

# Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 195

DECEMBER 2024

Childcare Crisis

Red Rooster  
(and Yellow Hen)

Kitty City Cat Café

Breastfeeding Center  
of Roanoke

Deer Park Farm/ Shanti

Holiday Shopping

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# WELCOME TO THE FRONT

I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure if you inspected Santa Claus's bag of toys on his sleigh on Christmas Eve, you'd find more than what you'd expect. That's because children all over the world have different likes. Except for the lumps of coal. All misbehaving kids get the same kind of dirty coal. (Most of it from our own region of Appalachia.) Our edition of FRONT this month reminds me of that mixed bag. How much more diverse could we be than stories about an organic-type venue in Floyd County; family snapshots dealing with childcare (including a coffee shop with onsite daycare); local small business holiday shopping; a ton of happenings in our FRONT'n About and FRONT Notes; end-of-year professional announcements; a breastfeeding organization; and a café... for cats? We hope you like our mixed bag present. And while we're at it...

We appreciate your patronage and wish you the merriest of holiday celebrations and a prosperous New Year.



**Tom Field**  
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**Gene Marrano**  
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by Carrie Poff



“Parents are thrilled to be close to their child during working hours. — Page 17

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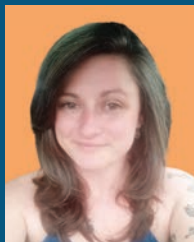
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# DECEMBER



Aila Boyd



Holly Brinja



Tom Field



Jennifer Leake



Kim Skellington



Nicholas Vaassen

## Advisory Board

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

# 2024 CONTRIBUTORS



**Daniel Colston**



**Carrie Cousins**



**Dan Dowdy**



**Gene Marrano**



**Shawn Nowlin**



**Carrie Poff**

“A significant portion of [small retailers'] annual income comes from holiday shopping.”  
— Page 58



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Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 50.



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construction

“Papa's kraut... Deer Park salsa... ravioli...” — Page 29

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# Our National and Local Childcare Crisis: *A Personal Perspective*

By Carrie Poff

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**FRONT reached out to a local small business owner-operator—and mother of young children—to share some of the scope of this critical issue, along with a few examples how parents are coping.**

From infancy through kindergarten, afterschool, holiday breaks, in-service days, snow days and summers off, our youth must be cared for while parents and guardians are at work. Staff shortages at childcare facilities, however, paired with wickedly high and ever-increasing rates for care, have thrown our country into a childcare crisis which needs to be resolved.

Numerous books have been written about the subject, describing different cultural approaches to detailing the history of it in the United States and of the crisis we currently have on our hands. So where do we begin a conversation about the struggle

to find a safe, affordable, and nurturing place for our children while also considering the pursuit of earning a living wage or pursuing higher education? Let's start with a quick history lesson of childcare in our country to see what's been attempted, what worked, and what did not.

By the mid- to late- 1800s, kindergarten had been established in the U.S, and Settlement Houses and "day nurseries" came into existence, to provide childcare for those not yet of school age, for low income, immigrant, and working-class people. By 1935, mid-Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt had created the Works Project Administration

(WPA) under Roosevelt's New Deal. This included the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) which led to the creation of Emergency Nursery Schools, serving 75,000 children whose parents were employed through the FERA.

In 1939, World War II sent predominantly men to fight, and women, consequently, had to leave the home to obtain war-time employment. The Lanham Act of 1940 caused a huge expansion in childcare to which, in 1943, Congress allocated \$20 million to create a universal childcare program. States and companies that applied for funding created "war nurseries" which cared for over 550,000 children regardless of household income. (Note - this is the closest the United States ever came to creating and instituting a subsidized, universal, childcare policy.)

At the end of WWII, 1945, men returned home. Subsidized, government-ran childcare ended and women, many of whom found that they enjoyed working outside of the home, had to quit their jobs to care for their children once again.

Fast forward to 1971 when Congress passed the Comprehensive Child Development Act, which called for the establishment of nationally funded, locally-ran childcare centers across the nation. Sounds eerily similar to our public school system, does it not? While many were in favor of this act, Nixon vetoed the bill because the Soviet Union funded childcare, and he believed in familial care versus communal care of children. The term "family-centered" was utilized and meant that mothers were encouraged to stay home and tend to the children while fathers worked outside the home. Mothers, however, continued their pursuits, and the need for childcare has continued to grow ever since.

The history of something that impacts us is imperative to know, as are the stories of people living history today. Sharing stories lets us know that we aren't alone; it makes the history we read about in books and magazines more relatable, and through vulnerability problems can be addressed and resolved. So let's read the accounts of three local parents, who are employees and entrepreneurs, to help us broaden our understanding of the importance of balancing work, life, and childrearing, with the hopes that employers will recognize the challenges and start to think more broadly about how they can contribute solutions to their employees' childcare needs, helping to instill a sense of community, instead of leaving employees to figure it out after-hours on "Childcare Crisis Island."

