

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 198

MARCH 2025

OnWard NRV

Alice Kassens on Econ

St Pierre Woodworking

FBRI: 'Quit' Research

Dragon Bite

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## Business Mission Center Position



Liz Kitley  
Virginia Tech Basketball  
WNBA Las Vegas Aces

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

We have an ace here.

Folks around here who follow Virginia Tech or the sports scene at all associate one Elizabeth Kitley (Liz) with a memorable college basketball season. Prior to Tech, Kitley led her high school (Northwest Guilford) to its first state championship. She was named MVP and rated a five-star recruit by ESPN, and recruited to play for VT by head coach Kenny Brooks. She contributed to Tech's trek to the 2023 NCAA Final Four Championship and led the ACC in rebounds. She suffered an ACL injury against rival UVA in the 2023 regular season finale, which sidelined her to end her college career. In April 2024, Virginia Tech Athletics announced the retirement of her jersey (number 33). An ACC Player of the Year (twice), Kitley helped to skyrocket the popularity of women's basketball, coinciding with other celebrity players, like her teammate Georgia Amooore and Iowa's Caitlin Clark.

So, it's super easy to wrap up this whole story with the Virginia Tech Hokies and all of that courtside success.

But then, there's the WNBA. The league is gaining notoriety thanks to players with the skills and energy and outright likeability, like Liz Kitley. The center now plays for the Las Vegas Aces.

Oh, and she happens to have a connection with a local business.  
Score!



**Tom Field**  
Publisher



**Gene Marrano**  
Editor

““

He was a giant in the science;  
he was a giant at the Institute,  
a true visionary. — Page 29



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“Microeconomics... and macroeconomics... ignited her passion. — Page 20

LEAD STORY PAGE 8

# Leading a Business with a Just Cause

Special Feature



FRONTcover photograph of Liz Kitley was submitted.



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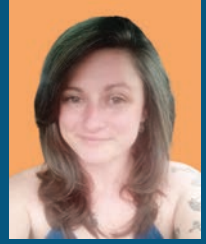
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# MARCH



Aila Boyd



Holly Brinja



Dan Dowdy



Tom Field



Sheri Winesett

## Advisory Board

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

# 2025 CONTRIBUTORS



**Zachary Collier**



**Jennifer Poff Cooper**



**Carrie Cousins**



**Gene Marrano**



**Nicholas Vaassen**



**Elizabeth Walker**

““  
The little things are often the big things.

— Page 11

““  
A place where all feel seen, heard, understood, and valued.

— Page 30



**Linda Balentine**  
Crowning Touch /  
senior services



**Micah Fraim**  
Fraim & Cawley CPAs /  
finance - accounting



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

““  
I found myself writing down quote after quote.

— Page 40





Submitted photos

Liz Kitley, center for Virginia Tech Hokies Basketball Team

# Leading a Business with a *Just Cause*

Special Feature



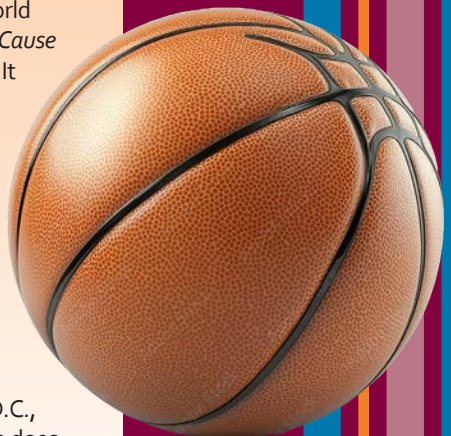


Dr. Logan Brooke, D.C.; Adjust NRV

What do a professional basketball player, a local chiropractor, and NYTime best-selling author all have in common? They all come together around the idea of a *Just Cause*.

The term *Just Cause* may be one you are familiar with if you are a Simon Sinek fan. It is a prominent theme within his book, *The Infinite Game*, and speaks to the idea that businesses must exist to create good in the world through the work that they do. Additionally, a *Just Cause* is something that has no clearly defined finish line. It is not a KPI, item you can report on a P&L, or firm deliverable. It is a vision for a better world that can never fully be achieved but yet each and every day you wake up to advance closer to it. It is also something that must impact every corner of your business and is the filter by which all decisions are made.

Some business leaders may find the idea of a *Just Cause* exhausting. They may see it as an objective without a finish line. However, Dr. Logan Brooke, D.C., finds it energizing and places it central to all that he does.





Adjust NRV and Liz Kitley

## A Vision to Inspire

Brooke leads his Blacksburg-based Chiropractic Practice with the *Just Cause*, "To build a world in which the vast majority of us wake inspired for better health." These are so much more than words. It is his commitment to make his business more than just a place you can come by for an adjustment or other chiropractic care. "One of my favorite ways to greet a patient is to say, 'Tell me some good news,'" Brooke said. In that simple greeting you see how he is establishing a culture that focuses on positive, uplifting, and inspirational topics.

The result of this type of business leadership is deep, transformational relationships with your customer base and community. If you browse the testimonials on his website, you will see that folks describe him as a great listener, and his staff as loving. "Loving" is not typically a word one would think of in a business context. Patients also note that it is more than just the functional treatment, but it is also the emotional benefit they receive when visiting his practice. Yes, that is his *Just Cause* in action.

Relationships matter and people are how businesses grow. As such, it is no surprise that Adjust NRV is thriving and creating a sense of connection amongst patients that has led to tangible growth. In fact, the growth is so significant that Dr. Brooke had to add another chiropractor to the practice in order to keep up with demand.

When it was time for the next addition to the team, the *Just Cause* was a critical factor in determining who

would be a good fit. A familiar Roanoke-based Chiropractor, Dr. Sean Skinner, ended up being the right fit for so many reasons. “Dr. Skinner has a vision very similar to our *Just Cause*. He sees his role in health care as someone who will inspire better health with everyone that he interacts with,” said Dr. Brooke.

## Creating an Experiential Brand

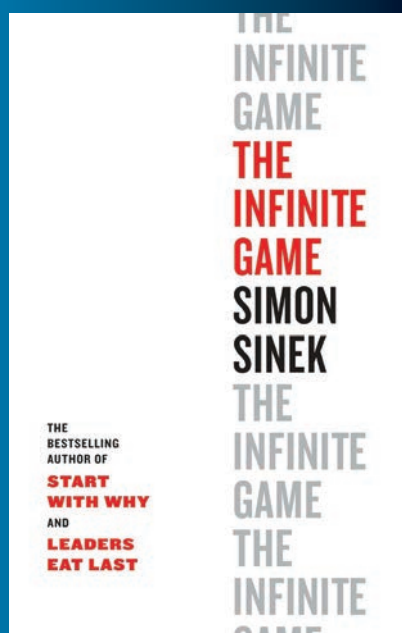
It’s not just in the hiring that this vision for a better world is evident. It is in the experiences that Brooke provides for his patients. He established a relationship with Liz Kitley during her days at Virginia Tech. When she was recently in town for her jersey retirement, Brooke was able to arrange a private reception and meet-and-greet opportunity between Kitley and some of his patients. Being based in Blacksburg, the fan base for Kitley is extensive and patients were ecstatic to have an opportunity to interact with Kitley, express their support, and give her a hug. Kitley undoubtedly inspires Hokie Nation and thus she was the right choice when it came time to offer an exclusive patient experience.

How does a meet and greet with a professional athlete advance the business goals of a chiropractor? It aligns with the *Just Cause* of the business and therefore, it is powerful fuel for the brand to grow and enact its vision.

A big and highly photographed event is a colorful backdrop to explain Brooke’s business approach. However, it also comes to life in more innocuous and everyday ways. For example, when you show up for your appointment, Adjust NRV has delicious and healthy snacks and drinks to choose from. This helps folks consider their health beyond their alignment and adjustments and into their food choices. It is also thoughtful as he realizes folks are often trying to squeeze in health appointments in an otherwise very busy day. The little things are often the big things when it comes to enacting a *Just Cause*.

A vision for a better world is also evident in how Brooke joins with like-minded professionals with the goal of rising together—yes even fellow chiropractors. He hosted a “Like Minds” event in which roughly 30 people from a variety of health and wellness companies came together to shake hands, interact, enjoy good food, and connect. There was no big goal beyond connection.

## A CATALYST AND INSPIRATION



The idea of *Just Cause* is presented in Simon Sinek’s *The Infinite Game* (Portfolio; 2019). Sinek describes a pursuit that commits to a vision of a future that is so appealing, we will build on that “week after week, month after month, year after year.” It’s a benevolent philosophy that gives our work and our life meaning—far beyond the winners and losers produced by finite games. And more worthy than “fleeting thrills” from awards or promotions or business deals. Amazon’s synopsis says, “Leaders who embrace an infinite mindset build stronger, more innovative, more inspiring organizations.”



**I stand corrected.**  
*Literally, I just got adjusted.*







Logan Brooke with  
wife, Tess


# Our Just Cause

## To build a world in which the vast majority of us wake up inspired for better health.

It isn't a networking group. And, the vision for "Like Minds" will continue to be a casual place for people who operate from an infinite mindset within similar industries. Brooke recognizes that if he is serious about his *Just Cause*, to inspire others toward better health, he must lock arms with other people committed to the same - even those that some might call his competition.

### An Integrated Vision

Sure, to some, living out a *Just Cause* may on the surface sound like a common business practice. What makes it uncommon is when one leader is so thoroughly committed across all areas of the business. It isn't just about the snacks, the positive attitude, the close patient connections, a cool athlete meet and greet, the 'collaboration over competition' mindset, or hiring for visional alignment. Those things as individual initiatives are activities. When all the pieces and parts come together under a united and enduring vision you find yourself enacting your *Just Cause*.

Brooke has seen success with a guiding vision leading all his decisions within his chiropractic practice. This invites other leaders to ask themselves if they are leading with vision and seeing business with an infinite mindset or if they are living to narrowly focus on ultra-defined and short-term objectives. The possibilities truly are endless when you embrace a *Just Cause* mentality for your business. 



Onward NRV photo

Katie Boswell, Onward NRV

# RURAL RESURGENCE

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

**No longer is the New River Valley (NRV) considered a quiet corner of Virginia, but rather a leader at the forefront of economic development.**

Major cities typically dominate state-wide economic growth, but according to a January press release from the public/private regional economic development organization Onward NRV, the region's 3.7% increase in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 was second only to Charlottesville's (4.2%) among Virginia's metropolitan regions. The region's growth also outpaced the national average growth of 2.9%.

