

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 201
JUNE 2025

Carilion Innovation's
Aileen Helsel

RBTC/RBIA's
Marty Rosendale

Pulaski's Sportsplex

Jon Murrill's Murals

Townside Gardens

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IV DRIP BAR & WELLNESS CLINIC

IVQ&A

answers to Roanoke's
new wellness curiosity



Kalee Perry & Bethany Nichols
Nourished IV Drip Bar & Wellness Clinic



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Welcome to the June 2025 edition of FRONT. This issue trickles with business introductions and gushes with stories. It's fluid—like our cover feature. Which is way better than dry and static and completely expected, don't you think? We hope you enjoy reading and get saturated with satisfaction.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

““

A new innovation usually starts with a feeling that something isn't right... — Page 12

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Special Feature



“ ”

I was awestruck by what I saw. — Page 22

EXPANDING ACCESS *to Lifesaving Care*



At Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, we've set a new benchmark for advanced healthcare with the Crystal Spring Tower expansion. Designed with one purpose in mind—to deliver the most advanced heart and emergency care—this state-of-the-art facility ensures that you and your loved ones receive the best care possible when it matters most.

Unrivaled Heart Care

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JUNE



Aila Boyd



Andy Brady



Dan Dowdy



Emily Field



Jennifer Leake



Olivia Marone

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



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Carrie Cousins



Shannon Dominguez



Tom Field



Hart Fowler



Frazier Hughes



Gene Marrano



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Linda Balentine
Crowning Touch /
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Mary Ann L. Miller
Bank of Botetourt /
finance – banking



Alicia Smith
F&S Building Innovations /
construction

“Murrill completed over ten exterior murals and multiple interior ones in Roanoke alone.

— Page 28

“Look at those ads... sing those jingles. — Page 17

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



nourished

IV DRIP WELLNESS CLINIC



Olivia Marone Photos

Kalee Perry, RN and Bethany Nichols, FNP-C

Drip, Drip, Drip

Roanoke's New Wellness Phenomenon: IV Drip Bar

Special Feature

Nourished IV Drip Bar & Wellness Center has arrived in Roanoke County—offering a relatively new wellness service that was only available elsewhere. The reception is mixed, but there are certainly a lot of people who swear by the benefits—including those who seek sports performance, immunity support, and stress recovery. And there are customers who want specific results too—such as relief from some physical discomfort or even...

hangover relief (yes, it's true). Weight management and longevity have also been cited as reasons for IV drip therapy, although those effects aren't the primary marketing.

The responses, reviews, and reactions are so positive by these customers/patients that non-clinical intravenous infusion owner/operators are banking on an expanding market. The people who don't—



or wouldn't—visit a drip bar, don't really need to be convinced, because they're never likely to try it. This includes individuals who "don't want anything to do with needles" and those who are just uncertain. (The medical community also shares mixed reactions; but most advice just states the therapy is not FDA-approved. In any case, the "bars" are legal and regulated, and IV infusions must be administered by licensed medical professionals.)

Bethany Nichols, FNP-C and Kalee Perry, RN operate Nourished IV Drip Bar & Wellness Center, along with 15 employees and two offices (Roanoke and Smith Mountain Lake). They describe themselves and the business as full-time working moms who set out on a mission in 2021 to open Roanoke's first IV Drip Bar and Wellness Clinic.

"We dedicate our lives to preserving the health and wellness of our community with innovative and holistic approaches to patient care. We have a passion for functional medicine, supplements and nutrition, and the preservation of vitality to support our clients discover and healthier, fit, and more confident version of themselves."

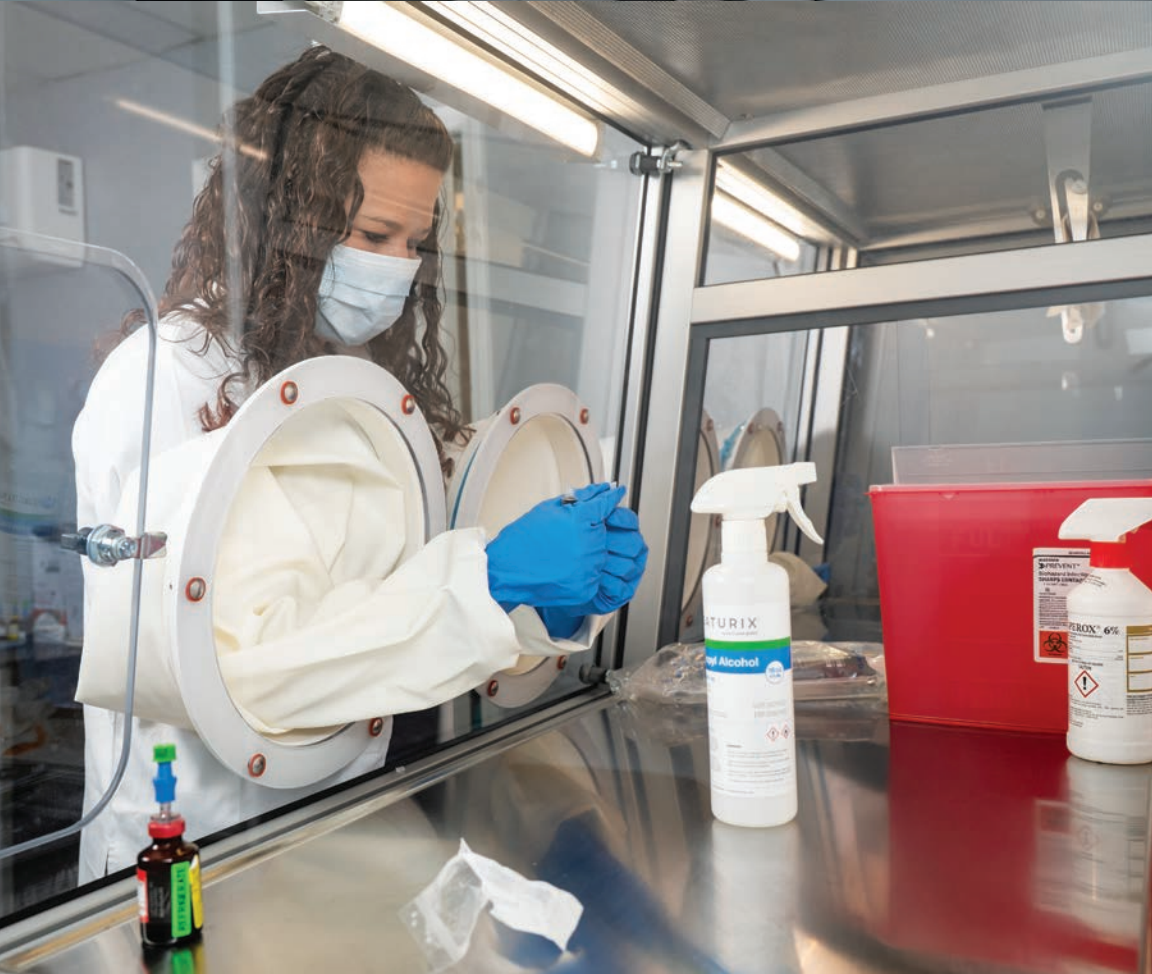
Nichols and Perry provided the following responses to FRONT questions:

What do you like best about your business?

The ability to make a meaningful difference in the lives of the community we serve with a unique, holistic approach to wellness and longevity.

““”

A high dose of vitamin C as well as other antioxidants, amino acids, and heavy metal detox protocols can reduce symptoms related to chemotherapy and radiation...



What kinds of customers are you attracting?

We attract individuals interested in a proactive approach to health and wellness rather than reactive, or those who prefer a more natural approach to supporting symptoms they are facing rather than medications. Often these are middle aged adults who have shifted focus to maintaining health, but also younger athletes and individuals looking to enhance energy and performance.

Are most of your customers familiar with your service or 'first-timers'?

As the first IV Drip Bar in the Roanoke Valley, the majority of our patients were first-timers when they first stepped through our doors! Over the last two years, many of them have become seasoned vets with monthly memberships bringing them back to make infusions part of their wellness routine. We continue to celebrate our first-timers making the decision to support their health on a regular basis with many clients saying they have heard wonderful things about IV therapy but have yet to try it themselves.


How are customers reacting?

We have 50 five-star Google reviews. (See some of them in the list at right.)

When do most people come?

Most people frequent Nourished on their days off as part of their self-care routine, to acquire pregame fuel prior to marathons and sports events, to recover from indulging a bit too heavily on a night out, as a social event to catch up with girlfriends as a group, or to refill monthly prescriptions that support quality of life.

Anything else you'd like to share?

There has been an increase in young people being diagnosed with cancer across the country, including our very own Kalee Perry, who was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma at the age of 23. Her story and recovery drive our passion to support community events raising money for cancer research through our Drip for a Cause Events and also providing supportive care for patients who have received a cancer diagnosis. A high dose of vitamin C as well as other antioxidants, amino acids, and heavy metal detox protocols can reduce symptoms related to chemotherapy and radiation, and enhance the effectiveness of other treatments received. 

RECENT REVIEWS

Billy B

I had a fantastic experience at Nourished! The staff were incredibly welcoming, friendly, and went out of their way to make sure I felt comfortable. What really stood out was how knowledgeable they were — they answered all my questions with confidence and gave great recommendations tailored to my needs. It's clear they care about both their products and their customers. Highly recommend!

Amanda W

My first experience was so much more than what I expected. It's a welcoming/sterile clean/lovely modern decorated environment with the most friendly and knowledgeable staff. They were patient in answering my questions, thoroughly explaining the options, and making sure I was comfortable. I felt right at home and look forward to future visits. So grateful that Roanoke is able to home such a treasure!

MT B

I love this place so much. The staff is SO kind and knowledgeable. I'm undergoing chemo and radiation, and the infusions help my energy levels so so much. The third time I came, I purchased a membership and coming every 3 weeks, I'm going to save nearly \$100 a month by joining. Cannot recommend them highly enough. The atmosphere and ambiance is also super relaxing. They also sell some salves and lotions made by a local artisan and the beef tallow balm is really helping with the effects of radiation.

John C

When I got out of bed yesterday, I knew I had a problem with an intestine issue. Today my wife took me in for an IV drip. This staff is the most amazing people who customize my IV to what I really needed. I could barely walk in on my own. I'm finally able to hold liquids and some solid. We highly recommend this clinic.



Carilion Innovation: *Helsel Seeks to Transform Healthcare*

By Aila Boyd

When Dr. Aileen Helsel looks at a problem in healthcare, she sees opportunity. As director of Carilion Clinic Innovation, Helsel leads efforts to transform frontline insights into practical solutions that improve patient care.

"I've always loved bench research — the creativity of designing experiments to answer meaningful questions and the sense of discovery that comes with it," Dr. Aileen Helsel said. "But even as I immersed myself in the lab, I was always drawn to the potential real-world impact of that research."