## STATE-FUNDED PROGRAMS

Virginia's state-funded childcare programs include the **Child Care Subsidy Program**, (subsidies to eligible families); the **Mixed Delivery** program, (funding to private, community-based preschools to serve at risk children); and the **Virginia Preschool Initiative** program, (free preschool for four-year-old children). A recent report (Oct 1) from Virginia Department of Education indicated 9,657 children on the waitlist for CCSP (likely exceeds 10,000 as the data collected was from 93 of the 120 localities).



The need  
for childcare  
has continued  
to grow.



Submitted

## APRIL & SAM GAYLER: Co-working

Meet April and Sam Gayler, the parents of six amazing humans. Right after their first child was born, April went to work night shifts in records at the hospital and Sam worked retail during the day. They could not afford childcare, and her night shift allowed them to have dual income without needing outside help with their son.

When their second child came along 18 months later, this was no longer a viable option. They sat down, exhausted, and prioritized what was important. They made a budget and decided to become a single income family. It meant things like only having one car, not having cell phones, not going on vacations or dining out, and living in modest neighborhoods.

Once the boys started school in Roanoke City, they started discussing April getting a job during school hours. But very soon, after starting kindergarten, their son Cody was diagnosed as autistic. Even though he tested highly intelligent, they felt the public schools weren't able to adequately accommodate him, so they decided to remain a single income family and to start homeschooling both children.

They bought second hand for almost everything and relied on hand-me-downs. The kids had smaller Christmases, and they utilized things like Toys for Tots, emphasizing holiday traditions and family time over gifts. April supplemented their one income by starting an at-home bakery and later, freelancing graphic design and video editing.

April and Sam had four more children, the youngest

““”

They made  
a budget and  
decided to  
become a single  
income family.

of whom is nonverbal with special needs. Taking into consideration the cost of his specialized care and with concerns about the quality of his care, utilizing outside childcare was not an option. They had heard horror stories from their friends about abuse towards their special needs children by various caretakers.

What transpired next, however, is utterly delightful. After years of exhaustion, financial woes, and the incredibly hard work of homeschooling five children, April and Sam now both work at Mineral Springs Christian School in Bedford County, and all of their school-age children attend there as well; April teaches middle and high school classes and Sam is the Administrator of Development. They are once again a two-income household, and they are able to bring their youngest with them to work, taking turns caring for him throughout the day. Talk about community!



## TRAVIS PALMER: Shifting

Travis Palmer, a single father with full custody of his two young children, works at Carilion. While Carilion does not have an on-site childcare facility, they do promote Honey Tree who works with Carilion employees, giving them a 10% discount on their childcare. Even with the discount, however, Mr. Palmer stated that it would take 85% of his paycheck to pay for his girls to go there. He pivoted to working 12-hr shifts, Saturday through Monday, hiring a babysitter or dropping the girls off with a friend or family member on the weekend. He saved all of his paid time off for the last 10 years, so he has been able to take Mondays off if there's no school.

““”

He pivoted to working 12-hour shifts.

While married, his wife had to stay home with the children because they could not afford childcare. “Do you want to pay childcare or [your] mortgage?” he asked.

## ROBIN ELLER: Home basing

Robin Eller was a stay-at-home mom with six children. After much research, she chose to homeschool each of them, “to be the influence on [them], teaching them critical thinking.” She, “did not want to produce cookie-cutter kids with a cookie-cutter education,” and wanted her values taught to them and not the values of the school system. This decision had nothing to do with the affordability of childcare, because there were costs associated with homeschooling. She worked as a homeschool tutor and later became an independent beauty consultant with MaryKay, to help offset the cost of their tuition. If, by chance she needed childcare, she would rely on family.

Each of these stories is unique and relatable. Together they demonstrate that when it comes to nurturing, educating, and caring for children, creativity abounds! However, there are two sides to every story. Let’s look at the struggles childcare facilities are having.

## TAP’s TAKE

Total Action for Progress, (TAP) conducted a needs assessment in February 2023. The results showed a lack of people who can afford to work at lower paying childcare facilities, resulting in facilities that have a workforce shortage. Not able to offer benefits, they are functioning with less staff and cannot accept higher enrollments. Meanwhile, operating costs increase, including skyrocketing insurance premiums, which is driving up the price of care per child. The current ratios of staff to children can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Section 8VAC20-780-350 of the Virginia Administrative Code, Ratio Requirements by Age Ratio.

Age	Ratio (staff:children)
Birth up to 16 months	1:4
16 months up to 24 months	1:5
2-year-olds	1:8
3-year-olds up to school age eligible	1:10
School age eligible up to 9 years	1:18
9 years through 12 years	1:20



Individuals are having trouble accessing childcare while they attend classes, so fewer people are pursuing higher education. Certain industries that require higher education for employment are seeing a shortage of qualified candidates, including daycare centers, and current employees cannot earn more without furthering their education. Lastly, people employed in industries such as manufacturing and medical lack childcare options for 2nd and 3rd shifts yet these two industries have the highest demand for new recruits.

