

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 202
JULY 2025

Atheling Mead Works
Adiabat Weather
Modern Reproduction
Mobility Plus
Brett Marston, VSB
Street Survival
Nic Schell, RPM

vbFRONT.com

A man with a wide, joyful smile is the central figure. He is wearing a dark beret, gold-rimmed sunglasses, a light-colored shirt, a dark tie, and a checkered blazer with a red flower pinned to the lapel. He is holding up a small, colorful card or pin. The background is a vibrant, out-of-focus display of various pinball machines, suggesting a museum or arcade setting. Large, stylized white text with a drop shadow is overlaid on the image, reading 'ding!ding!ding!' and '10 years!'.

ding!ding!ding!
10 years!

Nic Schell
Roanoke Pinball Museum



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A headshot of Brent Jenkins, a man with short dark hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a blue and white striped tie.

Brent Jenkins
Senior Commercial Banking Executive
(540) 339-3479

WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Now, THIS is definitely a first. Your FRONTcover this month is... a selfie. Not only that, but it's a pic for one of our littlest blurbs in the magazine—a simple FRONT'n About post. We've never showcased something that wasn't part of our story lineup as our COVER.

Maybe you can see why we made an exception this time.

It's fun. It's inviting. It's our own Roanoke Pinball Museum and the joy of simply playing games demonstrated by the director, Nic Schell. RMP just turned ten years old.

You don't have to be a wizard to appreciate that. Okay... maybe a little bit of magic...



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

“”
When you hit the bumpers and the
bells ring, it goes 'Oh yeah!' — Hulk Hogan



Yes, another selfie!

Roanoke Pinball Museum's Nic Schell and his father, Jack Schell. "My father played his first game of **The Beatles** pinball yesterday," Nic says. "Fun fact: He was also the one who introduced them back in 1964 for their big debut on stage in Dallas, Texas. RPM isn't just about pinball or gathering a pile of achievements; it's about the love of keeping memories alive. We live for the feels. Nothing else means as much as that... not even close."

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Valley Business FRONT

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Salem, VA 24153
(540) 389-9945
www.vbFRONT.com

Staff

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Publisher / Creative Director | Tom Field tfield@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945 |
| Editor | Gene Marrano news@vbFRONT.com |
| Advertising | Dan Dowdy (540) 797-7943 ddowdy@vbFRONT.com ads@vbFRONT.com (540) 389-9945 |
| Graphic Design | Nicholas Vaassen |
| Office Administration | Emily Field info@vbFRONT.com |
| Production | Berryfield, Inc. PO Box 1041 Salem, VA 24153 (540) 389-9945 |

Departmental Contacts

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Advertising | ads@vbFRONT.com |
| Subscriptions | info@vbFRONT.com |
| News / Releases | news@vbFRONT.com |
| Admin / Ops | info@vbFRONT.com |

(540) 389-9945
vbFRONT.com
morefront.blogspot.com

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JULY



Jade Richardson Bock



Aila Boyd



Emily Field



Tom Field



Kelsey Monahan



Anne Sampson

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.

2025 CONTRIBUTORS



Zachary Collier



Carrie Cousins



Dan Dowdy



Hart Fowler



Olivia Marone



Gene Marrano



Nicholas Vaassen



Linda Balentine
Crowning Touch /
senior services



Micah Fraim
Fraim & Cawley CPAs /
finance - accounting



Kevin Holt
Gentry Locke /
legal



Shatenita Horton
Freedom First Credit Union /
finance—credit unions



Mary Ann L. Miller
Bank of Botetourt /
finance – banking



Alicia Smith
F&S Building Innovations /
construction

“”
It was my
first job out
of college.
— Page 37

“”
AEO uses
more human
semantics and
language...
very much
like we speak.
— Page 15

Biographies and
contact information
on each contributor
are provided on Page 24.

“”
Mead was considered
a sacred drink. — Page 9





Warriors, Poets, and the Nectar of the Gods

By Hart Fowler

Dr. Stephen Ausband opens a tasting room for Atheling Meadworks, bringing a literary, multi-cultural, and ancient tradition to downtown Roanoke.



Gene Marrano photos

Once upon a time, a millennia ago in Scandinavia, Heoret was the grandest mead hall of them all, immortalized as the setting of the battle between the warrior Beowulf and the monster Grendel in an epic poem. At that time in Celtic mythology, mead was considered a sacred drink associated with the Otherworld, the realm of gods and ancestors and believed to bestow magical powers, wisdom, and poetic inspiration.

Atheling Meadworks founder Stephen Ausband grew up hearing his father, an English professor, reading Beowulf aloud and in Old English. He was intrigued by the culture, and the atheling Beowulf, which is Old English for prince. "Mead is certainly associated with the Vikings and the Celts but is also associated with the Greeks in the form of Ambrosia," Ausband said at the ribbon-cutting for the Atheling Meadworks tasting room in June. (An Atheling was a



Steve Ausband



Prince or Lord in Anglo-Saxon England.)

"It also dates back to the Egyptians and is one of the oldest fermented beverages that is known to man." He watched his grandfather make wine at his home and was inspired. "It was fascinating to see the fermentations that he had going so it was kind of a natural progression."

Ausband began experimenting with fermenting honey at 14, and developed his mead making process in medical school, and as a hobby while working as an emergency physician at Carillion. In 2019, he opened Atheling Meadworks in the warehouse of the Wimmer Tire building on McClanahan Street, which was formerly a Dr Pepper plant and for a while housed the Roanoke Railhouse brewery. 2025 seemed the right time to open a downtown tasting room with production, online sales and local distribution on solid ground.

"There seems to be an expanding market and interest in mead over the past few years, and there's been an increase in the number of meaderies across the country. You're starting to see mead on the shelves in different stores and folks becoming more aware of it as time goes on," Ausband said. "It seems to be an old beverage that's coming back."

The tasting room at 123 Campbell SE offers mead on tap, tasting flights and bottle sales, and the expansive space certainly has elements that hearken back. Gandalf and the elves drink mead in Lord of the Rings, and Tolkien described King Theoden's middle-earth mead hall having "Many woven cloths hung upon the walls ... bright sunbeams fell in glimmering shafts from the eastern windows, high under the deep eaves."

Mead tasters in Roanoke are greeted by



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Medieval style banners representing Ausband's ancestors and the Atheling logo adorning the exposed brick, naturally well-lit by the tall windows of the space. The tap system and service area resembles a modern bar, and more seating reaches the back of the building. On the spacious second floor there is plenty of room for events. Charcuterie boards (cheeses, sliced meats etc.) will be available for those who want to snack as well.

Root 2 Music draws on ancient traditional music and performed at the tasting room's opening night. Guitarist David Frank said their acoustic music "allowed the great hall to provide the reverberation" for their melodies. He said, "It is not difficult to sip the mead, close your eyes, listen and imagine you are in a stately court surrounded by lords and ladies."

Along with the literary tradition, that

musical tradition associated with mead drinking is found in the naming of Atheling's flagship mead Lyre's Song. The raspberry blossom honey delivers a complex floral flavor with citrus and balsam undertones and is named for the instrument that was played in the times Beowulf was recited in great halls. The oak-aged, blackberry-forward Shield Maiden, another character from the Middle Ages lore, is also available. Ausband noted that Atheling meads have won awards both national and internationally.

Will the drink of human history, popular with Vikings, Mayans, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans alike, become a popular option for locals and those visiting Roanoke? Ausband believes so. "With the interest in craft beverage across the board, and the willingness of people to try new things and to expand their palettes, there is growing area where folks are looking for something new." 



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LEAD BY EXAMPLE

**By Carrie Cousins,
Lead Point Digital**

Executive Summary:
*There's a new digital
marketing buzzword in
town – AEO, or answer
engine optimization.*

AEO

As search engines are replacing traditional results with artificial intelligence generated results, and as more people are turning to AI engines, such as ChatGPT for search queries, question and answer search has never been bigger.

That's where AEO comes in.

It's really just a different way of thinking about search optimization. I like to think of it as an "and" to your existing SEO strategy, helping you maintain current search optimization while adding a little boost with AEO.

When you write content for answer engine optimization, it is posed to answer specific questions that users may have when they use search. It started rising in popularity with voice search, such as Alexa or Siri, but has exploded with AI generators.

AEO is an SEO strategy for this simple fact – it is rooted in the same best practices with the addition of using a question and answer format designed to help users find precisely what they are looking for.

Ok ... maybe it is not quite that simple, but you get the general idea.

Think of it like this:

If you search "Why is the sky blue?"

Google will likely offer the first result as an actual answer to the question with cited links. Traditional search results will appear below the AI overview.

Your goal with AEO is to answer this question fully and appropriately so that your content is linked in that AI overview. Additionally, you'd want your content returned as an answer in AI engines if you used them for search in the same way.


This means your job with content is to pose, and answer, the question that users might ask about your product or service.

This does not replace your SEO program or keyword strategy; it pairs with it.

The big difference is that AEO uses more human semantics and language – we ask questions in search very much like we speak – and goes back to using long-tail keywords. (Long-tail keywords are specific search phrases that are longer but have lower search volume. The benefit is they can have higher conversion rates for those that do click through.)

AEO can be beneficial for almost any website, although deployment may be different. There's a fine line between creating content that people want to dive into and stuffing content for search.

Some of my clients are already using this to their advantage and we can see website source traffic originating from AI generators.

Digital marketing is changing fast right now, and considering AEO as part of your strategy should not be overlooked. 



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Ashley Ballard

Gene Marrano

Weathering the Future:

How Adibat is Making Weather Data Actionable

By Aila Boyd

Customized weather forecasts for niche business markets offered by a Roanoke-based company.

