

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 192

SEPTEMBER 2024

Pulaski Tourism

Roanoke's  
City Market Building

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# Home Field



Troy Henderson  
G&H Contracting

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Well, let's see: how many fronts can we bring you for September? Over a dozen. We have construction, tourism, community, technology, healthcare, service, finance, education, entertainment, arts, and once you dig into content that's not part of our story lineup (such as FRONT'n Abouts, FRONT Notes, Career FRONT announcements, etc.), we've got a lot of sectors covered.

Well, maybe not entomology. (We figure the cicadas are making enough noise for their audience.) Though we do have animals in some blurbs if you dig deep enough.

The point is, we continue to celebrate the fronts that contribute to our local communities and region. We hope you enjoy our presentation of the grand diversity in our commerce and happenings and the individuals who make this news as we wrap up the third quarter.

**Tom Field**  
Publisher

**Gene Marrano**  
Editor

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“The goal is to give students a real-world experience. — Page 29

LEAD STORY PAGE 8

# Play Ball!

by Tom Field







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# SEPTEMBER



Aila Boyd



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Tom Field



Gene Marrano



Sheri Winesett

## Advisory Board

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



# 2024 CONTRIBUTORS



**Carrie Cousins**



**Shannon Dominguez**



**Dan Dowdy**



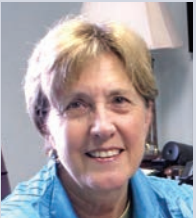
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**Mary Ann L. Miller**  
Bank of Boletourt /  
finance – banking



**Alicia Smith**  
F&S Building Innovations /  
construction

“ ”  
The love and artistry that have gone into this site build and festival this year is beyond words.

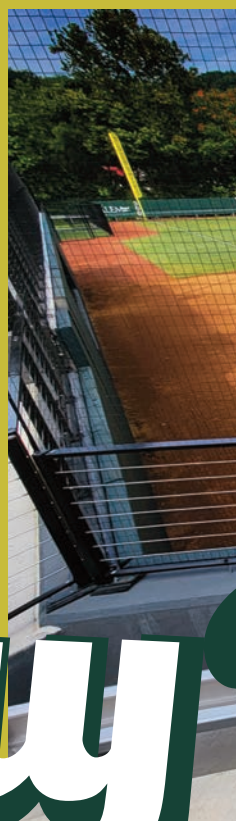
— Page 33

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 54.

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“ ”  
Maybe the mezzanine should be turned into a brewery. — Page 25



# Play

## Salem Recruits Local Contractor To Get Sports Complex Back In The Game

By Tom Field

"There was a ton of coordination and items constantly tweaked," says Troy Henderson. "From netting to wall pads, fencing and guardrails, even a fountain from Germany to canopies from Nebraska."

That's how Troy Henderson of G&H Contracting describes the "new" Moyer Sports Complex in Salem, when asked what made this project different from other construction jobs.

You could say the Complex was—complex.

And when G&H says that, it carries a lot of weight. The contracting business counts a ton of showcase buildings in its book—from schools to clinics to industrial to municipal to commercial and historic buildings we all recognize. G&H construction crews have been putting up structures since 1989 from its shop in Salem.

The Salem (or let's say Salem, Glenvar, Roanoke County) connection is an important one, too. It's not easy to miss G&H banners at school ball fields and G&H signs at job sites throughout this



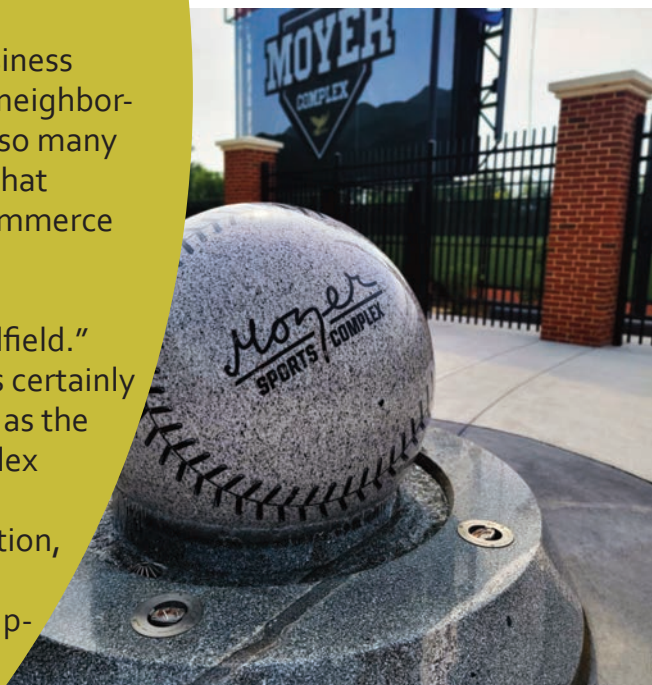


# Ball!

All photos by Tom Field except where noted

community. The business inserts itself in “the neighborhood” and is tied to so many local organizations that contribute to the commerce of Salem.

So, back to this “ballfield.” To call it a ballfield is certainly an understatement, as the Moyer Sports Complex consists of 22 acres of sports and recreation, primarily softball at its four championship-level regulation fields, 13 new pickleball courts (all the rage, now), a



From the large spinning ball water fountain to the park’s entrance sign, sports are celebrated in a big way in “Championship City” Salem, VA



children’s playground, walking-biking trail around the perimeter, and all the lighting, sound system, shading and coverage, parking, fencing, and security that accompanies a top-of-class municipal recreation park.

It was a near-\$30 million budget to essentially “fix up” the original park that opened back in 1992. The City of Salem also assigned a \$15 million bond for the job.

A big—very big—part of the job was something that no one would really see or appreciate. The site itself. Specifically, the underground.

The Moyer Sports Complex sits alongside the Roanoke River in a large, flat plot of land that’s ideal for playing games. Not so ideal, though, is the geology.

“The water has to go downhill,” says Henderson. “In many ways, it’s easier to work with a site that is completely level; but the difficulty here was we are barely above river, so earth is shallow.”

This site, was not only flat, but sitting on sandy substrate. Hydrologically, it was a





There were so many moving parts with the construction of this facility, and G&H really knocked it out of the park. They are the heart and soul of this project.

The Moyer has been a huge asset to our valley for over thirty years. All of these renovations and updates will ensure that the facility remains a strong economic driver for the region and one of the top sports complexes on the east coast.

Salem Parks & Rec  
Director **John Shaner**

challenge. You can't have water pooling up or flooding, and that was the natural ecological state there by riverside.

The contractor would have to address the runoff and draining and comprehensive facility plumbing works before all the fun and visible components could be tackled.

This challenge came into play when the City put the job out to bid and had to select the lowest bid construction business.

Who's going to come in, bring in all the resources necessary to dig up and rework the ground—AND—oversee the playability of the fields along with the building and rebuilding of structures to comply with "major league" recreational amenities?

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City of Salem

The architect:  
**Lose Design**

### **The subs**

Subcontractors on the 2023-24 Moyer Sports Complex include (partial list):

**Musco Lighting**

**The LandTek Group** (fields)

**Dant Clayton** (bleachers)

**Kegley Electric**

**Southside Plumbing**

**Sportsfield Specialties** (foul poles, wall pads, windscreens)

**Bulldog Field Equipment**

**Adams Construction**

**Creative Nursery Landscaping**

**David Stinnett** (DAFS/EIFS)

**Clinton Carroll** (masonry)

\*City of Salem street, utility, parks & rec, fire and other departments also provided services





Meagan Williamson

And who is best-suited to do that onsite, on time, under budget, and before the deadline for the desired booking of games? Whether Mother Nature played nice or nasty?

“We were happy to get this job,” Henderson says, citing his fondness for the Salem area. He coached and supported Glenvar teams and has a passion for sports that also added to the win.

When describing the project, it’s difficult to imagine a contractor building Moyer without local ties. Henderson references many local trades and suppliers and even multiple departments within the City of Salem itself that contributed to the timely rebuild of Moyer.

“For example, the street department and the fire department came in and combined their hose training to clean the pavement, water the sod, and such.”

The vetting and bidding process can often eliminate local contractors in municipal transactions, but in this instance, the most local contractor was the low (and only) bidder and the one most likely to



Sheldon Henderson  
G&H Contracting



meet and complete the requirements with its challenging specs.

The “hometown advantage” really applied this time.

Henderson lights up when recounting the project, even though many of the things he describes were not common activities he and the G&H crew typically encountered on job sites in the past.

Unique things like Tahoma 31 sod (like the kind used in the Superbowl) and unsuited “not-a-patch-of-good” ground, and an incredibly heavy, 40-foot tall Tie-back tension netting that had to be secured by poles in an unstable soil composite.

“This maybe was the hardest thing we’ve ever done,” admits Henderson. “But it was also the most enjoyable. It’s easy to look back at elevation plans and a lot of times you can see the finished project. But not this one. It was incredible how close you have to be to other engineers.”

“It was a neat, civil job.”



## So many “working parts” in this project



Let there be light. And sound.



Salem Street Department helped with the perimeter rail installation.

The support structure for the nets was particularly challenging due to the stress and high-tension, height, and sandy soil. Extra engineering and services by multiple parties were required for the subfoundation.



Pickleball courts (13 of them) and a contemporary train-themed playground greet visitors at entrance

## Salem Moyer Sports Complex

originally built: 1992  
renovated, upgraded: 2024  
(\$27.9 million project)

22 acres

4 Championship-Level Softball Fields

13 Pickleball Courts

Train-Themed Children's Playground  
(with special needs accessibility)

Hosted US Olympic Softball Team  
Hosts USA Softball, Virginia High School League,  
Roanoke College, Youth Rec Leagues

230 Days average use

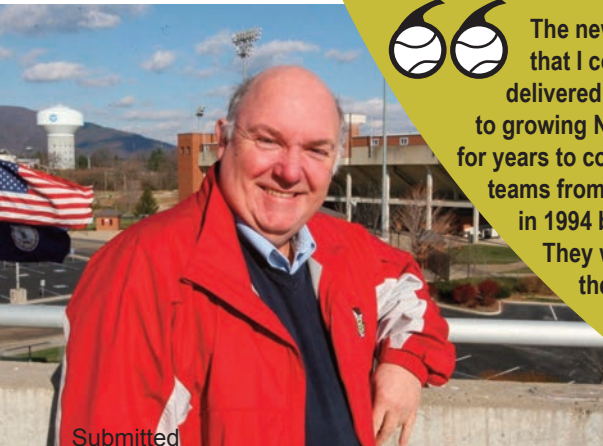
250,000 attendance (year average)

Significant Contributor to the \$52 billion dollar  
Sports Tourism Impact in Virginia's Blue Ridge



The new Moyer Complex has a “wow” factor that I could not imagine. What Troy and G&H have delivered is a testament to Salem’s commitment to growing NCAA collegiate championship events for years to come. I just wish we could invite those teams from our first NCAA softball championship in 1994 back to see the new facility... They would not believe what is in the old footprint.

Salem Tourism  
Director **Carey Harvey**cutter







Sheldon Henderson, Donald Gibson, Troy Henderson, Bruce Spurlock

Working with the City of Salem was satisfying, Henderson says. "There wasn't a single meeting where we weren't laughing. It was a lot of fun. Salem is like that, though. You know people; and you know everyone wants to help get it done. You're going to see that person at a school event or Sunday School or whatever. There's a spirit of everyone working together for the better good."