One factor contributing to this growth is collaboration among businesses, higher education institutions, and local governments. They frequently join forces in innovative ways. For example, Onward NRV's Executive Director Katie Boswell said, a "wide variety of consortium members" were involved in creating the AM2 Tech Hub – the AM squared representing additive manufacturing and advanced materials, and a Tech Hub designation being a strong endorsement of a region's plan for its technology ecosystem. This industry-led consortium of over 50 partners, cooperating with the New River Valley Regional Commission, won a Strategy Development Grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, one of the few applications awarded that grant.

The NRV's collaboration-first model is conducive to success. Boswell discussed Onward NRV's Leaders' Summits for manufacturing and technology, which provide programming and promote networking. Some manufacturing summits even see industries opening their doors to one another – including competitors – for guided facility tours and Q&A.

"This speaks to how highly they regard learning from one another," Boswell said. "Everyone's better when they work together."

Another reason for the region's prosperity is strategic investment in infrastructure such as broadband and transportation. In the case of broadband access, Floyd County's Citizens Telephone Cooperative led the charge. It worked hard to get Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) grants from the state government to achieve 100% broadband coverage, "a great advantage for the county," said Boswell.

Consisting of Floyd County, Giles County, Montgomery County, Pulaski County, and the City of Radford, the NRV features a successful balance of businesses flourishing alongside an eclectic mix of small-town life.



Each of the five localities features its own unique character. The colleges (New River Community College, Radford University, Virginia Tech, and the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine) allow access to cutting edge research and talent. The industry piece includes technology/IT, manufacturing, and agriculture. A diverse economy makes the region strong and helps it sustain amid any economic shocks that might come its way, said Boswell.

Typically, businesses interested in locating in Virginia begin at the state level. The commonwealth's reputation as a pro-business environment "absolutely makes a big difference," said Boswell. One state-level policy that makes Virginia attractive is investment in site preparation (a major focus for the Youngkin administration, with increased funding set aside for grants.) By handling infrastructure and grading, sites are ready for new businesses to start profitable work as soon as possible. There is also the Virginia Talent Accelerator, considered one of the best workforce development programs in the country, according to Boswell. Helping businesses recruit, train, and retain talent gets businesses to come to the area and to be successful.

Why else are businesses coming to the region? Boswell attributes it to the higher education institutions, both the emerging talent and research they provide. She also cites, "regional culture" – the outdoors, relatively little traffic and congestion, and a lower cost of living than the national average.

"Their people like living and working here," she said.


There are still challenges, two of the biggest being housing and child care. Boswell said

that businesses know how important these issues are, because they are so important to their employees.

A housing trust fund, the only model like it in Virginia, was created by the New River Valley Regional Commission working with homebuilders, localities, and large employers such as Virginia Tech and Carilion. In this initiative, which is about two years old, a \$2 million grant from Virginia Housing will continue to fund projects over time, using a rotating schedule of the five community's projects. Pooling money makes the dollars go further, and it is used in "ways each locality feels is important to it," said Boswell.

There are also ongoing efforts to address child care. The Community Foundation of the New River Valley sponsors the First Steps initiative to increase access to high-quality child care. There is also a summit series to bring together stakeholders to collaborate on solutions.

"Progress is being made, but the work is not over," Boswell said. Boswell is excited for the future, specifically mentioning the NRV passenger rail initiative, which will be a "huge benefit for transportation" and should come to fruition in 2027, with an Amtrak station slated for Christiansburg. Providing easy access to Washington, D.C., and New York city, it will continue to grow interest in businesses locating here.

Successful businesses lead to good-paying jobs, which lead to a high quality of life for all citizens. A win-win for the NRV. While the New River Valley charts its own course, Boswell said it is important to be "thoughtful about examples of what has been successful," learning from those, while adapting lessons to "what works for our region." 





## LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Carrie Cousins,  
Vice President at  
Lead Point Digital

Executive Summary:  
*Seven SEO tips  
to drive traffic.*

# Think SEO SHOP to drive online sales

Every business that sells online is looking for a better way to drive traffic and sales to their e-commerce store. A solid search engine optimization strategy is one long-term path to generating sales.

SEO SHOP is your quick guide to planning and managing SEO for your e-commerce website with 7 tips to help you create stronger SEO for your SHOP.

- **S**tart with keyword research. Knowing what words people use to describe your product or service can help you know what language to focus on with your product information. Think about audience as well. For example, if you sell tennis shoes, people might also search for sneakers, kicks, running shoes, walking shoes, etc. (Or are your shoes only for tennis players?)
- **E**mbrace user intent. Users visit a website for one of three primary reasons – to learn something, to do something, or to be entertained. What type of user are you serving? Your best opportunity to make a sale is from a “do” user.
- **O**ptimize pages and checkout for mobile users. From product pages to ease of checkout, everything on your e-commerce site has to be lightning fast and work on a phone. Bonus points for your business if your online store allows direct sales on other platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram. (If you aren’t sure about how to do that a marketing agency or digital partner can help.)
- **S**hare content to grow the funnel. Some of my best e-commerce clients sell the most product from links embedded in their own content. This includes blog posts with content relevant to the product being sold with links to purchase, video how-tos or tutorials, and product guides that that emphasize ease of use.
- **H**one in on technical SEO. There’s nothing more detrimental to online sales than a broken link, crawling error, or missing information or title that causes search

engines to skip your site altogether. Run a technical audit at least annually to ensure that your online store is in to technical shape.

- **O**rganize product pages for quick checkout. How easy is it to add something to the cart and check out? Product pages need a clear and direct path: Add to cart → Cart preview → Enter payment information and complete checkout. Make sure key elements of the shopping experience, such as the cart are visible and accessible at all times. (Keep that checkout process as simple as possible too. Only ask for information you absolutely need to ensure a smooth and quick purchase for shoppers.)
- **P**rioritize speed and user experience. A light fast website will make users happy and keep them moving through their buying path. Compress images, minify code, and use caching where appropriate to ensure that pages load quickly and allow shoppers to see everything they need to make a choice. A fast website can actually encourage impulse buying! 📺

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Roanoke College

Dr. Alice Kassens

# Leading the Way in Economics Education and Community Impact

By Aila Boyd

**This fall, Dr. Alice “Allie” Kassens will assume the role of dean of the School of Business, Economics, and Analytics at Roanoke College. The appointment is a testament to her multifaceted career as an economist, educator, and policy advisor.**

Known for her ability to make complex financial concepts accessible, Dr. Alice Louise Kassens has established herself as an influential figure in the academic and business communities alike.

“Allie Kassens is nothing short of remarkable,” said Roanoke College President Frank Shushok Jr. “She’s a brilliant mind in the field of economics and a gifted educator who devotes herself to helping other people — both in the classroom and in the community — better understand the complex financial forces shaping our world. Her work doesn’t just contribute to the field; it makes it more accessible, more engaging, and more human.”

Kassens’ journey into economics began

unexpectedly. While pursuing a history major and art history minor at the College of William and Mary, she enrolled in summer courses on the recommendation of her mother. Those courses — Principles of Microeconomics and Principles of Macroeconomics — ignited her passion for the field.

“Within the first minute of the first class, I was hooked,” Kassens recalled. That pivotal moment led her to declare economics as her second major and laid the foundation for a career dedicated to exploring and explaining the intricate workings of economies.

Since joining the Institute for Policy and Opinion Research (IPOR) at Roanoke College in 2011, Kassens has played a crucial role as

a senior analyst. She oversees reports like the quarterly Virginia Consumer Sentiment Report, which offer invaluable insights into the state's economic health.

"Our research is a vital tool for businesses, investors, and policymakers," Kassens explained. "It helps them gauge consumer sentiments, which are key indicators of economic well-being and growth."

Under her leadership, IPOR has introduced innovative projects such as the Virginia Trust Index, measuring public trust in institutions. These reports serve as a diagnostic tool for the state economy, much like blood pressure readings assess individual health.

Kassens' expertise extends beyond academia to the policy realm. As a former member of the Governor's Joint Advisory Board of Economists, she contributed consumer sentiment data to shape budget recommendations. "Consumers account for approximately 70% of total spending," she noted. "Their behavior and confidence are central to crafting policies that ensure fiscal stability and sustainable growth."

Her ability to connect economic theory with practical solutions is evident in her approach to workforce challenges. Kassens emphasizes the importance of clear communication, stripping away jargon to provide actionable insights. "Understanding supply and demand in the labor market, for example, helps businesses develop competitive compensation packages to attract and retain talent," she said.

As Virginia faces evolving economic conditions, Kassens identifies two pressing issues: labor shortages and rising healthcare costs. With two job openings for every unemployed worker in the state, businesses must invest in workforce development and recruitment strategies.

"Industries like healthcare and hospitality are particularly affected," she said. "Companies need to focus on competitive wages, benefits, and training programs to close the gap."

In healthcare, Kassens (who is also an avid mountain biker and runner) highlights the




dual challenge of affordability and public health crises, including obesity and substance abuse. She sees opportunities for innovation through artificial intelligence, which can enhance productivity and optimize patient care. However, Kassens cautions that adopting AI requires addressing ethical and privacy concerns.

Her commitment to mentorship has a ripple effect on the regional economy. Graduates of her programs enter the workforce with a deep understanding of market dynamics, benefiting local businesses and fostering economic resilience.

As dean of the School of Business, Economics, and Analytics, Kassens plans to expand the school's impact by strengthening ties with the business community and enhancing opportunities for student engagement. Her collaborative leadership style and data-driven approach are expected to elevate the school's reputation as a hub for innovation and applied economics.

Kassens' career reflects how academic research and community engagement can converge to address pressing economic issues. Her efforts invite ongoing conversations about how education and data-driven insights can shape Virginia's evolving landscape.

At Roanoke College, Kassens endeavors to inspire students to engage with classically liberal economic principles through the Center for Economic Freedom. "Teaching students about the power of free markets equips them with the tools to make informed decisions," she concludes. 



## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

By Sherri Winesett  
COO  
Self-Made Biz

### Executive Summary:

*For women entrepreneurs and leaders, success isn't just about hitting business milestones—it's about leading with authenticity, integrity, and alignment between values and actions.*

## Lead like you mean it: the power of congruence for women who do it all

### Key Five: Congruence – Leading with Authenticity and Integrity

Congruence means showing up as your true self, practicing what you preach, and ensuring your decisions and behaviors reflect your core beliefs.