There are subsidies that can help people pay for childcare, but they don't help out enough. Nor do these subsidies help to consistently fund the caretaking facilities. With affordability and lack of care available during work hours being top barriers for employment, more people must rely on welfare programs to get by. Poor location of childcare options and even lack of employment opportunities within walking distance of their homes is another major factor, primarily for minorities. And for women, not being able to pursue the education they desire to get the jobs that will take them higher, they are kept in menial jobs where their potentials cannot be reached.

TAP discovered that Southwest Virginia is underserved in terms of quality and early childhood education. One thing is for certain, when it comes to childcare, quality matters greatly. So... are understaffed and financially strapped facilities capable of more than just keeping children out of harm's way? How many facilities allow or utilize screens to help occupy children? Considering that infants to preschoolers have incredible developmental needs physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally, how much of their time is spent on devices and how much is allocated toward enrichment?

Middle school and high school students need our care and nurturing too, perhaps even more than younger children. Why? Because this age group is at a greater risk of experiencing depression, delinquent behavior, and even suicide. With hormones raging, these students get off the school bus and walk home alone, sit in a house alone or with their cell phone and social media, expose themselves to cyber bullying, engage in risky behavior, and they ruminate.

What matters the most for the secondary age group is that they are told and shown that they are not alone. Yet, in America, between the ages of 11-12, kids are suddenly treated like adults in terms of being responsible for

“ “

Subsidies  
don't help  
out enough.

## A BIT BETTER THAN AVERAGE

According to SmileHub (a nonprofit charity rating outlet) Virginia ranked 7th overall in its recent *States Providing the Most Support for Children: 2024* report. The report compared all 50 states based on 27 key metrics, with data sets that included the quality of public hospitals to spending per child per preschool enrollment. Virginia ranked 9th in public high school graduation rate; 16th in child well-being index; 18th in state spending per child enrolled in preschool; 19th in children's charities per capita and life expectancy at birth; and 24th for share of children aged 0 to 17 who live in a supportive neighborhood. (NOTE: States that ranked higher than Virginia included: Massachusetts, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Utah, New Hampshire, and Nebraska. Lowest-ranking states included: New Mexico, Nevada, Alaska, and West Virginia.)



The US scores very low when compared to other countries in terms of quality childcare and paid leave for parents.

themselves until the adults of their household get home from work. They ought to be provided with safe, enriching and emotionally supportive after-school opportunities as well. Roanoke Parks and Rec offers an incredible program called P.L.A.Y. or Positive Learning and Adventure for Youth. However, it only caters to children ages 5-11 (kindergarten through fifth grade).

Summer care is another big fish that we must fry. While there are plenty of summer camps to choose from, one in particular truly stands out. Spring Valley Farm, located in Moneta, Virginia, offers children the opportunity to be themselves. Jump in mud puddles, catch minnows in a stream, care for animals, and come home perfectly dirty and completely worn out. This past summer, they saw a demand for an additional group specifically for older students, so they created one...where's that "easy" button?

The United States scores very low when compared to other countries in terms of quality childcare and paid leave for new parents. We won't dwell right now on the fact that we're the only industrialized country on the planet without a federal paid leave policy; however, it ought to be mentioned that in the U.S., the average amount of leave given to new parents is 29 days. Imagine the toll of compounding financial stress, physical exhaustion, and mental fatigue that new parents experience and how that might affect their performance upon returning to work one month after a child is born.

## SUMMIT FINDINGS

On June 27th, 2024, the first ever National Child Care Innovation Summit was held, in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Department of Commerce. These very issues were addressed, and potential solutions proposed. Thus, the right conversations are being held and there are states that are pushing childcare reforms. This was the first summit of its kind, however, and there's still a long way to go.

Families like April and Sam Gayler's have gotten creative. Knowing communication was key, they sat down and put everything on the table. They set the example of what people ought to do, and they communicated, planned, and sacrificed. These are the steps to solving the childcare crisis.

To the younger couples out there wanting to start families, think about what level of education you wish to pursue, what career you desire, what companies offer onsite childcare and if they don't, map out the

childcare facilities close to your home and near your workplace.


Consider living frugally, to save up for the rising costs of childcare, or live near or with family, especially if considering a career in the medical or manufacturing industries.

## RED ROOSTER

Companies who don't offer onsite childcare, perhaps could take some notes from Red Rooster Coffee in Floyd, Virginia (see our profile in this edition). As their family and their employee's families grew, they created the "Yellow Hen," an onsite, Montessori-like childcare program which cost employees two dollars per hour per child. The cost for childcare comes out of employees' wages pre-tax and there's another bonus. Just imagine as a dad, getting to sit down and eat lunch with your best little buddy every day, or as a mother, nursing your infant throughout the day in a special nursing room and then returning to work. Happier, less stressed employees can contribute more to the success of a company.

Might we consider bartering for childcare?

Can companies continue to offer more remote positions? And what about the childcare facilities? How can they find quality candidates, offer a living wage plus incentives, reduce their overhead, and lower enrollment fees so childcare can become more accessible? Really, it's quite simple. Work out logistics and partner with local companies to create more onsite solutions like that offered by Red Rooster Coffee. They are exemplary.