Henderson mentions Salem's Parks & Rec director, John Shaner, frequently. "He [Shaner] is always fighting for the win. He's detailed and refuses to accept anything less."

Salem's Moyer Sports Complex project involved a lot of timelines. But Henderson specifically recalls February 14, "...because it was Valentine's Day; and we had just sorted out the net poles. Donald [Gibson] said he could get it done in four months."

Incredibly, both the construction timeline and budget were met—which is never a given on any building site; but particularly when one is so dependent on the weather and environment like this one.

Shaner and Salem had its ball teams and tournaments on the way!

### The stats

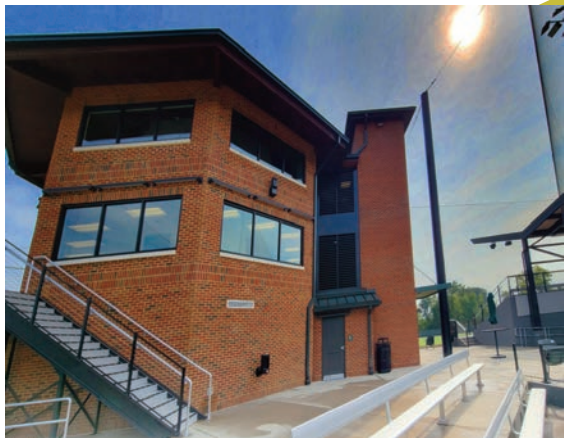
5,500 cubic yards of concrete

7,000 tons of USGA spec top dressing sand

948 tons of brick dust material

7,500 tons of blended rootzone mix

1,432 tons of clay for infields



City of Salem



### MVPs

G&H Contracting principal Troy Henderson said **Donald Gibson** was a “first-class, incredible superintendent... none better in a 500-mile radius.”

He also said Salem MVPs were Parks & Rec staff **Jim Farmer, Scott Scharnus, Eric O’Brien**



The City of Salem is thrilled with the reopening of the renovated James I. Moyer Complex, all 22 acres of it, and we celebrate its re-entry into the active facility status—a destination for Championship teams from all over the country.

Success comes from a team effort: John Shaner’s hard work and vision, his staffs’ dedication and commitment, and the support of Salem’s past and present city councils and staff ensured that many more people can meet under our shelters, enjoy our playground, do battle on our new pickleball courts, or walk around the complex to

“get their steps in” in addition to the athletes that will compete for victories.

The Moyer Complex is a critical facet of the economic growth that has occurred in Salem and the surrounding communities and has done a lot to put Salem on the map as Virginia’s Championship City. It will continue to be a treasure in Virginia’s Blue Ridge as the most sought-after location for recreation and relaxation for families, for championship games to be played, and for all citizens to enjoy.

City of Salem  
Mayor Renee Ferris Turk

## First tourney in the new park



Mike Stevens photos





Local business G&H Contracting earned its position in the game and proved its home field advantage by leveraging experience and tight ties with local resources.

The Salem “Championship City” Moyer Sports Complex is up and running, looking new and improved.

And you can visit it now.



Meagan Williamson



Submitted

# ***The Middle of Nowhere but that's the point***

**By Jennifer Poff Cooper**

---

**“Pulaski County is somewhere in the middle of nowhere” is one of Tourism Director Erika Tolbert’s favorite taglines, for a place she says offers a myriad of activities in a smallish, quiet environment.**

One visiting couple from Boone, North Carolina, told Erika Tolbert that Pulaski County provides many of the same experiences as Boone, but “without all the people.”

A huge selling point for Pulaski County is outdoor recreation activities. People come to hike and bike and tube. Claytor Lake, the New River, and New River Trail State Park (the county has three trailheads) are some of the attractions. There are also some lesser-known destinations like the Hoover Mountain Bike Complex and Draper Mountain Biking Trails.

Another draw is – and will be – sports tourism. The recent gift from Shelor Motor Mile to the county of Calfee Park and Motor Mile Speedway & Dragway will allow for many more events at those venues.

“Being able to host events like the SRX that bring people from all over opens the door

to having more big events,” Tolbert said.

Also planned is a large sportsplex, which will provide an indoor facility for cold weather months. These assets will attract outsiders, and the community can use them as well.

Tolbert sees her mission as two-fold. One part is bringing people to Pulaski County, especially overnight because the lodging tax is what funds the tourism department. She also wants to “flip the script” on people saying there is nothing to do locally. Rather, this Pulaski County native wants citizens to be proud of all the county has to offer.

“It is easy to take it for granted,” she said.

Target markets for the tourism department’s advertising include couples and families. For romantic getaways, it’s mostly empty nesters. With families, they are reaching out to “soccer moms” in their 30s and 40s.



To wit: Randolph Park hosts ball tournaments, and each family receives an electronic travel guide with clickable links. In both cases, said Tolbert, they tend to use “fluffy, feel-good wording” that appeals to females who do more of the trip planning.

Tourism efforts attract more than just visitors. Tolbert points to Pulaski County Administrator Jonathan Sweet’s “40 in 30” initiative – the goal of having 40,000 residents by 2030. She said that if the county can entice people to come for the weekend, they may stay forever. Similarly, tourism marketing also brings in new businesses.

Tolbert said, “Tourism is 100% an economic development asset. Restaurants and hotels need a reason to be here.”

Tourism is helping put Pulaski County on the map. Tolbert explained that, in the past, income has come from industry, but the county no longer has the workforce to support that with unemployment at



Courtesy photo

Erika Tolbert

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Award-winning signage at the Experiential Center

just 2%. Now the county needs to make money in other ways, and “tourism is the new wave,” she said.

The business community and the county help each other in promoting their offerings. A tourism partners group meets every couple of months, sharing about upcoming events and working together on grant opportunities from the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

In addition, the Board of Supervisors has authorized the creation of the Pulaski County Sports Tourism & Entertainment Authority. The authority will help administer and manage county facilities and assets and promote events.

“This innovative initiative will strategically manage and promote our sports tourism and entertainment assets, positioning Pulaski County as a leading destination in Virginia,” said Tolbert.

Recently, Pulaski County Tourism received two creative awards recognizing their exceptional work promoting tourism and enhancing visitor experience, according to a news release. The county’s innovative Experiential Center signage has been honored with a Communicator Award of Excellence, and the Pulaski County SRX ESPN Commercial earned a Bronze Telly Award.

About 10,000 people attended the SRX event (a stock racing series founded in part by NASCAR legend Tony Stewart), plus people were watching it at home, bringing national attention to Pulaski County. Tolbert feels this ad was highly regarded because it was aesthetically pleasing and immersive. It employed the “cool feature” of ASMR. “Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response is a unique form of relaxation that engages the senses in a deeply soothing manner. These tingling sensations, often triggered




New River Trail



by certain auditory cues like whispering or tapping, offer an escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life," according to audioengine.com. As Tolbert explained, ASMR is a trend, especially with young people, in which there is no narrator, no audio besides the sound of the activity happening in the video.




The award-winning signage is at the Experiential Center, previously known as the Visitor's Center. When the county was considering the center's future, after it shut down during the pandemic, Tolbert's predecessor noticed that people were only using it as a "pit stop." It was expensive to operate, too, so in its place there are now "Guideries"—booths, built by local high school students and placed in five locations, that contain a book full of QR codes that take visitors to the internet, so the information is never outdated.






"It's the sales center for Pulaski County," said Tolbert. Companies recruiting new hires or Realtors wooing clients can bring people in from outside the county and educate them with videos and pamphlets on local health care, education, recreation, industry, lifestyle, and cost of living – "all the things that make Pulaski County so great." 



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## FINANCIAL FIGURES

By Michael Shelton

### Executive Summary:

*Financial advisors are increasingly embracing artificial intelligence (AI) to deliver highly customized services, allowing for tailored investment strategies based on individual client data.*

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

# AI Meets ROI: How Hyper-Personalization is Transforming Financial Planning

In today's competitive financial landscape, personalization has become a defining feature of client engagement. By leveraging AI's ability to analyze extensive financial behaviors and preferences, advisors can provide more precise and targeted financial recommendations. This strategic use of AI enhances client outcomes, deepens relationships, and empowers advisors to offer more value-driven services.

## Redefining Client Engagement through AI

While personalization has always been a goal in financial planning, AI is elevating it to unprecedented levels. Traditional methods—periodic meetings and questionnaires—offered only a snapshot of a client's financial life. AI shifts this by continuously analyzing data in real-time, delivering insights that surpass what is typically discussed during in-person meetings. This allows financial advisors to be more proactive in their planning.

For instance, AI can track spending patterns, savings habits, and even significant life events, like a job change, to prompt timely adjustments to a client's financial plan. This proactive approach transforms financial planning from reactive to anticipatory, enabling advisors to better meet client needs.

## AI-Enhanced Investment Customization

AI's strength lies in its capacity to create personalized investment strategies by analyzing a broad array of data points, from income and spending to specific investment preferences. These insights allow AI to dynamically adjust portfolios, ensuring alignment with a client's evolving financial situation. Additionally, AI can integrate non-traditional metrics like environmental, social, and governance (ESG) preferences, helping advisors build portfolios that meet client values without sacrificing financial performance.


## Enhancing Efficiency and Precision

AI's ability to process vast datasets makes it an invaluable tool for financial advisors seeking to enhance the accuracy of their advice. By identifying patterns in market data, client information, and historical performance, AI enables more accurate financial projections and investment decisions. Moreover, AI can automate routine tasks such as portfolio rebalancing and tax-loss harvesting, freeing up advisors to focus on strategic planning while ensuring clients receive timely, data-driven insights.



**Balancing AI with Human Expertise**

While AI significantly enhances personalization and efficiency, it does not replace the need for human advisors. Clients continue to value the emotional intelligence, judgment, and personalized attention that only a human advisor can provide. AI should be viewed as a tool that complements and enhances the advisor’s role, enabling them to deliver more effective and scalable services.

As AI technology advances, its role in financial planning will continue to expand, becoming an indispensable asset that supports advisors in delivering targeted, efficient financial strategies that strengthen client relationships and drive better outcomes. 

“  
By identifying patterns...  
AI enables more accurate  
financial projections.”



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Submitted photos

# “Open To Every Possibility” Roanoke City Market building’s future

By Ian Price

**“We’re in a much better place,” says the public face of Roanoke’s iconic City Market building.**

Dating from 1922, The Roanoke City Market Building was a food court in the 1980s. The city market building was managed day-to-day by Roanoke City until a major renovation (almost 8 million dollars) took place in 2010-11. The move to a private foundation (the Market Building Foundation Inc., a public non-profit entity) was partly due to tax reasons and how much the day-to-day operations began to entail. Who was best suited for the job?

Elliot Broyles has loved radio – talk radio specifically – since he was 12. “I moved to Roanoke to go to Virginia Western Community College because it had a terrific radio TV production program” Broyles recalled now from the office he works out of at the Roanoke City Market Building. He interned and then eventually worked for Mel Wheeler Inc. taking on prominent roles with the now 100-year-old News Talk station WFIR and the Top 40 juggernaut K92. After about 5 years, Broyles realized that to continue growing in radio he’d have to move to a

bigger market. Broyles loves Roanoke saying “I’d lived in upstate New York and Richmond. Roanoke was a place just big enough where you can feel like you are in a city but also feel like you know a ton of people in town.”