Congruence builds trust, credibility, and influence, while a lack of alignment can lead to doubt, disengagement, and even failure. As a leader, being congruent means holding yourself accountable, especially when faced with difficult decisions.

### Why Congruence Matters for Women Leaders

Women wear a lot of hats—business owner, mentor, mother, friend, leader. With so many roles to juggle, it's exhausting to be someone you're not. So why would you be? Hiding your unique abilities or shifting your values to fit expectations will only create internal conflict and erode trust. The more you embrace who you are, the more others will follow your lead.

Studies show that employees are 75% more engaged when their leaders demonstrate authenticity (Harvard Business Review). When people see you practice what you preach, they trust your leadership. But if there's a gap between your words and actions, credibility erodes. Congruence isn't just a leadership trait—it's a strategy for lasting influence.

### How to Lead with Congruence


Here are six ways to cultivate congruence in your leadership and business:

- 1. Define Your Core Values** - What do you stand for? Take time to write down your top five values and ensure your decisions, leadership style, and company culture align with them.
- 2. Self-Reflect Regularly** - Ask yourself: Am I living in alignment with my values? Do my actions match my words? Regular reflection—through journaling, meditation, or mentorship—keeps you accountable.
- 3. Take Accountability** - Great leaders own their actions. If you make a mistake, acknowledge it, learn from it, and correct it. Admitting challenges or failures strengthens trust, not weakens it.
- 4. Lead by Example** - Your team will mirror your behavior. If you expect work-life balance, inclusion, and ethical decision-making, then embody those values—don't just talk about them.

- 5. **Align with Your Organization's Mission** - Your personal values should connect with your business or company's mission. When your work aligns with your values, you'll feel more passionate and motivated.
- 6. **Seek Honest Feedback** - Ask trusted colleagues or mentors for constructive feedback. Sometimes, others can see misalignment that we can't. Use this insight to refine your leadership approach.

## Congruence Leads to Stronger Teams and Businesses

When you commit to congruence, you attract trust, build stronger teams, and create a business culture where people feel valued. Clients and partners gravitate toward businesses led by people they trust.

As you step into 2025, challenge yourself to prioritize congruence. Your authenticity is your greatest leadership strength—embrace it, and success will follow. 



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# Compassionate Woodworker Cleans Up

By Holly Brinja

**A well-known craftsman in Floyd utilizes his business's social media reach to make a difference post Helene hurricane.**

*Organic growth across social media platforms builds an authentic following, which enabled business owner Bill St. Pierre of St. Pierre Woodworking and Sawmill in Floyd, VA, to head disaster relief efforts after Helene.*

Since 1989 in Westminster, Vermont, Bill St. Pierre has pursued the art of woodworking—an intricate craftsmanship with roots as far back as 800 B.C. In 1999, he set up shop and home in the Blue Ridge Mountains of South West Virginia.

Towards the end of the 2000s, social media reared its head as the next opportunity for business transparency to evolve with technology and meet consumer desires. In April 2013, St. Pierre met that challenge by launching on Facebook (@StPierre

Woodworking). Before long, he expanded to Instagram (@stpierrewoodworking) and then, in 2023, YouTube (@st.pierrewoodworkindandsawmill).

St. Pierre's posts give customers and enthusiasts a raw inside look at his portfolio, engaging them through restorations and unique custom designs. Each new like, view, and share spreads his trustworthy brand, expanding his client base further than traditional avenues "People want quality. They want to know what they're paying for and where it came from."

Then, when Hurricane Helene nearly eliminated mountain towns in North Carolina at the end of September, St. Pierre knew he had tools and skills to use. Previous





FloydFest Structure



attempts to help post-disasters through listed avenues, such as FEMA, went unanswered. So, this time, he turned inward and asked the community he'd spent a decade authentically building to help his good-hearted endeavors.

Shortly after the first post in search of families in need, he had three names. With a destination in sight, he set off for what he thought would be a couple of days of volunteering his time and excavator to get people dug out. Once on the ground, St. Pierre knew this was no one weekend fix. The victims needed more.


"The minimal help they've received won't even cover clean-up costs. They've lost everything. The people I've talked to, I've seen the look in their eyes. The devastation, this isn't the American way. I had to start doing something; I started using my Facebook and social media like the others down there because it needs to get done." Bill St. Pierre on News Nation.

St. Pierre's Woodshop and Sawmill remains open Monday through Thursday, but YouTube episodes are on the back burner. St. Pierre continues to spend Friday through Sunday on the ground in North Carolina, where clean-up continues, and restoration

has a plan for Americans who are still up to their waist in debris and wreckage. At the same time, they wait for viable government assistance. We've done with just this little bit of money... imagine what could be achieved with more."

As of the beginning of January, St. Pierre's efforts have raised almost \$1 million to remove debris, cover materials costs for rebuilding, temporary shelter for families, and more. Forty-two families are in new RVs, five of which came from a South Carolina shop where FEMA had purchased 100 custom-built campers for previous relief efforts, only to cancel the order near the end of production, never provide payment to the business, and then never reclaim them when future disasters struck.

"These people need to know that their fellow Americans care."

If you'd like to contribute to efforts on the ground for our neighbors in North Carolina, please consider 'Support Western NC Families Impacted by Hurricane Helene' at GoFundMe. Follow St. Pierre Woodworking and Sawmill on Facebook and Instagram as Bill St. Pierre continues to post raw videos and information about what's happening through clean-up and restoration. 

# BIZ OPS

By Zachary A. Collier

**Executive Summary:**  
*Some business metrics are straightforward – such as return on investment, or percentage of repeat customers. However, other metrics can be difficult to quantify and interpret.*

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

## Defining effective metrics is critical for success

For example, we want to make products that are “secure,” but how exactly do we measure security? More generally, what makes a good metric?

Metrics are measurable properties or attributes that indicate the extent to which we have achieved our objectives. If a company has the objective of improving product quality, an example metric might be the number of defective units per 1,000 produced. The company can then measure the rate of defective products over time and understand whether they are making progress toward their objective. If they are not making progress, the metric serves as a signal that something is wrong, and additional actions need to be taken.

*It is important that companies establish effective metrics. There are several basic qualities that good metrics should have. In general, metrics should be relevant and directly linked to organizational objectives. Metrics should drive decisive action rather than being simply “nice to know.”*

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The metric should be measurable, and the relevant data should exist or be able to be acquired. In terms of communication, a metric should not be vague or imprecise and should be easily understood across the organization. There should also be traceability of metrics, linking it to someone who is responsible for “owning” the metric and performing follow-up actions.

Additionally, a group of metrics should be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (MECE), meaning that they don’t double-count anything but also don’t leave anything out that might be important.

The process of developing effective metrics can strengthen organizational decision making by facilitating the clear articulation of business objectives, identification of performance benchmarks and targets, acquisition and analysis of relevant data, and development of a continuous improvement plan. Without a set of metrics that are linked to an organization’s objectives, it is difficult to know whether or not improvement is being made. Well-developed metrics are indispensable tools for taking an organization from where it is now to where it wants to go in the future. 



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# Quit Research!

[where “quit” is an adjective, not a verb]

Carrying on with substance abuse quit research - developed by a visionary FBRI leader

By Gene Marrano

**The work of the late Dr. Warren Bickel is taken to the next step by his colleagues: asking the question, why is it so difficult for some to quit - and how long might it take?**

After a relatively brief battle with cancer, which included a going away party when he was still alive, Warren Bickel, an author and the principal investigator on substance abuse cessation research at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, died last September. Bickel (profiled previously in Valley Business FRONT) was also working with colleagues at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute on developing diagnostic tools that could help chronic substance abusers self-diagnose before they sought treatment. The International Quit & Recovery Registry that Bickel developed has become a baseline source of information on the addicted for other researchers to use in their studies.

One of those at the FBRI who has picked up the torch from Warren Bickel is Rafaela Fontes, a research scientist on the Roanoke campus and the first author of a study, Beyond the first try: How many attempts

are necessary to achieve substance abuse cessation? Within a day or two of its online release in early February the Brazilian native, recruited to the FBRI two years ago, was getting feedback from fellow addiction researchers elsewhere. Fontes also used data from online The International Quit & Recovery Registry launched by Bickel for her work. “We have people from all continents and several different countries, [and] we are very careful with data privacy,” notes Fontes. Names are not included in her quit research studies.

Fontes found that substance abuse disorder is a chronically relapsing condition often requiring multiple quit attempts, that the number of quit attempts varies by substance (opioids and pain medications were the worst offenders; hallucinogens required fewer attempts) and that people who have a longer history of substance abuse disorder might need more time before achieving abstinence. That’s been known all along to an extent says Fontes, but now her team at the FBRI is applying the science to it – attempting to quantify how many attempts to successfully quit it might take – depending on what substance is being abused. The FBRI study revealed it took six attempts on average to quit opioids and pain medications.

“When we’re talking about addiction one size does not fill all,” says Fontes, who earned her Ph. D in the states before going back to Brazil, prior to being recruited to the FBRI. “We cannot use the same strategy for everything.” What substance someone is abusing adds Fontes, “really matters.” The more severe disorder someone has also makes it more of a challenge to quit.



FBRI photos

Dr Warren Bickel


The study also found that early intervention improves the quit rate odds of success and reduces relapses. 344 registry participants (18 years old or more) who had completed surveys on the substance(s) abused and had reported abstinence from at least one substance were included. Using a substance 10 or more times: nicotine, alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, opioids, inhalants etc. were part of the criteria. “People don’t really ask, how many times is it going to take [to finally quit]. They don’t really pay attention to the differences across substances;” says Fontes.

The goal for Fontes and Allison Tegge, the corresponding author and research associate professor at the Fralin Institute: that their work informs treatment, with a goal of avoiding high rates of relapse and readmission to a recovery program – relapses that can cost people their jobs, businesses, families – even their lives.

