development Partnership.

Permitting made easier

Roanoke County's new Citizen Connect Permits app provides status information for all permit applications submitted to the County. Users will be able to retrieve permit information by typing in an address, owner name or Parcel ID in the search bar or by clicking on a parcel on the map. Once a parcel is selected the user will be able to view permit status information, various maps and imagery, and print reports. "We are continuously seeking

new ways to improve our processes for citizens, making information more accessible, efficient, and transparent,” says **Tarek Moneir**, the County’s Development Services Director. “The new app will reduce the need for phone calls, emails, and in-person visits to County staff.” The County’s Information Technology staff partnered with Solid Syntax LLC to develop the app in-house.

Props for Pro Bono work

Spilman Thomas & Battle (Spilman) announced that **Bryce J. Hunter** and **Lori D. Thompson** were named to the 2024 Pro Bono Service Honor Roll by the Virginia Access to Justice Commission for their voluntary pro bono service contributions. Both Hunter and Thompson have a long history of pro bono service. Hunter serves on the Virginia Board of Bar Examiners Character and Fitness Committee and the Virginia State Bar

Disciplinary Committee. At Spilman, his practice focuses on banking and financial services law. Thompson provides representation in guardianship cases through Blue Ridge Legal Services. At Spilman, her primary area of practice is litigation, including bankruptcy and creditors’ rights. She also serves as the Member in Charge of the firm’s Roanoke office and Chair of the firm’s DEI Committee.

“I believe that all attorneys have the capability and the responsibility to assist in providing legal representation to those who are in desperate need of legal assistance and cannot afford it,” Thompson said. “If everyone contributes a few hours of their time, it can make a big difference to those in need.”

Partnership business director recognized

Consultant Connect announced its annual list of North America’s Top 50 Economic Developers,

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.

and **Ann Blair Miller**, the Roanoke Regional Partnership’s director of business investment, was awarded the recognition. Miller has worked in economic development for 25 years. “Her superpower is relationships—she has the ability to build meaningful connections with everyone she meets, which has directly led to her success,” states the Regional Partnership.

Roanoke is All America once again

Roanoke has again been recognized as one of ten All-America City Award winners. The National Civic League presented this year’s honor (the City’s 8th All-America award) to recognize Roanoke’s work to actively engage

residents in strengthening democracy. Community inclusion programs in Roanoke address disconnection, language barriers, and limited job opportunities among immigrants and refugees. The establishment of the Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board has led to the renaming of public spaces, increased civic engagement through public hearings, and zoning reforms aligned with equity goals to expand housing opportunities.

BOCO business microgrants

The **Botetourt County** Board of Supervisors and Economic Development Authority are asking businesses located in Botetourt County to consider

Notable Transactions

sponsored by covenantreal.com

- **IvyRehab** leased 2,763-square foot retail space at Orchard Marketplace in Daleville
- **YMCA of Virginia’s Blue Ridge** leased 47,000-square foot in upper level of Roanoke County’s Tanglewood Mall for multi-purpose fitness and rec center
- **NB Handy Operations** leased 55,145-square foot industrial space at 1000 Dillard Drive in Lynchburg
- **73-acre Claytor Lake Boy Scouts Aquatic Center** purchased by Shelor MM Shah Development for reported \$2.7 million
- **Instinct & Intelligence Canine Training** leased 12,000-square foot industrial space at 3125 Salem Turnpike in Roanoke
- **Elite Arts Collision Center** leased 6,000-square foot facility at 5423 Williamson Road in Roanoke

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

applying for the County's small business grant program. Grants are intended to support existing small businesses in the County by providing grants in the amount between \$2,000 and \$4,000. The application period ends July 12. See the botetourtcountyva.gov website for more details.