There are so many questions, and really, we're almost out of time to find the answers as the cost of living and employee absenteeism due to lack of childcare are ever increasing. Childcare stories must be told so we can better understand the problems and seek out solutions. Perhaps our country's leaders ought to take a second look at that Comprehensive Child Development Act that Nixon vetoed or reinstitute the Lanham Act of 1940 (obviously with some modifications). If K-12 public schools are state, locally, and federally funded, perhaps the simplest solution is that childcare should be, too. Women especially deserve the right to have children AND to achieve professional success if they so choose. These things are not mutually exclusive. Above all, the education, safety, and nurturing of our country's youth is uncompromisable. It is time to put this crisis to bed. 

## REGS FOR LICENSED OPERATORS

In October, the Virginia Board of Education adopted its newest standard for licensed childcare centers to "enhance safety." Some of the specifics include:

- superintendent alert on lost or missing child
- screen time
- soap (removed the "only liquid soap" requirement)
- have epinephrine on hand
- water testing (for lead)
- dietary restrictions on record
- climbing equipment height restrictions

The "Standards for Licensed Child Day Centers," was developed to make the state and federal laws more understandable, according to VA DOE. In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly transferred oversight of early childhood care and education programs from the Board of Social Services to the Virginia Board of Education.

“

If public schools are funded... perhaps childcare should be, too.



All photos: Tom Field

“

The response has been overwhelmingly positive.



# If A Small Coffee Shop Can Do It...

By Tom Field

Okay, it's a little bit more than a little café—Red Rooster in Floyd is a substantial coffee business and one with quite the popular following—but still... who would think of a small business like this coming up with a solution for employees who need quality, affordable, and accessible childcare?

It happened—as coffee connoisseurs are fond of saying—organically.

Co-owner, co-founder Haden Polseno-Hensley explains:

"The catalyst was simple," Polseno-Hensley says. "We had a two-year-old child, and my wife wanted to come back to work. We started a small babysitting collective, which we were paying for out of pocket, where my wife's sister took care of our kid, her kids, a

friend's kid, and another employee's child. When two more staff got pregnant and said they wanted to keep their careers on track, we realized we needed a better solution."

Red Rooster was established in 2010 in downtown Floyd, VA (population 432). Polseno-Hensley says the business started with "the simple notion of roasting excellent coffee" and it wasn't long before word of Red Rooster's quality spread around Virginia and up and down the East Coast.

"Today, we employ nearly 50 people while roasting some of the best coffee in the world."


The company has won numerous awards, and it has garnered attention as one with a mission of making a positive social impact.

One big, most notable impact is the childcare provision.

Yellow Hen (in-house childcare center) began in 2018. During the summer, Polseno-Hensley says they juggle schedules to allow 24 kids (during the school year, it's closer to 12–16). The business charges a nominal two-dollars per hour per child—and yes, there is a waiting list.

"The response from our staff has been overwhelmingly positive. There have been hurdles along the way; but parents are thrilled to be able to be so close to their child during working hours. About sixty-five percent of our staff has had a child in Yellow Hen at one point or another."

Haden Polseno-Hensley is married to his business partner, Rose McCutchan, for 14 years; and they have two children, ages 9 and 6.

The need for childcare solutions in the US today is "urgent," Polseno-Hensley says. "Even if you aren't starting your own in-house facility, it's worth investigating solutions to make it easier for your employees to afford and obtain childcare." 



Red Rooster's Haden Polseno-Hensley in the Yellow Hen with little friends, Birdie and Simon.

““”

The Red Rooster Coffee employee on-site childcare program received a lot of attention this year. Its story was published in the Wall Street Journal and its model was included in the National Child Care Innovation Summit.



Shawn Nowlin photos

# A PLACE FOR CATS

*Kitty City Cat Cafe is the Purrrfect feline community hub in downtown Roanoke*

By Shawn Nowlin

**Kitty City Cat Cafe gives felines lovable opportunities, provides community opportunities.**

When LS Ackerman, her husband Peter and their two children – Lilly and Luc - collectively decided it was time to leave their home in north Georgia to start a new chapter in a different city last year, all agreed that wherever they relocated to needed to have a few things. At the very top of that list was an inclusive, diverse environment with plenty of opportunities.

Fast forward to today and Ackerman, with assistance from her family, owns Kitty City Cat Cafe on 601 Salem Avenue in downtown Roanoke. Located in the Blue Ridge Indie Market, with approximately 2,000 square

feet, the business offers a little something for everyone. In addition to a book themed tearoom, there is a photography studio, a punk shop and artisan space for creatives to rent out too.

"We had our official punk shop grand opening on November 23. We like to describe our space as 'weird, eclectic and wacky art.' We offer a mix of our personalities. I got more of a paranormal vibe, while he is more into the punk rock stuff," Josh Sterno and Samantha Barton said.

They added, "We have been together for five





years. We met in Savannah, Georgia, and moved to Roanoke after we had our second child. I met LS first and introduced her to Sam. She has been great to partner with."