On Campbell Avenue in Roanoke, a specialized weather intelligence company is helping organizations across the country—both public and private—make better decisions through custom weather data analysis. Adibat, formerly known as METCON, is led by Ashley Ballard, one of fewer than 250 Certified Consulting Meteorologists in the world.

Ballard co-founded Adibat to bring high-level geospatial weather intelligence to a broader range of clients after years of supporting the federal government and intelligence community. The company helped sharpen its business plan by participating in The Gauntlet mentorship program and competition.

"METCON's focus was in the federal government space," Ballard said. "The transition to Adibat was fueled by expanding our team and bringing

our expertise to the private sector." The new name is a nod to the adiabatic process, a thermodynamic principle central to weather systems—symbolizing the company's deep scientific grounding.

That foundation is evident in Ballard's own background. With degrees in meteorology and geography from Virginia Tech, and more than a decade of experience in climatology and remotely sensed weather data, Ballard leads the company with a "science-first" approach.

"Everything we do is grounded in our professional understanding of weather information," she said. "Weather is inherently geospatial, and providing our clients with the best weather insights requires a spatial lens."

As the company's lead atmospheric data scientist,

Ballard oversees the transformation of billions of daily atmospheric data points into highly customized, actionable insights. This includes integrating data from satellites, weather stations and high-resolution models into a GIS framework to interpret not just the "what" but also the "where" and "why" of weather events.

"Our co-founder, Robert Blevins, coined a phrase that speaks directly to this: 'We can drown you in weather data, but what you really need are insights,'" Ballard said.

Adiabat's client deliverables vary from tactical weather reports and climate risk assessments to weather feeds for dashboards and executive briefings. Each solution is developed after an in-depth discovery process with the client, ensuring it's aligned with their specific operational thresholds and concerns.

"We tailor our deliverables depending on whether the client is a decision-maker, an

analyst or an executive," Ballard said. "It's not just about forecasts—it's about what those forecasts mean for operations."

That philosophy was on full display when Adiabat helped a transportation firm refine its approach to severe winter weather. Using snow-road modeling within a GIS framework, the firm was able to anticipate high-impact areas, treat roads in advance and reduce costs and disruptions.

The firm's success, Ballard said, came down to one thing: context.

"A generic forecast only tells part of the story," she said. "But if we tell you that the last time your location had 4 inches of rain, three of your assets flooded—that gives you something to act on."

Adiabat's expertise is applied differently depending on the client. Government work



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often involves humanitarian monitoring or support for strategic operations in challenging environments, with reports designed to meet rigorous security and data integrity standards. In the private sector, the company supports resilience planning, supply chain optimization, and insurance modeling.


Across both sectors, Ballard emphasizes the ethical importance of transparency. "Confidence and uncertainty need to be communicated clearly," she said. "Not all data is created equal, and by educating our clients on the strengths and weaknesses of various data sources, we foster trust."

As climate volatility increases, Ballard said clients are shifting from reactive to proactive planning. She noted changes in banking regulations, engineering standards and emergency management protocols as signs that weather resilience is becoming a business imperative.

To meet these evolving needs, Adiatat is expanding locally and nationally. Partnerships in the New River Valley are growing, particularly in insurance, construction and consulting. The company is preparing to launch a new product this summer: a strategic weather action plan to help businesses evaluate the ROI of using weather data in decision-making.

"We're also developing a winter weather product tailored to insurance and real estate groups, set to release in late 2025," Ballard said.

As the science of meteorology evolves, so does Adiatat's role as a trusted advisor in weather intelligence. Ballard's vision is clear: to empower clients with the knowledge and confidence to act—not just react—when the weather turns.

"Our goal is to help businesses make weather-smart decisions that build resilience, improve safety, and drive success," she said. 

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BIZ OPS

By Zachary A. Collier

Executive Summary:
With the rapid adoption of AI across business, data analytics are more important than ever. But even before AI became the craze, jobs like data scientist and data analyst were popular.

Zachary A. Collier is Assistant Professor of Management at Radford University.


Making the most of your data

When you hear the word “data,” what comes to mind? Many people likely envision numbers in a spreadsheet or prices moving along a stock ticker. The word “data” carries connotations of quantitative analysis. A lot of data in business are in fact quantitative – how many return customers visited your store, the increase of customer complaints relative to last month, the percentage of defective products manufactured, and so on. These types of measurements are quantitative and fairly easy to measure.

Not all data are quantitative, however. The American Heritage Dictionary provides the following definition for “data”: “Facts that can be analyzed or used in an effort to gain knowledge or make decisions.”

The “facts” that can be used to make decisions aren’t just numbers. We rely on qualitative metrics all the time, such as in weather forecasts (rainy versus sunny). When you are asked in surveys to provide certain demographic information, that is qualitative as well.

Beyond being qualitative in nature, the “facts” might not be facts at all, but opinions. If I sold ice cream, and I asked people what their favorite flavor was, the answers, in the form of opinions, would constitute import data that could help me decide how much chocolate, vanilla, and mint chocolate chip to order. Other important opinions might include the degree to which an R&D project fits within the company’s portfolio, or how much risk a company is willing to take on an investment. Opinions might even look like numbers. An expert might provide a subjective probability assessment (“There is a 75% probability that this project will meet the schedule deadline.”) While these assessments look objective because they are expressed as numbers, they are basically just opinions.

Simply because some data are non-numerical or capture opinions, this does not mean that they can’t be useful for decision making. Of course, the famous caveat regarding data applies: Garbage In, Garbage Out. Business leaders need to make sure that the data being used is of sufficient quality for the decision at hand. At the same time, don’t overlook useful data just because it cannot be easily quantified. Good decision-making leverages the available data, regardless of its form. Quantitative and qualitative, objective and subjective – all types of data can be used to make better business decisions. 

“The ‘facts’ might not be facts at all, but opinions.”

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Legacy Photography

Kim Skellington pitching at RAMP Demo Day

Tackling the Overdemand for Genetic Counseling and Testing

By Kelsey Monahan

Kim Skellington's Modern Reproduction looks to fulfill genetic counseling and testing in the growing pregnancy market that needs streamlining.

RAMP (Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program) is an initiative within the Roanoke Blacksburg Innovation Alliance (RBIA) and in partnership with the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC) that provides entrepreneurial resources to startups.

Once accepted for either their Spring or Fall Cohort, RAMP applicants undergo three months of rigorous work leading up to Demo Day where they present live pitches to the region's business leaders and community.

Navigating Genetic Testing in Modern Day

Modern Reproduction, founded by Kim Skellington (Licensed, Certified Genetic Counselor based out of Roanoke), was selected as one of the six newest cohort companies for Spring 2025. With a mission to “provide resources and information to anyone who wants to learn more about genetic testing options available for reproduction in the 21st century” whether planning to become pregnant, currently pregnant, or after pregnancy; Modern Reproduction understands it can be difficult to navigate the options and decide which is the best fit.

When asked about her vision for Modern Reproduction within the scope of her RAMP venture, Skellington says, “I’m working on identifying a solution for genetic counseling and genetic testing in the fertility space such as a chatbot for healthcare providers, easier scheduling to private practice genetic counselors, or educational modules for patients. I’m currently working to speak with individuals in the fertility space to understand the current genetic testing/counseling paradigm and identify what solution may be a good fit.”

With a background in reproductive health studies, Skellington knew she wanted to work with patients on their fertility journey.

“Genetic testing isn’t new, but it has historically been narrowed in scope. What is new is the explosion of IVF [In Vitro Fertilization] where carrier screening/genetic testing is routine. We have a higher volume of genetic testing

in the infertility space than we do genetic counselors. Unfortunately, genetic counseling can’t keep up with the demand. How can we provide proper pre-and-post-test counseling instead of relying on various staff to guide patients through the process?” That’s where Modern Reproduction comes in.

“The reality is that people are usually introduced to genetic counselors once they’re already pregnant or have already started the IVF process,” elaborates Skellington. But counseling can help even before pregnancy by completing carrier screening and discovering whether both parents are carriers of the same genetic disorders, thereby allowing further testing on just the relevant conditions, if any. The various resources on the Modern Reproduction website help both physicians and patients delve into the considerations to make when deciding which tests to take and even which labs to use for the recommended tests.

“Right now, I’m working on developing a tool to address the increasing rates of genetic testing and getting back to our origins where genetic counselors were involved for both pre- and post-tests.” Skellington alludes to Artificial Intelligence potentially being the answer to help with scale and meeting the demand.

“Some patients may want to speak with a live genetic counselor, but others may opt-in or find an AI post-review readout sufficient.” For example, if a couple is not matched as carriers of the same genetic disorder, then their readout would most likely be straight

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CONTRIBUTORS

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

Jade Richardson Bock is a Grief Educator + Senior Consultant with Building Beloved Communities. jade@buildingbelovedcommunities.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.

Zachary Collier, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Management at the Davis College of Business and Economics at Radford University. [zcollier@radford.edu]

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

Dan Dowdy is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading services (proofingprof.net). His background includes service in the U.S. Air Force and an extensive career in education, including

teaching college-level writing competency and business courses, and working for a Fortune 100 company. [ddowdy@vbFRONT.com]

Emily Field is the office administrator for Berryfield, Inc. (publisher of FRONT and a media / marketing firm). She lives in Salem with her husband, Tom, and is the mother of three and grandmother of three. [efield@berryfield.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]

Hart Fowler is an independent journalist with commissions by the Washington Post, Blue Ridge Outdoors, 100 days in Appalachia and others. He is also publisher of 16 Blocks, a non-profit print and digital arts and culture magazine. [hart.fowler@gmail.com]

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

Kevin Holt is a partner at Gentry Locke's Roanoke office where he has worked since 1998. His specialty practice area is commercial, real estate, intellectual property, and ERISA

(Employee Retirement Income Security Act) litigation. He enjoys supporting and attending games of his two sports-active daughters and enjoys traveling (visiting 27 countries and 38 states).