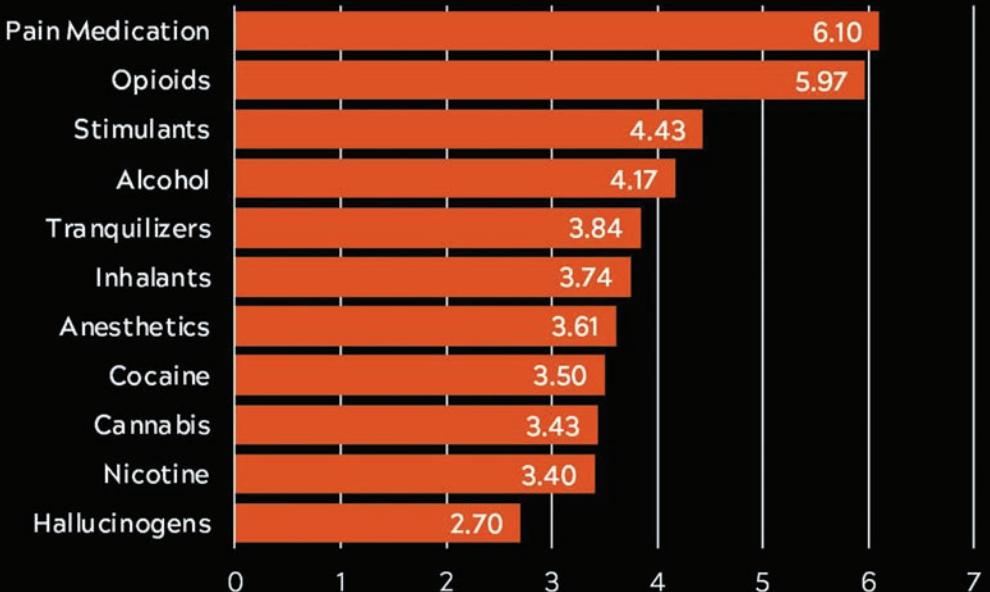
The late Warren Bickel is one of five authors listed on the new study – his legacy in the addiction recovery field living on months after his passing. “He was a giant in the science, he was a giant at the Institute, a true visionary,” says Dr. Fontes of Bickel, “he had a different perspective on addiction (Bickel was also involved with psychiatry



Rafaela Fontes

and behavioral medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.) “His research was so groundbreaking, informing better treatment. It’s really hard to put into words what his loss means to us. I feel like science truly lost a giant.” 

## Quit Attempts by Substance





## A dragon's lair

Meet Kathryn Ecsedy and her secondhand bookshop and creative reuse center (5342 Franklin Rd, Roanoke). **Dragon Bite Books & Craft** "encourages eco-consciousness, self-exploration, artistic play, and new experiences, with libraries that represent diverse perspectives by

centering those on the margins," she explains. "I want Dragon Bite to be a place where all feel seen, heard, understood, and valued." The "hybrid" space is currently open Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays from 12 noon to 6:30pm [ <https://linktr.ee/DragonBiteBooks> ]

**Photo by:** Olivia Marone  
[www.oliviamaronephoto.com](http://www.oliviamaronephoto.com)





Submitted photos

## ROA-Taubman collab >

The **Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport** ground floor terminal and hallways on the second floor are looking a bit more cultured these days. The Taubman Museum of Art has installed 20 works of art and descriptive panels throughout the ROA terminal. Taubman executive director Cindy Petersen says it may help draw more visitors to the downtown museum as well. One highlight - a 14 by 21 foot pop-up piece of art in front of the baggage claim area by artist Collette Fu, which is now in the Taubman Museum collection after it was on exhibit at the museum in the past.

Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport executive director Mike Stewart joked

that he was looking for ways to make the ground floor terminal at the airport less like "a mausoleum," and now twenty pieces of art on loan from the Taubman Museum of Art are helping to do just that. "We've been looking for more opportunities to do more partnerships for several years. I've been trying to figure out what we can do to put a little [more] interest in this end of the building. People already love the Taubman. [This is] a taste of what the Roanoke Valley and our area is all about." Petersen says this is an ongoing initiative and other pieces of art from the museum's permanent collection will make their way to the airport terminal on a revolving basis. Students from local colleges helped create the explanatory panels for each work on display.





Gene Marrano photos

## NRCC students have easier glide path to Roanoke College >

Roanoke College has partnered with New River Community College (NRCC) to expand the Rapid Maroons transfer program, providing a **clear and seamless pathway** for students seeking a four-year degree. The agreement, signed by Roanoke College President Frank Shushok Jr. and NRCC President Robert Brandon, marks NRCC as the second community college to join the program, which initially launched in September 2024 with Virginia Western Community College.

Rapid Maroons allows NRCC students to access joint advising, student activities, and an easier application process, saving them time while ensuring they stay on track academically. NRCC students enrolled in the program will be encouraged to complete their associate degree before transferring to Roanoke, where they will have already established relationships with faculty and students. "This vital partnership is about more than just simplifying the transfer process," Shushok said. "It's about making a promise to students that their education matters. If you are admitted into New River Community College, you can also matriculate directly into Roanoke College.

Along the way you are getting advised by Roanoke College, taking the classes that are going to be seamless for your transfer."

NRCC students in the Rapid Maroons program will also have access to facilities and programs at the four year liberal arts school in Salem. "You're really enrolled in two schools at the same time," noted Shushok. *Picture: Roanoke College President Frank Shushok Jr. (at left) and New River Community College President Dr. Robert Brandon signing the Rapid Maroons program agreement.*





# THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:** *One of the most recognizable faces of the arts and culture world in Roanoke is leaving his post at the end of June. But he says whoever replaces him will bring their own vision to the job.*

## Buena Suerte Pedro Szalay!

First it was Ginger Poole leaving Mill Mountain Theatre as producing artistic director after almost two decades in January - and now the face of Southwest Virginia Ballet will do the same at the end of June.

After 18-plus years as Artistic Director for SWVA Ballet, Pedro Szalay will retire - he's moving to Scotland after that with his husband Mark Shephard - who has often portrayed the magical Drosselmeyer in the Nutcracker ballet, performed every December at the Berglund Center by Southwest Virginia Ballet pre-professional students and community members. (I was honored to appear in the opening 15 minute "Party Parents," scene in Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker – which follows Clara in the magical Land of Sweets – in 2023, where we had to learn some challenging dance routines.)

"Now I look forward when I come back to see somebody else, to see what direction they're going. Art is always evolving and nothing stays the same."


Southwest Virginia Ballet has collaborated in recent years with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and the Taubman Museum of Art, among other cultural organizations, and Szalay founded the Roanoke City public school outreach program, Dance Espanol: "the kids I [encounter] every day ... I see some of them already professionally – doctors, in the nursing field or dancing. It's nice to see that beautiful work I started. I look back at all of the things I did – I'm very proud with what I'm leaving behind."

Born in Venezuela to parents from Hungary - and sporting a clean-shaven head in recent years - Szalay is a familiar face in the local arts community. He says arts organizations have supported each other to grow stronger: "the arts here are very strong [because] there is more collaboration. We've collaborated with all the [Roanoke] arts organizations."

Szalay says he will leave his mark - as he gets ready for a move to Scotland – he's been there but neither he nor Mark have family there – it's simply time for a new life adventure



Pedro Szalay

he says. "This is a nice moment to do a transition, not only for the company but for the school, which is still going strong, the Star City School of Ballet (both are housed in a remodeled building at the 9th Street Southeast Riverdale development)." As Southwest Virginia Ballet celebrates its 35th year, someone new will pick up where Pedro Szalay leaves off, with big dancing shoes to fill. 

## Budgeting for the subscription world

Let's get right to it. There are two areas of business operation that have become increasingly (if not totally) subscription based. One of them—technology—is an area just about every business depends on—large or small. The second—membership—is more optional, but most businesses in most markets engage them at some level.

In one sense, subscriptions are easier to budget than other purchase models. Particularly when scheduled monthly, you just throw them in the operating budget and account for accordingly, like any overhead.

But it gets tricky when things start happening like bundling and segmentation and specialization, not to mention renewals and upgrades. If you're not careful, you "suddenly" discover one day that one-to-three products or services you really needed has turned into dozens. And you often find a mess of line-item expenses where it's difficult to determine which is more valuable or necessary than the other.

Jim, in accounting, will swear by those CPA chapter dues. Kim, in marketing, will just die if you cancel the graphic design software suite.

Here are some thoughts on the two areas. Before I address each, you'll notice that both of them start with the same number one: Conduct an Audit!

### Your Technology Subscriptions

Unless you're just carving figures from a stick as you sit outside on the bench at the general store, selling them for five-dollars cash; your business has technology subscriptions. (Whittlers have tech, too, to be clear.) If you haven't looked closely, you might be surprised how much you actually spend on technology. It can get out of hand. So out of hand, in fact, you could be spending twice what is required. Larger enterprises can reach absurd levels of overspending for tech. Some will spot it, overcorrect, and put in restrictions that hurt the operations (at least in the short term) because employees and departments became dependent on the systems—even if they are redundant.

Here are some management tips:

1. **Conduct an audit.** First, make sure you identify all your tech subscriptions. You might have some of these in different budget classifications, but the reality is, all of these are tech subs:
  - communication system(s)
  - office "machines" (copiers and such)
  - industry/business-specific software applications (i.e. CADD)



## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

### Executive Summary:

*Today, more than ever before, so many services you need as a business operator are subscription-based; budget strategically.*



Draft a mission statement for your technology.



Consider layering due dates.

- general/enterprise software applications (i.e. MS Office)
- departmental software applications (i.e. Excel, Adobe)
- website server/services, hosting, domain registrations
- eMail services
- backup / protection applications or services
- cloud storage (i.e. device or general)
- internet, broadband, streaming services
- remote apps, VPN, networking/conference programs, etc.
- tech support
- warranties; consolidated services; etc.
- licenses (institutional and enterprise apps, ESPECIALLY!)

**2. Establish a mission.** We all know technology is for the purpose of making operations more efficient. With tech, you're supposed to be able to complete a task faster, smarter, better, cheaper. It wouldn't be a bad idea to draft a mission statement for your technology—making it specific to your business and its objectives. As you go through each subscription expense, make sure it matches your mission. If it doesn't support your mission, you can probably eliminate it (and still do those peripheral tasks with resources you already have).

**3. Eliminate redundancies.** The larger your organization is, the tougher it will be to eliminate redundancies. We all prefer our own technology choices (especially applications, but also for hardware and even the vendors we use). Start with the subscriptions that aren't as user-loyal or require little effort to change. An example: cloud or backup storage. It's just unnecessary to pay for multiple separate clouds, regardless of the capacity reserved or used.

If you find multiple software applications or suites being used to perform the same function or what will ultimately deliver the same output, try to pare that down to one (or at least fewer). To reduce redundancy, I would highly advise selecting the software or package that is the top choice (for industry or utilization or user) and commit to the licenses or system-wide use. This often means choosing the most popular off-the-shelf applications. There's a big advantage of this approach: you're able to attract, recruit, hire, and place more tech-ready or tech-trainable employees. You're more likely to have better vendor support; and you'll be better-positioned and competitive down the road.