Established in 2019, Carilion Clinic Innovation supports healthcare providers who identify problems and develop solutions. Since Helsel stepped into the director role in April 2022, the program has expanded its focus.

"We've broadened our focus to include strategic partnerships with startup companies developing products to improve patient care," Helsel said. "We recognize that healthcare startups can greatly benefit from being connected to

a healthcare system through clinical input and validation and opportunities for pilot testing, feedback and real-world impact."

The innovation journey at Carilion typically begins with a feeling that something isn't right.

"A new invention usually starts with a feeling that something isn't right — the feeling that a clinical or operational outcome could be better, which usually prompts people to ask how to improve the outcome," Helsel explained.

Staff members file a disclosure with Carilion Clinic Innovation, where the team works to define the problem and understand past solution attempts. Sometimes existing market solutions are identified, but when they aren't, Carilion's engineers build solutions tailored to the specific problem.

For early-stage innovators, particularly those with clinical backgrounds, the initial support is foundational.

"In most cases, it's simply mentorship and knowledge transfer," Helsel said. "Many of our inventions come from individuals with clinical backgrounds who were never trained as entrepreneurs, so step one is often learning about intellectual property, business law and technology transfer."

Carilion's distinctive approach to innovation includes a Proof of Concept Program that rapidly tests and refines ideas.

"Carilion is unique because we're one of the only healthcare systems in the country with a human factors team, innovation team, and simulation team embedded under one roof," Helsel said. "This allows us to take ideas brought to Carilion Clinic Innovation or conceived in partnership with CCI and rapidly design, prototype and test them."

This comprehensive approach can move through design, prototyping and testing in high-fidelity environments within just four to eight weeks, helping to identify flaws early and redirect resources to more promising projects.

The program's success is measured on multiple fronts, from financial returns to cultural impact.

"Carilion Clinic Innovation's success is measured in several ways — the return on investment from products we develop, patent and license; the number of startup



Aileen Helsel

companies that spin out of our work; or the number of products that reach the market and make a difference for patients," Helsel said. "But just as important is the cultural impact within Carilion itself."

Partnerships are central to Carilion's innovation ecosystem. Collaborations with Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC provide complementary expertise and resources.

"The expertise at Virginia Tech has been instrumental in shaping and validating

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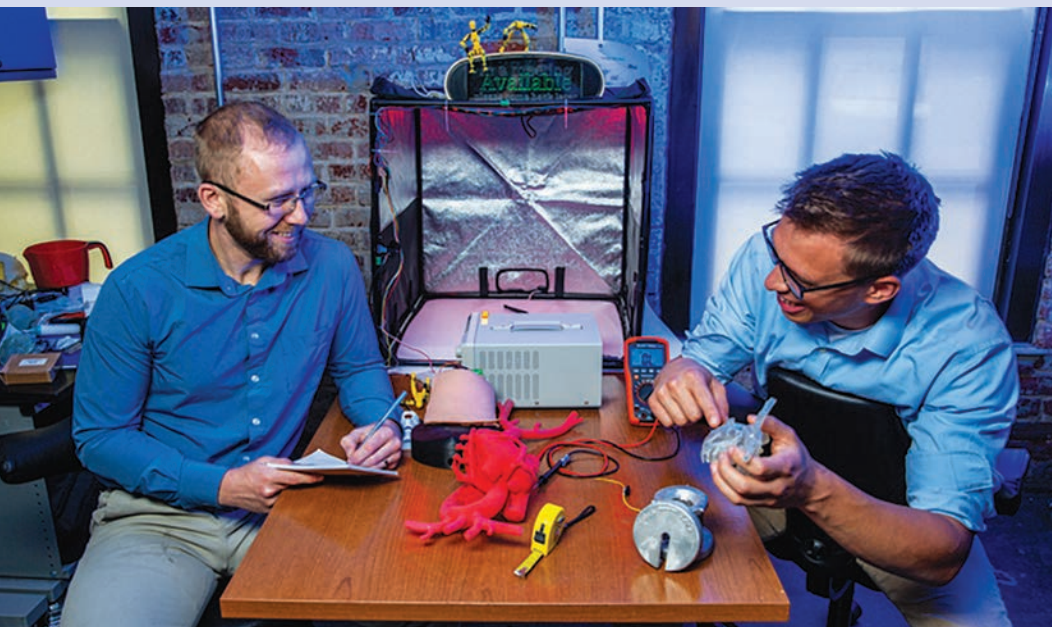
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some of our more complex innovations," Helsel noted. "At the same time, the medical school brings a strong clinical perspective and a sense of practicality."

Regional connections further strengthen the program's impact. Three Carilion Clinic Innovation projects have been through the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP), and Helsel serves on both the Roanoke Economic Development Authority and the Roanoke Blacksburg Innovation Alliance Board of Directors.

Looking forward, Helsel sees technologies that improve healthcare access as particularly promising for Carilion's rural patient population.

"One of the most exciting trends in healthcare innovation is the rise of patient-centered technologies that help people access care wherever they are," she said. "This is especially important in rural regions like ours, where distance and limited access to specialists can create real barriers."

Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and data science are becoming fundamental elements of healthcare innovation.

"AI, data science and digital health are no longer separate categories of innovation — they're becoming foundational elements


that will be incorporated into nearly every solution we develop," Helsel explained.

For healthcare professionals with innovative ideas, Helsel's advice is straightforward: "The first step is the hardest because you have to go it alone. Once you reach out and make contact, our entire team is at your disposal, and we're happy to serve as a resource along the innovation journey."

Helsel's transition from molecular bioscience researcher to innovation leader was influenced by a pivotal experience with technology transfer during her PhD studies.

"It showed me there was an entire field focused on translating scientific discoveries into real-world products," she recalled. "It was exciting to see the mechanics of how ideas move from the lab to the market, and it ultimately set me on a path toward innovation leadership."

What continues to inspire Helsel is witnessing the enthusiasm of first-time inventors.

"I get excited seeing how energized they become by the opportunity to solve a problem they've often been dealing with for years," she said. "There's real joy in watching someone realize that they can do more than work around an issue — they can actually help fix it." 



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LEAD BY EXAMPLE

**By Carrie Cousins,
Vice President at
Lead Point Digital**

Executive Summary:
*Lobbying for advertising
and its measurable
contribution to our
economy.*

Advertising is more than slogans and cute jingles

I've loved advertising since I was a small child. The Saturday morning cartoon experience was must see TV thanks to commercials for Barbie, Lego, and Fruit Loops.

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Now, I understand that's only a small part of the picture. Advertising is a significant and vital part of the Virginia (and national) economy, that supports households (like mine) and supports jobs in other industries.

The Advertising Coalition releases national and state numbers on the impact of advertising each year and you may be surprised at the value behind the creative. The 2025 report showed that:

- Advertising helps support 754,847 jobs annually in Virginia
- Advertising helped support \$143.5 billion in economic activity in Virginia in 2024
- Every 1 job in advertising supports 27 jobs across different industries in Virginia
- Nationally, every \$1 spent on advertising returns about \$20 in sales

It's an element that touches almost every industry in some way, helping small businesses generate new foot traffic and customers to sustaining revenue for Fortune 500 brands.

Advertising is also ingrained in the U.S. Constitution through the First Amendment and helps consumers make educated choices before purchasing products or services.

But why is all this important today?



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I was able to spend a day on Capitol Hill with the American Advertising Federation and other advertisers from around the country to share information about our industry with lawmakers. From people at Google and Meta to us here at LeadPoint Digital, the value of this industry was loud and clear – advertising is at the backbone of consumer need as well as an economic stimulator.

This industry is fueling jobs, spending, and is a central part of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (20% in 2024). It's a necessary business expense ... literally.

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Bringing 40 years of expertise to the RBIA mix

By Gene Marrano

An experienced executive who worked for and with startups in Maryland brings his know-how to the region. Finding investors for the next great idea is a major focus.

Martin Rosendale, dubbed the Entrepreneur in Residence, knows a thing or two about working with startups after a stint from 2018-2022 as CEO of the Maryland Tech Council, a trade association described on the website homepage as “a collaborative community that is actively engaged in building strong technology and life science industries by supporting the efforts of our individual members.” Now he’s bringing that expertise to the Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC) and its umbrella organization, the Roanoke Blacksburg Innovation Alliance (RBIA).

Prior to that Maryland Tech Council stint, “Marty” Rosendale says he was involved as a biotechnology and life sciences executive for almost 40 years. Life sciences is a big buzzword heard often in these parts, particularly as it relates to startups going through the RBTC 12 week mentoring program, and on a bigger scale when it comes to institutions like the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute. “I’ve been the CEO of five companies,” says Rosendale, who calls himself semi-retired, a term he adds

good-naturedly that his wife might dispute.

One of the companies he managed, ZLB Bioplasma, went from 0 to 200 million dollars in sales within three years, so Rosendale has seen startups like the companies RBTC also hopes to turn into major job creators come to that fruition. The secret sauce if there is such a thing he adds, “starts with the passion of the founders. Either through research or otherwise they come across something that they determine there is an unmet need for, and they become very passionate about bringing it to market.”

With a daughter and grandchildren living in Lexington, frequent visits to the region also made Rosendale aware of the collaboration taking place in Roanoke between Virginia Tech, Carilion and the City of Roanoke, all working to make the Innovation Corridor a reality, a partnership he dubs as “phenomenal. I haven’t seen anything like it – anywhere else in the country.” Ability, desire and passion he calls it. “The opportunity to become a part of that was just exciting.” To play some small role in helping to build the Life Sciences community here was the clincher, “something I couldn’t pass up.”

As for challenges to growing that life sciences sector, a critical mass of experienced executives in the field would help. Not having enough access to capital – those early angel investors included, is a typical hill to climb for startups elsewhere as well notes Rosendale. As the Entrepreneur in Residence his role here is to focus heavily on the capital market, adding that “no industry hub,” is ever satisfied with the funds on hand as they look to grow.

Reaching out to capital markets, including internationally, is often the key to leveraging future significant growth. “We need to take the time and the effort to bring in the angel



Martin Rosendale


investors and the experienced executives – and help our company founders navigate those capital markets. How do they find the right investors, negotiate term sheets – how do they bring that capital into this region to assist them with growing and scaling their businesses? That’s what I think we need to focus on.”

That was Rosendale’s focus with the Maryland Tech Council, where a mentoring network of some 200 business executives could lend their expertise as well to fledging companies. “[Its] very similar to what Erin Burcham and John Hagy [are doing] with the RAMP program,” alluding to the downtown Roanoke Regional Accelerator Mentoring Program.

“Erin is probably one of the best economic developers. She’s amazing – her energy, passion; her ability to bring people together and support this kind of collaboration.” High praise from someone with decades of experience in the field. The Commonwealth

Angels program that has been rebooted in recent months as another spoke on the RBIA wheel is one example says Rosendale. “Erin is amazing in that role as CEO and President.”