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]

Olivia Marone is a seasonal contemporary portrait photographer with over two decades of experience. While she has worked in a variety of photographic settings, her true passion lies in the studio. With expert facial coaching and a knack for helping clients feel at ease, she ensures you look your absolute best. [olivia.marone@gmail.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]

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.

Kesley Monahan is a technology solutions account executive in the higher education sector. When not traveling, she works from her home office based in Salem. [kelseyfmonahan@gmail.com]

Anne Sampson is a photographer and writer who has been active in local arts and events for 20 years. Her work highlights the sights of people of the Roanoke Valley. She specializes in fresh looks at familiar subjects. [sampsona7@gmail.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]


forward and simple. Offloading these kinds of engagements to AI could leave the more complex discussions for actual genetic counselors and thus free up availability.

"How can the community help with our mission? Let me hear your story! Right now, I'm in the process of speaking with individuals in the infertility space, both patients and providers, and listening to how genetic counseling is involved in their journey. I want to develop a solution that is needed and design a tool that people are actually asking for. I want to receive feedback and recommendations from the people experiencing this," shares Skellington.

That feedback—as well as information and Skellington's work—is being developed on the website at www.modernreproduction.com.

"The goal is while we hope you are able to gather all the knowledge you need



from this site, we also don't want you to have to figure it out all on your own." 



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SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Jade Richardson Bock

Executive Summary:
Businesses both large and small, will experience grief in the workplace.

Jade Richardson Bock is a Grief Educator + Senior Consultant with Building Beloved Communities. jade@buildingbelovedcommunities.com

Responding to grief in the workplace

Not long after I began my career in providing community-based support for children, teens and adults grieving the death of a loved one, a five-year-old girl burst into my office. She was breathless and blurted out her big question: WHAT IS GRIEF ANYWAY?

My answer hasn't changed from that surprise encounter years ago: *Grief is a big word for all the feelings we feel when we lose someone, or something, important to us.* Queen Elizabeth simply said, "Grief is the price of love." We are born to love and form attachments in our relationships; and we naturally hurt when those attachments are broken: that's grief. The death of a colleague, or the death of a colleague's family member will occur during your career. How will you respond? To provide a supportive workplace, consider the following:

When a colleague dies:


- Who is the best person in the company to connect with the deceased family?
- How will you communicate the news of the death to other colleagues? *We recommend a personal phone call to immediate team members and a company-wide email after the phone calls have been made.*
- Who is the best contact person for that employee's external accounts or business relationships?
- Who will collect that employee's personal belongings and return them to their next of kin?
- Who from the company can attend the funeral, or send a thoughtful card or arrangement to the next of kin?

We are often afraid to say something that could cause a grieving person distress, so we avoid them - which is even more painful! Start with something that acknowledges the death, like: *"I am so sorry your mother has died. Please know that I care."* Listening is far more important than struggling to say the "right thing."

When a colleague's loved one dies:

- Who will call them and offer condolences?
- Who from the company can attend the funeral or send an arrangement?
- Have a condolence card signed by the team on their desk when they return to work.

- Compile a list of community resources for grief support and share them with bereaved colleagues.

Maya Angelou wrote, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Creating policies in advance will help ensure that the grieving people you encounter in the workplace will appreciate how you made them feel supported during their time of grief. 

Carilion's Center for Grief and Healing in Roanoke offers a range of services to support individuals grieving the loss of someone important to them. For upcoming events and resources, visit carilionclinic.org/grief

“Listening is far more important than struggling to say 'the right thing.'”



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Van Man

Clay Highberger of **Mobility Plus Inc** of Virginia in Salem has an intriguing, visually stimulating workspace: his shop.

He sells, services, and installs mobility equipment for the disabled. This includes wheelchairs, scooters, lifts, and ramps; but his specialty is fitting mobility vans for the physically challenged. Find out more at mobilityplus.net

Photo by Olivia Marone





Gentry Locke

Brett Marston

Setting his own high bar – and meeting the challenge

By Gene Marrano

Sworn in on July 1 for a one-year term, K. Brett Marston is the first Roanoke-based attorney to be President of the Virginia State Bar in two decades.

"It comes with high responsibility, being sort of the head of attorneys in Virginia, in terms of the organization that establishes the rules of practice," says Brett Marston of his three decade march to becoming the VSB president. "We can have a little fun along the way. It's a really good group of people that run the organization."

Brett Marston is the managing partner for Gentry Locke Attorneys, which also has offices in Richmond, Norfolk and Lynchburg. Marston is a UVA graduate who then went on to the George Mason University School of Law. He joined Gentry Locke in 1994.

Marston is no stranger to holding high office; he was President of the Roanoke Bar Association in 2006, 12 years after joining the RBA. He's a big believer in giving back, receiving the RBA's President's Volunteer Service Award, Silver Level. In 2004 Marston was named the Virginia State Bar R. Edwin Burnette Jr. Young Lawyer of the Year award.

The Virginia State Bar is no niche organization. "Every lawyer in Virginia has to be involved in that group," says Marston, providing him with a high profile statewide. "I've been involved [in various roles] pretty much since I began working at Gentry Locke in 1994." Helping out after a hurricane through the Young Lawyers Conference was one of his first brushes in giving back to the community in some way, and Marston has served on various boards since then.

Much of Marston's legal work with his team involves the construction industry; he is an active member for the Construction Law Board of Governors and the Litigation Section for the VSB. He's also been a member of the Bar Council, representing the 23rd Judicial Circuit that includes the Roanoke area. He was the VSB President -elect for 2024-25 and ran unopposed for President.


A native of Appomattox, Marston says he never really envisioned himself as the VSB President, but he's "always enjoyed being involved in organizations," like the Roanoke Regional Partnership, the Roanoke Valley

Sports Club, and as a member of the Roanoke Symphony Board of Directors. "This was just a natural outgrowth of being involved in the profession that has been so rewarding for me. It's a way to give back."

Being involved in various bar organizations is also the Gentry Locke way he adds, "providing leadership to the profession." Then Gentry Locke attorney Bill Rakes "made a big impression on me," when Marston was a summer associate even before he finished law school and joined the firm. "It's kind of ballooned since then – and here we are." Bill Rakes was a VSB president about three decades ago.

The state bar does have a strategic plan; the basics include making sure the financial house is in order, which includes setting dues for members. Opportunities for more attorneys to become involved in leadership positions like he did early on is also on the agenda. As is, "introducing more law firms to Artificial Intelligence and how it can serve them." Increasing access to justice for more Virginians via pro bono representation is on Marston's to-do list. "We're going to go about it with a positive, can-do spirit ... and move the profession forward [via the strategic plan]."

Marston says he wouldn't have taken on the role of VSB president for the next year, if it wasn't for the "good team at the firm ... the commitment of my partners and our administrative team." In fact, they encouraged him to seek the President's role, representing the firm across the Commonwealth. "I've kind of been preparing for this for the past few years."

One of the two sons of Brett and Colleen Myers Marston, Luke, is also an attorney (which makes for interesting dinner conversations, he chuckles); their other son William attended George Mason as well. "It's pretty awesome, it's one of those things I take as an honor," says Brett Marston on his ascension to the President's role for the Virginia State Bar until June 30, 2026. "I take it pretty seriously to represent the area very well. Virginia lawyers have always made a difference in the history of our country." 



Submitted



Roanoke's Pinball Museum is 10 years old >

The **Roanoke Pinball Museum** inside Center in the Square - downtown Roanoke's long time cultural hub – celebrated its tenth anniversary in June, with special pricing for the Pinball Wizards and gamers that visited on June 19. At the same time the museum is adding more space, by taking over the former home of the Harrison Museum of African American Culture. The Harrison will reopen at Melrose Plaza sometime this Fall. **Nic Schell** is the "Executive Director of Pinball: "A mixture of all groups," is how Schell describes their patrons. Pinball is nostalgic. I was an arcade kid growing up. We have machines that work from the 40's, 50's, 60's ... every decade." No quarters needed; a \$15 admission ticket guarantees unlimited play."

Those with "Pinball DNA [and] muscle



memory... it's still going to be in there when you step up to that machine. If they were good back in the day, they'll be good at it now," says Schell, who came to Roanoke seven years ago to run the museum – and also came with years of experience on how to keep them operating. The Pinball Museum also offers tournaments and leagues, which are very, very popular and sell out almost instantly. Kind of like a bowling league, but with pinball."



TechNite winners >

Nearly 500 leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators from across Virginia gathered to celebrate the region's technology and life sciences community at **Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council's 25th Annual TechNite** in late May - an awards ceremony that honored the past year's notable achievements and leadership that is shaping the community and paving the way for the future. Highlights included the induction of **Nancy Agee** into the RBTC Hall of Fame, Ruby Award winner **Marc Nelson** (Roanoke City's Director of Economic Development), and Qentoros, which was awarded the Hart of the Entrepreneur Impact Award. TechNite was held this year at Virginia Tech's Beamer-Lawson Indoor Practice Facility for football.

- The winners: **Kim Snyder**, KlariVis - Entrepreneur of the Year

- **David Ayares**, Revivicor - Innovator of the Year
- **Novonesis & Munters Corporation** tied as the Large Leading Tech Company of the Year
- **The Tiny Cargo Co.** - Small Leading Tech Company
- **Aileen Helsel**, Carilion Clinic Innovation - Regional Leadership Award
- **Bacchus Therapeutics** - Rising Star in Biotech
- **QlutchQMS** - Rising Star in Tech
- **Gretchen Matthews**, Commonwealth Cyber Initiative, Southwest Virginia - STEM-H Educator of the Year
- **Megan Atkinson**, Montgomery County Public Schools - K-12 STEM-H Educator of the Year
- **Marc Nelson**, Roanoke City Economic Development - Ruby Award
- **Nancy Agee**, Carilion Clinic - RBTC Hall of Fame
- **Qentoros** - Hart of the Entrepreneur Impact Award







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ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

Are long-time employees becoming extinct? Stats are absolutely trending that way.