**4. Schedule by renewal.** Timing can be a critical component of your technology subscription. From a financial perspective, you might not want all your chickens coming to roost on the same day. Many subscription services offer a discount if you pay annually versus monthly. Some change the rate scale on your renewal date (and many offer a big discount for new subscribers, which sends a powerful sticker shock when you go to renew for year two or next term). Depending on your cash-flow,

you may choose due dates (monthly, quarterly, annually, other) over cost (discount). Small businesses (and seasonal businesses, in particular) should consider “layering” due dates, so you’re not walloped with a mass of hefty renewals in the same month. Keep in mind, vendors have their own contracts for canceling, adding, upgrading, downgrading, renewing, extending, specializing, or changing your subscription. All vendors do not manage these things in the same way; and some of the costs can be quite significant (where you can’t even scrap it all and just start over). The leaders (recommended previously) tend to mimic each other when selling and servicing these subscriptions, but there is no universal model or consistency. Act as if it’s all inconsistent; inspect each provider.


**5. Copycat and benchmark.** As you move throughout your operating year, check the productivity and use of your current technology subscriptions. Gauge employee “tech satisfaction” and watch what your competitors are doing (in other markets, too). There are user-groups for all of these subscriptions (they require subscribers after all); so listen out for advice on efficiency (i.e. ask your departments for those reviews). Contact a peer (even if it’s another industry) and see if they will share the tech subs they prefer. If you find numerous others are using something you don’t have; you might want to prepare for a transition.

**6. Negotiate.** Always work to secure the best price, the best rates, the best contracts for your technology subscriptions. Ask this simple question: Am I on your best plan? Check in—yearly, or at least every other year—to see if you can get a better rate. If you think there is even the slightest possibility of getting your subscription at a better rate with another vendor—don’t hesitate to share that with your current vendor. (A good time to do that is just prior to renewal time; but mid-term works, too.) Some vendors will act as if they don’t care whether they keep or lose your business; others will offer a remedy.

## Your Membership Subscriptions

Ahhh. Guess what? I just teased you. We don’t have room to discuss membership subscriptions in this issue. I just employed a tactic that subscription services employ! Hooking you for the next thing in line.

The good news is that—when it comes to our FRONT subscriptions—we actually have a truly free version (online) where we present this magazine in full, exactly as we do in print, and with no paywall whatsoever. I do invite you to consider subscribing to our print edition (there it is!)... but you don’t have to.

I’ll address budgeting and strategy for membership subscriptions in the next FRONT. 



Listen out for advice on efficiency.



Am I on your best plan?



## GUEST COMMENTARY

By Elizabeth Walker

**Executive Summary:**  
*As the producer and host of Dear Business Coach podcast, I've discovered an extraordinary truth: we live among geniuses who are eager to share their wisdom.*

## The hidden genius among us: lessons from the Dear Business Coach podcast

This became strikingly clear during our summer segment, "Exposing Excellence with Roanoke Valley Leaders," which quickly captured our community's attention. Over an intensive six-week production period, I had the privilege of interviewing remarkable local leaders including Gene Marrano, Liz Long, Sheri Winesett, Katie Zawacki, Kris Simko, Scott Perry, Katie Beach, and John Lusher. These conversations showcased the incredible diversity of talent in our region – from business owners and speakers to coaches, producers, podcasters, board members, writers, activists, and advocates.

What strikes me most is how naturally the generosity flows when people are having fun. The leaders I've interviewed consistently show that our best work emerges when we share freely with others. This spirit of openness creates a rippling effect, inspiring others to contribute their unique insights and experiences.

In seeking out these leaders, I've discovered something remarkable about their approach to organizational structure. Those who've stepped up to share their stories demonstrate an inherent need to learn from their teams. They understand that true productivity isn't just about processes – it's about making work meaningful and sustainable for the individuals who make these processes possible.

Strong leaders understand that words matter – they shape culture, drive innovation, and build bridges between ideas and action. The most effective leaders I've encountered are masterful communicators who choose their words with intention and care.

The Roanoke Valley business community embodies a unique approach to leadership – one that's deeply community-driven and fueled by a passion for engagement. Our summer series guests demonstrated that success here isn't measured solely by individual achievement, but by the connections we forge and the knowledge we share.

When guests appear on the show, they give up their most precious asset – time and attention. As Scott Perry would say, they share "out loud and in public." It takes courage to show up for unscripted conversations and trust a new podcaster with your story.

The summer series revealed that the arts, social sciences, and business sectors in Roanoke are deeply interconnected,

creating a rich tapestry of talent and expertise. The genius in our midst isn't hidden in corner offices or behind closed doors – it's alive in the stories, experiences, and wisdom freely shared by leaders who understand that our collective success depends on our willingness to learn from one another. Thank you, Roanoke leaders, for raising your hands and not keeping your trusted secrets! 🙌

“  
”  
Our best work emerges when we share freely with others. Openness creates a rippling effect.



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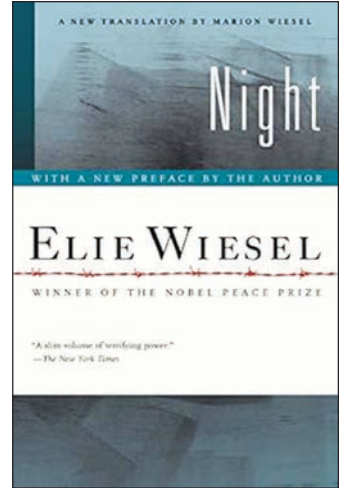
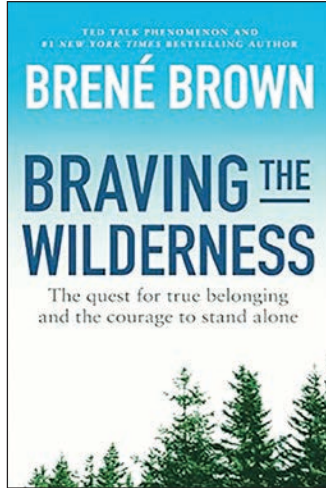


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## FRONTReviews >

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



### *Staying connected, anyway*

In this time of extreme political division, this book—*Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* (Random House; 2017) by Brené Brown—is the breath of fresh air anyone can use. Brené's main focuses in this book are discussing our sense of belonging by living authentically and setting boundaries, yet creating stronger connections with others in the process. She discusses how we can build trusting, meaningful relationships, and how we can find connection even with those who we most vehemently disagree. Whether you find yourself feeling disconnected with others politically or within your personal relationships, this book has guidance and exercises we can all use and implement. I found myself writing down quote after quote to keep close by.

—Lauren Webb

### *Not just night; darkness*

One of the reasons I enjoy reading is for the escape. Probably why my go-to genre is literary fiction. There's no escaping *Night* (Hill and Wang; 1958) by Elie Wiesel. I saw this little autobiographical snippet at a book fair, and I remembered reading it long ago. The revisit was necessary—something I needed to do—but no less tragic the second time. There's no escape, because you are fully embedded in Wiesel's narrative. You are enveloped in the horror, the pure evil,

a sadness so deep, no empathy could ever cover even a fraction of the Auschwitz and Buchenwald experiences. As much as we seek goodness, we must never forget the terror and inhumanity some people endure. (And we should not trivialize or hyperbolize rough situations or disagreeable people by throwing the "Nazi" word around, so carelessly.) When death is brought directly to your family right in front of you, the despair, loss, and emptying out of whatever flicker of life inside you—all of this must be unsurmountable. Somehow, Elie Wiesel was (is) able to share the darkest of time. It's a most unfortunate component of our understanding, but we need to know how bad things can get.

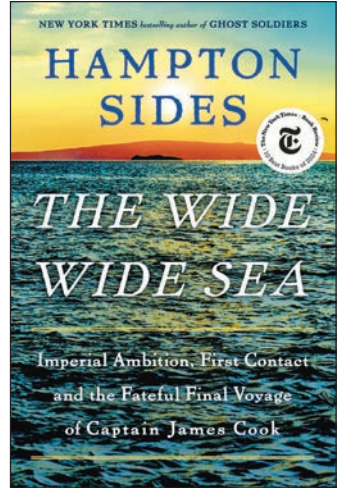
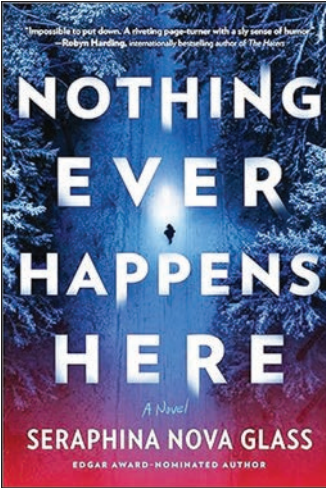
—Tom Field

### *Read—and watch—what happens*

In *Nothing Ever Happens Here* (Graydon House; 2025) by Seraphina Nova Glass, the first thing you get is a clever title. Because you just know SOMETHIN'S gonna happen here. Of course, it does. The second thing you get is an interesting dichotomy—a story of murder and embezzlement and threats and missing people, yet it's all lightweight, partially comedic, and wrapped up in small town with colorful characters to include two entrepreneurial women, their families, a senior living community, and an inept police department. Here's a story that could have just as easily been submitted as a sitcom screenplay. A lot happens here; episodically.

—Tom Field





Brood Restaurant & Bar

## Brood impresses on first visit

Expect to spend some serious cash if you go there, but Brood Restaurant & Bar, which opened in August 2023 on East Main Street in Salem in the space that formerly housed another upscale eatery, Blue Apron, is a good choice when you're looking to impress – or to celebrate something special. Calling itself a "Seasonal Southern American Inspired Bistro," the shrimp and grits indeed reminds one of a dish expertly prepared in New Orleans perhaps. I enjoyed the generous helping of mussels as an appetizer.

My dinner companion raved about the butternut squash soups (it smelled great for sure) and the chicken schnitzel that featured "Alabama Sauce," and braised greens with bacon. An extensive wine and cocktail list make it a complete night in a warm, comfortable atmosphere. An excellent choice for something new if you haven't tried Brood already.