Hagy, who came from the Research Triangle in North Carolina to head up the RBTC (its Spring 2025 cohort completed the mentoring program last month) has also impressed Rosendale, who likes the Exit RAMP program designed to further support RBTC graduates as they look to move up to the next rung on the ladder. Hagy “took it a step further,” by bring RBTC startups on the road, “where they can pitch to investors in other parts of the region.” That could mean looking for backers in North Carolina or Northern Virginia/DC for example.

Rosendale assesses that, “the group that Erin has brought together, the leadership in RBTC is fantastic.” Now he is part of that mix, bringing his experience to the table, as the Roanoke-New River Valley region looks to become a bigger player, especially in the Life Sciences field. 

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REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:

In real estate and dating and life do you ever wonder if there is just one way to communicate if you are trying to get someone's attention?

Frazier Hughes is with Keller Williams Realty. Reach him at frazierhughescom@gmail.com

Introducing the TKO for communication in real estate and life

Over my 20 year sales career working with Dale Carnegie, selling Luxury cars and now homes, I have found this to be a valuable way to make sure you reach the client or person of your choice.


This is a guaranteed way to get in touch with a client. This is a great way to engage the client and make sure they feel your presence and know you are with them or after them. This can be done after you are in the transaction and especially before. Before the date and after.

If you do not get a reply back from a prospective client after using this technique, which is so simple—they are typically busy, so do not hesitate to try it again a few days later.

Step one: is the phone call. Isn't it crazy many people these days are not talking as much on the phone anymore but just texting? I mean I have sold many homes where 95% of the transaction is texting. One major investor here with hundreds of homes does not even talk but texts only. So, if you have to leave a message – it probably won't get listened to. That's okay, just do it and move onto the 2nd step.

Step two: send a text. Hey, this is the preferred way of communication these days so it's okay. Send a detailed text with some creative emojis. I like the sunshine as it's always positive, Emojis add more substance and show you care and are personable.

Step three: copy and paste the exact same text into an email titled 'Sorry I missed you.' Now they have the email, text, and voicemail from you. If you have Gmail, Mailsuite is a free add-on that allows you to see if they've opened your email.

This is called The Triple Knockout for a reason. Here is why. Because you know if you have tried to communicate with someone these three ways, you know darn well they have seen your text, email and voicemail. You cannot miss to knock them out with your persistence and great level of communication. 

“If you have tried... three ways, you know darn well they have seen your text, email, and voicemail.”

What showing up for your team really means


I've learned it's not about flashy perks or one-size-fits-all solutions. The best leaders are the ones who pay attention, know their people, and who show up in ways that actually matter. For me, support has looked like a lot of little things that add up. When I was sick, my boss DoorDashed food to my house—no questions, no fuss, just a simple act of care. On Valentine's Day, she did it again, turning a regular workday into something memorable. She's shown up at my Hoot & Holler storytelling night at Grandin Theatre, not because she had to, but because she genuinely wanted to support what matters to me outside of work. These aren't grand gestures but practical, thoughtful ways of saying, "I see you."

It's not just about comfort, though. Good leaders know when to push their people to be their best and do their best. When I got curious about artificial intelligence, my boss didn't just nod and moved on -- she encouraged me to dig in, experiment, and even start teaching AI workshops in the community. That kind of trust and encouragement helped me grow into a local resource on a topic that interests me immensely. She challenged me to think critically and step up but also knew when to let me rest and recharge.

That's the other side of good leadership: knowing when to let your employees rest. Hustle culture tells us to keep grinding, but constant pressure leads to burnout and, eventually, people checking out. My boss respects my boundaries and never pushes me to work more than I can handle. She trusts me to know my own limits, and that trust makes me want to give my best when I am at work.

Practical support matters, too. Instead of a cookie-cutter benefits package, I got to choose what worked for me—like internet and phone reimbursement, and health insurance that covers my family. She's transparent about how profits are shared, and makes sure everyone feels the rewards of our collective success.

Showing up for your team isn't about constant praise or flashy rewards. It's about paying attention, offering practical support, knowing when to push, and letting people rest. That kind of leadership keeps people engaged, helps businesses thrive, and makes work feel like a place you actually want to be.

As I prepare to leave Building Beloved Communities, I'm grateful for the space to heal, learn, and grow. I hope more leaders in the Valley take these lessons to heart—because when you show up for your people, everyone wins. If you're curious about my next adventure, follow me on LinkedIn and we can stay connected. 



SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By Shannon Dominguez

Executive Summary:

In the small business world, we talk a lot about "company culture" and "employee engagement," but what does that actually look like on a day-to-day basis?

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



Pulaski County Parks and Rec team

Courtesy photo

Pulaski County: New & Noteworthy

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

In September 2024, Valley Business FRONT reported that the Pulaski County Board of Supervisors had authorized the creation of the Pulaski County Sports Tourism & Entertainment Authority, which would help administer and manage county facilities, as well as promote sports tourism and entertainment assets.

Fast-forward to spring of 2025. The county has created the Director of Sports Tourism & Entertainment position and revealed a first peek to the public of a bold new venture, the Pulaski County Sportsplex.

Tim Miller entered the new role in January, after working more than 25 years in sports and entertainment, mostly in larger communities with more amenities. Miller

attended college in the area (Roanoke College) but had never even visited Pulaski County until his job interview. He was more than pleasantly surprised by the venues: "I was awestruck by what I saw."

Miller wears several hats: chief sales officer, facility manager, and in-house event producer. He oversees the facilities and ensures they are maximally utilized.



Pulaski County

Tim Miller

In addition, Miller leads the Sports Tourism & Entertainment Authority (STEa), a non-profit entity that is the “public face of the sports and entertainment initiative” and serves in an advisory role.

This emphasis is innovative, on the leading edge of a national trend. The sports and entertainment business is booming. In most places it focuses on bringing in visitors, Miller said, but Pulaski County wants more utilization of its facilities, as in attracting outsiders like tournaments on weekends, and offering programs



Pulaski County

Shay Dunnigan

to the community during the week.

Pulaski County was already known for its speedway and Motor Sports Park, the historic Calfee Park baseball stadium (home of the Appalachian League’s River Turtles), and community-oriented Randolph Park. Now, it will add the crown jewel: the Sportsplex.

The idea of a community recreation center was first conceived fifteen years ago, but the time wasn’t right, said Shay Dunnigan, Director of Parks and Recreation for Pulaski

JUN 6

FIRST FRIDAYS

THE DELANEYS

SOUL EXPRESSIONS



Courtesy photo

Sportsplex Inside

County. Since then, the vision morphed from a rec center into Virginia's largest indoor versatile sports, entertainment, and exposition facility.

"Timing is everything," Dunnigan said.

Helpful in bringing the Sportsplex to fruition is that Pulaski County already owned the building, site of the discontinued manufacturing operation of candlemaker Gala Group. Miller said renovating instead of building new saved about \$40 million.

"We are not going to have massive debt," Miller said, which means less pressure to monetize and more access for the public. Stakeholders' input was important. Miller said a public survey revealed "one big thing": the community's desire for a recreation center.

County leaders also saw an opportunity. "The youth sports industry is exploding," said Miller. "It's a multi-billion dollar business."

The 165,000 square feet, state-of-the-art indoor Sportsplex will be a versatile facility, serving both citizens and visitors. High school athletes can even train there in cold or inclement weather. It is scheduled to open in late summer of 2026.

With the county's dual goals of inspiring

health and connections, and designing a building to host tournaments, Dunnigan said, "It's a unique approach to a rec center."

Dunnigan recently coined the phrase "wallness wellness," meaning that the county's community programs had outgrown their space. Now, it will be able to expand programming to more ages and interests.

Miller highlighted some of the facility's attributes. The Sportsplex will have the potential for 26 pickle ball courts, the largest number of pickle ball courts available anywhere in Virginia. The restaurant will feature an outside entrance, adding "another [food] option for the local community." In the Golf Institute, a simulator will allow golfers to play any course in the world virtually.


Such a shiny new facility doesn't come cheap. The Sportsplex is costing \$10 million. County leaders have used the word "enterprising" when describing its approach to funding.

"The hope and intention is for the building to pay for itself," said Miller. "To be determined."

Sources include fees for building use, memberships, and sponsorship opportunities for both national and local companies throughout the county's facilities. Miller

listed the additional funding sources of county smokers' tax revenues and "generous" donations. The Sportsplex will be commercially available for tournaments, and rooms and outdoor spaces will be rentable to the community.

There are "a lot of unknowns" about the economic impact of the new Sportsplex, said Miller, but he and Dunnigan agree that it will be a boon to hotels, restaurants, and small businesses in Pulaski County. Their departments collaborate with Tourism, led by Director Erika Tolbert, on everything from managing calendars to marketing. (See September 2024 issue.)


For outside Sportsplex clients, like tournament operators, and guests, like travel sports families, Miller said: "We want them to have a positive experience so we can convince them to come back." For its residents, Pulaski County is creating a "true community hub," said Dunnigan, that will be accessible and welcoming and will "enhance quality of life." 

PULASKI COUNTY SPORTSPLEX AMENITIES

- 8 indoor basketball/volleyball/futsal (indoor soccer) courts
- 2 indoor turf soccer fields
- 4 permanent indoor pickleball courts, 22 additional indoor pickleball courts (total 26)
- 8 futsal courts
- community weight room
- cardio room
- senior fitness room
- 1/5 mile indoor walking track
- 110 meter indoor sprint track
- 2 drop-down batting cages
- indoor Golf Institute
- 6,300 square foot indoor playground
- full-service restaurant and catering
- conference rooms
- exposition space
- entertainment space




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BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:
HR pulse surveys serve as the organizational equivalent: quick, frequent check-ins that help leaders monitor the health of their company through its people.

The power of pulse: what business leaders can learn from the ICU

Monitoring a patient's pulse is a fundamental yet critical practice in a hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). It offers real-time insights into a patient's condition and alerts medical staff to subtle changes before they become life-threatening. The same concept applies to the workplace.

Unlike traditional annual engagement surveys, which can be lengthy, outdated by the time they're reviewed, and too infrequent to catch emerging issues, pulse surveys are intentionally short, typically five to ten focused questions, and are conducted regularly. Weekly, monthly, or quarterly check-ins allow leadership to detect cultural shifts, emotional highs and lows, and operational stress points in real time.

Why Pulse Surveys Matter

Just as a stable heart rate can signal recovery and sudden spikes can indicate trouble, pulse surveys provide leaders with an immediate snapshot of organizational well-being. They enable HR and executives to identify early warning signs—such as disengagement, communication breakdowns, or declining morale—before they escalate into turnover, burnout, or performance issues.

Proactive Culture Care

In healthcare, failing to monitor a pulse can mean missing the opportunity to intervene. The same applies to businesses. Pulse surveys assist leaders in acting before a team flatlines. Whether it involves identifying poor manager relationships, dissatisfaction with workload, or confusion about goals, regular feedback empowers decision-makers to implement timely, targeted changes that enhance the employee experience.