Hop little bunny, hop, hop, hop

It pays to be disloyal.

Well, that sounds harsh. Discouraging. But the truth is, when it comes to employment and career development, disloyalty often provides a big payoff.

I'm talking about job-hopping.

In the olden days, showing a rash of short-term positions with different companies on your resume was not only a turnoff for hirers, it was a bad sign. It meant your organization would not likely be able to depend on this applicant. You're merely a steppingstone to the next bigger, better thing.

I have a good friend who's worked for a local company for nearly three decades. He rose quickly through the ranks; he served through the good times and the not so good. He was most certainly part of the family. Would he have been better off if he cultivated his experience and assignments with three, four, five, or more other businesses during those three decades?

Financially speaking—yes.


I have another associate in the banking industry who has been in top positions with so many different institutions, I have to ask for his business card to remember which bank he's with now. (That's actually a bit uncommon in banking, which often fosters long tenures.) In many industries, especially the technology sector, everyone seems to understand you will not advance at exceptional paces unless you do switch employers.

Is all this movement a problem? Perhaps not, as long as the talent pipeline and consistent output is maintained. However, there is a response that I just don't see happening that much throughout the labor markets.

Disloyalty goes both ways.

Why don't more employers consider retention strategies that replicate the catalysts that encourage an employee to leave in the first place? If John is far more valuable at another organization, perhaps his current company can confirm that value prior to the impending exit. It might require tearing down some rigidity and processes that have been in place since the company's founding. But it also might be worth it. The fact is, companies can be disloyal, too.

I've always told my kids (and others) that, ultimately, you're always working for yourself—no matter what. (Even though I would not suggest saying 'this job would be a good steppingstone for me' during an interview, which actually happened to me once when I was hiring!)

Changing jobs is not easy. There's always a bit of disruption and ramp-up time for employees and employers. If you want to reduce changeover, take down the one-way sign on Loyalty Avenue. 

Taking the helm in uncertain times for non-profits

Long time Council of Community Services employee Alison Jorgensen is the new President and CEO for the Council of Community Services in Roanoke, the capstone to a career that began in 2002 and has seen her take on roles from Director of Volunteer Services and Director of Resource and Capacity Development, to Vice President of Planning, and most recently as Chief Operating Officer.

Jorgensen succeeds the retiring Anne Marie Green, who spent five years as President and CEO following her retirement from 30-plus years with Roanoke County. Green is still in the public eye mix as a member of Salem City Council. Of Green, Jorgensen says, "she has left the Council in a great position for us to move forward – and to weather the next few years." Jorgensen praised Green's "calm leadership style ... it's been a joy to work with and for her."

The Council of Community Services is a 65 year old organization, with a focus on human services planning, "figuring out what needs there are in the Roanoke Valley, working with other partners to help meet those needs," adds Jorgensen. The statewide 211 Virginia hotline that people can call to connect with services is operated by the CCS. Another program focuses on housing and homelessness, "working [families] to get them rehoused as soon as possible." A drop in center assists those dealing with HIV and harm reduction connected with substance abuse. "Working to keep people safe ... and get [them] into treatment services."

"Alison is an extraordinary leader at a pivotal time in the Council's life-giving work in the community," said Joe Cobb, chair of the CCS Board of Directors, which elevated Jorgensen to the top post. Cobb is also the Mayor of Roanoke.

"I've kind of grown up there," says Jorgensen of her new role, "it was my first job out of college, I've pretty much worked in every department and are excited to have this new role in the organization." Jorgensen earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Roanoke College (sociology) and then earned a Master of Science in Nonprofit Administration from Louisiana State University. She is an advisor with Leadership Roanoke Valley and a board member for Restoration Housing.

"Organizations nationally and locally are either anticipating funding cuts or have already experienced them," says Jorgensen about the current cost cutting mode in DC. "We have certainly had our share lately," she notes about a loss of some federal funding, "it's just a really important time in the area to make sure that non-profits are working together, formulating plans to continue to serve as many people as possible. I think it's just going to be a lot of unknowns in terms of funding in near future."

Jorgensen expresses confidence that the CCS and other non-profits will be able to endure these challenges. CCS cuts to date she says have come from the Commonwealth, but



THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Stepping up to the top spot - and dealing with potential loss of funding - is the latest challenge for Alison Jorgensen.



Alison Jorgensen Council of Community Services

often that money is passed through from the federal government. About 70 people currently work for CCS, several positions remain unfilled due to budget cuts from the last few months.

HUD and other housing services are facing proposed budget reductions in the contentious federal budget that was still under review at press time. "We don't know what that will look like yet." Working with partners to allocate resources and avoid duplication of services is crucial at this time she notes. "I've been teasing Anne Marie that she knew when to get out."

United Way of Virginia Blue Ridge President and CEO Abby Hamilton sent a similar message out recently, asking more people to lend their time and expertise to non-profits, and/or to make financial contributions, helping to fill the void left by potential loss of federal funding.

"Right now, we are just really keeping an eye on what's happening [in Washington] with the budget. We haven't started those really deep conversations yet. It's a little bit of commiserating right now," says Alison Jorgensen, "I think we're really going to have to put our heads down and start thinking of creative ways to help each other through these potential cuts. I don't know what that will look like. I don't think any of us do. It's really important for us to keep an open mind." 

FRONTReviews >

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

Eating the rich

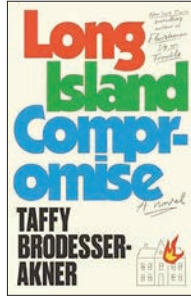
I'm glad I stuck with it. Honestly, I almost gave up after reading the first part of Taffy Brodesser-Akner's *Long Island Compromise* (Random House; 2024). The setup / narrative of a wealthy businessman kidnapping should have been the most exciting and dramatic part of the story. 'Twas so dull in comparison to the entirety of the novel! What powerful character studies of this Jewish-family-of-styrofoam-packaging-magnate in Long Island's Middle Rock. I absolutely devoured it. My only complaint is one of formatting: such long sections. Breaking it up a bit would have made brighter reading. But such impeccable writing, grabbable narration, unavoidable swallowing development of triple protagonists. Do you really want to be uber rich? LIC may change your mind. (Oh, and it has dybbuks, destitutes, and dominatrixes, oh my.) I was hooked. Still am.

—Tom Field

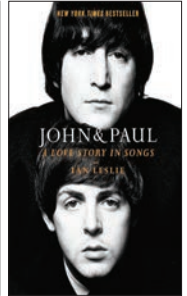
Heavenly music

What better venue to hear baroque music and a choir than inside a church sanctuary? Actually, the venue for Roanoke Baroque's season ending concert last month was held at the Oakey's Downtown Chapel, which holds its own when compared to other church sanctuaries in the city. Accompanied by the Roanoke Baroque Chamber Singers, and led by Roanoke Baroque artistic director Dr. Michael Shasberger on the baton, the music of Monteverdi, Martini, Handel and Vivaldi came to life as the choir sung the lyrics in Latin.

The stirring and uplifting sound of the choir, backed by a ten-piece chamber orchestra, transported patrons of the non-profit back to the heyday of the baroque style music of the 17th and 18th century. Roanoke Baroque also debuted two new period-appropriate instruments (upright bass, organ)



Roanoke Baroque



that were the result of a successful short term fundraising campaign. Check out Roanoke Baroque when its new season begins in October with the music of Vivaldi. The choir will return for two Christmas concerts.

—Gene Marrano

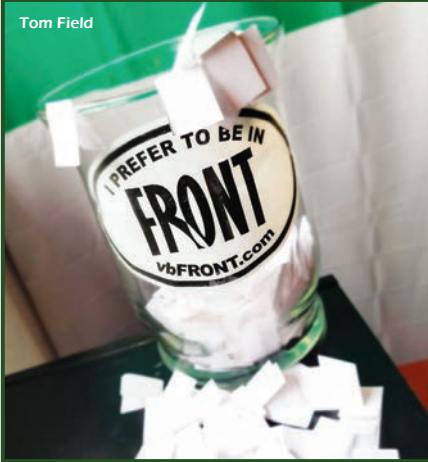
All about that long and winding road

Beatles junkies – and anyone else interested in the myriad of styles of music the Fab Four produced in less than a decade – from bubblegum pop to searing rockers and drug-fueled tunes tinged with the psychedelic – can take a deep dive with the two leaders of the band in a new book, *John & Paul: A Story In Love Songs* by Ian Leslie (Celadon Books, 2025). Leslie cleverly uses a different song title for each chapter as a jumping off point, detailing how John Lennon and Paul McCartney collaborated to create each song, then describing their relationship at the time in great detail.

Much to the chagrin of (especially) George Harrison and Ringo Starr, John & Paul formed a bond that was collaborative, competitive, and wracked with jealousy at times as they each took turns being seen as the artistic leader for the group – all while turning out increasingly sophisticated albums, most notably when they stopped touring in 1966. The book continues into the solo years of the 70's, leading up to John Lennon's murder outside his New York City apartment building in 1980. Leslie writes how deeply Paul was hurt, and how he vowed then to "never have a falling out," with anyone else again. As Paul McCartney continues to tour in his 80's, often reminding concertgoers of the collaborative genius he and John Lennon represented, a magic that Ian Leslie writes about in great, fascinating detail.