Youngkin board appointments

Cybersecurity Planning Committee: **Uma Marques** of Botetourt County, Information Technology Director, Roanoke County Government; Virginia Manufactured Housing Board: **Jamey Young** of Rocky Mount, Quality Assurance Manager, Fleetwood Homes; Radiation Advisory Board: **James P. Nunn**, MS, CHP, DABR, of Blacksburg, Senior Medical and Health Physicist, Varian Medical Systems Advanced Oncology Solutions; Assistant Professor of Health Sciences, Virginia Western Community College

More tourism grants

More than \$3.27 million in matching grant and sponsorship funds will be awarded to 268 tourism programs as part of **Virginia Tourism Corporation's** Marketing Grants programs. Announced in late May, these funding programs are designed to leverage local marketing dollars with matching state

funds to increase visitation and traveler spending through 2025. Local partners will commit more than \$9.2 million to match the VTC funding, providing more than \$12.5 million in new marketing and event production activity focused on increasing overnight visitation to Virginia across all nine GO Virginia regions. The funding will impact 1,230 combined partners according to the VTC.

Local recipients include the **Beaver Dam Farm Sunflower Festival** and **Wesley Hodges Fly Fishing and Bird Hunting** "Virginia is the New West," in Botetourt County. Nine organizations in Floyd County including **Floyd Tourism, FloydFest, Floyd Yoga Jam** and the **Town of Floyd** are on that list, as is **Mountain Lake Lodge** and **Giles County**. Also, the **Smith Mountain Lake Chamber of Commerce**, The **Steppin Out** festival in Montgomery County, **Roanoke Food Tours**, **Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge**, and **Stay Roanoke**.

RC cannabis studies cert programs

Roanoke College is launching a new catalog of continuing education courses in cannabis studies designed to help employers, health care providers, caregivers, growers and more gain a better understanding of the rapidly evolving world of cannabis. The non-credit-bearing courses start this summer

and will equip working professionals and other learners with up-to-date knowledge about the science and legal standing of cannabis in Virginia. Classes range in length from one-hour seminars to eight-hour programs. Classes can be taken individually or as part of the pursuit of a professional certificate. No prior experience or knowledge is required.

"Cannabis is a topic on many minds these days as the federal and state landscapes continue to change in this multi-million-dollar industry," said Professor **DorothyBelle "DB" Poli**, a biologist and director of the cannabis studies program. "These courses are unique and taught by experts in a face-to-face way to ensure all your questions are answered." The continuing education program marks the first time Roanoke has offered non-degree courses and certificates. The announcement comes shortly after the college became the first school in Virginia to offer a bachelor's degree program in cannabis studies.

Radford cyber grant

The **GO Virginia State Board** announced has awarded a \$202,872 grant to support a **Radford University** initiative aimed toward growing the regional economy though IT and cybersecurity education programs. This is first GO Virginia grant awarded to the

university. Developing IT & Cybersecurity Certification Pipeline (ITCCP), a partnership between the Radford University Division of Economic Development and Corporate Education and the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative Southwest Virginia, is a collaborative project with Radford University, Virginia Tech and New River Community College designed to increase the number of professionals with IT and cybersecurity certifications.

MVP is online, Regional Chamber endorses project

The **Mountain Valley Pipeline** that drew opposition from landowners who lost land to eminent domain for the 303-mile natural gas pipeline project – or were concerned about environmental impact – is now in operation. The Roanoke Regional Chamber is on board however, issuing this statement when the pipeline went online – after years of delay, billions in cost overruns and numerous fines for environmental infractions during the construction process.

"Natural gas is an important energy source for residential, industrial, and commercial operations, and the Mountain Valley Pipeline, along with partners like Roanoke Gas, will provide greater access to an affordable, reliable energy supply that will help our region recruit and retain employers.

AI's Impact on the Small Business Arena

Cox Business 2024 Small Business Survey

Despite the headlines touting AI as human replacement, most small business owners and employees surveyed by Cox Business view the technology as a tool to strengthen and grow their teams, and plan to increase investment to grow customer service, marketing and sales this year.