More importantly, the act of asking creates a powerful message: we care enough to check in. This small yet consistent gesture builds trust, boosts engagement, and reinforces a feedback-driven culture. Employees who feel heard are more likely to stay, perform, and contribute to a positive workplace.

Smart Leadership Decisions

Just as doctors use patient vitals to create informed treatment plans, executives can utilize pulse data to refine communication, policy, and leadership development strategies. This transition shifts HR from reactive to proactive and provides leaders with clarity on where to invest their energy and resources.

What to Measure


Effective pulse surveys often focus on areas such as job satisfaction, management support, work-life balance, and



team communication. To start, three simple questions can offer immediate insight:

1. On a scale of 1 - 10, how satisfied are you with your current work?
2. Do you feel that your manager supports you in doing your best work?
3. Is there anything we can do to enhance your work experience this week?

Conclusion

In medicine and business, ignoring vital signs can lead to serious consequences. HR pulse surveys are essential tools for maintaining organizational health. By listening regularly and responding intentionally, leaders can foster a culture where people thrive—and business results follow. The pulse of your company is its people. Ensure you're checking it. 



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Submitted photos

Jon Murrill



The ROI of the Mural – from the Muralist’s perspective

By Hart Fowler

Jon Murrill has become the unofficial mural master in the region, as Roanokers continue to support the boom of big outdoor art.

Patrons that commissioned art have been the lifeblood for solo artists dating back perhaps to cave paintings, when someone’s work was deemed valuable enough by the tribe to put paint-stick to wall, leaving behind something that lasts longer than we do.

The process of funding public art has been refined and reinvented over centuries, with humanity’s best known public artworks being made possible by business owners. As either community-minded art philanthropy, or clever marketing, outdoor, public-facing murals are good for business, and the mural business has been booming of late in Roanoke - with Jon Murrill leading the charge.

The former Patrick Henry High School Art teacher and world-class portrait artist has

been making murals for three years, and went full-time a year and half ago. One of his first large scale mural projects was as an assistant to James Bullough, the German muralist that brought the gargantuan-sized mountain climber to the Freedom First building in downtown Roanoke two years ago. Murrill recently completed another commissioned mural at their Lynchburg branch.

“Public art is a growing scene and it seems like there’s quite a bit of private investment and interest there,” said Murrill, who’s completed over ten exterior murals and multiple interior ones in Roanoke alone, with many more throughout the region, in the last two years.

His recent focus in downtown Grandin



Village has transformed neighborhood exterior walls into vibrant places with a story. His series “Mothers of the Forest” presents building-sized renditions of the personalities and stories of three local women. Hyper-realistic with a vibrant and 3-D effect, he followed up that series with a beautifully rendered Cardinal for the adjacent bicycle shop, transforming the area into another outdoor arts panorama.

Murrill said word about his work spreads, leading to more commissions as he builds

relationships with business owners. These projects typically begin with a conversation when a patron wants to gift something to the community, like with Whit Ellerman, the owner of Cardinal Bicycle.

“Whit didn’t have to fund ‘Mothers of the Forest’ or allow that to be painted on his building. But the investment there was to bring joy and acknowledgement to the community, and I think that return is just as great as painting something that thematically deals with the business as well”.

JUNE 7	JUNE 14 3PM-9PM	JUNE 20	JULY 12
			
GHOST TOWN BLUES BAND	FIVE DOLLAR SHAKE & JERRY WIMMER TRIO	RED DIRT REVOLUTION	 daLeville town center





Nathan Webster is the owner of Scratch Biscuit and Village Grill, the Grandin Village cornerstones that adjoin Cardinal Bicycle, and commissioned Murrill to paint the neighborhood's iconic firehouse at the Grill. He voiced praise for the project on Facebook when Murrill finished the work in April:

"Cardinal was gracious enough to include the back of our warehouse with their mural and paid for the project. Was a very cool neighborly thing for them to do. I absolutely LOVE the way this cardinal stands out and looks!!! Thanks to Cardinal [Bicycle] and Jonathan for his artistic work."

Murals stand out – like the H&C Coffee neon sign in downtown Roanoke, and are a part of the collective viewscape. Murals are free to view, always open, and often visible when driving.


Owner Matt Thompson's Fleet Feet store on 220/Franklin Road in Roanoke is seen by approximately 40,000 commuters a day. Thompson commissioned Murrill's "Blue Ridge Tortoise and Hare" mural on the building last year.

"That piece more than almost any other piece I've done has received the most compliments, people love the characters I designed," Murrill said, while also

commending Thompson's creative input. "They also pertained loosely to the business [which sells running shoes]. There was a relationship between the aesthetic and the theme to his business. It also attracts people to ask 'well what's going on in there ... what is in that space?'"

Murrill's unique and thought-provoking concepts, rich creative design, and masterful delivery has made him one of the most visible and in-demand local artists. On-the-job, his attention to detail was readily apparent to Fleet Feet's Thompson who again posted about Murrill's work on Facebook last Fall:

"Watching Jon Murrill work reminds us to push our boundaries and hold ourselves to the highest standards. He routinely assesses his work from various lanes on 220, Home Depot's parking lot, Starbucks lobby, lights on, lights off, and all angles."

He remains humble approaching his second year as a full-time muralist, living his dream. "Five years ago, I never would have imagined ... it's something I really cherish now. I can't say that financially all the time, but it is incredibly rewarding for me to be able to paint for a living. To be able to look at my friends and family and children - and for them to see me pursuing my dream of being a painter." 



Roanoke’s outdoor mural portfolio keeps expanding >

A well-known Roanoke smoke shop near 13th Street Northwest on Orange Avenue has a whole new look. **Huff N Puff** now features a colorful new mural by local artist **Sarah Kirk Parcell**. “I said lets run with this space age, 50’s kind of vintage sci-fi, retro look. I just think it really fits the aesthetic

of the business – and its colorful.”

Parcell says the owners wanted that vintage space-age theme with a nod to Alice in Wonderland — and the result is a bright, retro-style design that covers the once plain white building. Parcell also notes that the shop’s new sci-fi inspired mural and freshly painted secure windows have helped totally transform its curb appeal. Parcell says working in full public view along one of Roanoke’s busiest roadways made this project especially rewarding.





Something's happening at the zoo >

The new ADA-accessible **Skyline Stage at Mill Mountain Zoo** also includes some metal panels that were turned into art by **Tay Whiteside** and his Lift Arc Studios staff. "There are four custom plasma cut panels with different animals and a landscape. Designed by a very talented artist, Jake Smith. We've done a few projects for city organizations, but this is one with maybe the biggest payoff, at least visually." Those panels were revealed at Mill Mountain Zoo when they cut the ribbon last month.

At the dedication Roanoke Mayor **Joe Cobb** had high praise for executive director

Nikki Voudren and the Mill Mountain Zoo staff - which earlier this year had to deal with debris and fallen tree limbs from a storm that damaged some of the zoo's animal enclosures: "emerging through a storm is what Nikki and her team do best. The remarkable achievement of this new Skyline Stage [which overlooks the valley] is a testament to the power of transformation."

The new Skyline Stage can be rented for private parties, when Mill Mountain Zoo is not using it for other events. Project partners include RL Price Construction, Boxley Ready-Mix, Hughes Associates and the Cabell Foundation. New Roanoke City Manager Valmarie Turner also helped cut the Skyline Stage ribbon.



Gene Marrano




Nibbling away at the housing inventory shortage

A ribbon was cut on some new higher-end homes in the Roanoke Valley in late April, The Ridge at Fairway Forest in Roanoke County. "We are working closely with NVR, Inc./Ryan Homes to create a lot of new housing in the Roanoke Valley, New River Valley, Franklin County and beyond," noted Alexander Boone with ABoone Real Estate Inc. Boone's own plans to create a community of lower cost townhomes with several retail options on the old Poage Farm property received pushback from local residents; Boone is looking at more traditional and higher end homes instead.

As for Ryan Homes, "NVR, Inc. trades under the name Ryan Homes and is the fourth largest homebuilder in the United States. They sold close to 23,000 homes last year for more than \$10 billion in sales revenue. Says Alexander Boone: "ABoone Real Estate is developing communities to attract Ryan Homes to the Roanoke Valley. Ryan Homes' entry into the Roanoke Valley is transformational for housing in this region because of the diversity, price and quality of homes that we will help Ryan Homes build in our region. We currently are working on more than ten new home communities for Ryan Homes across the Roanoke and New River Valleys, Franklin County and beyond."

Is there much interest in houses that start in the 500's and go up from there? "There is such strong demand for high-quality homes in the Roanoke Valley that all appointments for the first three days of the new community [were] taken," Boone said in an e-mail. "They also have received more than 100 phone calls [before the ribbon cutting] for information."

Okay, maybe new homes in the mid-hundred thousand range and up won't attract first time young homebuyers – but maybe comfortable baby boomers who want to move up from older housing stock will buy those Ryan Homes and free up some lower priced inventory. Due to local and nationwide housing stock shortages, not to mention prices inflated by that shortage, older Americans are staying put longer and not turning over their properties. (Salem recently cut the ribbon on a new single family detached home development).

I also saw that Senator Mark Warner (D-Va.) is backing a bill supporting the rehabilitation of 500,000 older, blighted houses nationwide. Hmm, Roanoke City has some of those. Attacking the housing shortage that also drives up property taxes for those fortunate enough to own a home – attacking from both ends of the spectrum – is one way to address the problem, here and elsewhere. Its critical: if we don't have enough inventory for younger home buyers or maybe even those that want to buy upscale new and retire in the mountains, the failure to address the housing issue adequately will have an economic impact on the valley – and its residents. 

THERE'S
SOMETHING
HAPPENING
HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
*Attacking the housing
issue from several
angles can't hurt.*

Such a gentleman

Talk about a Throwback Thursday...

I couldn't have had a more nostalgic business moment. The project deadline was right upon me, but I wanted the business of a local restaurant, because I knew it would be a good fit.

"Let's just go eat there tonight," I announced to my wife, and I can drop off the material, I thought.

Our dinner there was delightful as usual. As our server asked if I was ready for the check, I nodded and then asked for the general manager by name.

"Oh, she's not here tonight," our server said. "But I can get you the manager on duty," he said, as I detected a slight hint of concern in his eyes. (He might have wondered if I had a problem.)

A man I have never seen before arrived at our table and announced himself. The first thing I did was to praise our server and our usual excellent service and experience. Then, I said I usually talk with the GM; but I just wanted to invite and ask for the restaurant's business in this project (as I showed him the material).

"I can just leave this here with you," I said, knowing that the deadline would likely expire before they could respond. At least we still had a nice dinner, I thought.

The manager asked for more detail, so I quickly showed him the options, so he could relay them to the GM.

"Could you hold on for a bit?" he asked, then picked up the material and left. Five minutes later, he returned—and handed me a check.


"Is this correct?" he asked. I said yes, we both smiled, we shook hands, and I thanked him.