—Gene Marrano

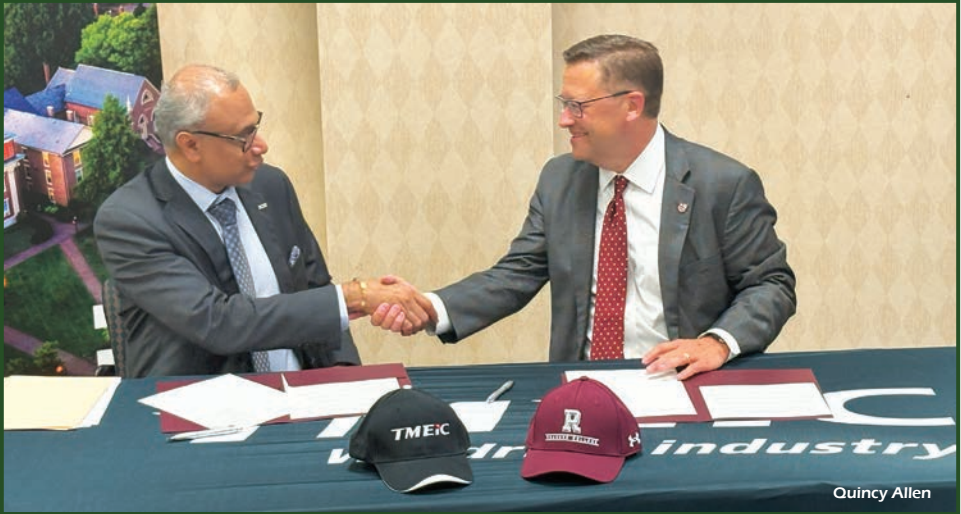
The reviewers: **Tom Field** is a creative director, writer, and publisher; **Gene Marrano** is a news reporter and FRONT editor.



Tom Field

FRONTjar gets workout >

May 2025 marked the 200th published edition of **Valley Business FRONT** (since the inaugural journal, October 2008). To celebrate and mark the milestone, FRONT held a campaign where readers, patrons, and everyone else could enter a \$200 drawing for a chance to win \$50 in four drawings from mid-May to early-June. During the campaign, a variety of popular FRONTcovers were showcased from the past 17-year volumes. (FRONT has been published every month.) Congratulations to our drawing winners: **Jesse Hilmandolar, Savannah Dobb, Meg Hibbert, Pete Deaver.**



Quincy Allen

Roanoke College—TMEIC pact >

Roanoke College has partnered with global manufacturing company **TMEIC**, in a commitment to support their students with scholarships, internships, and professional mentoring. In late May TMEIC President & CEO **Manmeet Bhatia** and the President of Roanoke College, **Frank Shushok**, signed papers cementing their partnership: “we’re trying to close the gap between what we offer at Roanoke College and what local partners and industry leaders want to fill their needs,” said Shushok. TMEIC America is headquartered in Houston, Texas, with its engineering center in Roanoke; Roanoke College and TMEIC will offer \$5,000 each towards engineering scholarships, beginning with a pilot program involving two students.

Meanwhile Roanoke College’s Dean of the school of Health and Science, **Karin Saoub**, is leading the charge to have the school’s growing engineering program accredited. “There are two paths we envision for our graduates. One would be to go on to graduate school and get a masters in a specific area of engineering. The other is to go out and actually work in the field.”

Roanoke College’s program would allow those who go to work to earn credits towards a professional engineering license – employed at places like TMEIC in Roanoke County, which is owned and operate by a conglomerate. TMEIC specializes in renewable energy, oil and gas, and other industrial markets. TMEIC and Roanoke College mentors will be paired with engineering students in order to offer guidance and possible internships.



Museum on the move >

After a decade at Center in the Square in downtown Roanoke, the **Harrison Museum of African American Culture** is packing up its most recent artifacts on display, getting ready for a big move this fall. New executive director **EB Smith** says they are targeting a late October reopening in northwest Roanoke at **Melrose Plaza**, depending on how construction goes inside the former Goodwill Industries headquarters building, which will feature a spacious central lobby where visitors can head off in multiple locations.

The new home for the Harrison Museum will have 10,000 square feet to work with - including a new black box theatre room and 7,000 sq. ft. of gallery space. "We'll be able to accommodate events and do a wide range of programming," says Smith, who also envisions possible collaborations with some of the other tenants at Melrose Plaza - like the public library branch and the Market on Melrose. Coming to the Melrose campus soon - an adult high school, a wellness center and Henrietta's Café, with food prepped at the adjacent Market on Melrose full-service grocery store.

Melrose Plaza will formally celebrate with a grand opening on July 31. "There are not many models really throughout the United States that has so many different offerings under one roof," says **Kelley Weems**, director of community impact for Goodwill Industries, "we do hope that this would be a platform for other communities to see what we've been able to do here."

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Iconic lines >

The intricate, freehand pen and ink drawings of **L. Jackson Doyle**, featuring popular Roanoke landmarks, are available at **The Little Gallery** in downtown Roanoke. Doyle received an architectural degree from Virginia Tech in 1977, as reflected in these drawings. He retired as an architect after 45 years in the Roanoke, Salem, Smith Mountain Lake, and regional markets.



Kiwanis awards \$20,000 in Scholarships >

The **Roanoke Kiwanis** awarded \$20,000 for six scholarships to high school seniors in May of this year. Scholarships are given to applicants from the six area high schools in which we sponsor Key Clubs - William Fleming, Patrick Henry, Cave Spring, Hidden Valley, Northside, Roanoke Catholic School. Students completed an application with a personal history, their expected field of interest for college, transcripts, and extracurricular and service activities. Applicants also provided letters of recommendation. The Kiwanis Scholarship Committee read through all applications and scored them based on financial need, community service, and academic achievement. **Elise Dearstyne** (Roanoke Catholic School) received the top award of \$6,000. Other recipients included: **William Xiao** (Northside High School); **Whitney McNulty** (Northside High School); **Cameron McPhee** (William Fleming High School); **Tamara Preston** (William Fleming High School); **Vicki Zou** (Northside High School).



Playing together >

On what was suspected to be a rained-out affair, instead the sun blasted out at the Salem Red Sox stadium on midday June 17 for a multi-chamber networking affair. Participating chambers of commerce included (alphabetically): **Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce**; **Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce**; **Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce**; **Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce**; **Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce**; and **Vinton Chamber**; as well as the **Roanoke Regional Homebuilders Association**.



That's a lot of diapers >

HoneyTree Early Learning Centers, a fixture in early childhood education and afterschool care in the Roanoke Valley, has reached its 50th anniversary. Founded by **Kathy and John McLeod**, HoneyTree calculates that employees have changed over 1 million diapers, served hundreds of thousands of meals, employed over 15,000, and graduated upwards of 10,000 preschoolers. To mark the milestone, HoneyTree hosted a special celebration at the historic Hotel Roanoke in late April, an event that brought together current and past teachers, families, and community leaders.



VWCC-JMU pathway >

Virginia Western Community College and James Madison University have signed an articulation agreement on that will result in a seamless transition for students focusing on the field of biotechnology. Virginia Western students completing the Associate of Science (A.S.) degree in Science with a major in Biotechnology and meeting all requirements will be guaranteed admission to the Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree in Biotechnology program at James Madison University (JMU). "Biotechnology has become a significant economic driver in the Roanoke region," said Dr. **Elizabeth Wilmer**, Vice President of Academic and Workforce Solutions at Virginia Western Community College. "Virginia Western's STEM Dean and faculty have taken a leadership role in growing biotechnology in our region and making Virginia Western a strong contributor of education and training in the field."

(Pictured) Virginia Western's vice president of academic and workforce solutions, Dr. Elizabeth Wilmer, and James Madison University's interim provost, Dr. Bob Kolvoord, sign the articulation agreement in May at the STEM Building on the Virginia Western campus.



New space for consultant >

Cortex Leadership Consulting has unveiled its new meeting space last month at the Grandin Colab, a tech savvy pot curated by **Barrows Inc.** Cortex President & CEO **Lynda Foster**, then spoke about how her company has leveraged AI and shared tips thru demos on practical and complex problems that can be solved with AI applications. The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce helped cut the ribbon.



Courtesy of Member One

Member One med school scholarship >

Roanoke based **Member One**, a division of Virginia Credit Union, will contribute a total of \$50,000 during the next five years to support the Henrietta Lacks Excellence in Medicine Scholarship at the **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine**. The scholarship provides financial assistance for Carilion School of Medicine students who are members of an underrepresented population in the medical field. The scholarship honors Henrietta Lacks, an African-American and Roanoke native, who was diagnosed and treated for cervical cancer in Baltimore.

Lacks lost her battle with cancer in 1951, but her cancer cells shared with researchers has played a significant role in supporting more than seven decades of medical discoveries, from vaccines for polio and COVID-19 to studies of the human genome to treatments for cancer and HIV/AIDS. More than 110,000 scientific publications cited the use of her so-called "immortal cells," including three instances of Nobel Prize-winning research, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Pictured: Dr. Lee Learman, pictured left, dean of the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine with Tim Rowe, Member One market president, beside the school's statue of Henrietta Lacks.

JUL 11
THE DELANEYS



AUG 1
SOUL EXPRESSIONS



SEP 5
BANANAS AT LARGE





FIRST FRIDAYS





Demo time >

RAMP—Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council's Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program held its **Spring 2025 Cohort Demo Day** at One City Plaza event venue in downtown Roanoke on June 5, where six entrepreneurial businesses "pitched" their missions as the current term concluded. Welcomed by RAMP director **John Hagy**, and emceed by sponsor National Bank's **Harvey Brookins**, presentations included **Helix Acoustics** (DNA extraction and molecular diagnostics); **Huginn Sono** (wearable bladder scanner); **Modern Reproductions** (genetic consult in IVR; see story in this issue); **NebulaNeuro** (AI-powered neurotransmitter measuring); **Pod Farms** (hydroponic systems and natural vertical farming); and **QlutchQMS** (quality management software and regulatory compliance services).