—Gene Marrano

## Adventure, imperialism and violence

Hampton Sides is one of my favorite non-fiction authors, having penned best sellers like *Blood and Thunder*, *Ghost Soldiers* and one of my favorite reads, *In the Kingdom of Ice*. Now comes *The Wide Wide Sea: Imperialism Ambition, First Contact and the Fateful Final Voyage of Captain James Cook* (Doubleday, 2024.) On July 12, 1776 Cook

set off for this third voyage on the HMS Resolution, with a mandate to explore the Arctic region for the fabled Northwest passage, the theoretical ice-free corridor (at least in the summer months it was posited) that could cut down the voyage time to months – instead of the much longer journey around Africa's Cape of Good Hope - to Asia, the Pacific Islands and the west coast of America.

Revered in Great Britain, Captain James Cook was renowned for his seamanship and concern for his crews onboard the creaky and often leaking wooden boat that was the Resolution, his human leadership and a dedication to science. Not to mention filling in gaps on the wildly inaccurate maps of the era – and claiming remote islands for Great Britain – whether there were already native peoples living there or not. Rebuffed by ice he turned back from the Arctic on his final voyage and making a return stop in Hawaii, the people once friendly to him and his crew on a previous voyage murdered Cook on the beach in plain view of crew members on the Resolution, anchored just offshore. Sides tells a great story of bravery, adventure – and the presumption of the time that Britannia ruled the sea – and whatever territory it vowed to claim.

—Gene Marrano

The reviewers: **Lauren Webb** currently lives in Salem and works in education; **Tom Field** is a creative director, writer, and publisher; **Gene Marrano** is a news reporter and FRONT editor.



Hayley Ohi



## Where the wild things are >

It's in Daleville, Botetourt County, apparently... the wild things. **Grow Wild Play Center**—a “Montessori-inspired space designed to foster social play and stimulate child development” and provide connection for parenthood—has opened. You can book play sessions or a party. Owner Chelsea Craft describes herself as a Botetourt native, full-time mama, part-time registered nurse, and certified in maternal nursing.



Submitted

## High-minded Hokies >

**Virginia Tech's Ethics Bowl Team** competed in the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl National Competition in Norfolk at the end of February. The club started in 2021; the current six-student team (Sam Peden, Jesse Macklin, Sean Scott, Alisha Waddell, Greyson Hunziker, Gaurav Jones) is one of only 36 teams—from nearly 200 nationwide—that competed in the event, hosted by the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics. Topics of ethical dilemmas include anything from AI tools to space weaponization to media usage of photographs of tragedies, and more. In December, the VT team won all six of its matches at the regional competition in Baltimore.



## Kettle calculations >

It's been a while since Christmas, but the **Kiwanis Club of Roanoke** reports a "merry and bright" holiday for 43 children at West End Center for Youth from its Salvation Army Red Kettle bell-ringing campaign. Roanoke Kiwanians provided 32 volunteers who raised \$1,762 over three nights in December outside of downtown Roanoke's Center in the Square. The club has raised more than \$24,000 for this campaign since 2008. It also donated \$1,000 to the Grand Angel program at Family Service of Roanoke Valley.



Gene Marrano



## Salem-Roanoke Baseball Hall of Fame >

After spending several seasons at Triple-A in the Los Angeles Dodgers farm system - with little hope of making the major league roster as an infielder - future big league coach and manager **Terry Collins** says he became a student of the game, learning all he could at the Dodgers spring training camps: "after a workout you'd sit in the backroom at Dodgertown and sitting next to you was Sandy Koufax. On the other side was Don Drysdale. And on the other side of him was Maury Wills. Sitting out in the parking lot was Roy Campanella talking to catchers. You grasped as much knowledge as you could from those guys, hoping that one day your going to get your chance to coach."

Terry Collins went on to manage the NY Mets to the World Series in 2015, one of three major league teams he skippered. He was the keynote speaker and a **Salem-Roanoke Baseball Hall of Fame** inductee at the annual Hot Stove banquet and fundraiser in late January. Collins played on the 1972 Salem Pirates, who won the Carolina League championship, with a lineup that featured a handful of future major leaguers, including Dave Parker, who was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame last year. The other four new entrants in to the Salem-Roanoke Baseball Hall of Fame have local roots as a player or baseball coach. The HOF has its own building next door to Salem Memorial Ballpark, home of the Single-A Salem Red Sox, who open the 2025 season early next month.



## "Head spa" here >

Roanoke Virginia's first headache clinic, **Align Neurology**, is now open. Jamie Brackenrich is a nurse practitioner and will offer on-demand headache medicine with a mission to achieve "headache freedom." Align Neurology treats migraines dizziness, pain, tension headaches and sinus headaches, and is located at 4521 Brambleton Ave. Suite 205 in Roanoke County.



Courtesy of SRCCC

## Rollins rolling >

**Rollins Automotive** in Salem on West Main Street cut a ribbon on January 28 after opening late last year. **Michael Rollins** is a master mechanic and, "always dreamed of owning his own shop," says Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce executive director Amanda Livingston.



Submitted

## New digs for Regional Chamber >

By late spring, the **Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce** hopes to cut the ribbon on its new space, at **Varsity Park** on Franklin Road. What some might think of as just a Varsity Storage facility also has offices and meeting rooms. Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce President **Eric Sichau** says it's also about accessibility in the planned move from the downtown Roanoke on South Jefferson it now owns and occupies: "for sure it makes parking a little bit easier, and accessibility. We view this as an ongoing evolution and vision to serve chamber members and the regional business community. The Chamber has a rich history, and this is kind of a new chapter in a part of the city that is an extension in a growing corridor of downtown Roanoke." The Regional Chamber has been located in downtown Roanoke on South Jefferson for almost three decades.



## Panda finds second valley location >

**Panda Express** finally arrived in the Roanoke Valley about two years ago in the Tanglewood area - and now grab-and-go, fast casual dining Chinese restaurant has opened the doors at Valley View. Roanoke City approved a rezoning request that led to building the new corporate-owned Panda Express at Valley View in what had been part of the Wal-Mart parking lot. Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Eric Sichau was there for a ribbon cutting in late January, and said, "It's right here where the foot traffic is. It certainly supports the folks coming to shop at the Wal-Mart. It's a good deal and an expansion, and we certainly support that Panda is expanding in the region." The ribbon cutting attracted Chamber board officers and staff, several Roanoke City councilmembers, and the Northside High School marching band, which had to perform inside the new Panda Express at Valley View, due to the rainy weather.



Submitted



## Feeling the love in BoCo >

The 2025 **Botetourt County** "State of the County," event that took last month drew 150 people participated in the event in person and virtually. The event also debuted "Love is All Around in Botetourt County," an original song written by Botetourt's own **David Austin** and performed by **The Parkway Players** (pictured). On the job for nine years now, County Administrator **Gary Larrowe** said, "so many things have taken place, so many positive connections that have been made. This is a special place." Botetourt County has seen a surge in growth in housing starts and in business expansion in recent years. 2024 was a year of growth and resilience and a focus on community." Larrowe mentioned broadband accessibility gains, "something we've been working on since 2017 when I got here," as a major milestone. The launch of the Destination Botetourt Small Business Center was another highlight, as was a BoCo small business grant program. He also hailed county Fire & Rescue crews that traveled to North Carolina to assist in the cleanup after Hurricane Helene devastated western North Carolina communities.



## RU-MGCC Tartan Transfer >

Radford University President **Bret Danilowicz**, Ph.D., and Provost **Bethany Usher** visited Mountain Gateway Community College last month to discuss the Tartan Transfer Program, a partnership with eight Virginia Community Colleges that streamlines the transfer process for students. The initiative offers a seamless pathway for community college students to continue their education and earn a bachelor's degree at Radford, with benefits such as affordability, maximized transfer credits, personalized advising, and career preparation.



## VT's State of the University >

A look at Virginia Tech's past decade and a vision for the future served as the structure for President **Tim Sands'** annual State of the University address last month. Sands highlighted the university's growing impact across the commonwealth, mentioning the recent opening of Innovation Campus Academic Building One in Alexandria. Sands said he wants to continue placing emphasis on growing Virginia Tech's innovation network, which extends beyond Blacksburg and beyond the Washington, D.C., area. The university's current outreach include Virginia Cooperative Extension offices in every county of the commonwealth; the graduate education and research network in the D.C. area; the global presence in Europe, Africa, and India; and the health science and technology hub in Roanoke. A year ago, Sands announced an initiative that involved partnering with leaders from Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery County, and the New River Valley Regional Commission to collaborate on shared challenges and opportunities and explore ways to work together. The group, known as Partnership for Progress, launched a website and conducted a survey that has received more than 800 responses. "As we grow, we will be challenged to form an innovation network that transcends the borders of our campuses and engages partners where they live and work," Sands said.





## VWCC in NW >

Since 2022, Virginia Western Community College President Dr. Robert Sandel has invited leaders of nonprofit groups in Northwest Roanoke to a series of outreach breakfasts where they explore a shared mission of improving lives through education. At the most recent breakfast, held Feb. 8, at the College's Hall Associates Career Center, the group thanked Dr. Sandel for initiating this outreach. "Dr. Sandel had a vision that every person in every community would have the opportunity to learn a skill, get a certificate or a degree," said **Kenneth Belton**, a Virginia Western Educational Foundation board member who co-hosted the outreach breakfasts. The breakfast served about 30 nonprofit leaders and college staff, where speakers included the College's Student Behavior Advocate, **Kim Stafford** and **Hillary Holland**, who leads the Office of Disability Services and serves as a guide for students seeking accommodations as they learn. **Roanoke EnVision Center** was also presented, as well as Roanoke City CCAP Success Coach **Frank Tyree** and College Recruiter **Paige Miller**, who provided details about their visits to 8th grade classrooms as part of a new middle-school outreach initiative. Dr. Sandel retires in June 2025 after 24 years of service.



## BoB rockin' in Rocky Mt >

Bank of Botetourt held a ribbon-cutting, celebrating the opening of its newest branch in Rocky Mount, Franklin County, on Feb. 7. The bank—at 875 Tanyard Road—was built by Roanoke's F&S Building Innovations and designed by Roanoke's Hughes Associated Architects & Engineers. CEO Lyn Hayth, III welcomed the team, Jess, Zachary, Mary, Chelsee, Lisa, Scott and said the new office is "a reflection of our ongoing commitment" to all the expanding communities Bank of Botetourt serves.