It's what we used to call "a gentleman's agreement." Certainly, an outdated term today; but there are times when I truly miss some of the old-school ways of doing business.

I share this little Throwback Thursday moment as a reminder and consideration for all of us to remember the value of keeping things simple.

This example involved an ethnic business; and since it's happened before, I think "gentlemen's agreements" are more culturally acceptable here. I just know that I like it—and I operate my own business in the same manner whenever I can.

I also know the opposite extreme is frustrating if not infuriating at times. That example includes some of our largest corporations that force their "subjects" to navigate through endless online trails or wrestle through calls as you're passed from one person to the next.

They need to go out for dinner at our local restaurant. And pick up a few tips. 



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
Simplicity is such a beautiful thing.

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.

Women 1, Men 0

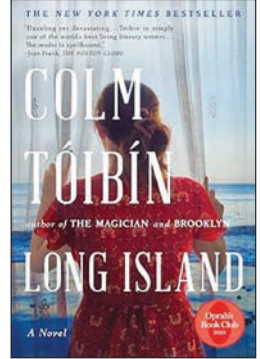
I don't generally read mid-sequel books as a first selection. Sure enough, within mere minutes, I could tell I was in the middle of this soap opera. I'm betting the previous novel (*Brooklyn*) did a better job captivating the audience than this one, *Long Island* (Scribner, 2024) by Colm Toibin. I started to entitle my review 'Even the Best Men Are Creeps' to indicate the feminist-leaning character flaws and primary plot; but women here have their flaws, too. Except our protagonist. Eilis Lacey is the overplayed victim here for full empathetic response. I liked the story of Irish village life (most of our story is not in Long Island), eclectic villagers, pubs and chip houses, and one impertinent mother. But our narration was flat enough that I don't think I'll continue the journey. (Then again, I don't watch the Lifetime network, either.)

—Tom Field

Street Expo comes to Roanoke

National and local performers took over downtown Roanoke for a weekend last month for the Street Performer Expo, an event the organizer said is all about giving artists a platform — and the public a reason to smile. The festival centered at the intersection of 1st Street and Kirk Avenue, where performers from around the country showcased everything from breakdancing and live poetry to comedy and crowd-interactive stunts.

The lineup included Snap Boogie, a finalist from *America's Got Talent*, and **The Loud Mime**, a vaudeville-style performer from



New Orleans known for mixing slapstick physical comedy with unexpected vocal narration — hence the name. His routines blend classic mime movements with improv, props, and audience interaction. He recently spent time busking in Europe. But it wasn't all national acts. Organizer **Jefferson Rose** said much of the talent is homegrown, thanks to support from his Roanoke-based fledgling nonprofit **Busk Roanoke**.

I took in several performance during the Expo, it's nice to see the City Roanoke, which closed off several streets to help make this happen, welcome the type of event you normally see in some bigger towns, with talented buskers including musicians making local residents and visitors perhaps smile a bit more — and maybe even laugh.

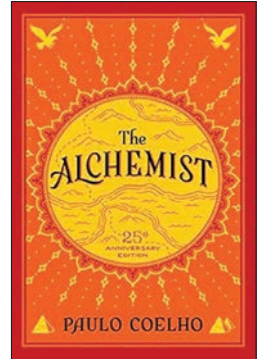
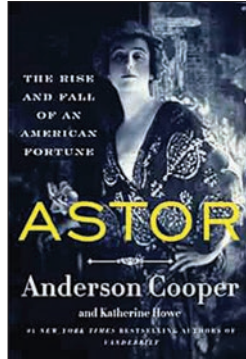
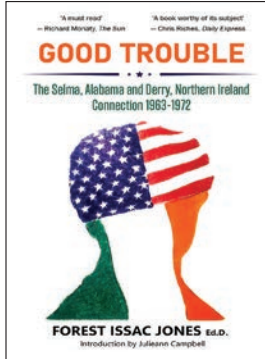
—Gene Marrano

New book about troubles

Fighting for civil rights is something that happens in many countries, all the time. In the 1960's it took place here with the black civil rights movement - and in Northern Ireland as well during that same decade. *Good Trouble - The Selma, Alabama and Derry, Northern Ireland Connection 1963-1972* is a new book by **Forest Issac Jones**; his father was the Salem City manager at one time. While working on his master's degree the younger Jones went to Northern Ireland to study the Catholic civil rights movement in a Protestant majority country: "when I visited in 2001, I met a lot of people that were very complimentary about the black civil rights movement and how they borrowed so much from our movement to help the Catholic



Street Expo



civil rights movement in Belfast and Derry, [which] is known as the civil rights city of Northern Ireland."

Future Congressman John Lewis was badly beaten by police during the Selma march, Lewis coined the phrase "good trouble," in describing the fight for a person's rights. Jones, who works for Salem City public schools, says the parallels with the 1960's Catholic movement in northern Ireland (during The Troubles) and the fight for black civil rights in the U.S. in the 1960's were evident.

—Gene Marrano

American fortune—and fall

The Astor Family was reportedly the wealthiest in the world at one point in the late 1800's, and it all started with beaver furs. Immigrant John Jacob Astor arrived in this country as a butcher, so perhaps killing and skinning beavers for the fur then in fashion with many high society types made perfect sense. In the mid-1800's he then turned his eye to snapping up cheap Manhattan real estate – and the rest is history. *Astor: The Rise And Fall Of An American Fortune* (Harper, 2023, paperback 2024) lays it all out – the mansions, the hotels (including the Waldorf Astoria), the estates in England – and the many substandard tenements the family owned in south Manhattan, primarily the home for newly arrived immigrants. The wealthy in New York City turned their attention to pricier mid-town and uptown at some point.

Author Anderson Cooper tells the story with the type or breezy narrative he employs in pieces for *60 Minutes* and CNN, along with

co-author Katherine Howe. Then came sibling rivalries, legal battles, one family member expatriating to Europe, razed mansions and convictions on fraud charges in 2009, spelling the official end of the Astor dynasty. Anderson knows something of the genre; his mother was Gloria Vanderbilt, who became a fashion designer, in a family tree that dates back to the Gilded Age when the Vanderbilts were upper-crust rivals to the Astors – one scion from that troubled family perished on the Titanic disaster.

—Gene Marrano

Desert treasure

I finally got around to reading this most-celebrated novel, *The Alchemist* (HarperOne; 2015) by Paulo Coelho. I was boarding a plane and loaded it on my phone (instead of tablet), which worried me (because I don't prefer such a small screen). However, I was completely surprised when I reached the Epilogue in the middle of my connecting flight. So short! Although I found the reading a bit juvenile (despite the heavy-hitter reviewers and celebrity fans); I did enjoy it. The noble ideals of courage and wisdom and truth coupled with the beauty of quest and journey and mission are well received. Our seer-shepherd boy has my attention. My favorite "lesson" is the advice to complete your trek to treasure—even if you find yourself at a place of contentment at some point mid-route.

—Tom Field

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



Bank joins Melrose complex >

Bank of Botetourt held a ribbon-cutting on May 9 at its new full-service branch at the new Melrose Plaza in northwest Roanoke City. The office will be staffed by Rita Joyce, Dorothy Smith, Danielle Alexander, Tra'Quan Robertson, and Tara Tinsley. Public dignitaries and Goodwill Industries of the Valleys joined the dedication, that Bank of Botetourt Executive Vice President and CLO Ned Honts called "a welcoming environment for the Northwest Roanoke community [that provides] accessible banking, financial literacy, and community support."



Saucy talk >

Faith Christian School in Roanoke hosted the 9th Annual **Roanoke Valley Leadership Series** breakfast program to a gathering of well over 200 at Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center on May 13. Introductory remarks were provided by Joel Shepherd (Virginia Furniture Market) and Lieutenant Governor of Virginia Winsome Earle-Sears. The keynote address was by Mark Conklin of Chick-fil-A and Wise Counsel, who said the chicken franchise founder Truett Cathy told him his job was to "make sure we don't run out of leaders." Conklin's "Secret Sauce" leadership recipe includes four main ingredients: worship; influence; stewardship; excellence. Community youth leader Keith Farmer of the nonprofit Straight Street was presented the 2025 Inspiring Roanoke Award.



Tom Field

Vinton salutes >

The **Vinton War Memorial** property in the Town of Vinton presents a striking display with USA flags in the front yard. Entitled "Vinton's Field of Honor: Our Fallen Heroes" a banner notes all six branches (US Army; US Marines; US Air Force; US Navy; US Coast Guard; and US Space Force) and says proceeds and donations benefit Shield Chaplaincy (support for law enforcement officers). The flag arrangement is sponsored by Sirens and Salutes, Colonial Flag Foundation, and Vinton's Greenway Group of Realtors: Brandon Alterio.



Submitted

Local beauty scene >

Before artist **David Heath** paints landscapes of our region (including this new one, Paris, VA, up near Winchester) and a strong collection from Virginia's Blue Ridge, Shenandoah, Blue Ridge Parkway, Smith Mountain Lake, etc. **The Little Gallery** in downtown Roanoke offers his work, created in his studio, from in-the-field and photographs, and onsite plein air oil sketches.



Leaders follow art >

The Art of Leaders: A Regional Celebration of Arts and Leadership soiree was held at Roanoke's Jefferson Center on May 14. A **Roanoke Cultural Endowment** production, the evening featured the portraits of Roanoke artist **Whitney Brock**, a selection of ten celebrity leaders: **Dick Daniels** and **David Page** (Q99); **Joe Cobb** (Roanoke City Mayor); **David and Leah Wiley** (Roanoke Symphony Orchestra); **Brenda Hale** (Roanoke NAACP); **Joe Gaither** (youth coach); **Dan Casey** (Roanoke Times); **Ginger Poole** (Mill Mountain Theatre); **Nancy Agee** (Carilion Clinic); **Robert Sandel** (Virginia Western Community College); **Heywood Fralin** (VT-C; philanthropist). RCE's **Shaleen Powell** said the event is "a beautiful reflection of the belief that the soul of a community is found in its stories, its creativity, and its cultural richness." Coordinated by **Mary Miller** (technology and community leader), the evening featured the art show, reception, and a program where all models were asked to share their personal perspectives on leadership. Model Brenda Hale's remark that "we live in the Star City; [therefore] we are all stars who should be shining our light," brought the crowd to its feet. Guest speaker president **Frank Shushok** (Roanoke College) encouraged all citizens to "imagine Roanoke better than we are now" instead of the usual approach to compare one city or region with others.



No 'cleanup on aisle' needed >

The **Market on Melrose** grocery store that opened last November in northwest Roanoke City still appears brand new. With easy access, friendly employees, completely full inventory, reasonable prices, and an impeccable environment, it provides an attractive local alternative to franchises. A major 'tenant' in the Melrose Plaza complex operated by Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, the 15,000-square-foot store was built to combat food insecurities and bring vitality to the northwest community.