Broyles then took a job with Waynette Anderson, who started the event management company Sponsor Hounds which oversees events across Roanoke, most notably at Dr. Pepper Park. He worked there for nine years, eventually becoming Vice President of the company. “Business, budgeting, managing a business, growing [a] business, I learned a lot from her” Broyles recalled. Then the job opened up for the first Executive Director for the Roanoke City Market Building. The foundation took the step forward to create that position which Broyles has had for about 8 years.

The City Market Building is now at 100% occupancy. Broyles says foot traffic is 40% above last year at this point as they continue growing back post-pandemic.




“We just went through a branding project” Broyles says which involved changing the logo, and design, and the way that we interact with the community. “The philosophy behind running and managing a space like this and our next step beyond that is a redesign of the ground floor.” He says it’s not a renovation project like what happened in 2010-11 but “more of a user-experience design project” as Broyles calls it. The complaints stem from that aforementioned renovation which left it “too wide open” and “too cold” among other concerns expressed.

“Open to every possibility” Broyles says about what he can share about the redesign. When a company is selected for the project Broyles says they “will have flexibility to say” if spaces should be used for an entirely different purpose. “Maybe they think the mezzanine space should be turned into a brewery” he cited for example. “I think our focus is on drawing community events, programming, and activity in the building” Broyles recalled. He also pointed out the “love everyone has for the building” saying “it’s the centerpiece of our downtown. It deserves the attention it’s getting now, and I think we’re moving towards a better future for the market building as a whole.”

It’s all about finding the right company to do that work as far as Broyles is concerned. “Trusting somebody who has dealt with a historic building like



Elliott Broyles

this or a food hall like this to choose what should be done because it’s worked in other areas... I think that’s the important part.” A foundation that derives its income from eatery rental booths and an event venue (Charter Hall on the top floor) and is subsidized by the city needs “some influx of capital” says Broyles. “Doing budgets for years at Sponsor Hounds on each event and working with Waynette on the yearly budget certainly prepared me” for working on the yearly budget for the foundation, which Broyles says is now “one of my favorite parts of the job.” He adds that, “we now have capital on hand to handle the first phase of this project with money we saved over the years and we’re in a much better place than we were financially than we I started.” Stay tuned. 

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## SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Shannon Dominguez

### **Executive Summary:**

*Does your nonprofit use a rinse-and-repeat process for its annual report?*

*These reports are crucial for showcasing impact, inspiring donors, and building trust with community partners.*

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

# Crafting Impactful Annual Reports for Nonprofits

Effective reports go beyond numbers, telling a story of how your mission and vision come to life. Staffing constraints often challenge smaller nonprofits, making a rinse-and-repeat template invaluable. An annual report is more than an end-of-year task; it's a strategic tool that highlights a nonprofit's work, engages stakeholders, and lays the groundwork for future success. By starting with a template, using storytelling, and connecting with your community, you can leverage your annual report to strengthen community ties and attract new supporters.

## Develop a Comprehensive Template

If you're not sure where to start, identify key sections. The following are useful when applying for grants or engaging with community partners and donors:

- **Executive Summary:** Start by identifying the most significant achievements and challenges of the year to craft a concise overview that captures the essence of the report.
- **Mission Statement:** Review and refine the mission statement to ensure it clearly reflects the organization's current purpose and strategic direction.
- **Programs and Services:** Gather information on all initiatives, programs, and services; highlight key outcomes and innovations to demonstrate impact.
- **Financial Summary:** Compile and present financial data in a clear and accessible format, using charts and graphs to enhance transparency.
- **Donor Acknowledgment:** Create a comprehensive list of donors and partners, ensuring accurate recognition and expressing gratitude for their contributions.
- **Success Stories:** Collect compelling narratives from beneficiaries, staff, and board members that illustrate the tangible impact of the organization's work.
- **Future Plans:** Collaborate with leadership to define and articulate strategic goals and priorities for the upcoming year, aligning them with the mission and vision.

*For inspiration, check out the annual reports of other organizations.*

## Make an Impact with Storytelling & Visuals


Storytelling transforms data into a captivating narrative that resonates with readers and inspires action. Highlight the impact of donations by quantifying what a \$20, \$50, or \$100 contribution achieves, such as buying diapers, funding a counseling session, or providing school supplies. Show the faces behind the work by collecting photos from community events, meetings, and celebrations, adding a personal touch



and visually illustrating the organization's impact.

## Connect with Your Community

Email and mail the annual report to community partners, donors, and stakeholders. A budget-friendly tip: the post office offers a special rate for nonprofits. Consider mailing a postcard with a QR code linking to a digital version of the report. To enhance your contact lists, collaborate between development and outreach departments to gather information at community events and meetings. Share the report on your website, newsletter, and social media, and have printed copies available for in-person meetings.

An annual report is a powerful narrative that encapsulates the essence of your nonprofit's journey over the past year. Embrace the opportunity to showcase your organization's impact and your annual report becomes a catalyst for growth and community engagement. 

“”  
For inspiration, check out the annual reports of other organizations.



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# Fostering Roanoke's Young Film Talent

By Aila Boyd

**Tyler Lyon, a Roanoke native, is quietly shaping the future of local cinema one student at a time.**

As one of the driving forces behind the Grandin Theatre Film Lab since its inception in 2016, Tyler Lyon has established the program as a launchpad for young filmmakers across the region. By providing high school students with practical experience and

expert guidance, Lyon is cultivating a new generation of storytellers, equipping them with the skills they'll need for careers in film, as well as other disciplines.

Lyon's career in film began with a degree in film and video studies from George Mason University in 2013. He has worked on dozens of productions, ranging from corporate videos to feature films, for various clients. His role at the Grandin Theatre Film Lab marks a significant chapter in his career, focusing on nurturing young talent.

As the program director, Lyon has developed the film lab's curriculum, including course syllabi, lesson plans and program strategy. He teaches nearly all the courses, recruits and schedules guest speakers and handles communications with students and parents.

Lyon also serves as an adjunct faculty member of video production at Roanoke College, which complements his work at the film lab. The program, designed for students in grades 9-12, covers various aspects of filmmaking, including lighting, screenwriting, storytelling, acting and sound engineering. Students have access to professional video editing equipment and filming locations.



Courtesy photos

Tyler Lyon





"The goal is to give students a real-world experience in filmmaking," Lyon said. "We want them to develop technical skills and the creativity and critical thinking necessary to excel in any field they choose."

The film lab operates rigorously during the school year, providing students with an experience akin to an additional class. Some private school and homeschool students even receive academic credit for their participation.

"We run a rigorous program, which is why we get the results we do," Lyon noted. "For instance, Reese Robers had two Academy Award-qualifying film festivals on her resume by the time she was a freshman in college."

The film lab also assists students in navigating the film festival circuit, helping them select the best opportunities and avoid less reputable events. "Our students do the work themselves," Lyon emphasized. "We have hours of behind-the-scenes footage to prove it. At our annual screening at the Grandin Theatre, we show this footage first to highlight the effort that goes into making these films."

The lab's success is reflected in the films produced and the relationships formed among the students. Many form lasting friendships and professional networks that extend beyond their time in the program.

"Being a part of film lab isn't accidental," Lyon said. "Our students come here because they want to be here, and that enthusiasm is what drives their success."

Under Lyon's leadership, the lab has graduated countless students over the years. Many have pursued further studies or careers in the cinematic arts at universities with well-regarded film programs.

Robers, a three-year participant from Patrick Henry High School, received a \$20,000 national scholarship from the Emmy Awards and is now double majoring in cinema at the University of Virginia. This summer, she is interning at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

"Reese is a modern-day Renaissance woman," Lyon said. "We're really proud of her."

Carter Schaeffer, another notable alumna,

joined the lab as a freshman from Salem High School and stayed throughout his high school years. Schaefer is now a political science major at Roanoke College and is preparing for a semester in Washington, D.C.

"He's been with us ever since the second year of film lab. He's been an intern, including this most recent year," Lyon said.

The lab also helped Nabeel Raza, who decided against a film career but still gained valuable skills. "Nabeel told us he learned how to tell a story, work with a team, and balance tasks like scheduling. These are skills that will benefit him in any career," Lyon explained.

Raza took on various roles throughout his three years in the program. "Production taught me a lot about logistics, direction taught me a lot about leadership and working with different personalities. I'm in medical school now and that has already been useful in working in multidisciplinary teams to treat patients," he said.


Lyon emphasized that the lab aims to develop not just filmmakers but also creative, considerate and problem-solving individuals. "Many of our students benefit from the program even if they don't pursue a career in film. They learn storytelling, teamwork and time management skills that are valuable in any profession," he said.

Raza's mother, Mona, currently serves on the Grandin Theatre Board of Directors. Her pitch to parents is simple: "You get to see excitement in your kid's face when they're making something special on their own

and learning so much. At the end of the day, you get to go to the premier and just be astounded by what your child has made." In addition to Nabeel, her daughter, Zoya also participated in the program for three years.

Looking ahead, the lab plans to expand its reach. The program already draws participants from the cities of Roanoke and Salem and the counties of Roanoke, Botetourt, Franklin as well as homeschool and private school communities. Next year, the program hopes to include a student from Pulaski County. "We believe the film lab is one of the best-kept secrets in Roanoke," Lyon said. "We want to make sure that students that would be a great fit for what we offer find out about the program."

Ian Fortier, executive director of the Grandin Theatre Foundation, echoed Lyon's sentiment when he said that the film lab is a bridge for local students. "It provides them an advanced skill set that has proven to put kids in college at high levels, with top 20 film schools in the nation, and helps their college applications and resumes stand out above the rest," he said. "And if a student doesn't have that desire, then Film Lab also serves at developing all the hard and soft skills that will help them succeed at whatever they choose to pursue in their lives."

In addition to maintaining healthy enrollment numbers, the lab is exploring the possibility of adult education programs. "We've heard from many people who wish they had something like this when they were younger," Lyon said. It's also considering reviving its summer program, which has only been held once before. 



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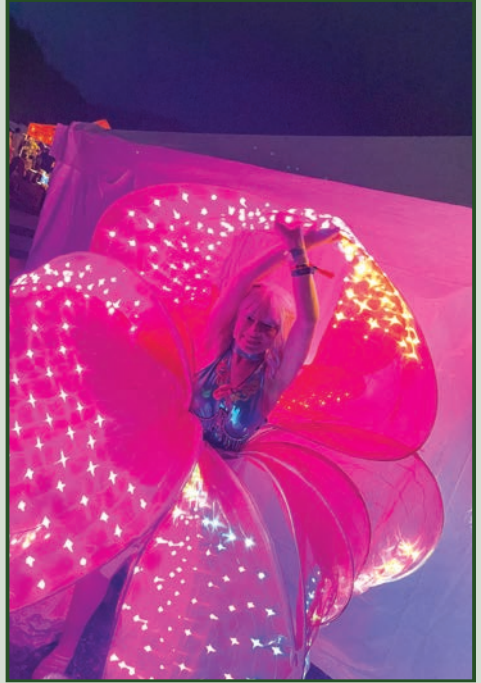
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## FloydFest 2024 Horizon debuts new home >

FloydFest, the boutique music and outdoors festival now more than two decades old, returned after a two-year hiatus at its new home in the heart of Floyd County on 200 acres now owned by its CEO, **John McBroom** of **Across the Way Productions (ATW)**. After moving from leased property on the Floyd-Patrick County line after the 2022 mid-summer event, ATW couldn't obtain all of the permitting needed to launch at its new site in 2023, so FloydFest took a year off.