Enhancing customer experience

Fifty-three percent of small business owners report AI had a positive impact on customer experience in 2023, and plan to use AI to support the customer experience in several ways this year:

 **36%** Online order product/service recommendations

 **35%** Website live chatbot

 **35%** Online order placement

 **33%** Customer service calls

Help wanted

Currently, 75% of small business owners say they are responsible for their company's AI implementation and operations. And even though more owners and employees say their company did not feel much impact from last year's IT labor shortage, 42% of owners did see an impact, having experienced decreased revenue.

More money for AI

Two-thirds of small business owners invested in AI last year and 53% plan to invest in AI even more in 2024.

Gen Z business owners are the most active age group when it comes to AI investment, with 84% having invested in the last year and 74% planning to invest more in 2024.

This year, small business owners expect AI to help their organizations:



The bottom line

AI has a clear impact on daily operations in the small business arena, but the full value of AI cannot be realized without the right connectivity and strategic support. For more key findings and to learn how Cox Business can advance your small business's AI journey, visit www.CoxBLUE.com/SmallBizSurvey.

About the Cox Small Business 2024 Survey on AI in the Workplace

Cox Business commissioned a blind survey of 502 U.S.-based small business owners and 511 U.S.-based small business employees in March 2024 to uncover their understanding and usage of AI in the workplace.

The project's construction has generated a positive economic impact, and its operation will, too, by providing the energy supply needed to support business expansion and job creation. Economic development is key to the growth of the region, and we welcome the MVP's operation and expect it to play a significant role in supporting the long-term growth and economic success in the region of Virginia's Blue Ridge and beyond."

New trails on the mountain

Roanoke Parks

Foundation is working on increasing the trails mileage on Mill Mountain by 30 percent. The Foundation is in the middle of a \$250,000 fundraising campaign to build four miles of new natural, multi-use trails.

Andy Gill, president of the Roanoke Parks Foundation says they will connect to existing trails, ease congestion and be available to hikers and cyclists. They will be built by professional trail builders with special machinery. "The biggest thing I would say is the timeline. Our city's volunteer trail building capacity is about a mile per year. We're going to accelerate that, and these four miles of trails should be built in a matter of months."

Gill says the machine-built trails will require less maintenance because the trail beds will be more durable. He says race organizers

have come to Roanoke and marveled at the possibilities that a new network of trails on Mill Mountain can offer. Gill says other localities are building these types of trails and studies have shown they are an economic driver. They hope to start construction in October and Gill adds that they are more than halfway to their fundraising goal.

Branch acquisition

Branch Group, Inc. (Branch), a heavy-highway and building contractor headquartered in Roanoke, has announced the acquisition purchase of Burnsville, N.C.-based Young & McQueen, a contractor specializing in heavy civil, highway, site work, bridges, and structures construction. The growth of programs in the region and its proximity to both its headquarters in Roanoke, and current work in central North Carolina allows Branch to better serve its current customers and reach into new markets.

"This is a great move for both companies," says Branch CEO **Donald Graul**. "Young & McQueen's culture aligns perfectly with Branch. Their strong reputation and work quality in western North Carolina will continue the success of both companies. Branch's strong balance sheet and expertise in large projects and alternative delivery will enable our combined companies

to perform larger more complex projects for our clients." Young & McQueen will be integrated into Branch operations and will continue to execute current contracts and pursue new work out of the Burnsville office.

Bonsack social

A nearly \$10 million complex, tentatively called the '**540 Social**' Entertainment concept has been proposed for Bonsack area in Roanoke County. It would feature an indoor and outdoor pickleball court, corn hole, ping pong, fowling, high-tech bowling, axe throwing, darts, an arcade, and 18-hole outdoor champion-style mini golf options. Family-owned Trail Development Group of Roanoke wants to build the new venue.

Shoe shoo, southside

VF Corp., a Denver-based global apparel and footwear company with brands including Vans, The North Face, Timberland and Dickies, plans to close its distribution center in Martinsville in March 2025.