Three decades 'petaling' >

Mark Frye, florist-owner of Vinton-based **Creative Occasions**, hit a 30-year milestone this year with his business, that has been recognized frequently for its creativity, unique arrangements, artistry, and exceptional service. The popular florist (profiled in September 2018 FRONT) is not only celebrated in our local / regional market for weddings and numerous professional and private events, but gained acclaim as a seasonal decorator at the US White House during the holidays. Creative Occasions will host an open house this month (June) to celebrate the anniversary.



Sanctuary for the senses >

5 Points Music Sanctuary in Roanoke continues its chock-full calendar of entertainment, including this Van Morrison tribute (One Irish Rover Band) and memorable evening experience on May 15. Executive director **Tyler Godsey**, who introduces shows, always reminds the audience of the 5PMS mission, its community service, and music therapy and hearing loss advocacy, since its founding in 2017. The converted church hosts a surprising number of events throughout each month, with a reputation of projecting an exceptional sensory environ and diverse genre—all with a small but mighty staff and energetic volunteers.



More subs in Blacksburg >

A favorite local restaurant known for its freshly sliced subs and salads has announced its return to Blacksburg this fall, 2025. **Sub Station II**, a community staple for 37 years, signed the lease on a 2,400 square foot space at 220 Gilbert Street within the Gilbert Place at North End development, just steps away from the Virginia Tech Campus.

Sub Station II, which was operated by longtime owner **Hamid LaPusa**, closed its doors in 2023 at his retirement. The new restaurant will be corporately owned at first. The restaurant will mark the 38th location in the Sub Station II franchise chain and is expected to create 20 new jobs when it opens.



More nurses from MGCC >

Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) honored the hard work, dedication, and perseverance of its Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) graduates during a pinning ceremony held on May 7th at the MGCC Convocation Center. The event coincided with National Nurses Day. 34 graduates were recognized for completing MGCC's nursing program. The traditional pinning ceremony represents the transition from student to professional nurse.



Careers in forestry > MGCC

Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) hosted the Virginia State FFA Forestry Career Development Event (CDE) in late April, at the college's sawmill area. The event saw a turnout of student teams from across Virginia, with high school, middle school, and 4-H teams participating in a variety of forestry challenges. Six high school FFA teams, winners from regional competitions, competed in events that tested their skills in areas such as wood and equipment identification, tree disorder identification, map interpretation, and a comprehensive written forestry knowledge exam. These students showcased their expertise in forestry and environmental sciences, preparing for future careers in the field. In the afternoon, the competition expanded to nine middle school FFA teams and four 4-H teams.



Agency gets multi-state senior account >

Roanoke-based **Anstey Hodge** has announced a marketing partnership with Episcopal Retirement Services (ERS), a respected leader in senior care serving over 3,000 older adults across Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. Specialists in marketing senior living communities and services nationwide, Anstey Hodge will focus on innovative solutions that support Episcopal Retirement Services' (ERS) goals, including digital campaign management and support for ERS's continuing care retirement communities in Cincinnati and Louisville. In addition to digital campaigns, Anstey Hodge is also supporting key initiatives within ERS' Center for Memory Support and Inclusion (CMSI), which brings expert memory care knowledge and compassion into the broader community. Anstey Hodge is a full-service advertising agency that specializes in marketing senior living communities nationwide.



Salem biotech expands >

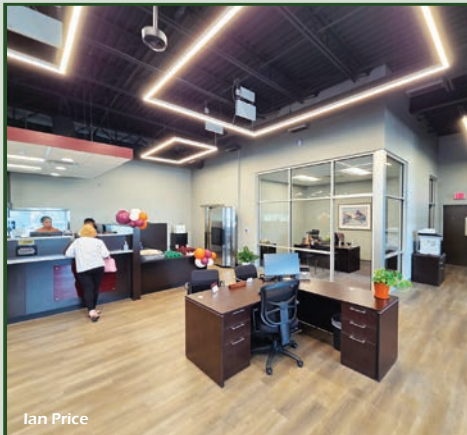
Novonesis, a global biotechnology company specializing in enzymes and microbes biosolutions, has announced a \$5 million expansion at its Salem facilities, to enhance its spore production capabilities. The investment will take place over the next 18 months and will include improvements to three of the company's five facilities in Salem. The expansion will also create five new jobs, reinforcing the company's commitment to growth in the Roanoke Region. Headquartered in Denmark, Novonesis employs over 10,000 people worldwide, with operations in major markets such as China, India, Brazil, Argentina, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. The company's Salem operation plays a critical role in Planetary Health sectors of the business, producing biosolutions that support plant growth, animal health, and aquaculture systems, as well as products for water treatment and industrial cleaning.



VBR and partners brighten kids' days >

They're called "Jared Boxes," - named for a young boy who succumbed to cancer; boxes filled with small toys and other gifts. **Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge (VBR)** and some of its partners donated items for the Jared Boxes, which were assembled and donated last month at Carilion Children's Tanglewood Center. **Carrie Mahoney** is a certified Child Life Specialist: "comfort items we can hand out to kiddos while they're in the hospital, organized by age groups, so we can grab and go. Something to do, a little distraction from the hard times they're going through in the hospital. And just a little fun."

Kathryn Lucas is the Director of Public Relations for VBR: "we send the majority of our time and resources marketing outside the community, because we're trying to bring visitors in, but it's important for us to stay connected with the local communities - so they know what we're doing, and that they're just aware of us." Carilion staff nurses, the Salem Red Sox, Chik-Fil-A and other VBR partners (there are about 1600) helped assemble the Jared Boxes.



National Bank of Blacksburg now in Roanoke >

Cutting a ribbon last month on Franklin Road (right next door to Ridge View Bank, which opened its headquarters facility last November), **National Bank of Blacksburg** is now in Roanoke. **Brad Denardo** is chair and CEO for The National Bank of Blacksburg. The National Bank of Blacksburg was founded in 1891, and states that "strong community engagement," is part of its mission. NBB has had a loan production office in Roanoke since 2016, but Denardo says COVID and supply chain issues pushed back the construction timeline for its first Roanoke location. "We bought this lot in 2020. This is our first branch [in Roanoke]. It won't be our last."



Submitted

Scholarship winner >

The **Don Holliday Memorial Scholarship** Tournament Board of Directors announced **Brooke Smyth** as the 39th recipient of the Don Holliday Memorial Scholarship. Some notes on the winner: Academics 4.04 GPA at Glenvar High School, National BETA Club, Roanoke County Schools Student Advisory Council, Senior Class Officer. She will attend Virginia Tech in the fall of 2025. The Don Holliday Memorial Foundation was formed in 1986 to honor the memory of Don Holliday, district sales manager of Piedmont Airlines. The first Don Holliday Memorial Golf Tournament took place in June 1987 and has now awarded over \$550,000 in scholarships. The scholarship is administered by the Roanoke Valley Golf Hall of Fame which each year awards a 4-year, \$30,000 scholarship to a deserving boy or girl from Southwest Virginia who also has an interest in golf.



Submitted

Member One supports Head Start >

Thanks partly to a \$50,000 donation from **Member One**, a division of Virginia Credit Union, Roanoke-based nonprofit **Total Action for Progress (TAP)** is now offering bus transportation for children participating in TAP's Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Member One joined TAP for an April 10 event to celebrate the new bus, which will be used daily to transport children to and from the Head Start facility. It will also be used for student field trips. Member One donated \$100,000, half supporting TAP's transportation initiatives for its Head Start programs and half supporting the nonprofit's Domestic Violence Services program, which provides safe housing for families fleeing domestic violence.



Gene Marrano



Digging the new Cancer Center >

Construction has the 100-million-dollar **Carilion Taubman Cancer Center**, which will rise at the Virginia Tech-Carilion Riverside campus, in front of the parking garage near the medical school. The lead contractor is RMBB based in Alabama, working jointly with Roanoke-based Branch Build. The local Caterpillar heavy equipment dealer wrapped several construction vehicles in pink - the color used to symbolize the fight against cancer. RMBB also worked with local partners on the new tower almost completed at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital.

Nancy Agee may be retired from her position as CEO of Carilion Clinic, but she is still working to raise the remaining funds needed for the new Cancer Center: "the community [came] together for this very important project. We're going to have a place for hope and healing, and world class care. It's been my dream for quite a while now. [Her husband Steven had a bout with cancer]. It's very exciting."

The new Cancer Center will be focused on research and is due for completion in 2027. "This has been planned very carefully for the synergies within this Riverside [campus in Roanoke]. We have a medical school, we have the [Fralin Biomedical] Research Institute, and it's where we have a veterinary program, for cancer for animals."

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



Carter

Dennis Carter has been named vice president of strategic partnerships and innovation at Emory & Henry University. A life-long educator, Carter played a significant role in the development of the Southwest Virginia Healthcare Excellence Academy Lab School and vice chair of the governing board. He helped E&H establish the Grow Your Own Teachers and Teachers for Tomorrow programs, involving collaboration with Virginia Highlands Community College and Wytheville Community College. He is on various community service boards and has a bachelor's degree from Emory & Henry, a master's degree in

educational leadership, and a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies from Virginia Tech.



Townsend

David Townsend, professor of management in Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech, has been appointed to the Digges Family Professorship of Entrepreneurship. The Digges Family Professorship in Entrepreneurship is designed to attract and retain top scholars in entrepreneurship, reinforcing Virginia Tech's leadership in the field, by providing recognition and financial support.

Brian Kleiner, a professor of construction and industrial and systems engineering in the College of



Kleiner

Engineering at Virginia Tech, has been appointed as the Vorster-Kleiner Endowed Director's Chair. The Director's Chair in the Myers-Lawson School of Construction was established with gifts from several construction industry donors. The creation of this endowed chair enables Virginia Tech to generate new interest in the school and in the construction industry more broadly.

Dustin Read, head of the Blackwood Department of Real Estate in the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech, has been appointed to the Bates Family Professorship in Real Estate. The Bates Family Professorship in Real Estate was established in 1984 to support real estate



Read

education at Virginia Tech. At the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, he served as the founding director of the Master of Science in Real Estate program. Read joined Virginia Tech as an assistant professor of property management in 2014. In 2021 Read left Virginia Tech to serve as professor and director of the Master of Real Estate Development Program at Clemson University and in 2024 returned to Virginia Tech.



Ross

Shane Ross, professor of aerospace and



ocean engineering in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech, has been appointed the Roanoke Electric Steel Chair of Engineering. The Roanoke Electric Steel Chair was established with gifts from the Roanoke Steel Corporation in 1976. Ross is internationally recognized for his contributions across a range of interdisciplinary fields, including control theory, dynamical systems, space mission design, chaotic fluid dynamics, environmental transport of microorganisms, and the biomechanics of living systems.



Wellar

Ryan Wellar will join the Virginia Tech Division of Information Technology as executive director for the User Experience

and Engagement unit within the Division of IT. Wellar has held IT leadership roles at Auburn University and at Penn State University. He has used data analysis and outreach efforts to elevate customer experiences, modernized IT service management processes, led a 24/7 remote call center, and streamlined incident management processes.