Submitted

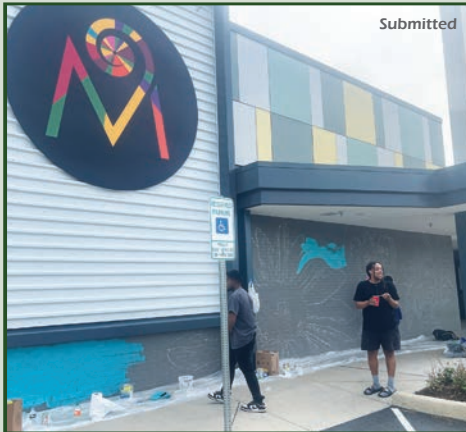
NRV lights up >

New River Valley Leading Lights honored 39 community volunteers for its annual banquet at the end of April at Virginia Tech's German Club. The organization (established in 2017, following the terrible April 17 shooting at Virginia Tech) recognizes individuals who positively impact community in the NRV region. First row from left: Debbie Sherman-Lee, Elena Abalde-Sanchez, Gunin Kiran, Makayla Davis, Nancy Manley, Virginia Neukirch, Christine Gibson, Faye Cofer, Bonnie Graham, Judy Diggs, Lois Craig, and Grace Vaughan Sacks / Second row from left: Tess Larsen, Clara Meyer, Kevin Culhane, Peggy Preston Fanney, Betty Werner, Dave Werner, Ciara Moore, Kim O'Donnell, Mandy Farris, and Reginald Crockett. Additionally, 11 Distinguished Recipients included: Tess Larsen, Athithi Prakash Suganya, Makala Davis, Christina Casey, Jacob Cole, Ciara Moore, Ryan Rupert, Grace Vaughan Sacks, Elisabeth Wasserman, Kim O'Donnell, Faye Cofer, Judy Diggs, Gunin Kiran, Mandy Farris, and Elena Abalde-Sanchez. Bonnie Graham of Pulaski County was named as the German Club Alumni Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award.



New SML rescue boat >

Roanoke-based **Ridge View Bank** has provided financial support to **Smith Mountain Lake Marine Fire Rescue** for a newly custom-built fire boat, an advanced vessel that will enhance emergency response capabilities and ensures greater safety and coverage for residents and visitors on Smith Mountain Lake (SML). Ridge View Bank helped finance the new boat to serve the community that has housed and supported the bank for years. "Supporting the Smith Mountain Lake Marine Rescue Squad in acquiring a fireboat is not just an investment in their capabilities, but also in the safety and well-being of all who live and visit the beautiful lake," said Ridge View Bank President **Carrie McConnell**.



Mural at Melrose Plaza >

Work was underway by late May on a mural at **Melrose Plaza** in Roanoke. It will cover the outside wall on the front of the building, with another design on the side that faces 24th Street northwest. The front side mural will be called "rooted in joy." **Amanda Napier** is the director of business services for Goodwill Industries of the Valleys and the Market on Melrose: "it's just to bring the whole Melrose Plaza together and bringing in the community." That happened when Cobbs recruited people from the local neighborhood to help with the painting. Cobbs also painted a mural at the Berglund Center that honored residents past and present from the Gainsboro neighborhood - part of which was uprooted to build the Roanoke Civic Center complex.

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

EDUCATIONAL
FRONT



Treanor

Jonathan Baros has been appointed the new assistant dean of finance for the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, where he will oversee fiscal operations. Baros joins the college with more than 16 years of experience in fiscal planning, agricultural administration, and Extension programming. His previous experience was the Department of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University and then North Carolina State University's Plants for Human Health Institute.

Laura Treanor has been announced as president of Virginia Western Community College, effective July 1;



Treanor

succeeding Robert Sandel, who served the college as president for 24 years. Treanor comes from Vincennes University in Indiana, where she is provost, dean, and senior vice president for instructional services. Prior to that she was vice president and dean at Baker College (Flint, MI) and has taught at Roanoke College, West Virginia University, and Barton College (Wilson, NC). Treanor has a bachelor's degree and a doctor of education at Virginia Tech and a master's degree at Ohio State University.

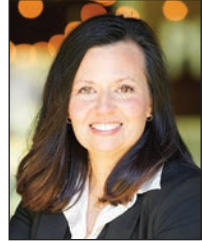
Elli Treanor has been named associate director for impact and evaluation at Virginia Tech's Center for Economic and Community Engagement. She



Travis

joined the center in 2015 as an economic development specialist and will now lead development and implementation of high-quality applied research projects and build the center's capacity to do impact and evaluation work, serving as a resource for community partners and Virginia Tech faculty who need evaluation assistance. Travis earned her Ph.D. in evaluation from the Virginia Tech Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education in April 2025.

Amy Orders has been hired as the next associate vice president for public safety at Virginia Tech, following a national search, effective August 4. Orders had served as assistant vice



Orders

chancellor of emergency preparedness and environmental health at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. As associate vice president, Orders will provide strategic leadership and operational oversight for Virginia Tech's safety and security functions.



Sible

Jill Sible, associate vice provost for undergraduate education and director of the Academy for Experiential Learning at Virginia Tech, has been named the university's

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next vice provost for undergraduate academic affairs. Since joining the university in 1998 as an assistant professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, where she is now a full professor, Sible has served in a number of academic, research, and leadership roles at Virginia Tech.



van de Gevel

Saskia van de Gevel, chair and professor in Appalachian State University's Department of Geography and Planning, has been appointed the next dean of Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources and Environment. Van de Gevel succeeds Paul Winistorfer, who is retiring after 16 years as dean.

Brandy Salmon, who since 2017 has led



Salmon

Virginia Tech teams focused on connecting the university with corporations, foundations, and alumni worldwide has been named the university's first vice president for innovation and partnerships. Before joining the university, Salmon worked for more than a decade promoting technology commercialization, innovation and strategic partnerships.

Dwane Sterling has been named associate vice president for



Sterling

Enterprise Solutions and Enabling Technologies within the Division of Information Technology at Virginia Tech. He most recently served as chief information officer at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, where he led a comprehensive modernization of the college's IT systems.

Tracy Peery has been hired as division director of human resources for the Advancement Division AT Virginia Tech. Following a nationwide search, Peery joins



Peery

Virginia Tech from Emory & Henry University, where she most recently served as assistant vice president for risk management and human resources.



Rooney

Kevin Rooney has been appointed as senior director of Secure

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Identity Services by the Division of Information Technology at Virginia Tech. He assumes the role after serving as interim director since March 2024. Rooney leads Secure Identity Services, a group within the Division of Information Technology's Security and Identity unit that provides online identity management, authentication, and authorization services that enable secure and appropriate access to data and applications for students, employees, and other affiliates of Virginia Tech. Rooney's career in information technology has spanned a number of roles over more than 30 years.

LEGAL FRONT

Brett Marston of Gentry Locke was appointed president of the Virginia State Bar (see Legal FRONT profile in this edition).



Puvak

Jonathan Puvak of Gentry Locke was sworn in as president of the Roanoke Bar Association at the association's 100th Annual Meeting. He's the 18th Gentry Locke attorney to lead the RBA. Puvak is a member of Gentry Locke's General Commercial group and serves on the Executive Board.



Grubb

Alichia Grubb of Gentry Locke was named the Young Lawyer of the Year by the Roanoke Bar Association. She is a member of Gentry Locke's Commercial Litigation and Construction groups. Grubb is also one of the only attorneys in the Commonwealth who represents heavy-duty towing and recovery companies related to highway clean up in connection with VDOT programs.

DEVELOPMENT FRONT



McDaniel

Shawn McDaniel has been named the new executive director for development at Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at Virginia Tech Carilion and for Health Sciences and Technology at Virginia Tech. He is a seasoned fundraising professional with 28 years of experience in philanthropic development for academic medical and research institutions. Most recently, McDaniel secured fundraising

for the OU Health Stephenson Cancer Center. He held leadership positions at the KU Endowment Association and Mayo Clinic with multimillion-dollar campaigns; and serves as co-chair of the National Association of Cancer Center Development Officers' major gifts affinity group. McDaniel has been recognized nationally for excellence in integrated advancement.



Bauter

Anna Bauter joined Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission as Peer Network and Community Engagement Coordinator. Originally from northern New York, she earned her BS in Public Health from the University of Massachusetts Lowell and MS in Public Health with a concentration in Community Health from East Tennessee State university.



Ladi

Tahmineh (Tammy) Ladi joined Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission

as planner II: GIS and Data Analyst. She is finishing her PhD in Geography and Planning at the University of Toledo, Ohio; has a MS in Regional Planning from Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran; and a BS in Urban Planning from Azad University in Tabriz, Iran.

COMMUNITY FRONT

Missy Morris has been hired as the new Main Street Executive Director of the Town of Rocky Mount. The appointment is part of the Virginia Main Street Program and a joint effort between the Town and the nonprofit, aimed at the promotion and growth of the central (downtown and uptown) business district. Morris has a strong background in events management and operations.

REAL ESTATE FRONT



McCullough

Precious McCullough has joined Waldvogel Commercial Properties as property manager. Her experience includes residential and commercial property management and a background in marketing and compliance. McCullough is a licensed real

estate salesperson and active in professional associations such as the Roanoke Valley Association of Realtors and the Virginia Apartment Management Association.