Raise your hand, post-stroke

Carilion Clinic reached a milestone in May being the first health system in Virginia to implant Vivistim® for improved arm and hand function post stroke. When paired with

occupational therapy, vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) can improve a patient's arm and hand function, even years after a stroke. The therapy can revive hope for stroke survivors even years after their initial recovery efforts plateau.

BOCO announces citizen portal

Botetourt County has launched a new webpage dedicated to keeping residents informed about ongoing and upcoming development and construction projects within the county. "What's Going On In BOCO," calling it part of the county's commitment to transparency and community engagement. Residents can access information on current projects in various stages of approval, from authorizations granted by the Board of Supervisors through projects under construction in the county. The webpage features an interactive map along with descriptions of proposed projects. The webpage will be updated monthly to show what's going on in BOCO.

Salem City approves HopeTree rezoning

A divided **Salem City Council** voted to approve a rezoning for the **HopeTree** project—a major community development that could include the construction of up to 340 residences

and commercial space on the campus grounds.

When industries collide

Norfolk Southern and **CSX** railways have sued **Cox Communications** over broadband installations; part of a legal dispute involving right-of-way and liability in remote locations.

Farmer improvements

Virginia Tech and **Virginia Cooperative Extension** recently received a \$1 million grant to improve soil health, crop production, and water quality across the commonwealth. The initiative is designed to build upon existing soil health efforts. The

project seeks to improve farming practices through a comprehensive strategy focused on farmer mentoring and widespread implementation of soil health best practices.

UL downsizes

The **University of Lynchburg** announced it is eliminating 12 undergraduate and five graduate programs, phasing them out over the next few years as students complete those programs. These majors include business studies, community and nonprofit leadership, diversity strategies, management, music, music education, physics, religious studies, Spanish, Spanish education, special education, and

theater. Twenty-five minors will also be eliminated, ranging from music and theater to gender studies, German and arts administration. The university will also phase out its MBA in cybersecurity along with four Masters of Education specializations. About 40 faculty positions will be eliminated as the programs end. The university has already reduced its executive leadership team by four roles and laid off a total of about 40 positions on the university staff.

Blacksburg bank reaches to Waynesboro

The holding company of the **National Bank of Blacksburg** acquired Frontier Community Bank and its three

branches in a deal valued at approximately \$16.07 million.

Lester takes CBS

Martinsville-based **The Lester Group** acquired Williamsburg-based Customer Builder Supply Company in early June. CBS will continue to operate under the same name; and details of the transaction were not disclosed. The Lester Group managed building supply stores, commercial real estate, and forestlands in the Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina markets.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field

Check out additional FRONT Notes from Valley Business FRONT on our Facebook site or social media links at www.vbFRONT.com.

“” There's a huge opportunity for Roanoke to be a forward-thinking city... — Page 17

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Dan Smith

Mitzi Tinaglia with her current two border collies.

Even with Dogs, Communication is Key

By Dan Smith

Mitzi Tinaglia is comfortable in the gym training people, or in the yard training dogs. She has a national championship to prove it.

It has been nearly a quarter century since Mitzi Tinaglia began training border collies seriously, professionally. She owned and operated her own insurance agency for 20 years, before becoming a dog trainer.

It has now been 15 years competitively. During those latter years, while her two sons (Joseph, 41, and David, 39) were in their teens, she began in earnest, training dogs in a multitude of disciplines. In 2019 at the American Kennel Club's national championships in Tulsa, her dog Maverick, became Tinaglia's first national obedience champion. She had been a professional for 10 years at that juncture.

The Roanoke Valley native, who is 64, not only trains dogs, but also trains people in various aerobic, strength and stretch exercises at the Salem YMCA and Salem Senior Center. She had registered a number of significant titles before the national championship and her ribbon collection was, and remains, little short of massive.

But the national title underscored her competence like little else could.