Jones

David Jones has been appointed as the new Director of the MG-TEC IT Academy at Mountain

Gateway Community College, following the leadership of Ashley Pratt, who helped launch the MG-TEC initiative during its foundational year. Jones previously served as a research associate for the National Security Institute's Cyber Workforce Development Program and has provided Cyber Warfighter Training with the 91st Cyber Brigade of the Virginia National Guard, as well as at the Virginia Military Institute's Cyber Defense Lab. He has also taught at the Virginia Military Institute, Southern Virginia University, and Virginia Tech, and is a veteran of the US Army Reserves.

Pamela VandeVord is now the research and



VandeVord

scholarship director at Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science at Virginia Tech. She previously served as the College of Engineering's associate dean for research and will continue forming partnerships across the university.

Tammy Moore has been named the new interim vice president for marketing and communications at Hollins University. In this leadership role, Moore will oversee the

Have a career announcement?

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Moore

university's marketing and communications team and guide efforts to enhance the Hollins brand and increase its national visibility. She will lead the development and execution of strategic initiatives that strengthen the university's reputation and connect with audiences across a variety of platforms. Moore will also serve as the media contact for Hollins University.

LEGAL FRONT



Johnson

David Johnson has joined Gentry Locke law firm as associate. Johnson is joining the firm's Roanoke office as a member of the Civil Defense Litigation Practice Group, handling workers compensation matters for the firm. Prior to joining he worked in the Office of the Norfolk Commonwealth's Attorney.

Timothy Lovett has joined Spilman Thomas & Battle (Spilman) law firm as an associate, further enhancing the



Lovett

firm's capabilities in litigation, creditors' rights, and bankruptcy law. Lovett's practice focuses on litigation in both state and federal courts, as well as bankruptcy and creditors' rights. Lovett earned his undergraduate degree from Southern Illinois University Carbondale and his law degree from University of Kentucky College of Law.

Kevin Holt of Gentry Locke was elected to a second three-year term as representative for the 23rd Judicial Circuit on Bar Council, the governing body of the Virginia State Bar.

MARKETING FRONT



Lampert

Stormie Lampert has joined 5Points Creative agency as social media coordinator, responsible for developing, implementing, and managing clients' social media strategies. Originally from Phoenix but spending most of her early years in Virginia, Lampert has a bachelor's degree in

mass communications from Virginia Commonwealth University. Her experience includes managing digital and social media at a luxury real estate brokerage in Scottsdale, AZ.

COMMUNITY SERVICE FRONT



Jorgensen

Alison Jorgensen has been appointed as the new President and CEO of The Council of Community Services in Roanoke. Jorgensen began her career with the Council of Community Services in 2002 and has worked in every facet of the organization including Director of Volunteer Services, Director of Resource and Capacity Development, Vice President of Planning, and most recently as Chief Operating Officer.

MUNICIPAL FRONT



Livesay

Samantha Livesay has been named executive director of the Montgomery County Blacksburg

Christiansburg Regional Tourism Office. She will be responsible for strategic marketing of the region's diverse attractions (including breweries, wineries, distilleries, festivals, museums, theaters, dining and lodging, and Virginia Tech activities). Livesay's experience includes serving as senior director of business engagement for Onward New River Valley, community relations coordinator for Community Housing Partners, and various positions with the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. She has a bachelor's degree in communications and public relations from Radford University.



Clair

John Clair has been hired as police chief for the Town of Blacksburg, effective July 1. He most recently serves as Chief of Police in Marion, VA; previously Chief of Police in Quantico, VA; officer in Prince William County and Dumfries, VA. Clair also held roles with the US Department of Justice and the US Department of State. A US Army veteran, he has a BS degree in religion, philosophy, and humanities; an MS degree in executive leadership; and a

graduate of Police Executive Research Forum Senior Management Institute and a graduate of Virginia Rural Center's Leadership Institute.

Megan Baker, Roanoke County's economic development director, has been named one of the top 50 economic developers in North America by Consultant Connect, a consulting agency connecting economic developers



Baker

with site consultants to promote best practices in the industry. The annual recognition honors outstanding economic development professionals nominated by their peers for

innovative strategies, strong practices, and measurable impact in building thriving communities. Baker has served the County position since 2022. Since then, the County has celebrated \$144 million in new project announcements and the creation of 1,300 jobs, including major investments from Wells Fargo, Mack Trucks, Southern Team Hyundai, and Vistar Eye Center.

TOURISM FRONT

Catherine Fox has accepted a position as director of regional destination development at Friends of Southwest Virginia. Fox was previously a director with Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

“She genuinely wanted to support what matters to me outside of work. — Page21

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CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

Andy Brady is a family man, outdoorsman, and businessman. He runs multiple businesses and franchises through Virginia, and the broader east coast, including Green Home Solutions, RoanokeOnTap, and Brady's Distillery. He sits on the Mill Mountain Zoo board as vice president and focuses on helping local businesses flourish through networking and outreach. [AndyBnoke@protonmail.com]

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in her family's home place. [cooperjp91@gmail.com]

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

Shannon Dominguez lives in Vinton and is a passionate reader and writer. She escaped a cult

8 years ago and is working on a book called, "This Ends Now", which focuses on breaking generational cycles. [shannon@buildingbelovedcommunities.com]

Dan Dowdy is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading services (proofingprof.net). His background includes service in the U.S. Air Force and an extensive career in education, including teaching college-level writing competency and business courses, and working for a Fortune 100 company. [ddowdy@vbFRONT.com]

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]

Frazier Hughes was recruited by the CEO of Keller Williams Realty after being named 2017 salesman of the year at Berglund Luxury of Roanoke. He also hosts The Roanoke Real Estate Podcast, is Dale Carnegie Trained, a former radio personality, and is a Social Media Influencer. [frazierhughescom@gmail.com]

Jennifer Leake is a trusted advisor to HR professionals and small business leaders seeking to build stronger teams through smarter hiring, deeper engagement, and emotionally intelligent leadership. Founder of Assessment Pros and creator of the "Best Job Ever" system, she provides tools and strategies to create workplaces people don't want to leave.

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 WFIR Newstalk radio. "Best one on one interview" award from Associated Press of the Virginias for his interview with former Roanoke County Chief of Police Howard Hall. [gmarrano@cox.net]

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.

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]

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Parkway paving

Approximately 22 miles of the **Blue Ridge Parkway** in Virginia are being resurfaced this summer as part of a pavement preservation program. Work began mid-May and will continue through this September. Visitors that encounter active work zones can expect short duration and single lane closures from milepost 122, at US 220, to milepost 143, near Pine Spur, including paved overlooks.

More brews for downtown Roanoke

Parkway Brewing Company, a popular Salem craft brewery, is opening a second location in downtown Roanoke at street level space of The Bower building (17 Campbell Ave). The brew pub includes a kitchen and will have a small stage for music performances, and will possibly open as early as the end of July.

NRV train station

Ground was broken in late April on the **New River Valley Rail Project** in Christiansburg. As part of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's (VPRA) Transforming Rail in Virginia (TRV) initiative, the New River Valley Project will allow VPRA to extend its Amtrak Virginia service from Roanoke to Christiansburg and return passenger rail service to the New River Valley for the first time since 1979. The New River Valley Project includes a new station platform with canopy,

track improvements and updated signaling system, and an Amtrak layover facility in Radford. The extension of service to Christiansburg will be via Norfolk Southern's main line (N-Line), the result of an agreement between VPRA and Norfolk Southern. VPRA will use existing infrastructure with a focus on developing a station stop at the Cambria site (to be called the New River Valley Station), which previously served the community from 1904 to 1979. The project will also enhance Norfolk Southern's freight service through the area. Renovations are expected to begin in 2027. The estimated cost of VPRA's New River Valley Project is \$264.5 million. Preliminary construction began in late February with full construction commencing this spring. Amtrak Virginia service is expected to begin in 2027 with two daily roundtrips between Christiansburg and Washington, DC, with stops in Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Culpeper, Manassas, Burke Centre, and Alexandria. Trip times are estimated to be 50 minutes between Christiansburg and Roanoke and just under six hours between Christiansburg and Washington, DC.

Cost-conscious funeral alternative

Roanoke Cremations has opened in Roanoke—a subsidiary of Oakey's funeral services that specializes in direct cremation services without traditional

funerals or ceremonies. The new offering is a response to affordability and accessibility, as well as an option for families to "allocate resources toward other meaningful priorities at a time of loss."

Kidney gets go ahead

Carilion Clinic received state approval for its **Kidney Transplant Program**. The Virginia Division of Certified Public Need approved the application that will result in our region's only organ transplant program. The first application was filed in January 2024, and included support from numerous stakeholders, including 16 cities, counties, and towns in Carilion's service territory; over 20 community organizations; over 1,500 community members).

Book store shutters brick-and-mortar

Downtown Roanoke book store **Book No Further**, is closing its retail shop and transitioning to an online-only store. The business was pitched to a hopeful new owner, but owner Doloris Vest cites changes in the industry for the decision to stop retail sales as of May 31. Shoppers are encouraged to visit the website; and an inventory reduction sale is in progress.

Out to pasture

New Freedom Farm in Buchanan—a horse care nonprofit for assisting military veterans and first-responders—has announced it is closing

effective the end of July this year. The organization was founded in 2016 and cited the retirement of founder Lois Magill as the reason for closing.

Chemical expansion

QualiChem in Salem—a producer of metalworking fluids used in aerospace, medical, and automotive manufacturing—is investing \$9 million to expand to a 48,500-square-foot facility on Idaho Street in Salem (while keeping its existing plant on Industrial Drive). The expansion will create about a dozen new jobs.

It's not 1%, it's another increase

The **City of Roanoke** adopted its new \$403.7 million budget on May 12; but on the business front, the approved additional 1% meals tax has not been popular and was contested by Roanoke restaurateurs, who mostly cite the tax (now 6.5%) as unfairly targeting one business sector. Only councilman Nick Hagan opposed the 5-1 vote.

Fast tracking initiative

The launch of the **Made in Virginia Investment Accelerator** (MVIA) was announced last month, described as a first-of-its-kind initiative that will ensure Virginia continues to compete for transformative investment projects. MVIA fast-tracks innovative business investments in America by coordinating state agencies for an efficient

and expedited client journey. The initiative has executive sponsorship from the offices of the Governor by the Secretary of Commerce and Trade and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

Ranked to live

Roanoke was listed in the 2025 Top 100 Best Places to Live ranking by Livability.com. Picturesque environment, affordable cost of living, job opportunities, dining, and outdoor recreation for young families and professionals were cited among the recognition. Roanoke's score tied with Cincinnati and St. Louis in the 100 listed.

Expansion in the 'Burg

Delta Star Inc., a manufacturer of power transformers and mobile substations for the electrical grid, will invest \$35 million to expand their Lynchburg operations. The project will create 300 jobs. This announcement marks Delta Star's second

expansion in two years, following a \$30 million investment and 149 new jobs in 2023. Delta Star has designed and manufactured mobile transformers and substations in Lynchburg since the 1960s. Headquartered in Lynchburg, Delta Star is one of the largest U.S.-owned medium transformer producers in the country.