FestivalPark in the Floyd County town of Check is much closer to Roanoke, only about a half hour away, making it easier for day trippers who are not enthused about camping. All of the parking at FloydFest is now on site, another plus (no shuttle buses or trailers hauling camping gear). Festival Park is hilly and in fact a shuttle "train" was launched this year to haul people up the long steep hill back to the parking area and the Canopy Grove Stage, a more intimate setting akin to the Pink Floyd area at the old park.

The main stage, which hosted the likes of

Sierra Ferrell, Caitlyn Krisko & The Broadcast, Charlie Crockett and Victor Wooten, was a temporary one this year, with ATW saying they would go to work building a permanent main stage right after FloydFest 2024 Horizon was over. Early on during the 5-day festival in late July McBroom said he was hearing "good things," from patrons about FestivalPark; ATW solicited feedback via a QR code in the festival program and will review those comments. "The love and artistry that have gone into this site build and festival this year is beyond words," McBroom (a musician himself who played with several groups at FloydFest) wrote in the program. ATW hopes to turn FestivalPark into a public space for local residents to hike its trails and use its disc golf course in its long offseason.

"It's not far from home," noted Jared Stout, a Roanoke favorite and 2022 On the Rise runner up band as voted by festival goers. "I think they did really good with the [new] site. We're happy that it's here, we're happy that its open." His Jared Stout Band is doing some touring and in fact had a Texas concert date on the books. "We're having a great time." Most likely the majority of the 10,000 patrons at FloydFest 2024 Horizon felt the same way.



## LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Carrie Cousins

**Executive Summary:**  
*There's more to the formula than direct sales from marketing.*

# There's a "Plus" to Your Return on Investment

There's simple math that most businesses do when thinking about advertising.

### Dollars spent on ads < Sales from advertising

In the digital advertising space, it's pretty easy to calculate. You can literally follow an ad click that converts into an online purchase. If purchases total more than the ad spend in a month, most businesses can see the direct value of the ads.

But this equation is missing a less quantifiable metric.

### Dollars spent on ads < Sales from advertising + Indirect sales from brand awareness

There are often sales that don't follow the direct path from clicking an ad to purchase, but still lead to a purchase eventually. This is the bonus return on investment that comes from advertising in general.

Recently, a client saw this phenomenon with his ad spend.

For a month, he advertised one specific product to generate interest. It's not even for sale yet. During that time, he sold 100 units of other items online.

The ad campaign ended, and sales of those other items dropped to 6 the next month.

The ad campaign for the presale item was generating enough interest in the business and leading enough visitors to the website that it resulted in a "plus" on their return on investment, an unexpected revenue gain from advertising.

This is a common occurrence with advertising. While you are directing traffic and visitors to a specific product or service, they stick around to learn more about your business. Advertising generates direct awareness for the thing you are promoting, but also everything else that you do.

That impact can be multiplied with any additional advertising or marketing activities – pairing Google Ads with social media ads or television ads, promoting a blog article and running ads on YouTube, or almost any other combination. In addition to clicks, people will think about your business again later and likely search for your product or service online. There, they may again find an ad and click it or find an organic search listing that leads them to your website.



Another client asks to see this each month when looking at their website analytics. Whenever they run TV or streaming commercials, website traffic from search engines increases, as do sales. There's not a direct return on investment to measure, but it is a plus!

President John F. Kennedy said "a rising tide lifts all boats," and it couldn't be more true about advertising. Any marketing or advertising activity will impact all of the other things you are doing. *And that's return on investment plus.* 📈

“ Advertising generates direct awareness for the thing you are promoting, but also everything else that you do.



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# Digital pirates: the rising threat and cost of ransomware

By Gene Marrano

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**The cybersecurity threat associated with computer systems and databases being held hostage for payments has increased dramatically in recent years. Is your organization keeping pace with these hackers?**

Just about every week it seems there is a headline about some cybersecurity incident – witness one last month where hackers stole almost 3 billion files with each person’s name, address, date of birth and social security numbers, among other records. But there are times where cyberattacks go under the radar; in many cases they involve ransomware breaches, where a phishing e-mail opened by an unsuspecting person allows bad actors access to their organization’s databases – and freezes them in place,

demanding a payment before allowing their victim access again. Something many do not want to be made public.

The federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) states that from 2013-2018 ransomware made up about 2 percent of all cybersecurity events and 4 percent of all financial losses from such events. Since 2019 it’s 30 percent and 27 percent of all financial losses. Like it impacted inflation and other key factors of everyday life, the pandemic is partially to blame as more worked remotely in a mix of personal and professional environments, where ransomware pirates were able to exploit weaknesses in personal computers that were connected to a business or organization databases, leaving users more susceptible to e-mail phishing attacks.

Wade Baker is co-founder of a cybersecurity think tank, the Cyentia Institute, which worked with CISA on that research; he is also an associate professor on integrated security in the Department of Business Information Technology at Virginia Tech. Baker came to Tech “with a lot of industry experience in the cybersecurity field.”

In some cases, these ransomware attacks remain under the radar, with a payment made in untraceable digital currencies that leave no paper trail, like Bitcoin. After all, who wants their end user customers to know they cannot be trusted with sensitive information, or that their firewalls are not up to par? Ransomware attackers can be savvy, not only going after the biggest players but just as likely to attack a local



VT



school or hospital, tailoring the payment amount to a figure they figure a victim can handle. Defying these online bandits and vowing instead to find a workaround can cost millions and in some cases is more financially damaging.

CISA says the education sector has been most vulnerable to these breaches – considered to be low-hanging fruit, followed closely behind by the health care industry and manufacturing – three more established sectors where older legacy computer security systems may be less able to prevent e-mails from more suspicious characters from reaching someone's inbox. CISA claims ransomware accounts for around 9 percent of cybersecurity incidents at larger organizations – but more than 40 percent at smaller businesses.

"Cybercriminals saw an opportunity," in 2020 says Baker, with people spending more time on their home computers working "outside layers of protection that typically wrap [around] corporate networks," or even personally – perhaps bored or lonely while sitting out the worst days of the pandemic in isolation. "The internet was one of the few things we could do for entertainment," says Baker; "you're more likely to click on things. That was a real opportunity for cybercriminals, and they pounced on it."

Some of that low-hanging fruit however may even be individuals on home computers, where all data is wiped out by a ransomware attack. "You might lose documents, pictures –

[that's] what I fear the most." Backing up data, on a cloud service for example, is a good idea says Baker, who notes that some companies and government organizations have even hired former top-flight hackers to help safeguard against future digital invasions.

Innovation in the ransomware world now include "wipers," which not only freeze certain databases for example but can destroy entire systems – if the demanded ransom isn't paid. Think that doesn't affect the Average Joe? Such a 2018 attack on municipal services in metro Atlanta impacted 6 million people and cost taxpayers up to \$10 million according to a CISA study. Not to mention that online services the typical end user might rely on may be offline for an indefinite period of time while the organization hit with an attack figures out how to deal with it. "It could be days or weeks," notes Baker, "or however long it takes. We [all] can be indirectly impacted."

Training employees to recognize phishing e-mails, stronger anti-virus and anti-malware software packages, along with keeping systems current security-wise and properly backed up may not prevent all ransomware attacks but it's a good baseline. "I wouldn't necessarily say that cybercriminals are smarter than security professionals," Baker advises, "it's just a matter that attacking is easier than defense. If I'm sufficiently motivated and determined ... I can keep trying. It's just hard to plug all of the possible of the possible weaknesses against a determined adversary." 📺

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## WOMEN WHO LEAD

By Sheri Winesett

### Executive Summary:

*The journey to transparent leadership begins with cultivating a 360-degree view of your actions, decisions, and outcomes, which necessitates a deep dive into self-awareness.*

*Sheri Winesett is Chief Operating Officer at John Mattone Global, a premier executive and leadership coaching boutique, and Author of *Transparent Leadership for Women Who Mean Business**

## Key One – 360 Accountability & Self Awareness

This process may push you out of your comfort zone, but that discomfort is where real growth happens. Embracing the unease that comes with self-reflection and feedback sets extraordinary leaders apart from the average.

Leadership isn't confined to your workplace; it permeates every aspect of your life. Whether you're leading your family, your church, your friends, or your workplace, how you show up in one area of life often reflects how you show up in all. Therefore, it's crucial to regularly assess how you present yourself as a leader.

One effective way to do this is by performing a "checkup from the neck up" daily. This means evaluating your thought patterns and how you interact with others. Ask yourself if your thinking is positive and constructive or if you're indulging in "stinking thinking" that might hinder your effectiveness. Catch yourself! Keep a journal to reflect and become more mindful of how your thoughts shape your behavior.

Gaining outside perspectives is also invaluable. Without input from others, it's easy to remain blind to your shortcomings. Often, the fear of vulnerability prevents us from seeking feedback, but overcoming this fear is essential for growth. Be curious and open to feedback; it will help you to align more closely with your true potential.

Another key aspect is understanding and managing your triggers. Triggers are those small things that provoke a strong emotional response, such as fear or anger. Recognizing what sets you off and why is the first step in controlling your reactions. If you can address the root cause of your triggers, you can manage your emotions and lead with greater clarity and composure.


Removing your excuses is non-negotiable. Excuses create a mindset of scarcity and self-doubt, preventing you from addressing the real issues and finding lasting solutions. When you make excuses, you avoid the problem and perpetuate a cycle of ineffective behavior. The excuses you tell yourself and others can have a lasting impact, influencing the behavior of future generations. That responsibility alone should motivate you to eliminate excuses from your life.

Understanding your leadership style and that of others is crucial. The best leaders are adaptable, knowing how to adjust their approach based on the needs and styles of those around them. Most women have an innate ability to adapt, which is a significant asset in leadership. You can't control how others behave, but you can control your responses



and adapt your leadership to create the more effective outcomes.

Finally, be grateful for your mistakes. Admitting to and learning from mistakes is a sign of strength. Mistakes are growth opportunities, so instead of fearing failure, celebrate it. You either win or you learn. Choose to learn, and you will continue to grow as a leader.

By focusing on 360-degree accountability and self-awareness, you're well on your way to becoming a truly exceptional leader. 

“ Without input from others, it's easy to remain blind to your shortcomings.

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## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

**Executive Summary:**  
*Memoirs, biographies,  
and autobiographies  
aren't just for celebrities.*

### Your record

I was chatting with local business icon Vic Foti the other day; and when I left his office, he handed me a copy of a small paperback book entitled: *My Memories: The Life of a Country Boy*. Great literature it is not. What it is, though, is a simple recount of another local business icon's life. It's the story of George Harvey, Sr. the entrepreneur and founder of the Harvey automotive dealership in Radford. George and Vic were friends. Also, business associates—as Vic is a well-known and positioned accountant for commercial enterprises across our region (and an entrepreneur himself).

The book—locally published—was compiled by Harvey's granddaughter, Alexandra Siple, in 2021 (Harvey died in February that same year); in what appears to be a straightforward transcription of Harvey's telling of his own stories.


This kind of book idea—whether a memoir, a biography, or autobiography—is a good idea. It's a treasure for the Harvey family for sure. It's also of special interest to his friends and business associates, whom he names all throughout the storyline.