While Ackerman's main objective with Roanoke's first cat cafe is to provide a safe space for felines to socialize and improve their health, she is also passionate about making arts and crafts more accessible for

people. "I found the perfect building to do everything that I wanted. We have clothing and other things that people can take for free. You would think that it would be the people who are taking stuff who are the happiest, but I've found that it's those who donate. All our jewelry, candles and sculptures are made by local artists," she said.

In its first 100 days, Kitty City Cat Cafe helped





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100 felines find a new home. To commemorate the occasion in July, Ackerman invited the community to participate in a Cativersary Party. "We opened in May and since then, we have had close to 200 adoptions. A lot of people fall in love with a particular cat when they visit, and they end up taking them home. We are very busy on weekends, so we recommend that people make reservations on weekdays, especially in the morning," she said.

As much as Ackerman loves other animals, nothing compares to her affinity for cats. The main reason is that the first animal she ever owned was a cat. The beautiful feeling that comes from creating lifelong memories with one's cat is something that Ackerman wants others to experience. "I have had cats my entire life. As I child, I named my first one 'Good Kitty,'" she said.

Running a business can be emotionally and physically draining, especially if certain precautions aren't taken. Ackerman measures

success for Kitty City Cat Cafe by accomplishing one reasonable goal at a time. Those who work tirelessly to accomplish a goal often say that when they achieve it, it's a feeling they want to experience again. In Ackerman's case, she knows her business is well-positioned to have success, in part because of the individuals she surrounds herself with.

Sometimes being in the right place at the right time makes all the difference in the world. Since making Roanoke their home, Ackerman and her family have cultivated some strong connections and friendships. Explaining how helpful those around her have been, Ackerson said, "One cannot achieve great things solely by themselves. I am so fortunate to have so many selfless, hard-working people advocating for my success. I cherish every step throughout my life's journey because it led me to where I am today." For additional information, visit [kittycitycatcafe.com](http://kittycitycatcafe.com). 



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## LEAD BY EXAMPLE

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

**Executive Summary:**  
*It seems like everyone  
is offering an SEO  
service right now.*

# SEO that's not too good to be true

You probably get 10 emails a week with claims that for \$2,000 a company or individual can have you ranking at the top of search engines in just a month. Or you might get a phone call from a sales rep that claims your website isn't ranking and they can fix it right away. It all might sound a little too good to be true. Because it is.

Search engine optimization is a long game that takes time, strategy, and planning. There are no quick fixes and anyone who claims otherwise might as well be selling beach-front property in Oklahoma.

A client recently asked: *How do you know the difference between "real SEO" and someone who is making a false claim?* It starts with working with someone you know and trust. If you are new to thinking about an SEO strategy for your website, do some homework and talk to colleagues. Who do they use? What have the results looked like? Be aware of any big promises. A solid SEO strategy takes time.

Pay attention to the overall strategy and how it pertains to your business goals. Are SEO efforts generating traffic that helps you sell more or engage more effectively with your audience or is it just more traffic? (Website traffic isn't always a good thing.)

Don't panic with changes to algorithms or Google updates. Changes are happening all the time. If you are creating valuable content for real people, you will always come out ahead here.

Ask questions. Most reputable SEO agencies or providers will not make sweeping judgement about your site and send a random email. They'll work with you to understand your goals, conduct an audit, and then make recommendations.

Often when you get into conversations about ranking higher in search engines, you'll look at options for organic growth as well as paid advertising. You may choose to do one or the other or both.


Then they asked: *How do you know you have a solid SEO strategy in place?*

That answer is a lot easier. You can see the results. Your partner should be able to help you understand what keywords you are ranking for and if that traffic is converting. Are they filling out forms or buying items?

You can also feel it. SEO should not feel like magic; it is a strategic element of your overall marketing mix. It can help

you generate more leads, sell more products, and get more of the right people to your website.

A reputable partner will work with you to develop a long-term strategy that supports your business goals. They'll help you plan the right mix of organic search engine optimization and may recommend some paid search engine advertising support as well.

While there's no quick fix, businesses that invest in a strong SEO strategy can reap the rewards for decades to come. 

“It starts with working with someone you know and trust.

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Submitted

Erin Vandelinde

# Supporting Families Through the Breastfeeding Journey

By Aila Boyd

**Putting experience to good use in starting a niche small business in Roanoke County**

Erin Vandelinde, an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant, founded The Breastfeeding Center of Roanoke in the Cave Spring area of southwest Roanoke County in 2023, to address the gap in specialized breastfeeding support for families in the Roanoke Valley. Originally

from Richmond, Vandelinde leveraged her personal breastfeeding experience and years of professional expertise to create a practice focused on individualized lactation care.

Vandelinde's journey into lactation consulting stemmed from her experience. "My personal

struggles with breastfeeding highlighted the critical need for professional guidance and support,” she said. These challenges motivated her to become a certified lactation consultant, allowing Vandelinde to offer evidence-based care tailored to each family’s breastfeeding goals.

Before opening The Breastfeeding Center of Roanoke, Vandelinde worked as the lactation lead at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery in Blacksburg, where she gained extensive experience in guiding new mothers through their breastfeeding journeys. This role helped her develop a deep understanding of the challenges that families face, which she now applies to her private practice.