Where's the beef? Right here in Virginia

New branding unveiled in April at the Virginia Beef Expo will help connect Virginia consumers with meat products that have been produced solely in the Commonwealth. "Virginia Verified Beef" will be part of a **Virginia Verified Meat** brand that demonstrates to consumers that the product was bred, born, raised, and processed in the state. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will administer the Virginia Verified Meat program, working with industry partners like

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the Virginia Cattlemen's Association to provide certification. Virginia Verified Meat includes qualifying cattle, goats, sheep or swine.

Williamson Road grants

Five Williamson Road businesses have begun façade work thanks to a grant funded by **Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association** (GWRABA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation to beautify the profile of Williamson Road. "These renovations mark phase 1 of GWRABA's commitment to enhancing Williamson Road's location and profile, ultimately restoring its status as a destination," says the GWRABA's Valerie Brown. The organizations receiving

grants are Minute Muffler & Brake Shop, Porter's Automotive Inc., American Hotel LLC, A & E Auto Salon and Richee Freeze.

Tech cited for patents; inventions created

Virginia Tech earned the No. 73 spot on the National Academy of Inventors' 2024 Top 100 Worldwide Universities List and ranked No. 45 on the 2024 Top 100 U.S. Universities List. Both lists rank the top 100 universities being granted U.S. utility patents. The National Academy of Inventors maintains the annual ranking to highlight the importance of research and innovation taking place within academic institutions. The list is compiled using calendar year patent data from

Notable Transactions

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- TPG SIXOTWO, LLC acquired 17-apartment complex at 602 Day Ave SW in Roanoke for \$1,589,500
- Unnamed company signed purchase-option for 1,200-acre undeveloped industrial site at Bryant property (Patriot Centre II) in Henry County
- Historic building at 101 E Main St in Fincastle (Kyle House) was sold for \$489,000
- 18,444-sq-ft office building at 210 S Jefferson St in Roanoke (former home of Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce) purchased by 201 South Jefferson Street, LLC for \$1,000,000
- Former 10,762-sq-ft Atlantic Union Bank building at 2950 Market St NE in Christiansburg was purchased by New River Valley Regional Commission for \$2,000,000

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

the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Virginia Tech's issued patents grew from 32 in 2023 to 50 in 2024.

Integer will expand

A company that manufactures components for medical implants is investing further in the Roanoke Valley. Integer, which makes parts for pacemakers and stents, is expanding operations in Salem with a new leased facility. Integer Senior Director of Operations Pete Hall said, "I am proud of the work our Integer Salem team is doing for our customers and in the community, and look forward to collaborating with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership as we expand our presence in the region." Hall says the investment reflects both rising demand and the strength of the local workforce.

Cyber grants

The Commonwealth Cyber Initiative (CCI) awarded 18 seed grants to nine Virginia public universities for a total of \$1.61 million to address

cybersecurity issues in artificial intelligence (AI). Researchers are from Christopher Newport University, George Mason University, Old Dominion University, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Military Institute, Virginia State University, Virginia Tech, and William & Mary. Funded by the state, CCI is making Virginia a global leader in cybersecurity and has more than 40 Virginia universities and colleges focused on workforce development, innovation, and research. Virginia Tech is participating with other schools on at least six cybersecurity-related projects.

Senior living community recognized

Brookdale Roanoke has been recognized by U.S. News & World Report as Best Memory Care among senior living communities across the nation for the fourth year in a row. Residents and family members were surveyed in thousands of Independent Living, Assisted Living, Memory Care, and Continuing

Care Retirement Communities across the country. These ratings provide families and prospective residents further insight into the community's care, food and dining, engagement opportunities, management and staff. Brookdale Roanoke has achieved the highest possible rating. The Best Senior Living category was added to the U.S. News & World Report listings in 2022.

Dr. Pepper Park at The Bridges cranks up for 2025

Dr. Pepper Park kicked off its 2025 season last month with Pandora's Box - an Aerosmith Tribute band. Dr. Pepper Park president Waynette Anderson said 30 or so concerts will be booked for 2025: "we have a great new app to download you can download on your iPhone or Android. That's the best way to be the first to know. We send out a push notification as we announce shows." Or just go to drepperpark.com or Facebook. There are tribute bands on the schedule already playing

the music of the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, Simon & Garfunkel, ABBA, Taylor Swift and more. Jackson Dean and Sara Evans are among the country acts booked so far.

New lactation hub

Breast Roanoke now has its first dedicated space to provide lactation supplies and support after renovations at CHIP of Roanoke Valley's headquarters in downtown Roanoke. Breast Roanoke's Director of Outreach Engagement Kaley Sweeney says the newly updated basement space allows them to offer much more help than before: "our whole purpose is to serve the community by advocating for families to provide human milk to their babies." Through its F.E.E.D. Lactation Hub, Breast Roanoke now offers free nursing supplies, pumps, and feeding gear to families across the Roanoke Valley.

Bedford brew taps out

Beale's brewery in Bedford posted mid-

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May that it is closing its taproom on May 25—a surprising announcement to many, as the business was a popular “hangout” for patrons, and provided an energetic vibe to the town. The taproom was also known for its barbecue. The release said Beale’s will continue to distribute beer “in retail shops and bars throughout Virginia and DC” but also said it is

looking to find a new operator for the space (a large industrial brick complex just off Bridge St/US 221 in the downtown area.

CHIP gets a facelift

A Roanoke nonprofit that supports young families and underserved children has renovated its headquarters to better meet growing community

needs. **CHIP of Roanoke Valley** celebrated the improvements recently at its building on the corner of Third Street and Albemarle Avenue Southwest Roanoke. CEO Rachel Hopkins says the project enhances both the public spaces and internal infrastructure. “We did a renovation on the lobby thanks to the Delta Dental Foundation, [installed] some awesome

technology allowing us to have conferencing in the conference room – which other community partners use.” Work on a basement renovation also turned it into a family resource center. “What this allows us to do is provide dignified spaces and tools,” says Hopkins.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

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“ ” This transition shifts HR from reactive to proactive. — Page 26



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Casey Jones with her mother, Liz McGowan Broughton

Growing A Growing Business

By Andy Brady

Townside Gardens in Roanoke is more popular than ever, thanks to a major expansion.

The customers agree. It is a truly unique experience the moment you step into the plant area at Townside Gardens. The way the area is set up for shopping makes for a beautiful stroll, drawing you into the atmosphere. Walking through the garden area, you can easily envision what you could do in your own outdoor and indoor spaces, be it home or office.

With an impressive 300 plus combined years' experience in gardens, nursery, and greenhouse work, Townside Gardens and its 35 knowledgeable employees have become a staple for gardening and indoor plants in and around Roanoke.

Since its founding in 1987 as a simple pop-up operation setting up tables in a parking lot, trucking plants from their greenhouses

in Natural Bridge, to its current state, much has changed. As Covid began, the original owners "were trying to decide, okay, do we close? And if we close, we probably won't reopen...if it closes for an indeterminate amount of time, you know, if and when will we reopen, and what would that look like?" This led to one of their employees of five years, Casey Jones, coming up with a plan. She would make an offer and see if there was any interest in selling.

"The original owners were extremely helpful," Casey says. "The younger of the two helped out actually working in the greenhouse with me the first two years. It really trained me a lot more. I can text them right now, and they'll still be there for me," she explained. Many employees stayed on as well, including Barb, who has worked at Townside



Gardens since the year of its founding.

New greenhouses were built in Franklin County, where Casey lives, eliminating the Natural Bridge commute and localizing production. The state-of-the-art automated greenhouses grow fruits, vegetables, and plants from seeds or plugs. The employees also create their own hanging baskets which are nurtured for weeks before hanging out on the shelf for you to browse and take home.

Casey had big dreams and needed to grow. The business would need more space and more parking. After the closing of the Dunkin' Donuts directly adjacent to Townside Gardens, that property was acquired and revamped for the nursery. Six parking

spaces was not much (though it was enough to use as a horseshoe shaped drive-through for pickup orders during Covid, where employees would load plants straight into customers' cars). The expansion provided 15 additional, much-needed parking spaces. By reconfiguring the parking and removing a dividing fence, the business now has significantly more room for a more expansive collection of plants, water fountains, outdoor decorations, and more.

The building that formerly housed the donut empire now provides a temperature and humidity-controlled environment, where Townside Gardens can house succulents and indoor plants. This new storefront expands the already diverse collection of decorations, gift items, and local artisan made products.



Andy Brady



Townside Gardens



Andy Brady photos



Casey says other unique items have been added to the business, including botanical and boutique gift items, local artwork, pottery, doormats, tea towels, candles, an expanded selection of gardening supplies, and many other things that some current customers already request. Customers can expect “a whole new experience” from their previous visits, Casey says, thanks to the expansion now underway.

One of the most exciting additions will be the use of the kitchen—not for making donuts this time, but for teaching classes. That service was a long-desired dream; and now, thanks to the additional space, Townside Gardens will have classes such as wreath making, succulent gardening, gardening projects, indoor plant life, and more. After the class the participants will be able to take their creations and projects home with them.

“Our classroom space allows us to work more in the community and serve our customers even better,” Casey says. It’s especially attractive if you are building a home, buying a home, or finally getting around to landscaping the way you always wanted to. Townside Gardens even has

professional landscape designers on staff, such as Julia, who can help you plan out your look and feel to make sure you get the appropriate plants and design that will create a space you love.

With a customer base that previously pulled primarily from the local neighborhood, Townside Gardens earned a reputation from the locals; however, today it has grown to include customers from all over Roanoke, Botetourt, and Salem. The business even has customers from West Virginia and North Carolina.

Casey says another rapid change that happened is the business has brought in a much younger customer base, with even more demographics interested in houseplants and gardening.

Today, first time visitors often repeat, “I’ve lived in Roanoke all my life. I’ve driven by here forever. I’ve never noticed it.” It seems to only take that first visit to make customers for life. Some customers reviews have noted that Townside Gardens is set apart from other nurseries in the area with its expanded offering of houseplants, gifts, and local artisan creations.






The business is open seven days a week. One reviewer said, “a visit makes for a quaint getaway, whether you’re ready to shop for plants, start a garden, or you simply want to shop local; you won’t be disappointed in your trip.”

“I think [one of the most rewarding parts of the business] is just the aspect of getting to know members of the community; being able to greet people by name. Asking them,

‘how did that work out for you last time? Do you have a picture? Or, how is this project that you’ve been working on turning out?’”

We have third generation customers now,” Casey says. “You really get to know people. Especially with this expansion project, it’s been very rewarding getting to hear all the feedback from everyone and input into what we should do with the expansion. It’s really been like a community project.” 

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“ ” This is called The Triple Knockout for a reason. — Page 20



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