At our business journal, we often publish profiles of people—usually “executive profiles” of leaders in business. Our editor or I will write a brief for an assignment (unless we're writing the profile); and I couldn't help but think how fantastic it would be to have something like one of these books to accompany these assignments. Just about everything you would ever need to tell the story and capture the character is right there.

Of course, for many, these books are a bit sanitized. Although Harvey's book reveals a few youthful indiscretions, it was noble and clean and... well, perfect for his grandchildren and protégé to consume. I was recently gifted a memoir-type project where I published a book of life stories; and the result was one that the young'uns should only read selected chapters. Kudos to Harvey's granddaughter and whomever helped record his story for remembering the audience.

Since we profile so many business and community and organizational leaders over the past 36 years (not kidding, THOUSANDS), you might be surprised to discover these life stories don't become boring.

That's because everyone's story is unique.

And that's why you should write or have one written about yourself. For your family, friends, associates. (Maybe even for the ones who didn't exactly support your trek.) 



## Musings

**Affordable housing:** Roanoke City Council passed a rezoning ordinance earlier this year that reclassified R-1 single family housing as lots that could also be turned into multi-family dwelling units, for example a number of townhomes on a lot formerly reserved for one house only. The city estimated a modest impact, perhaps 40 units a year. Naturally some residents objected, saying a multi-family project built next to their house could impact property values, an objection often raised for many development proposals, whether residential or commercial – and often unfounded by supporting data.

Some residents also claimed that the city did not provide enough time for public input. So, City Council backed up and put the rezoning ordinance on hold, and said it would go through the approval process again. Lo and behold, on a 3-2 vote the Planning Commission voted to NOT recommend its approval (with two commission members absent) and it heads to City Council again this month. It passed by a 4-3 vote in March. Will Council cave and shoot down the rezoning or hold firm? Roanoke City is again losing population after dipping below the 100,000 mark again.

Affordable housing is an issue in Roanoke, as it is nationwide, even becoming a centerpiece of Kamala Harris’s late bid to become President. Some of those objecting to the Roanoke City ordinance correctly point out that there is plenty of neglected and blighted housing stock that could be renovated as an alternative – but how do you compel those property owners – some call them slum lords in many cases – to renovate or sell to developers at a price that makes redevelopment affordable when all is said and done? It will be interesting to see if City Council holds the line and leaves the new ordinance in place over the objections of some residents.

**Local community theater:** City Councilwoman Stephanie Moon-Reynolds helped cut the ribbon when the Bear

continued on Page 42



Bear Theatre ribbon cutting



## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
*Thoughts on affordable housing and community theatre.*

# Letters

## Clubbing column

Well, my goodness, Tom! That cover is a real throwback [October 2014 FRONT cover shown in publisher's column, August 2024 FRONT] - and the cool part is that I'll be Club President in October. In fact, I just had my president training class last night, via video conference. There were 394 participants from around the world! Our club has successfully transitioned back to in-person meetings, although we have retained a Zoom-only membership - some of our older members with health issues appreciate it, as do our younger professionals who find weekly meetings a challenge. Our club is now the 17 largest and most active in the world - there

are 6,474 clubs in 85 countries. Thank you so much for writing about us and please know you are always welcome to come to a meeting!

**Jeanne Bollendorf**  
Roanoke Kiwanis

## Housing for small-town-big college

Wow – you did a really good job of summarizing a very complex story, Jennifer [“Blacksburg Housing” article; August 2024 FRONT]. Thanks for the extra work you put in to make sure it was accurate and clear!

**Leslie Hager-Smith**  
Mayor, Blacksburg

Send us your feedback in a letter with name and where you live – good or bad: [news@vbf.com](mailto:news@vbf.com)

## Marrano / There's something

from Page 41

Theatre in downtown Roanoke opened its first production at Community High School in late July at Community High School. She gave warm opening remarks about the value of the arts to the city to several dozen people at the ceremony, drowned out to a large extent by the passing freight train unfortunately. That's so Roanoke. But the reviews for *Crimes of the Heart* and audience feedback was positive; next up in October is *Arsenic and Old Lace*, a chestnut that was once a hit movie starring Cary Grant. (PS I'm a board member for Exit, Pursued by a Bear, the full name for the Bear Theatre.) Meanwhile sellout crowds came to see both the musical versions of *Footloose* at Attic Productions in Fincastle, and 9 to 5 at Showtimers. Community theater appears to be alive and well in the valley, get out and support it. 🍷

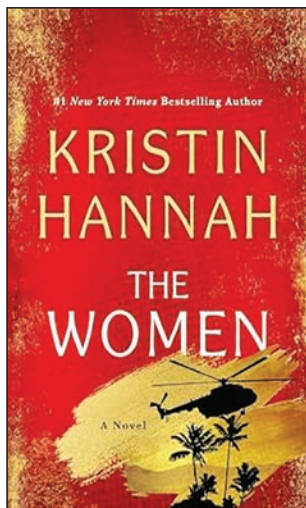
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“Expecting a vacation to stave off burnout isn't realistic.”



## FRONTReviews >

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

### *Disrespected in unpopular war*

If you've ever read a novel by Kristin Hannah, you know you're going to need some tissues and time to read in private. *The Women* (St Martin's; 2024) by Kristin Hannah proves no different. This book follows a young nurse, Frankie, who eagerly volunteered during the Vietnam War thinking it would make her parents proud. She had no clue how mistaken she was. Not only were her parents disappointed and ashamed to have anyone find out that their daughter was in the war, but her country also made her feel ashamed of her involvement.

While it is widely known that there is a lack of resources and assistance for veterans, this book highlights how especially difficult this was for the women after returning home from Vietnam. The nurses' experiences were equally traumatic and their sacrifices just as great, yet once they returned home,

they were constantly being told that "there weren't women in Vietnam." Although all Vietnam War veterans were disrespected and shamed, the women were completely invalidated and silenced when they tried to talk about their experiences or ask for help. Throughout this book, Frankie takes us along her journey of heartbreak, loss of innocence, PTSD, addiction, and trying to find her purpose. Kristin Hannah's talent for storytelling and the level of research that goes into her books always result in a five-star rating from me.

—Hayley Ohl

### *Vacay might not be enough*

Entrepreneurs don't have easy lives. The endless string of 60-hour work weeks, jam-packed with hustle and grind, can take its toll. But if you're expecting that long-awaited summer vacation to "fix" your exhaustion, overwhelm, and lagging motivation, think again. Small business strategist Julie Bee says you might come back from that week of ocean breezes or mountain air dreading the screech of the alarm clock more than ever. A recent nationwide study found that 41 percent of employed Americans report experiencing burnout after taking time off—and Bee says entrepreneurs are particularly at risk.

"Expecting a vacation to stave off burnout isn't realistic because time away doesn't

“”  
Although all Vietnam War veterans were disrespected and shamed, the women were completely invalidated and silenced...



solve the problems that were causing your stress,” says Bee, author of *Burned: How Business Owners Can Overcome Burnout and Fuel Success* (Matt Holt; June 2024). “Not only will those problems be waiting when you return, there may also be a whole new set of fires for you to put out. That can be enough to tip you over the edge into burnout.” Bee, who guides other business owners on how to get “unstuck,” work through burnout, and take their companies to the highest level, speaks from fifteen years of experience as an entrepreneur—and from the other side of her own business owner burnout. In *Burned*, she acknowledges that periodic stress, struggle, and even burnout are givens when you own a business. Her book provides tactical advice on how to make space for addressing burnout, fix any problems it has caused, and leverage its lessons *while* running a company.

—Dottie DeHart

### *A slow simmer comes to a full boil*

Writer Erik Larson knows how to spin non-fiction historical tales, in a style that is both readable and suspenseful. Witness *The Devil in the White City*, *In the Garden of Beasts* and *The Splendid and the Vile*, all bestsellers. Now comes *The Demon Of Unrest: A Saga Of Hubris, Heartbreak and Heroism At The Dawn Of The Civil War* (Crown, 2024), which in vivid details describes the runup to the Confederate States attack on Fort Sumter in the waters off Charleston, South Carolina, manned

by Union soldiers but surrounded by secessionist troops in the breakaway state of South Carolina, as other southern states were still debating whether or not to secede after the unlikely election of Abraham Lincoln, who had long been opposed to slavery and was seen by the agrarian south as likely to demand they free the enslaved population that toiled on plantations and in their homes.

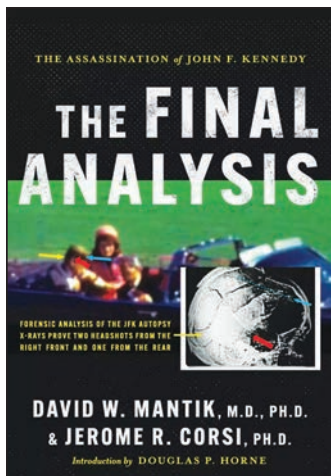
*The Demon of Unrest* shows the conflicted feelings about going to war, how some on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line wanted to avoid Civil War, a conflict which eventually killed 750,000 Americans before it was over, on the battlefields or from diseases that often spread like wildfire. It’s a spellbinding and tense tale, sort of like the frog placed in a pot of cold water – unaware of the danger until it slowly heats to a boil. For readers who find history related to the Civil War – how did this happen on American soil? – Larson’s book, like his others, should be considered a must-read.

—Gene Marrano

### *The Final Analysis ... or is it?*

“X-Rays PROVE two headshots from the right front and one from the rear,” screams a sub-head on the front cover of *The Final Analysis: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (Post Hill Press, 2024) but of course that’s counter to the Warren Commission report that determined all three shots fired at Dealey Plaza in Dallas came from the rear





Bear Theatre

and presumably Lee Harvey Oswald's mail order rifle fired from the Texas School Book Depository - when the Kennedy motorcade slowed down to 11mph around a sharp turn in the road. "I'm just a patsy," Oswald exclaimed as he was paraded before journalists at the police station - before he was gunned down by Jack Ruby (conveniently some would say) just days later.

I would say that *The Final Analysis*, written by David W. Mantik and Jerome R. Corsi, the former an MD/PhD, the latter sporting a PhD, may appeal to forensic buffs who like really deep and somewhat repetitive dives into their theory and the "evidence" provided that Kennedy was killed by shots coming from the front, not just from behind him. That would bring the grassy knoll theory front and center. But *The Final Analysis* is indeed repetitive, technical to fault and injects politics right up front, railing about the stolen 2020 Presidential election and Deep State conspiracies that really had no place in the book and may put some readers off. There are better, more prosaic conspiracy theory tales about the assassination of JFK for sure.

—Gene Marrano

## Strong opening for The Bear

The inaugural production for Exit, Pursued By A Bear - Bear Theatre for short - was a promising one, with a ribbon cutting and remarks from Roanoke City Councilwoman

Stephanie Moon Reynolds and a healthy opening night crowd in late July.

As were the comments from those who attended the opening weekend for Beth Henley's Pulitzer prize-winning, Tony nominated drama/black comedy *Crimes of the Heart*, centered on three sisters, on stage at Community High School in downtown Roanoke: "Fabulous" ... "It was wonderful" ... "I loved every minute of it" ... "We enjoyed it."

Local playwright and actor David Walton said he, "loved the acting, the costuming, the set ... so very good. The very best of community theater."