Edmondson

MUNICIPAL FRONT

Christian Edmondson has been appointed Command Staff Captain of the Bedford County Sheriff's Office. She has served the

Bedford Sheriff's Office since 2006 and has held positions as patrol deputy, vice/narcotics investigator, criminal investigator, sergeant of Professional Standards Division, and Captain of Administration Division.

Born and raised in Carroll County, she attended New River Community College and graduated from New River Criminal Justice Academy in 2006.

LaRue Dickerson was appointed Roanoke's Postmaster for the USPS (after serving as Acting Postmaster since March 2024). He will be the lead postal official for retail and delivery services for Roanoke. Dickerson's

prior experience includes Alta Vista Postmaster and Station Manager at the Roanoke Carrier Annex. His postal career began in 2015 as a City Carrier Assistant at the Roanoke Carrier Annex and became a full-time City Carrier two years later. Dickerson is a Roanoke native and graduate of William Fleming High School.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

“ ”
This was just a natural outgrowth...
a way to give back. — Page31

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Record investment says Governor

The Youngkin administration announced last month it has reached more than \$100 billion in committed capital investments in Virginia, stating that is more than the previous two administrations combined. The Governor's executive order, *Accelerating Strategic Business Growth, Job Creation, and Investment in Virginia*, which makes permanent the *Made in Virginia Investment Accelerator (MVIA)* announced in May. MVIA partner agencies include VEDP, the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Port of Virginia, Virginia Energy, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Works, the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development, and Virginia Housing.

Labor numbers promising

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Current Employment Statistics Survey ("CES" or "establishment survey") data, Virginia's nonfarm payroll employment edged up 500 over-the-month to 4,272,700, a 47,900 increase since April 2024. Since January 2022, the CES job count has increased by 268,100. In addition to the 500 nonfarm payroll jobs added in April, March's revision includes another 800 jobs. The Commonwealth's labor force participation rate decreased by 0.1 percentage points to 65.4 percent in April,

2.8 percentage points higher than the national rate. "Despite a dip in overall labor force numbers, businesses across Virginia are still adding jobs. We're working closely with industries to support expansion and investment that will drive long-term job creation," said Secretary of Labor Bryan Slater.

Workforce housing grants include NRV recipient

More than \$16.9 million has been allocated in funding for the Virginia Workforce Housing Investment Program, to support workforce housing development in 10 localities across the Commonwealth to create 740 workforce housing units. In total, the projects will leverage over \$254 million in private investment. That includes funds for a project at the old Prices Fork Elementary School, awarded to the New River Valley Regional Commission and the| Town of Blacksburg, totaling \$923,888. In its fourth and final phase of development, this project will develop new rental housing units to support increased regional job growth in the surrounding communities.

Member One Federal Credit Union name to be phased out

Following a merger in August 2024, Virginia Credit Union and its Member One division have announced that the now-combined organization will operate in all markets as Virginia Credit Union,

beginning in the spring of 2026. Said Virginia Credit Union President/ CEO Chris Shockley. "We know this merger will continue to benefit our members, staff, and the communities we proudly serve, and we look forward to further building on our proud tradition of member and community service under the Virginia Credit Union name." The credit union will work through 2025 and into 2026 in preparation for Operational Day One, the date legacy Member One operations will be fully integrated into Virginia Credit Union — operating under the same brand and with the same systems, products, and services. Operational Day One will likely occur in the spring of 2026.

More Dawgs next season

Following a record-setting home attendance season at the Berglund Center, the Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs have unveiled their home game schedule for the 2025-2026 season, officially announced on Wednesday. Beginning this fall, the SPHL home schedule expands from 28 to 29 games, offering fans even more thrilling hockey action at home. Roanoke's regular season opener is set for Friday, October 17 at 7:05 P.M., marking the start of the franchise's 10th anniversary.

The Dawgs will again take the ice on Black Friday on Friday, November 28 and ring in the New Year with their annual New Year's Eve game on Wednesday, December 31. Puck drop for all home games

is 7:05 P.M. unless otherwise noted. Single game tickets go on sale September 17 at 10:00 A.M. at Berglund Center box office and online. Various ticket packages and season tickets are available now through the Rail Yard Dawgs front office staff.

Williamson Road working on safety, curb appeal

The Executive Director for the Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association recently gave her annual update on what's happening along that busy commercial thoroughfare to both Roanoke City and Roanoke County. Valerie Brown says while there has been some pushback about the idea of reconfiguring Williamson Road from two lanes each way to one - with a middle 3rd turning lane, there are also stakeholders looking forward to a demonstration project commencing this Fall: "those involved with public transportation, we [also] have the biking group, churches and area schools. Everybody who touches Williamson Road in some way, shape or form." Making Williamson more pedestrian friendly as well is another goal says Brown, who adds that the WRABA home office is running out of short-term meeting and office rental space at its office, due to high demand from those – even from out of town – looking for a temporary work/ meeting option. Brown also noted that says a handful of businesses along Williamson have been repainted while

others have or will take advantage of facade grants - bringing more curb appeal to that busy roadway.

Award for Roanoke company that promotes outdoor living

LivingOnThePatio, a Roanoke-based company that champions outdoor living spaces, has been honored as the "Outdoor Living Space Transformation Champions of the Year 2025 - USA" by LUXlife Magazine in its prestigious Home & Garden Awards. LivingOnThePatio (profiled last month in Valley Business FRONT) is an outdoor living space company based in Roanoke. With a focus on education, partnerships and personalized service, they help clients transform outdoor spaces into inviting retreats that reflect the lifestyle and taste of each client.

Tourism grants

More than \$2 million in matching grant

funds will be awarded to 197 local tourism programs across the Commonwealth. These awards are funded through the Virginia Tourism Corporation's Marketing Leverage Program, Destination Marketing Organization Grant Program, and VA250 Tourism Marketing Program. Local recipients of funding includes the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Across-the-Way Productions (FloydFest), Floyd Center for the Arts, Floyd Tourism, Floyd Yoga Jam, The Town of Floyd, Visit NRV, Wrenn Pottery in Floyd, Discover Rocky Mount, Franklin County, the Smith Mountain Lake Chamber, Christiansburg Institute, Sinkland Farms, Pulaski County Tourism, Humble Hustle (Roanoke), Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge and the City of Salem Tourism.

Radford to offer BioTech major

The Radford University Board of Visitors has approved a proposal to establish a new

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undergraduate major in applied biotechnology, pending approval by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) during the 2025-26 cycle. Applied biotechnology is a fast-growing, interdisciplinary field that combines biology, chemistry and engineering to drive innovation in medicine, agriculture and manufacturing. If authorized by SCHEV, Radford's new program will become the first applied biotechnology major offered in Roanoke and across Southwest Virginia. According to the Virginia Office of Education Economics, biotechnology jobs in the commonwealth are projected to grow by 7.3% in the coming years, with approximately 10 job openings for every graduate from a

related program. Slated to begin in fall 2027, the first cohort of Radford's applied biotechnology program will comprise up to 24 students. They will be taught by two new full-time faculty members and industry-trained adjunct instructors.

5Points scores again

5Points Creative in Roanoke has received four Communicator Awards for promotional materials. Two projects received an Award of Distinction, including the Australian Labradoodle Association of America Communications Strategy and the Good Samaritan Hospice Community Report. The Good Samaritan Hospice Community Report and the FEDUP fundraising video both received an

Notable Transactions

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- Reese Real Estate Development Partners purchased 35,212-sq-ft former LDL grocery (on 5.38 acres) at 126 Piedmont Place in Danville for \$3,420,000
- Standalone building (Cave Spring Cleaners) between Brambleton Plaza and Willow Oak retail complexes at 4316 Brambleton Ave in Roanoke County sold for \$550,000
- 126-acre lot with home at 1983 Timber Ridge Rd in Glade Hill sold for \$1,125,000

COVENANT REAL ESTATE SERVICES

- Alleghany Regional Commerce Center opened 104-acre shovel-ready pad site off I-64 about 3 miles from Mountain Gateway Community College
- 9,000-sq-ft former Disabled American Veterans building at 2383 Roanoke Blvd in Salem sold to unnamed new owner for renovation and multi-tenant use
- The View—a 72-unit apartment community in Salem at 777 Roanoke Blvd sold from Caroline Forest LLC to View 777 Salem LLC for \$123,750

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

Award of Excellence. The Communicator Awards are the leading international awards program dedicated to recognizing excellence, effectiveness, and innovation across all areas of communication. This marks 22 Communicator Awards in 5Points Creative's 16 years of service.

Carter teams up with Commanders

Carter Machinery and the Washington Commanders have joined forces in a new multi-year partnership. As part of the collaboration, Carter Machinery will be featured on Commanders gamedays and other Northwest Stadium events through activations and signage. Carter Machinery will also present a new content series, Constructing the

Commanders, and will work together, "to explore ways to utilize Carter's equipment services to support the operations of Northwest Stadium." Carter Machinery has over 30 locations across the Mid-Atlantic, including one in Salem.

Is that a drone?

Virginia Tech's UAS (uncrewed aerial systems) was awarded \$5 million from the US Army for "drone defense" research of domestic threats from unmanned aircraft. The investment could be partially the result of a recent rash of mysterious drone sightings reported along the US east coast.

Moss replaced

Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech will be the

new name of the 12-year Moss Arts Center in 2026 (named for popular Virginia artist Patricia Buckley Moss and the estate's \$10 million pledge for the construction). The naming agreement was revised and approved by board and was established as a "a mutual decision [and] shared commitment to cultivate additional support as a catalyst for engagement, inspiration, and discovery and to continue to bring world-class art, experiences, and educational programming." The front grounds at the facility will be named the Patricia Buckley Moss Lawn.