The Breastfeeding Center of Roanoke distinguishes itself by providing client-centered, personalized support. Vandelinde begins by assessing each family’s specific circumstances and breastfeeding goals. “We take the time to understand where each family is coming from and what their specific goals are,” she explained. This individualized approach helps ensure that the care offered aligns with the unique needs of each family.

The center offers a wide range of services, catering to families at different stages of their breastfeeding journey. These services include prenatal classes to prepare expectant mothers for breastfeeding and postnatal consultations to address issues that may arise after birth. Additionally, Vandelinde provides ongoing support as the child grows. “Our goal is to provide continuous support and guidance, ensuring that families have the tools they need to succeed,” she noted.


One of the key features of Vandelinde’s practice is the flexibility of her service delivery. She offers in-office and virtual consultations to accommodate the diverse needs of her clients. For families who prefer more personalized care, she also provides home visits, which allow her to observe the family in their own environment and offer tailored recommendations. “Home visits allow me to see firsthand how a family interacts with their baby and identify any environmental factors that might be affecting breastfeeding,” Vandelinde said.

Since opening the center, demand for its services has steadily grown, reflecting the increasing recognition of the importance of professional breastfeeding support. Vandelinde has helped fill a gap in the region, where few providers offer the same level of specialized lactation care. Many of her clients express how difficult it was to find the help they needed before the center opened. Word-of-mouth referrals from satisfied clients have contributed significantly to the center’s success. “Building strong relationships with our clients is key to our success,” Vandelinde said. “When families feel supported and understood, they are more likely to recommend our services to others.”

Her reach extends beyond the Roanoke Valley, as Vandelinde serves clients in areas like Covington and the New River Valley. The availability of virtual consultations has further allowed her to assist families across southwest Virginia, ensuring that breastfeeding support is accessible to a wider audience.

Collaboration with local healthcare providers is another key aspect of Vandelinde’s approach. She works closely with pediatricians, midwives, and OB-GYNs to ensure that her clients receive coordinated and comprehensive care. “It’s crucial for healthcare providers to be aligned in their approach to a family’s health,” Vandelinde said. This collaboration helps integrate breastfeeding support seamlessly into a family’s overall healthcare plan.

Looking ahead, Vandelinde is exploring ways to expand her services to meet the growing demand for lactation support in the Roanoke area. “We are continuously evaluating how we can improve and expand our services to better meet the needs of our community.” One of the potential expansions includes creating groups for new mothers and breastfeeding parents, which would provide peer support and education. “These groups would offer a space for families to share experiences and receive guidance in a supportive environment,” Vandelinde added.

As The Breastfeeding Center of Roanoke continues to grow, Vandelinde said she remains committed to providing high-quality, personalized breastfeeding support to families across the region. 



## BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

**Executive Summary:**  
*Stay and exit interviews  
create a positive cultural  
environment.*

## Spreading joy and reflection: the gift of stay and exit interviews

This season is synonymous with joy, warmth, and a spirit of giving. It's a time when people come together to celebrate and show appreciation for one another. In the workplace, this holiday season presents a unique opportunity to extend that spirit of gratitude and reflection through meaningful **stay and exit interviews**. These conversations, often viewed as procedural, can be reimagined as gifts that reinforce connection and growth regardless of the time of year.

### Stay Interviews: A Present of Appreciation

Stay interviews provide a **proactive way to understand what makes employees feel fulfilled** and keeps them engaged in their roles. Businesses can elevate these interviews by incorporating a theme of gratitude and celebration. Rather than focusing solely on areas for improvement, take time to acknowledge employees' achievements and contributions over the past year. Use this time to make them feel valued for their dedication and reinforce the work aspects that bring them joy.

Start by asking questions such as, "What aspects of your work bring you the most joy?" or "What accomplishments this year are you most proud of?" This approach encourages honest dialogue and underscores the company's commitment to nurturing a supportive environment where employees feel cherished.

### Exit Interviews: Parting with Goodwill

Exit interviews can transform from final, transactional conversations into **moments of positive closure** that reflect the feeling of goodwill you seek. Even when employees choose to move on, expressing sincere appreciation for their contributions can leave a lasting impression and strengthen relationships. Begin these interviews with a gesture of thanks, such as, "We're grateful for the time you've spent with us and the impact you've made."

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# A CHRISTMAS POEM

*A Christmas poem for the business community in the spirit of Clement Clarke Moore. Merry Christmas and happy holidays all!*

'Twas the day of new hires, and all through the hall,  
The managers gathered, both seasoned and small.  
They'd studied their notes with a diligent care,  
In hopes that great talent soon would be there.

The candidates lined up, their resumes tight,  
They spoke of their skills and their visions so bright.  
With questions in hand, each leader explored,  
Searching for talents that perfectly scored.

"**Hire right**," said the mantra, "invest from the start,  
Look not just for skills, but a passionate heart."  
For a team is not built by just filling a seat,  
It's grown from the souls that make it complete.

The day turned to noon, and the choices were made,  
The contracts were signed, and the offers conveyed.  
And soon the new faces would join in the fray,  
With hopes high and dreams to brighten the day.