"Audiences with an interest in seeing passionate people portraying passionate people will be in for a treat with Exit, Pursued by a Bear's production of "Crimes of the Heart." - wrote Emma Thomas, a freelance journalist who has had several stories in Valley Business FRONT. Sadly, she is moving to northern Virginia this month and will be missed. *Arsenic and Old Lace* is up next for The Bear in October; director Brian Lee (at center in photo) was showing that cast what the set will look like after the opening rehearsal table read.

—Gene Marrano

*The reviewers:* **Hayley Ohl** of Salem works in human resources for a healthcare organization; **Dottie DeHart** is a publicist in Hickory, NC; **Gene Marrano** is news editor of FRONT.



## HCA supports AEDs >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem and HCA Virginia leaders celebrated a \$25,000 grant award recently to The Compress and Shock Foundation, a Roanoke based nonprofit promoting AED education and accessibility. The grant will provide AEDs for eligible organizations across Virginia and education events in underserved communities. "This is a tremendous opportunity for our foundation," said Jack Perkins, Executive Director of the Compress and Shock Foundation, "to continue engaging communities that don't have access to CPR and AEDS's [defibrillators] in their community." Perkins said the grant will enable Compress and Shock to install another dozen AEDs around Virginia, and to pay for trainers that will go into underserved communities to demonstrate how they work – and can save lives.



## Blindness no impediment for this artist >

July was National Disability Pride Month and to celebrate the **Taubman Museum** got a new mural in its outdoor patio - this one was painted by a blind artist from Texas. **Bramblitt** lost his eyesight when he was in college. He was born with epilepsy and while in school he contracted Lyme Disease. Complications with medications, his worsening epilepsy and the lime disease led to his loss of vision. He says the people at North Texas University made accommodations so he could stay in school. Now 53, Bramblitt says he became the world's first blind muralist in 2017. He has painted a new mural for the Taubman Museum of Art which celebrates all forms of expression. He says art and the people around him saved his life. "I hope the artwork is [an inspiration]. I know that other people's artwork inspires me every day. Every time I do an art workshop, I leave inspired." He led a workshop at the Taubman where participants painted with blindfolds on.

Bramblitt uses paint with different textures to tell the various colors. He paints objects and portraits by touching the subjects. He's painted portraits of professional skateboarder Tony Hawke and Academy Award winner Jeff Bridges as well as numerous musicians. "I am the most fortunate person in the world," he said.



## Giant leap for LEAP >

The **Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP)**, has opened a new brick-and-mortar food store on Patterson in Roanoke's West End neighborhood week, which will provide fresh food to the area. **Cam Terry** is a farmer at Lick Run Farms; his produce is sold at local farmer's markets, and now at the LEAP community store, which was funded in large part by federal grants and includes a community meeting room featuring a mural painted by the prolific Jon Murrill. "This store is here to build up this community and provide food directly to people who need access to healthy and fresh food," says Terry. "The fact now that we have this public-facing and easily accessible option for people who pass by here on the way to work and home every day ... is just a really exciting development."

Terry says with downtown residents moving more towards the west end, it's one of the only nearby places local residents can get local fresh food, adding that that he's happy to be able to supply the store as a producer. The LEAP store will be open three days a week, giving producers like Terry the opportunity to sell their produce on other days at markets organized by LEAP (like one on the weekends in Grandin Village) or elsewhere. "We wanted to have more options for farmers and how they can sell and grow food for the local community and also have more options for consumers," says **Maureen Best** with LEAP, "so with the LEAP community store being open Wednesday-Thursday-Friday from noon to 7, we have [other options for producers] between six site markets and the mobile market. So, we're really excited trying to build a diversity of options for consumers and farmers and food-based businesses."



## Martin's owner branches out again >

"Making Roanoke cooler one weekend, and one block, at a time!" So says **Jason Martin**, owner of the new **Jaybird Tavern**, in a space on Luck Avenue that was once home to Clutch Meats. He also owns the popular Martin's restaurant and live music joint, and the upscale Sidecar next door.





Courtesy of DRI

## DRI spearheads new mural >

**Downtown Roanoke Inc**, **The Roanoke Arts Commission**, and **ALCOVA Mortgage** have unveiled a new mural in downtown Roanoke, in the City market area. **Jon Murrill** is responsible for the mural that pays tribute to the "1218 Train" that was once part of Norfolk and Western's steam locomotive line. Director of Marketing and Communications for Downtown Roanoke Inc, **Izzy Post Ruhland**: "Murrill obtained his Master of Fine Arts Degree from Radford University, and since then has exhibited in juried exhibitions, solo exhibits, and group shows. His handiwork can be seen in several places in Roanoke, including murals commissioned by local businesses." Ruhland says DRI, the Arts Commission, and ALCOVA partnered to memorialize the Star City's rich history with locomotives.

## GoFest jumps to second locale >

The 14th annual **Anthem GO Outside Festival (GO Fest)** is set to return to Roanoke, from October 18-20, and has announced an expansion that adds a second location at **Explore Park**. The new "Adventure Outpost" at Explore Park joins the "Festival Basecamp" centered around **Elmwood Park** and the streets in downtown Roanoke. A complimentary shuttle will connect each location, for all attendees. **Pete Eshelman** is the director of the **Roanoke Outside Foundation** and founder of the Anthem GO Outside Festival, which draws brings tens of thousands of people regionally every year while providing an economic boost to downtown Roanoke businesses: "this year's festival promises a true mountain-metro adventure. The 'Festival Basecamp' in downtown Roanoke will continue to buzz with energy, surrounded by restaurants, retail, and entertainment. Meanwhile, the 'Adventure Outpost' at Explore Park will provide a picturesque setting with its scenic beauty, mountains, trails, and river—perfect for camping, testing outdoor equipment, and enjoying the Ultimate Air Dog Show."

The Dog Show returns after a two-year hiatus; the move to downtown streets from the River's Edge complex led to some logistical issues that made it difficult to set up the massive pool that the dogs jump into while chasing after a ball, frisbee, etc. Local and national outfitters will also show off and sell their gear at Go Fest, which also features live music and entertainment/food options for those attending the free gate festival.



## LewisGale's heart care award >

LewisGale Medical Center is one of 61 hospitals nationwide to receive the American College of Cardiology's NCDR Chest Pain—MI Registry Gold Performance Achievement Award for 2024, which recognizes its commitment and success in implementing a higher standard of care for heart attack patients. To receive the Award, LewisGale Medical Center has demonstrated sustained achievement in the Chest Pain—MI Registry for two consecutive years (2021 and 2022) and performed at the top level for specific performance measures.

"We're honored to receive the Gold Performance Award for our dedication to meeting comprehensive performance measures in patient care and demonstrating leadership to high-quality performance," Michele Gillespie, LewisGale Regional Health System vice president of cardiovascular services, said.



Gene Marrano

## New mother home >

It's called The Grove on Patterson - a residential treatment facility for pregnant and postpartum women that are dealing with substance abuse disorder - continuing the services once offered at the now-defunct Bethany Hall. The non-profit **Restoration Housing** is taking the lead on making the 1919 Colonial Revival property on Patterson Avenue ready for that mission - **Isabel Thornton** is Executive Director: "in the affordable housing world, I often get conversations that come to me about how to create treatment and recovery housing - for populations that need low barriers. That is our world."

The majority of Restoration Housing projects to date have entailed turning blighted, century old houses into multi or single-family affordable spaces. "It's not our typical business model; in this instance it is housing, but it is temporary." The Grove plan calls for a maximum of a six month stay for those women seeking treatment for substance abuse disorders. A \$400,000 donation from Aetna Better of Health of Virginia helped support Restoration Housing's purchase of the property earlier this year. The Grove should open to pregnant and postpartum women for stays of up to 6 months early next year after renovations. Bethany Hall, which merged with Trust House under the ARCH banner but is now closed, used to offer residential substance abuse Medicaid-billable treatment services for pregnant and post-partum women, typically on the lower end of the income scale.

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

## EDUCATIONAL FRONT



**Pennell**

Dr. **Kelley Pennell** is the new nursing director in the Associate of Applied Science (prelicensure-RN) Nursing Program at Virginia Western Community College. She has been a registered nurse for over 20 years, an advanced practice nurse for 15 years and is board certified as a clinical nurse specialist in adult health. She holds a DNP in Executive Leadership Concentration from the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio; MSN-Adult Holistic Nursing Clinical Nurse Specialist from the University of Texas at Austin; and BS in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix, Santa Clara, Calif. She also served on faculty

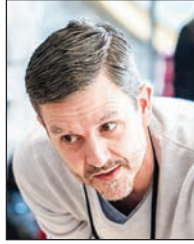
at Galveston College in Texas; National American University; Chamberlain University San Antonio Campus; and University of Texas at Austin.



**Sliwa**

**Bill Sliwa** was hired as Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing at Ferrum College. He has over 20 years of related experience, most recently with West Liberty University. He also worked at Maryville College and Lees-McRae; and coached football for 11 years within NCAA DI, DIIA, DII, and DIII. Sliwa has a bachelor of arts in Psychology from Buffalo State College.

**John Chappell**, associate professor at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, has been



**Chappell**

appointed to direct Virginia Tech's Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health (TBMH) Graduate Program.



**Espinoza**

**Juan Espinoza** has been named vice provost for enrollment management at Virginia Tech after serving as interim vice provost since January. Espinoza leads a division that includes Undergraduate Admissions, University Scholarships and Financial Aid, University Registrar, College Access Collaborative, Strategic Enrollment

Communications and Marketing, Research and Analysis, and Professionally Oriented Graduate Programs.



**Marinik**

**Andrew Marinik** is the new executive director for emergency management at Virginia Tech. Marinik joined Virginia Tech 17 years ago, first working with the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute for six years before serving as the emergency planner and subsequently the assistant director within Emergency Management.

**Mintai Kim**, professor of landscape architecture, has been named associate dean of graduate studies for Virginia Tech's College of Architecture, Arts, and Design. Kim is a professor in the

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Kim

Landscape Architecture Program in the School of Design, having joined the university in 2007. Since 2022, he has served as co-coordinator of the Ph.D. program in architecture and design research.



Feruzzi

**Mario Ferruzzi**, professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) and director of Arkansas Children's Nutrition Center, has been named the next dean of the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture

## Have a career announcement?

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

and Life Sciences, effective October 15th, succeeding Alan Grant, who is retiring after serving as dean since October 2009.



Caver

**Lynne Caver** has joined the university community as the director of finance and business operations for the Division of Information Technology. Caver came to Virginia Tech from the California Institute of Technology, where she was senior director of finance and information systems for facilities.



Guimont

**Corinne Guimont**, associate director of publishing and digital scholarship, will lead Virginia Tech Publishing, the university's digital-first open access publisher, in its mission to share Virginia Tech scholarship openly and broadly. She will build upon the work of Peter Potter, who began Virginia Tech Publishing in 2017.

**Reed Nagel** has been named assistant vice president of finance and director of procurement. Nagel originally joined



Nagel

the university's procurement department in 2017 and currently serves as associate director of procurement for goods, services, and information technology in the Division of Finance.



Turner

**Sarah Turner** has joined Virginia Tech's

## Valinda Hayes

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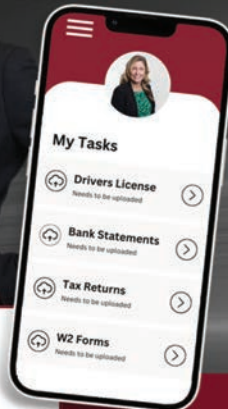
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College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences as director of alumni relations. Her professional journey includes leadership roles at Concord University and the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine. Most recently, she served as vice president for advancement at Concord University, overseeing fundraising, alumni programming, and marketing efforts.