Training high level performance dogs is an intensely competitive AKC sport, and it pits some of the best trainers in the country against each other. These trainers make a good living, and the titles can only help. She trains in multiple dog competitions: tracking, freestyle, conformation handling, and performance obedience. She has trained service dogs for people with disabilities, as well.

Tinaglia began focusing on border collies in 2003 and found training her first dog "was a struggle and very challenging." She worked "through our novice titles, through utility and finally got our utility title. She retired her dog, Jazz, from performance obedience "and pursued my tracking ambitions with her. We trained for a couple of years for AKC tracking and we earned the AKC Tracking Dog title." Her credentials were established with that

and it was time for another puppy, a border collie named Caden.

She recalls: "I knew if I wanted to compete on a higher level I would need more training, expert training. I read professional obedience training books, subscribed to monthly publications, traveled far and wide to various trainers searching to improve and become competitive."

She and Caden reached the limit of the dog's promise and brought in Maverick, a puppy she hoped would have immediate strong potential. The dog's owner apparently knew that, as well. "I was unexpectedly drawn to one of the little 'eye candy' pups," she says. "I couldn't get the dog out of my mind when we left. I called [the owner] and asked if I could purchase [Maverick]. It was a tough decision for her because she liked him, too, but decided to let me have him."

Tinaglia, who lives in Roanoke, started Maverick in performance training "as soon as I got him. The sport of obedience, developed in the 1930s, is all about fostering dogs that are well-behaved at home, in public, and in the presence of other dogs. During an obedience trial, performance dogs must demonstrate advanced obedience skills like precise heeling, staying, directed retrieving, directed jumping, position command discrimination and scent discrimination. All while showing they enjoy working with their handler."

Beyond having value for competitions, training for obedience trials "will strengthen your dog's manners," Tinaglia says. "Having a well-behaved canine family member means you can enjoy your dog's company almost anywhere. It will also prevent many problem behaviors like barking or jumping, by teaching alternative ways to behave."

The dogs Tinaglia trains are expensive to buy (a good border collie goes for about \$2,000) and expensive to train properly—regardless of the training goal. But the excellent breeding and the high-end training give the owner a valuable dog by any measure. Board and training for that dog will go for about \$950 a month. If you want to create a performance/obedience



Mitzi Tinaglia at the presentation of her national title in 2019.

show dog, you're looking at about \$75 per lesson, says Tinaglia. "Clients need to be educated on what they're getting," she emphasizes.

Clients "have to be committed and dedicated. ... Some don't realize the level of work it takes."

She continues to train for breeders. "A breeder wants to put a title on a dog," she insists. When a good home is found, the training often continues. Titles "make the whole line [of dogs] more desirable."

Still, she says, just because a dog has titles, the dog "is not necessarily a good breeding prospect. There are other considerations." A well-trained dog is good for more than ribbons and trophies, says Tinaglia.

And who should not invest in one of these fine animals, regardless of breed? "Anybody who doesn't want to make the commitment for care, responsibility, health and upkeep, realizing there are no guarantees as to temperament," she says. ... It is a lifetime commitment, even without" championships.

Bottom line: "Training is individual. The hard part is communicating with the [owner] at a comfortable level." That seems to be a universal business challenge. 🐾

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Three-to-five times more technology patents have come from (our region) over the national average. — Page 25

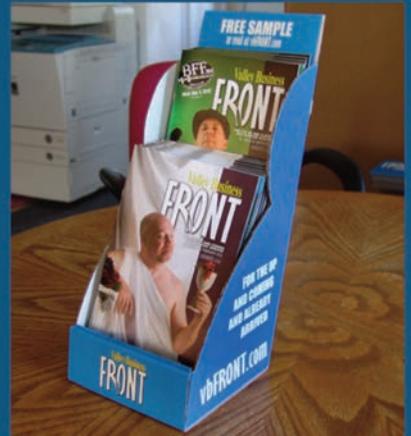
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