## RAM House new home >

A groundbreaking ceremony last month, for the new home planned for the **RAM House** day shelter for the homeless on Elm Avenue, a 12,000 square foot building that Lionberger Construction will start remodeling soon. RAM House executive director **Melissa Woodson** noted they are just over halfway towards their capital campaign goal of \$4.3 million, to support the move from a former church on Campbell Avenue. RAM House hopes to move in late this year or early in 2026. The expanded day shelter will feature a new kitchen wing, showers, private counseling rooms and an array of services from other agencies, to help Roanoke's homeless community get back on their feet. "We will be forced to rent a kitchen in a church unless we can continue to raise money at this record pace," Woodson warned, "donors who are making this dream happen are the people who will ultimately stop the unprecedented rise in homelessness that is sweeping our nation. We must all be part of a local answer." Woodson says local neighborhood opposition to the new RAM House location in Old Southwest on Elm Avenue that arose at a community meeting late last year seems to have simmered down. The owners of Virginia Transformer purchased and then donated the former office building to RAM House.



Submitted

## LewisGale's UWVBR grant >

LewisGale Medical Center has announced a \$25,000 grant award through the HCA Healthcare Foundation to **United Way of Virginia's Blue Ridge**. The funding will enhance three of the agency's priority initiatives, including its Healthy Roanoke Valley Community Resource Hub, the Behavioral Health Academy and healthcare career pathways. "LewisGale Medical Center has been a longstanding partner of the United Way, and we are grateful for the donation from the HCA Healthcare Foundation as we continue working together toward sustainable, long-term community health and well-being," said **Cheryl Mosley**, vice president, Community Impact. **Collin McLaughlin**, CEO of LewisGale Medical Center: "United Way of Virginia's Blue Ridge shares our commitment to transforming the future of community health by expanding access and building pathways to rewarding healthcare careers."

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

## EDUCATIONAL FRONT

**Raymond Cotter**, engineering teacher at Roanoke City Public School's Charles W. Day Technical Education Center, received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching—the nation's highest award for math and science teachers recognized by the U.S. government.



**Ambler**

**Jessica Ambler** was appointed director of Hollins University's Eleanor D. Wilson Museum. Ambler is a nationally recognized arts educator and curator whose experience includes working in museums and auction houses and teaching at several universities. She was director of Muhlenberg College's

Martin Art Gallery, a mayoral appointed officer of Allentown Arts Commission and council member of Lehigh Valley Arts and Cultural Alliance. A qualified and accredited appraiser, she has a Ph.D. and M.A. in art history, criticism, and conservation from the University of California, Santa Barbara; and a B.A. in art from University of California, Santa Cruz.



**Camden**

**Matthew Camden** has been named Virginia Tech Transportation Institute's division director of freight, transit, and heavy vehicle safety. Camden will manage research for the division, which makes up about 25 percent of the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute's (VTTI) total research enterprise. He also leads a team

to address significant heavy-vehicle challenges through deployment, testing, analysis, education, and outreach.



**Catena**

**Angela Catena** has been named the Title IX coordinator for Virginia Tech's Office for Equity and Accessibility (OEA). previously serving as Title IX coordinator at the University of New Mexico (UNM) where she specialized in sexual harassment prevention, Violence Against Women Act compliance, and nondiscrimination.

Ferrum College has appointed **Chris Watters** as the new Vice President for Institutional Advancement and External Relations. Most recently, Watters served as the Director of Alumni and Family



**Watters**

Engagement Events at Bucknell University. Before her work at Bucknell, Watters served as the Director of Alumni Relations at Berry College.



**Gruber**

**Nancy Gruber** has been appointed assistant vice president for resource management and planning with Outreach and International Affairs (OIA), bringing more than three decades of financial and administrative expertise to the role. A 1988 alumna of the Pamplin College of Business,

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Gruber has served the university since 1992, most recently as director of finance and administration for the division's Office of Engagement.

**Jennifer Davis** has been named the director of college scholarships for the Virginia Tech College of Engineering. Davis will oversee the college's scholarship programs, ensuring students receive the support necessary to pursue their academic goals. Davis has held various leadership positions, most recently serving as the associate director of financial aid at Washington and Lee University.



**Wooten**

**Patricia Wooten** has been hired as division director of human resources for the College

*Have a career announcement?*

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

of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Wooten will oversee a team of HR professionals and provide strategic HR leadership to both the academic and extension divisions. Wooten has nearly 20 years of HR experience; her career with Virginia Tech began in 2019 as HR manager for the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine in Roanoke.

### LEGAL FRONT

Spilman Thomas & Battle announced that **James Taylor** has joined the law firm as Counsel, based at Spilman's Roanoke office. Taylor's primary area of practice is litigation, with a focus on civil matters. He has



**Taylor**

extensive experience defending employers in complex issues and defending business clients against various allegations, including fraud, conversion, breach of contract, negligence, tort claims, and breach of fiduciary duty, among others. Fluent in Korean, Taylor practiced international law in Korea for several years following law school.

The Roanoke-based law firm Gentry Locke is pleased to announce that **Frank Clay** has



**Clay**

joined the firm's Roanoke office as an associate in the Plaintiff Group. Prior to joining the firm, he served in the United States Army as a paralegal, participating in Courts-Martial and Administrative Separation Hearings and advised military commanders on a range of legal matters.

### WELLNESS FRONT

**Rebecca Bishop** at Carilion Clinic was

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elected student outreach chair, and Ann Hutchens at Galen College was elected government relations chair of the Roanoke Valley Chapter of Virginia Nurses Association.



**Turnbull**

communications for Carilion Clinic since 2020, and a senior advisor in public relations and corporate communications prior to that (since 2014). He has a degree in English from Roanoke College and a master's degree in management, communication focus, from University of Maryland Global Campus.

## SPORTS FRONT

**Billy Wagner**—a Tazewell County native, baseball pitcher at Ferrum College, and player for 16 seasons with Major League Baseball teams at Atlanta, Boston, New York (Mets); Philadelphia; and Houston—was voted

into the Baseball Hall of Fame on Jan. 21 by the Baseball Writers Association of America.

## NON-PROFIT FRONT



**Carroll-Owen**

**Holly Carroll-Owen** was recognized with the 2025 Advocacy Award for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation – Virginia Chapter.

## SERVICE FRONT

**Justin Fix** has been named manager of Oakey's (funeral care) downtown Roanoke Chapel. A Vinton native, Fix graduated from William Byrd High School, and earned an Associate Degree of Applied Science in Funeral Service at the



**Fix**

Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Service. He joined Oakey's in 2018, which has five chapels in Roanoke, Vinton, and Botetourt, and will hit its 160th anniversary milestone in 2026.

## CONSULTANCY FRONT

**Sheri Winesett** has joined Self-Made—a women-led entrepreneurial consultancy—as chief operating officer. Winesett has been a business coach, chamber director, and small business advocate in the Roanoke region.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.*



**Vick**

**Cathie Vick** has been appointed president and chief executive officer of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce. She served as vice president of corporate and government affairs at Transurban (toll-road operators); and chief development and public affairs officer at the Port of Virginia. This Chamber has more than 30,000 members.

**Chris Turnbull** has been named chief of staff for Carilion Clinic president and CEO Steve Arner. Turnbull was director of corporate

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# CONTRIBUTORS

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**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.

**Holly Brinja**, a writer originally from Pittsburgh, PA, who now resides in Floyd, VA, is the creator behind HB Creations, where she brings content and creative ideas to life. Her content creations achieve sustainable organic growth for organizations across platforms by growing their brand and strengthening their relations within their communities, industries, and beyond.

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

**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. [cooperjpp1@gmail.com]

**Carrie Cousins** is the Director of Digital Marketing

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

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

**Tom Field** is a creative director, marketing executive and owner of Berryfield, Inc. in Salem, and owner of Valley Business FRONT magazine. He has written and produced programs and materials for local and international organizations for 40 years. [tfield@berryfield.com]

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

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

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

**Shatenita Horton** serves as the Senior Vice President of Retail Banking at Freedom First Credit Union. As a member of Senior Management, Shatenita directs the sales and service efforts through creation, coordination and management of company-wide Retail, Private, and Business Banking programs. She hails from Columbia, Missouri and has lived in Roanoke for the past 3 years. [shorton@freedomfirst.com]

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

**Elizabeth Walker** is host of the Dear Business Coach Podcast and Live Social Audio each week, 'broadcasting' from Floyd, Virginia. Look for her live-in-person workshops in Roanoke VA, Queens/Astoria NYC, and more to come. Reach her at dearbusinesscoachpodcast@gmail.com

**Sheri Winesett**, COO of Self Made, drives strategic operations, leadership development, and business growth initiatives, ensuring alignment between Self Made's mission and execution. She helps women entrepreneurs make the transition to the Digital Shift™ by implementing automations, optimizing tech, and creating scalable systems that allow them to duplicate themselves, streamline operations, and focus on what they love, grow incredible empires, and use their superpowers to make a bigger impact. www.self-made.biz

“People want quality. — Page 24



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*Stay glassy, Virginia*

**Press Glass**—which we announced its arrival to Henry County in 2020—is closing its operations in Stoneville, NC and moving the work to the Virginia plant at Commonwealth Business Centre. Over 100 employees will transfer with the change, about seven miles away. Founded in Poland, Press Glass fabricates flat glass for commercial construction.

*Tech ranks high in I-tech*

The Master of Information Technology program at **Virginia Tech** was ranked 4th in the nation by the U.S. News and World Report list of Best Online Programs. The ranking, released Jan. 21, evaluated more than 100 universities nationwide.

*From JV to Varsity*

The **Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce** is moving from its longtime location in the heart of downtown Roanoke (30 years) to the Varsity Park building at 1948 Franklin Road. The Chamber says the business center will provide more updated offices and a large 50+ guests meeting room.

*Call the CNM*

**Carilion Clinic** has expanded its midwifery services, part of its maternity care offerings. Midwife teams are now serving multiple locations, and no referral is required. Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs)

offer preventative exams for adolescent and adult women to post-menopausal care, hospital-based births, and medication options during labor and delivery.

*'Foot'ball in Roanoke*

**Roanoke FC**—a new semi-professional men's soccer club—has arrived in Roanoke City. It's a UPSL (400 clubs), 4th tier, US soccer division that will compete in the MidAtlantic Conference. The new team is open to local players who will play soccer regionally, potentially nationally. Roanoke FC is recruiting players and sponsors.

*An 'F' grade we like*

Virginia will be ranked third in the nation for franchise growth, according to a study (FRANdata) cited by the International Franchise Association. Stats include 1,447 additional local franchises with 13,193 jobs; contributing \$26.8 billion to the Commonwealth.