Joyce

(when it opens in 2025). Joyce has several decades of financial industry experience and is a current board member of Virginia CARES, board president of FedUp, and has served on other boards and community service positions with TAP, Blue Ridge Mortgage Lenders Association, YWCA, City of Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association.



Wood

joined Farm Credit of the Virginias (FCV)—a lending cooperative that serves Virginia, West Virginia and western Maryland—as a loan officer at the Roanoke branch. Wood attended Virginia Tech and received a bachelor's degree in animal and Poultry Sciences under the production business path, with emphasis in both equine and livestock.

department faculty at Virginia Tech. Stevens also reviews films (on WDBJ-7 tv and WFIR radio), on the board at Grandin Theatre, and volunteers with the Film Lab.

## REAL ESTATE FRONT



Cooper

**Briggs Cooper** has joined the Roanoke office of Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer as an associate in Commercial Brokerage Services. He was part of Thalhimer's 2023 Summer Intern Program; a 2024 graduate of Virginia Tech with a Bachelor of Science in Real Estate and a minor in Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Technology Management.



Ulbrich

**Thomas Ulbrich** has joined Freedom First Credit Union as vice president mortgage loan officer, working with home buyers in Roanoke and Smith Mountain Lake area. With over 30 years of experience in the mortgage industry, Ulbrich formerly served on the Economic Development Committee of the Roanoke Valley Association of REALTORS Affiliates and is the treasurer of the Rotary Foundation.

## ENTERTAINMENT FRONT

**Kate Chase** has joined Berglund Center as event manager. She was with the Jefferson Center in Roanoke for nearly 20 years as a volunteer and staff member.



Patterson

**Annette Patterson** of Vinton and president of The Advancement Foundation entrepreneurial network, was selected as one of 40 fellows from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) 2023-2024 Appalachian Leadership Institute. ALI is a comprehensive regional leadership program from ARC and in partnership with the University of Tennessee and other entities for economic development across 13 states in the Appalachian region.

## FINANCIAL FRONT

**Rita Joyce** has joined Bank of Botetourt as Assistant Vice President—Community Development Officer at the Melrose Plaza Office in Roanoke

**Makenna Wood** has

## MARKETING FRONT



Stevens

**Brent Stevens** has joined 5Points Creative agency as an account lead. He was director of the Writing Center at Hollins University and on the English



Madsen

**Kelly Dean Madsen** has been named board president of The Alleghany Foundation Board of Directors. She was secretary/treasurer and served on multiple

subcommittees since 2019. Born and raised in the Allegheny Highlands, Madsen graduated from Allegheny High School, received her bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, and certificate from UVA's McIntire Business Institute. She served on Clifton Forge Main Street Inc, Allegheny Highlands Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Board of Directors, Augusta Mutual Insurance Agents Advisory Board, and Mountain Gateway Community College Business Advisory Board. She is president of Racey & Dean Insurance in Clifton Forge.

**Bailey Medeiros** has been appointed the new director of the Roanoke Valley Collective Response—



**Medeiros**

a multi-sector initiative to provide recovery-oriented solutions to the addiction crisis in the Roanoke Valley. She has a bachelor's degree in philosophy from UC Santa Barbara and served as peer recovery coordinator and recovery community engagement lead with RVCR.

## MUNICIPAL FRONT

**Karli Foster** has been named the new Business Retention & Expansion and Workforce Manager



**Foster**

for Franklin County. Foster comes from Roanoke County, where she served as an Economic Development Specialist. She is a graduate of James Madison University with a Master of Public Administration and holds a Bachelor of Science in Public and Urban Affairs from Virginia Tech. She served as an intern in Franklin County in 2021.

**Angela Lawrence** has been appointed mayor for the Town of Buchanan by Town Council. She will



**Lawrence**

also serve as zoning administrator. Lawrence previously served as town manager for Dayton, VA, Chase City, VA, Ashland, VA and most recently, interim manager for University Park, MD. She has also led several nonprofit organizations and served as grants administrator, recreation consultant, and greenways and trails coordinator for Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

*Compiled by Tom Field and Gene Marrano*

“ ”  
If the county can entice people to come for the weekend, they may stay forever.

— Page 19

## FIRST FRIDAYS



SEPT 6



OCT 4





# 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. [cooperjp91@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.

**Shannon Dominguez** lives in Vinton and is a passionate reader and writer. She escaped a cult 8 years ago and is working on a book called, "This Ends Now", which focuses on breaking generational cycles. [shannon@buildingbelovedcommunities.com]

**Dan Dowdy** is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading

services (proofingprof.net). His background includes service in the U.S. Air Force and an extensive career in education, including teaching college-level writing competency and business courses, and working for a Fortune 100 company. [ddowdy@vbFRONT.com]

**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]

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

**Shatenita Horton** serves as the Senior Vice President of Retail Banking at Freedom First Credit Union. As a member of Senior Management, Shatenita directs the sales and service efforts through creation, coordination and management of company-wide Retail, Private, and Business Banking programs.

She hails from Columbia, Missouri and has lived in Roanoke for the past 3 years. [shorton@freedomfirst.com]

**Gene Marrano** is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFR 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.

**Ian Price** is a radio and print journalist in Roanoke who looks at things through a Millennial's eye. The Radford University communications major is also a pretty good DJ and trivia host, some say. [IanPrice23@gmail.com]

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

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

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

**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]

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“Cybercriminals saw an opportunity with people spending more time on their home computers working outside layers of protection that typically wrap around corporate networks. — Page 37

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*Not exactly local*

**Virginia Business** magazine has been acquired by Greensboro NC-based Bridge Tower Media, a subsidiary of Transom Capital Group private equity firm in Los Angeles.

*How to face flying*

**Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport** now has a facial recognition security system operated by TSA agents. The scanners match the face of the person at checkpoint with the person's photo ID, which is supposed to streamline the process and not require a boarding pass at that point. Passengers can opt out if they don't want their photos taken.

*Roll out the barrel*

**Speyside Bourbon Cooperage**—that already has a stave mill in Bath County—is building another mill in Pittsylvania County (at Brosville Industrial Park). The US subsidiary of the French company,

produces the strips of wood out of American White Oak for bourbon barrels. The new plant in Pittsylvania marks a near-\$17 million investment and should create around 40 new jobs.

*TAP tags Express*

**Express Title and Tag** in Moneta has been acquired by Tag Agency Professionals of St. Petersburg, FL. Express will continue to operate under its brand name as part of the TAP company. The business processes title and registration for vehicle buyers, auctions, fleet entities, and financial institutions.

*JA HOF*

Junior Achievement of Southwest Virginia recognized three business leaders for its annual Hall of Fame program: Dr. **Robert Sandel**, president of Virginia Western Community College as 2024 Laureate; **Kelly Woolwine**, with Evolution HR, Triumph

NIL and Life Ring Foundation as Entrepreneur of the Year; and **Douglas Pitzer** with Strokes of Genius, Blacks in Technology, and Young Doctors Roanoke as Social Entrepreneur of the Year.

*From Cabo to Peru*

**Inka Grill**—serving Peruvian cuisine at it Brambleton Ave Roanoke location—has leased the former Cabo Fish Taco restaurant in downtown Roanoke that exited in April.

*Sun rises in Bedford*

**Solarix**—a solar module manufacturer (allowing agriculture use along with solar energy applications)—is investing \$63 million for its startup that will create about 100 jobs at its facility in Forest (Bedford County). The company purchased an existing plant (AVET) for \$6.5 million and cites American-owned and made products (replacing Chinese)

as a primary mission for its renewable energy business.

*Hopeful ride at Hollins*

**Hollins University** has deployed a revised no-college-debt HOPE Scholars program where eligible, selected undergraduate “academically talented young women” applicants can get their four-year degree with the direct costs of attendance (tuition, on-campus food and housing, fees) fully covered. The program is for first-time, first-year, domestic undergraduate students who plan to attend Hollins this fall (2025) and are eligible for the Pell Grant. (The original HOPE program was established in 2021 to cover tuition for qualified students who lived within a 40-mile radius of Roanoke.)

*To [indoor] market we go*

LEAP (Local Environmental Agriculture Project nonprofit) has opened the **LEAP**

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## Community Store

on Patterson Ave. in Roanoke's West End neighborhood. The primary product is fresh fruits and vegetables, like a combined indoor farmers market / grocery store. The store officially opened on July 31.

## Southwest tourism

**Friends of Southwest Virginia** announced over 30 awards for tourism in early August; including: Pam Cox, **Scott County** for Outstanding Tourism Leader; **Town of Rocky Mount** "150 Fest" for Outstanding One-Day Event of the Year with more than 3,000 Attendees; and **Patrick County** Tourism Website for Best New Website over \$50k.

## Site prep boost

The following localities in our region are slated for funding from a \$126 million state grant announced by Virginia Business Ready Sites Program for developing industrial sites for new business: \$9 million for

**Danville** (Coleman site); \$7.5 million for **Roanoke City** (Centre for Industry & Technology); \$6 million for **Pittsylvania County** (Berry Hill); \$5.5 million for **Franklin County** (Summit View); \$5.1 million for **Wythe County** (Progress Park); \$3.5 million for **Radford** (Virginia Casting); \$1.5 million for **Bedford County** (New London).

## Playtime, kids

**Grow Wild**—a Montessori-inspired indoor play studio for children—is opening in Daleville in the upper strip mall at Botetourt Commons. The owner says she wanted to create a safe space for little ones to explore through purposeful play.

## Ag-Tech grant

**Virginia Western Community College** was awarded a \$343,209 Advanced Technological Education grant from the National Science Foundation to fund an "agricultural technician" program. This includes

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developing business opportunities through controlled environmental agriculture (CEA), facilitating members of VWCC's Business and Industry Leadership Team.

## Dead battery

Santa Clara, CA-based **Applied Materials** canceled its plan for building a lithium-ion battery components plant in Lynchburg and terminated a 2022 DOE grant tied to that development.

## Alumnus funds science

Shaun McConnon, a cybersecurity entrepreneur and **Roanoke College** alumnus (1966) donated \$20 million to the school's new Science Center

under development; that will now be named after him. McConnon gifted \$15 million in 2021 at the beginning of the campaign; and recently added another \$5 million, accounting for a third of the \$60 million campaign. A related part of the construction will honor former life sciences professor Bob Jenkins who taught at the school for 40 years and passed away in 2023.

## When robots go wrong

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has awarded a \$118,000 grant to **Virginia Tech**. The funds awarded will go towards a project developing robotics anomaly detection. As cited in an article, "Autonomous robotic

## Notable Transactions

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- **Savory Ventures Salem** "4th Street Eats" is a new food truck court planned for a commercial lot at 600 W 4th Street in Salem
- **Blacksburg** council approves 73 townhomes to be built on former site of Blacksburg High School
- A **quick-service restaurant** is planned for former bank branch at 2035 Colonial Ave in Roanoke; property sold to North Fork Holdings for \$1,100,000
- Montgomery County approves development of 14 high end homes on 50 acres at Brammer Lane in **Christiansburg**
- Bedford board approves sale of former **Body Camp Elementary School** building to Moneta-based Zitel for \$100,000
- **Fayette Street Lofts** apartments (and studios and multi-merchant retail) has opened in uptown Martinsville in historic Winn-Dixie grocery-then-furniture store

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

missions (ARMs) have become increasingly important in various fields, including manufacturing, logistics, search and rescue operations, and even space exploration. As the complexity of these missions grows, ensuring the reliability and safety of the robots becomes paramount.”