Hemp exit

The Hemp Mill (and Buffies Kitchen) in Vinton is closing after a seven-year run. The owner of the popular retailer, Debbie Custer, suggested

alternative local and online shops Earth's Essential Apothecary to her patrons as "Amber Fleming and her team share the same values." [Deb Custer and Libby Patterson appeared on the July 2023 FRONTcover story].

Chicken robots win

A team of 10 innovative students from **North Cross School**, known as the "Robotic Raiders," achieved a remarkable feat on May 22: they clinched the World KidWind Challenge Middle School Solar Championship. Their winning project, a high-tech, solar-powered transformation of the school's chicken coop, outperformed competitors from across the U.S., Asia, and Mexico.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

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

“Disloyalty goes both ways. — Page 36

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“We have a higher volume of genetic testing...
than we do genetic counselors. — Page 23

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We want to make sure that another mother doesn't wind up being me. —*Tammy Guido McGee*

Students learn to control their cars on slick surfaces by driving on a circular course of feed corn.

TRSS: The New Driver Responsibility Advocate

By Anne Sampson

In 2024, 8.5 million licensed US drivers were between the ages of 16 and 19.

—*National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA)*

Early on the morning of June 1, 2025, 24 teenaged drivers assembled at the Salem Civic Center for the Tire Rack Street Survival (TRSS) driving school. From 8 am to 5 pm,



All photos: Anne Sampson

they alternated classroom instruction with the opportunity to get behind the wheel of their own car with a personal driving coach, and safely push the limits of both their vehicle and their own skills in a controlled environment.

Brett Randolph is an Assistant District Traffic Engineer at the Virginia Department of Transportation. He's been the chairman of Salem's TRSS for nearly 10 years, working with a crew of 50 or so volunteers and 20 trained driving coaches. He got involved

when a volunteer asked him to look at the Transportation Map for the course, and he "knew...I could enhance it given my background in transportation safety."

"[TRSS] gives the student real-world experience well beyond the capacity of a standard Driver's Education Program," said Brett. "A key factor is the driving exercises are performed in the car that the student will be driving on a normal basis...[It] puts them through numerous accident-avoidance exercises along with classroom



TRSS student Teagan Whitlow was pleasantly surprised by the amount of fun and information she found.

material to align with the teaching points on the course. The goal of the school is to save young lives by gaining a familiarity with the safety functions of their vehicle and learn[ing] how to maintain calm and control of the vehicle during an emergency.”

Teens have an 89.2% chance of being involved in a crash during their first three years of driving. —NHTSA

After meeting their coaches, walking through a safety check that includes oil levels and tire pressure, and orientation, the group splits up between the classroom and driving. Out on the course, students run through a series of activities designed to mimic real-life road hazards: driving a traffic cone slalom course (with the occasional traffic cone casualty), slick surface control (creatively achieved by driving on a circle and a figure eight of feed corn), tailgating and braking distances (with the lead and follow cars in parallel lanes), and safely correcting when the tires leave the pavement. Safety protocols on the course are myriad and strict.

The confidence of many young drivers visibly increased as they were coached through the challenges. Students who started out as reluctant participants, present at their parents’ insistence, quickly warmed

up to a feeling of competency and the fun of being encouraged to push their limits.

Sixteen-year-old Mia DiGirolimo, was pleasantly surprised. “I didn’t know what to expect, honestly,” she said. “I thought we’d do some simple things for 15 minutes and then go to the classroom and learn some stuff. But now it’s really given me a new perspective on driving. Finding the limits of [my] car has really helped me feel more prepared for when accidents happen.”

Her father, Joe, brought his family from Charlottesville for the event. “I think it’s great because these are real-world driving experiences,” he said. “We hope this will make her a better driver.”

Students also had opportunities to safely see the force exerted by an airbag, and to sit in the cab of a stationary tractor-trailer from Fleetmaster Express, piloted by 35-year veteran driver, Eric Cantrell. With cars parked immediately behind and to the sides of the trailer, a person in the cab can observe which vehicles can and cannot be seen by the truck driver.

Classroom presentations cover techniques students will use on the course, the physics of driving, as well as sobering, first-person narratives about the dangers of distracted



The Salem Civic Center hosts two TRSS driving schools each year, in the spring and the fall.

TEEN-TO-TEEN

Mary King is the Program Manager for Youth of Virginia Speak Out About Traffic Safety (YOVASO), a grant-funded, Virginia State Police initiative since 2001. The focus is on establishing peer-to-peer educational programs in middle and high schools: teens are trained to talk to their peers about safety issues such as seat belt use for drivers and passengers, avoidance of distracted driving, drugs and alcohol, and obeying speed limits.

“Teens listen to each other more than they listen to adults, they have influence over each other,” said Mary. “It’s important to include them in any educational program where we’re trying to reach students. We try to catch them early—if we can get middle-schoolers to form safe habits, even wearing their bicycle helmets, they’re more likely to have safe driving habits.”

The hands-on lessons include the science and physics behind traffic laws like seat belts and speed limits, the State Police Distracted Driving Simulator (a mini-vehicle filled with noisy distractions, driven on a traffic cone course) and empowering young people to speak out as passengers when they’re in unsafe situations.

Students also hear first-person accounts from young drivers who have injured or killed someone, and the price they’ve paid.

“As students lead these programs, it’s been very gratifying to see them developing leadership skills that will serve them in their life and careers,” said Mary. Some go on to become paid staffers at YOVASO.

Before the creation of YOVASO, Virginia was losing about 200 teens per year to traffic fatalities. After the program got established, the number came down to the mid-70’s, with an uptick during the early years of Covid.

“We want them to understand that, even though they’re young, these things can happen to them,” Mary said. “They are not invincible.”



Coach Marc Wilson and volunteer Reid Kuder prepare to deploy an airbag, which flies into the air on detonation. Students get a close-up view of the spent airbag, which is still hot.

driving and careless choices behind the wheel. This spring's presenters included Tammy Guido McGee, founder of the Gweedo Memorial Foundation (connorguido.org) and www.IfYouSeeSomethingSaySomething.org, and Mary King, program manager of Youth of Virginia Speak Out About Traffic Safety (YOVASO).

Texting while driving increases a teen's risk of crashing by 23 times. 3,275 fatalities were attributed to distracted driving in 2023. —NHTSA

Dan Bryant came from Williamsburg with three of his children. He found Street Survival last year when he was looking for something more than the DMV offered. After his oldest completed the school and loved it, he told his younger children, "You guys need to do this." Along with respect for the car, he hopes his teens will absorb the lessons about distracted driving, as "they're all slaves to their phones these days." He credits his own experience in motorsports with providing the skills to avoid accidents when other drivers are distracted.

Seventeen-year-old Salem native, Teagan Whitlow, enjoyed the school. "It's good information," she said, "and it's fun." Her mother, Nicole, was excited for Teagan's participation.

"We have a family friend whose child did the school," she said. "She credits these skills with saving her daughter when she was run off the road. We're lucky to have this in our own back yard."

Drew Autry, 16, was there with his stepdad, Patrick Sullivan, from Kingsport, Tennessee. "I'm here to learn to be a better driver, to try to do better for myself and for other people too." He was inspired by the recent loss of his father in a motorcycle accident.

"I'm here to support him," said Patrick, "and I'm here to learn, too."


TRSS is hosted by the Blue Ridge Region Porsche Club of America (the BMW Club and the Shenandoah Chapter Porsche Club have hosted in the past), and many local businesses and organizations support the event with volunteers, dollars, swag and equipment, including Star City Corvettes, Roanoke Valley VW Club, Sportscar Clinic and Brogan Insurance.

Linda Brown has been a Street Survival volunteer for five or six years. She is a safety flagger, stopping traffic when someone on foot needs to be on the active part of the course. Her husband is involved with the VW Club, and she likes to help out. "But the main reason," she said, "is if we can keep one child from getting



killed...you just want to do anything you can to help them."

Registration is open for the next Tire Rack Street Survival on September 14, 2025 in

Salem, Virginia. Tuition is \$125. For information on scholarships, email StreetSurvival24153@gmail.com or call 540-339-6108. Go to www.streetsurvival.org for details, calendar and a link to register. 

SAY SOMETHING... ABOUT CARELESSNESS

Tammy Guido McGee founded the Gweedo Memorial Foundation (connergweedo.com) to educate about destructive driving decisions. The effort was born of personal tragedy: in 2019, her son, Conner, 16, and his friend, Logan, got into a car with an underage, unlicensed driver who'd been given access to a high-performance vehicle. They barely made it 500 yards, and all three boys were killed.

Tammy says the young driver bragged about speeding on social media and drove the car to school every day for a month. If the adults and students who were aware of this had spoken up, Connor would have finished college by now. Perhaps he'd be playing professional soccer. So, she also created an anonymous tip site: www.IfYouSeeSomethingSaySomething.org.

"Everybody is afraid to be a rat or a snitch," said Tammy. "This is why we founded our website... to give teenagers an anonymous voice to tell us what's wrong." In addition to driving concerns, Tammy says they get tips about bullying, sexual assault, drugs and alcohol, ammunition, shootings and bombs. It's a national website, and local law enforcement are notified.

Tammy presents at schools and organizations free of charge. "We travel all over the country raising awareness," she said. "We want to make sure that another mother doesn't wind up being me."

She has also been instrumental in getting driving-related legislation passed in Virginia, including making it a misdemeanor to enable or have knowledge of an unlicensed driver when an injury or fatality results.

"I think this is the smartest, hands-down, the most no-brainer course," said Tammy of TRSS. "Every single teenager should take this course. We want them to have every weapon in their arsenal. We want them to arrive alive."

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