*Ag help times three*

Governor Youngkin announced the Virginia Agricultural Disaster Microloan Program has been increased from \$50,000 maximum to \$150,000. This is the Virginia Small Business Financing Authority loan that offers assistance to ag-forestry-farm businesses affected Hurricane Helene.

*Southside rollin' large*

**Caesars Virginia** casino in Danville surpassed

all other casino resort revenues in the state in its first full month of operating after opening in mid-December. The resort reported \$28.5 million in January; the total revenue from all casinos was \$72.3 million, led by Hard Rock Bristol and Rivers Casino Portsmouth (after Danville).

*Shenandoah economic boost*

**Serioplast**, a global manufacturer of rigid plastic packaging, will invest \$25,725,000 to occupy a 140,000-square-foot industrial facility in Shenandoah County. The company is headquartered in Seriate, Italy, and provides packaging for companies like Procter & Gamble, Unilever, Reckitt Benckiser, and more. The project will create 45 new jobs. Collaborations include the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Shenandoah Valley Partnership and Shenandoah County, and a \$180,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund.

*Brownfield grants*

Five localities across the Commonwealth of Virginia have received \$1.5 million in Site Remediation Grants from the Virginia Brownfields Restoration and Economic Redevelopment Assistance Fund (VBAF). The winners included the **Town of Vinton** (\$500,000) for the redevelopment of the former Gish Mill property into a mixed-

use development. **Roanoke County** (\$208,862) will use its grant for remediation of asbestos in a vacant office complex being redeveloped into mixed-use space (including a hotel) in southwest Roanoke County by ABoone, on the site of a former office building.

*Latest VALET graduates*

10 companies are graduating from the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's Virginia Leaders in Export Trade (VALET) program, and 17 companies have joined the two-year program. VALET, which now has 412 graduated companies, assists Virginia exporters that have established domestic operations and are committed to international exporting as a growth strategy. Among the latest graduates at the **HUB Corporation** (City of Roanoke), and **TECHLAB, Inc.** (Montgomery County.) 17 more companies joined the VALET program in January, including **Oransi** (City of Radford) and **Valcom** (Roanoke County.)

*Sprucing up before 250th birthday*

Last year the General Assembly established the Virginia 250 Preservation Fund to support capital improvement projects at historic sites and museums that anticipate a significant increase in visitation in 2026, the year of the 250th anniversary of the

Declaration of Independence. Among the local sites that have received grants to make upgrades before the 2026 Semiquincentennial are the **Calfee Center** in Pulaski, and the **Montgomery Museum of Art and History** in Christiansburg.

### *UWVBR focused on childcare*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that childcare costs be less than or equal to 7 percent of a families' incomes. That's often not the case, especially for those at the lower end of the income scale. **United Way of Virginia's Blue Ridge** and president Abby Hamilton has crunched the numbers on childcare: "about 60 percent of working households of families that have young children have both parents in the workforce. You can imagine the lack of childcare could be an incredible barrier, not just in terms of costs, but in availability." The Child Care and Development Fund was extended through March of this year, it helps low-income

families pay for their childcare - but its future is in doubt. The Project 2025 playbook that the Trump campaign distanced itself from before the election calls for eliminating the Head Start program that now provides early learning and childcare to almost 800,000 children from low-income families. Early attempts to freeze federal funding led to concerns from Head Start childcare providers that they would have to cut staffing – or shut down all together.

### *Buena Vista downtown rebirth recognized*

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has designated Buena Vista as an Advancing Virginia Main Street (AVMS) community, along with eight other communities, including **Old Towne Covington**. The DHCD said Buena Vista has rebounded from several, "devastating floods," and now "people visit Buena Vista's Main Street district for its charming, small-town atmosphere and the sense of community it fosters." Established

## Have an announcement about your business?

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

in 2022, Main Street Buena Vista (MSBV) evolved during its time as a Mobilizing Main Street community to effectively implement the Main Street Approach to revitalize its downtown district.

### *Gentry Locke adds new practice group*

Roanoke-based law firm **Gentry Locke** has launched its High-Asset Divorce and Wealth Protection Practice, to meet the growing demand for sophisticated legal counsel tailored to high-net-worth individuals and families navigating complex family law matters. "We see an increasing demand among our existing clients and others in the communities we serve in Virginia, for sophisticated financial and business representation when it

comes to high-stakes domestic relation events," said Brett Marston, Gentry Locke's Managing Partner.

### *Local non-profit gets boost from New Belgium*

**New Belgium Brewing Company**, which has a beer production plant in Daleville (formerly home to Ballast Point) has announced support for **Points of Diversity**, a Roanoke local non-profit organization dedicated to providing life skills training and other diverse opportunities for youth and adults in the Roanoke Valley. New Belgium will be providing Points of Diversity with a \$1,000 grant through its Dollar Per Barrel Giving Program, which supports non-profits across the country that are making a positive impact in their communities. Points of Diversity provides

## Notable Transactions

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- **Spark**—a Hilton lodging property—has opened in a former building on Thirlane Rd right by Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport
- A 48,580 sq ft office building on 4.95 acres at **616 Idaho Street** in Salem was sold to an undisclosed buyer-occupier for \$5,695,000
- The **parking garage** in downtown Roanoke adjacent to the **Amtrak** station is slated to be seized by the City of Roanoke, following tax and structural code issues

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

## COVENANT REAL ESTATE SERVICES

- Five localities across the Commonwealth received \$1.5 million site remediation grants from Virginia Brownfields Restoration and Economic Redevelopment Assistance Fund; including \$500,000 for the former **Gish Mill property in Vinton** for a mixed-use development; the historic mill dates back to 1797
- **Apricot Lane** secured a 1,600 sq ft lease of retail space at University Crossroads in Blacksburg

a variety of programs and services to youth, including workshops on affirmation, communication skills, life skills, teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict resolution and gatherings for community dialogue on difficult issues.

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*HUM creates  
a Diaper Bank*

**Huddle Up Moms**, the local non-profit that offers support and education for expecting and new mothers, states that one in three families in Southwest Virginia need help buying diapers for their children. Director of Support, Hannah Goodman, has been distributing diapers and formula for families in need since launching its Support Shop in 2022. Goodman says the need continues to grow so they have launched Huddle Up Diaper Distribution & Lifeline Endeavor or Project Huddle. "This has several moms telling me it's between feeding my child – or putting diapers on them or clothing them. Or keeping them in a soiled diaper longer, and that breaks my

heart." The goal is not to meet a family's total need for diapers notes Goodman - but to help them bridge the gap to help make ends meet. HUM will supply packets of 25 diapers per child. HUM's Support Shop (The Haven on 5th Street SW in Roanoke) now assists more than 125 mothers a month - and that number is growing. Project Huddle plans to take that support to the next level, with the help of donations to make the initiative sustainable. (see [huddleupmoms.org](http://huddleupmoms.org))

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*RBTC goes virtual to  
address talent attraction*

The **Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council** is tackling the issue of attracting and keeping young tech talent in the region through several monthly webinars. RBTC is a non-profit member organization of technology professionals, businesses, and organizations. Its mission is to create an eco-system where innovation and entrepreneurship thrives. To do that the region needs to attract or grow its own tech talent.

Stuart Mease is consulting with RBTC on that issue. He's worked with Roanoke City, Virginia Tech and Wake Forest University. Mease says job seekers need to be willing to do two things: "if they're willing to humble themselves and take a job that may be kind of beneath them [to gain a foothold], or you're willing to acquire the skill sets in demand. I've always started with [telling students about] understanding the market first, before you select a major." Mease says the most sought after major RBTC members look for when they are hiring is a bachelor's degree in computer science.

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*ROA sees growth  
and new service to  
Florida's Gulf Coast*

**Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport** offered nonstop service to eight destinations in 2024, including Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago-O'Hare, Philadelphia and Washington-Dulles by Allegiant, American, Delta and United Airlines. Mike Stewart, executive director of

Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport, says this year that number increased to nine when Allegiant added a new nonstop destination last month. Allegiant now flies out of ROA to the Sarasota-Bradenton airport. The airport set a new passenger record in 2024, serving more than 756,000 travelers – a 2.8% increase over the previous record in 2000. Stewart says leisure travel appears to be driving the upward trend as more people come to the region for the outdoor amenities. "In recent years the 2019 [pre-pandemic] traffic had been the high water mark ... [2024] may be an all-time high." Stewart says in addition to adding more flights, ROA continues to focus on facility improvements such as a runway extension, an extra ticket counter and another gate. The FAA will have to sign off and then help fund those upgrades.

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*Leadership change  
for local nonprofit*

**Family Promise of Greater Roanoke** (FPGR), a local non-profit helping

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families experiencing homelessness to find permanent housing, announced the retirement of its long-time executive director, Marie Muddiman Beebe. The organization also introduces its new leader, Amy M. Morgan, who joined in January. Beebe led Family Promise from July 2011, when it was known as Interfaith Hospitality Network, until December 31. For 13 years, she guided the organization's small staff in sheltering unhoused families while guiding them to employment and permanent housing. Family Promise helped more than 1000 families

return to stability during her tenure, with more than 90 percent remaining housed a year later. New executive director, Amy Morgan, has extensive experience leading government and nonprofit agencies in the Roanoke Valley, specifically helping non-profits reach strategic goals.

*Mountain Gateway's Rural Guided Pathways*

**Mountain Gateway Community College** in Clifton Forge has been selected to participate in Phase 2 of the Rural Guided Pathways Project.

Colleges that are part of Rural Pathways work with each other — and with community partners in their regions — to implement evidence-based, institution-wide reforms grounded in the guided pathways framework. Phase 1 included 16 colleges and ran from 2022 through 2024. Phase 2 includes 28 colleges, many of which are continuing the work they started in Phase 1 and will run from 2025 through 2027. Participating colleges commit to designing and implementing a better student experience at their colleges, ensuring that more students earn

credentials and move on to living-wage jobs or transfer to a four-year institution with junior status. Phase 2 also requires collaborating with key stakeholders to increase economic opportunity in their region and partnering in the implementation of a cross-sector approach to guided pathways, while implementing evidence-based reforms that will address inequity and lead to improved educational and workforce outcomes.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field*

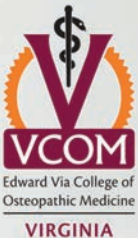
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This isn't the American way...  
I had to start doing something.

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