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### *New name for E&H*

Emory & Henry College is now **Emory & Henry University**. “This is a pivotal moment in the 188-year history of Emory & Henry,” said Dr. Lou Fincher, Interim President and former Senior Vice President and Dean for the School of Health Sciences. “Over the last decade, Emory & Henry has expanded its footprint to include four campus locations from Marion to Bristol. Members of the Board of Trustees at Emory & Henry reviewed and approved the new 2023-2026 strategic plan “Elevate in Excellence,” at its March 25, 2023, meeting that included a status change to move from a college to a private regional comprehensive university to be fully implemented as Emory & Henry University by Fall 2024.

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### *Credit Union merger complete*

**Member One Federal Credit Union’s** (Member One) membership has approved a merger with **Virginia Federal Credit Union** (Virginia Credit Union). The merger

between the Roanoke-based Member One and Richmond-based Virginia Credit Union was effective August 1. The combined \$7 billion organization now employs 1,100 staff and almost 500,000 members at 37 branch locations. As the organization works toward full integration Member One will operate as a division of Virginia Credit Union; legacy Member One members will continue to bank as they normally do, accessing services and loan opportunities through existing digital platforms, ATM networks and branch locations, according to the news release.

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### *Franklin County broadband grant*

The **Franklin County Broadband Authority** has been awarded over \$4.5 million in grant funding from Virginia’s Telecommunication Grant Initiative (VATI) program, to support a new project aimed at bringing broadband to additional unserved areas of Franklin County. The VATI program, administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), is designed to extend broadband service to currently unserved areas of Virginia.

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### *Research grant for NRV company*

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, one of the institutes that make

up the National Institutes of Health, has awarded \$288,986 to **Biotherapeutics, Inc.**, located in Blacksburg, Virginia for lung disease research as it relates to asthma. According to the American Lung Association, more than twenty-five million Americans live with asthma.

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### *Summit View gets boost*

The **Summit View Business Park in Franklin County** has been awarded \$5.5 million from the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program. The VBRSP, administered by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, is designed to fund infrastructure improvements that build operations-ready sites for employers and manufacturers ready to expand in the Commonwealth. Summit View Business Park was one of only 23 sites across Virginia selected for this competitive award. “This is a big win for Franklin County,” said Ronnie Thompson, Chair of the Board of Supervisors. The \$5.5 million grant will enhance the sewer capacity at the 550-acre Summit View Business Park; the improvements are expected to help attract new businesses.

---

### *Tech, Roanoke Valley SPCA team up*

A unique partnership between the **Roanoke Valley SPCA** and **Virginia Tech’s School of Animal Sciences** will

provide opportunities for enhanced student experiential learning, industry-leading research on shelter animal behavior and welfare, and a heightened level of expert care and training for pets seeking adoption. The collaboration will be led by animal behavior and welfare expert Megan Arant, who will split her time between the shelter and Virginia Tech. Arant will work with shelter pets on positive behavioral interventions and lead classes and student research activities focused on improving shelter animal behavior and welfare.

“Animal shelters nationwide are currently overflowing, and our communities aren’t immune to the increasing demand. Too often, pets are surrendered or experience a delayed adoption due to fixable behavioral challenges. Not addressing those challenges often results in a prolonged shelter stay,” said Roanoke Valley SPCA Chief Executive Officer Denise Hayes. “I’m excited to help bridge the gap between classroom and experiential learning. Students will learn critical handling and behavioral skills and the shelter animals will benefit greatly from these interactions,” said Arant.

---

### *Tourism Spike*

The **Virginia Tourism Corporation** has announced that Virginia’s tourism industry generated

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a record high \$33.3 billion in visitor spending in 2023, an increase of nearly 10% from 2022. The tourism industry in Virginia directly supported over 224,000 jobs in 2023, an increase of over 13,000 jobs relative to 2022. Direct travel employment is now at 93% of pre-pandemic employment levels. Travelers spent \$91 million a day in Virginia in 2023 according to the VTC, up from \$83 million in 2022. Virginia visitors directly drove \$2.4 billion in state and local tax revenue, an increase of 9% from \$2.2 billion in 2022. Overnight visitation to Virginia increased by 1.4 million to 43.6 million visitors in 2023, up from 42.2 million in 2022, essentially reaching full recovery to pre-pandemic levels.

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#### *Governor board appointments*

Board of Housing and Community Development: **Scott Stosser** of Blacksburg, Senior Vice President of Construction, SAS Builders; Board of Nursing: Dr. **Cleopatra Kitt** of Roanoke, Senior Vice President of Leadership Development, Retirement Unlimited Inc.; Safety and Health Codes Board: **Jay Abbott** of Blacksburg, former Director of Operations, Red Sun Farms LLC; Ex-Officio Member, Virginia Agribusiness Council Board of Directors; and Cave Board: **Andrea Futrell** of Christiansburg, Karst Manager, TRC.

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Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, Certified Interior Designers & Landscape Architects: **Tim Colley** of Blacksburg, President, Colley Architects, P.C.; and Virginia Fire Services Board: **James “Jimmy” Calvert**, PhD, of Moneta, Project Management Consultant, LMI Consulting, Inc.; Aquaculture Advisory Board: **Ty Walker** of New Castle, Owner, Smoke In Chimneys; Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders Commission: **James Stovall** of Roanoke, Executive Director, Hermitage Roanoke; and Board of Wildlife Resources: **Laura W. Walters** of Pulaski County, Chair, Pulaski County Board of Supervisors.

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#### *More Fed funding for broadband*

A federally approved Virginia Initial Proposal Volume 2 will enable Virginia to access its allocation of \$1.48 billion through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) federal Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act. The BEAD program is a \$42.45 billion nationwide program to expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment, affordability and adoption programs. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will administer the

Commonwealth’s \$1.48 billion BEAD allocation to build upon the work of the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI).

The next step in the BEAD program involves finalizing and ensuring all locations lacking access to high-speed internet and that are not part of any existing state or federal deployment projects are included in the program. Following the approval of locations by NTIA, Virginia will initiate the application phase later this year. During this phase, broadband providers will have the opportunity to submit applications to extend their services to these unconnected regions. Meanwhile, more than \$41 million in grants through the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) has been awarded for 10 broadband construction projects serving 20 localities throughout Virginia. The VATI program provides targeted funding to extend service to areas that are presently unserved by any broadband provider.

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#### *Startup record growth*

The Youngkin administration says a Day One goal of creating 10,000 new high-growth and high-wage startup companies in Virginia has been realized, a new startup milestone faster than any previous Virginia governor’s administration in the last 15 years according to Youngkin. “At the beginning of

my administration, I pledged to reinvigorate job growth and foster an environment for 10,000 new startups in Virginia and we’ve achieved it in record time,” said Youngkin in a news release.

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#### *Big bucks for Centre*

There were more than \$700 million in requests for site prep funding state-wide, but only \$126 million dollars of projects made the cut. Administered by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, 23 localities made the cut for Virginia Business Ready Sites program development grants. Roanoke landed 7.5 million for improvements to an 82 acre tract at the Centre for **Industry and Technology**. Alicia Cundiff, an economic development specialist with the City of Roanoke, on what this grant means: “to continue to make Tract 8 shovel-ready, to be able to attract future manufacturing prospects. We were really excited that we got our full funding request.”

---

It’s the largest parcel left in the city’s major business park just off US 460/Orange Avenue. Amazon is building a distribution center in the same center: “we do not have a definitive manufacturing company coming yet. The Commonwealth really saw that Virginia was losing out to other states on manufacturing opportunities... we just didn’t have enough shovel-ready sites

compared to other states." Cundiff says the infrastructure work on Tract 8, will not be completed until mid to late 2026.

*Arts are good business*

**Roanoke City Council** received the annual update on the arts and culture activities it helps support through the Percent for Art program last month. Under the Percent for Art fund, the city of Roanoke sets aside 1 percent annually of certain budget components for the arts. Douglas Jackson is Arts and Cultural Coordinator for the City of Roanoke. In its first year, the Arts Connect Neighbors program, an initiative of the Roanoke Arts Commission, the Roanoke Cultural Endowment, and Roanoke Neighborhood Advocates with funding from the City of Roanoke and the National Endowment for the Arts, supported 40 activities - and local artists says Jackson, who also gave City Council an update on the Riverdale project,

the 9th Street SE Industrial Park mix-use development that could include affordable living spaces and studios for local artists: "[there was] a preliminary feasibility study with ArtSpace out of Minneapolis. This is a model they've done in 23 different states. Members of the ArtSpace team will be back in town [soon]. They are still focused on Riverdale and the spectacular activities that provides. They've been here twice [so far]. They're looking at property." Jackson also told City Council the Roanoke Arts Commission will also be aggressive in going after grants; it has secured significant funding from the NEA over the past few years.

*More kudos for Mama Jean's*

**Mama Jean's** was a contender for Southern Living's "Best in the South," and finished with a second place award in Virginia for best barbecue joint last year. Owner of Mama Jean's,

Madison Ruckel, began his BBQ journey in 2006, and through years of hard work-he became- in his words, a "proper pitmaster." "It's huge for us," says Ruckels, "it definitely means a lot, all of the hard work." Now they have their sights set on an award for 2025. Mama Jean's still prepares its fare (which includes its popular cheesesteaks and taco) from a food truck while they continue to work on turning the former Jimmy V's restaurant on Brandon Avenue in Roanoke into a venue where they can cook inside the kitchen space.

*Show Pony to take over Local Roots space*

With the abrupt closure of the high-end Local Roots in Grandin Village, what is described as an affordable eatery called **Show Pony** will soon open in that space. "[a] casual neighborhood restaurant," says co-owner Jeff Farmer "I've always been fascinated with neighborhood

restaurants, I think they are a dying breed. Where everyone hangs out, unpretentious – not fine dining, fine dining." Farmer is Chef at the Stock Café on Church Avenue; his Show Pony partner is Cas Moser, the bar manager at Stock. They describe Show Pony's fare as refined comfort food, perhaps with a New Orleans twist since both hail from the Crescent City.

*New eats in Vinton*

**HCK Hot Chicken**, a fast-casual restaurant brand known for its fiery Nashville-style cuisine and distinctive premium sauces, has opened its first local outlet in Vinton at 2499 East Washington Ave. This new 1,500 sq. ft. location, led by Al Khalili Mohammad, offers dine-in, pickup, and delivery through Grubhub, Uber Eats, and DoorDash.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field*

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You can't control how others behave, but you can control your responses. — Page 38

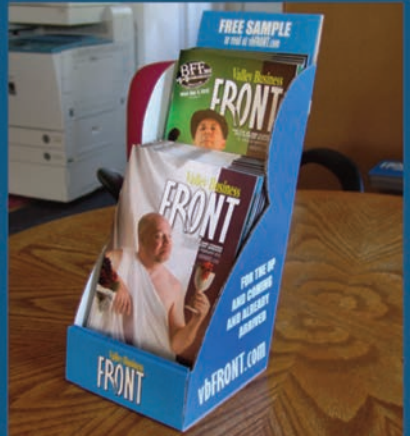
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