Now came the next task, the most sacred of all.  
**Engage these new voices**; don't let their drive fall.  
For in every heart lies a wish to be seen,  
To be valued, be heard, and not lost in the sheen.

Engagement was fostered with purpose and cheer,  
With growth moments steady and support always near.  
Leaders led both with their hearts and their minds,  
Inspiring the team towards goals they'd aligned.

"**Lead well**," said the whisper that echoed each night,  
"Be firm, but be kind, be a beacon of light."  
For the greatest of leaders are those who can weave,  
The threads of their teams into stories that breathe.

The workplace flourished with joy and with cheer,  
Employees felt valued, with no need for fear.  
Those once-new hires were now confident and strong.  
A team united, where all truly belong.

And as the day ended, a voice soft and low,  
Spoke the truth leaders always should know:  
"Hire right, engage people, and lead with your heart,  
And you'll build the **Best Job Ever!** —a true work of art."

In addition to typical feedback questions, infuse the conversation with questions such as, "What memories or experiences from your time here do you cherish the most?" and "How can we make this place more rewarding for future team members?" This shows departing employees that their feedback is valued and will create a better workplace for those who follow.

## Creating a Culture of Joy and Gratitude

When done with a spirit of joy and appreciation, **stay and exit interviews can help solidify a culture that employees genuinely want to be part of.** Encourage leaders and HR professionals to see these interviews as more than just routine—they are an opportunity to celebrate people and the unique value they bring. By doing so, organizations can spread a holiday spirit year-round, making employees feel that they are not just workers but integral members of a supportive and grateful organization.

**Create a more connected, engaged, and appreciated workforce.** If you want to integrate gratitude-focused practices or need assistance enhancing your stay and exit interview processes, reach out today! Let's work together to create a culture where your employees feel valued every day of the year. 📞



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Loretta Gibson



Deer Park Farm's Swede McBroom, Luke Volosin, and Shiloh Moates.

# Building 'shanti'

By Holly Brinja

**Deer Park Farm and Shanti produce craft, culinary, and creative vibe on 175-acres in—of course—Floyd.**

For many, the American dream in recent years has gone from a white picket fence in the suburbs to a secluded plot of land where they can homestead. For many Appalachian folks, this dream is not a revelation, and for Swede McBroom, it's a passion project where he employs locals and invites the public.

Fifteen years ago, faced with retirement from a 40-year career as a Master Furniture Maker, McBroom thought of the tranquil mountains where he'd helped open a Chinese medicine clinic years prior. He found three parcels a rock throw from what is now Springhouse Community School [springhouse.org]; inspired by his Buddhist practice, and the immediate sight of the property, he dubbed it Deer Park Farm.

"It was that or Turkey trot." He laughed.

He took three years to focus on the woodwork in his house and reservable ceremonial space, Shanti [ [www.shanticommunity.org](http://www.shanticommunity.org) ]. McBroom explains Shanti to mean "unity of life, peace." Upon their completion, he went another year before he hung up the chisels and put down the sandpaper for good.

With a fresh abundance of time, he decided to fence off where the main courtyard now resides and plowed the first rows himself. Mother nature provided, and soon, the first rendition of Papas' Kraut was going out to friends and family in Christmas baskets accompanied by other self-produced products.

When the tropical greenhouse went up, the upkeep required additional hands. The first employee came armed with culinary knowledge and a drive to produce. They spent the next five years cooking out of McBroom's home and selling Deer Park Farms, LLC products at local farmers markets until the first commercial kitchen finished construction in late 2021.

"This place has taken on a life of its own, and we're getting to a place where things are well defined—the right people are in the right place," he said.

These days, Dr Shilo Moates, PhD leads the farm, and Chef Luke Volosin the kitchen. Together, they utilize the evolving 175-acre property and the diverse backgrounds and knowledge of the nearly 15 local employees



to establish and maintain production quality.

The on-property store is open Monday through Friday, 10 am to 3 pm, and on weekends, by reservation. With over 18 products now certified to sell in public stores, you can find Deer Park's salsas, hot sauces, and more around Floyd, VA, at downtown legendary favorites the Country Store, the Republic of Floyd, and others.

The kitchen's latest fresh creation, ravioli composed of house-made pasta and delicate hand-crafted filling, has become a staple of Gerald's, an up-and-coming Italian restaurant in the heart of Floyd, Va.


Deer Park ravioli is also available at Pickle and Ash in Stewart and packaged frozen ravioli at local farmers markets in the surrounding New River Valley. The kitchen prepares to soar with local sustained products, much from self-production, and construction continues elsewhere on the farm.

Recently finished, a nine-foot live stream-fed well sits inside a stunning woodstove-fed sauna in the courtyard between the store and where the original garden still produces. This space invites up to 20 guests to the Scandinavian tradition of a cold immersion post-sweat when operating.

The newest work in progress, on track for 2025/2026 completion, sits on the hill past where McBroom homes his rescue horses. Omni Build is underway erecting a hundred-person outdoor event space

and a four-building retreat center. Two 10-person houses will have ample room for guests with separate bedrooms and private bathrooms. Five private ADA-outfitted suites will reside in the main building, where a mezzanine library will also overlook two classrooms, a commercial kitchen, and living and dining areas. Adjacent to the main building, the Hummingbird Cottage will provide retreat facilitators with private quarters overlooking the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains.

When probed for his five-year plan, McBroom hinted towards a focus on local artists and their work. Paintings, pottery, woodwork. All the things that bring tourists and locals out at the beginning of each June for the Floyd Artisan Trail. He hopes to give people a place to sit and ponder year-round to become submerged in the rich artistic history this region is known for.

And as for those working on the farm? "Well above the standard of living wages for all employees; I don't want a thing from it; I'm retired." 



## BUSINESS CENTS

By Daniel Colston

### Executive Summary:

*It's that time of year again. New Year's resolutions, financial goals, money-saving plans, and more all come into the spotlight.*

*Daniel Colston, CFP®, CEPA runs a tax and investing firm in Roanoke, Upward Financial Planning, specializing in helping business owners and retirees. He can be reached at [daniel@upwardfp.com](mailto:daniel@upwardfp.com).*

# Business owners: these new year financial planning tips will help you succeed

It can be difficult to know what kind of plans are best for your business - or how you can find the extra cash for those resolutions.<sup>1</sup> This article is all about how to create a successful financial plan for your business in the new year.

### Background: Why is new year financial planning important?

As a business owner, you know that cash flow is the lifeblood of your company. Yet, when it comes to financial planning, many business owners don't give themselves the time or attention they need to ensure their company's long-term success.

New year financial planning is important because it gives you a chance to take stock of where your business is at, where you want it to be, and thoughtfully plot a course to reach your dreams. It also allows you to set realistic goals and create a roadmap for how to achieve them.

Without a solid plan in place, it's all too easy to make impulsive decisions that can put your business at risk. By taking the time to plan ahead, you can avoid costly mistakes and set your company up for a prosperous future.

**Goal Setting: What are your goals for business?** As a business owner, it's important to have clear goals for your business. Without goals, it can be difficult to measure success and determine what steps need to be taken to achieve success.

There are a few different types of goals you may want to set for your business:

1. **Financial Goals:** What do you hope to achieve financially? This could be anything from increasing revenue by a certain percentage, to reducing expenses by a certain amount.
2. **Operational Goals:** What do you hope to achieve in terms of operations? This could include things like streamlining processes, increasing efficiency, or expanding into new markets.
3. **Strategic Goals:** What are your long-term goals for the business? This could involve things like growing the business, acquiring another company, or going public.
4. **Personal Goals:** What do you hope to achieve personally from owning and running a business? This could include things like gaining more knowledge and experience, building your network, or giving back to the community.

After a certain point, success is relative. Narrowing down how you define success and pursuing that vision with ruthless intentionality will take you far. No matter what type of goal

you're setting, there are a few key factors to keep in mind:

1. Make sure your goals are specific and measurable. For example, instead of setting a goal of "increasing sales," set a goal of "increasing sales by 10%." This way you'll be able to track your progress and know when you've achieved your goal.
2. Set realistic goals that challenge you but are still achievable.
3. Add a time-constraint to your goal.
4. Break your goals up into bite-sized portions. If a goal feels unattainable, you're less likely to work towards it and achieve it.

**Financial Planning: How can you optimize your budget, tax deductions, and more?** As a business owner, it's important to stay on top of your finances and make sure you're prepared for the year ahead. Here are some financial planning tips to help you get started:


1. Figure out your budget. Knowing how much money you have coming in and going out is crucial for staying on track financially. Make sure to track both your personal and business expenses so you can get a clear picture of where your money is going.
2. Stay organized. Keeping your financial records organized will make it easier to track your progress and spot any potential problems. Set up a system that works for you and make sure to keep everything in one place so you can find it when you need it.
3. Know your tax deductions. As a business owner, there are many tax deductions you may be eligible for. Make sure you know what they are so you can take advantage of them come tax time.
4. Have an emergency fund. Unexpected expenses can pop up at any time, so it's important to have some money set aside in case of an emergency. Having an emergency fund will help reduce stress if something unexpected comes up and give you peace of mind knowing you're prepared financially.

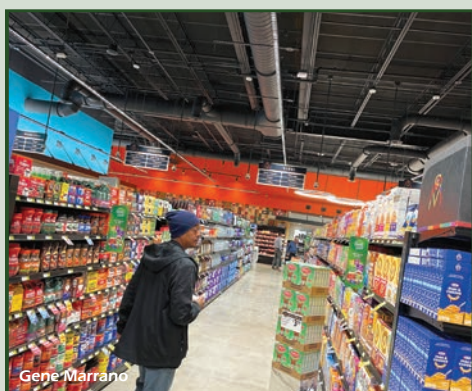
**Investing: How can you invest for success in your business?** When it comes to investing, there are a lot of different strategies and tips out there. But what really works? How can you invest for success in business? As a business owner, it's extremely likely that most of your income and wealth is tied up in your business. When business is great, this works for you, but what about when things don't go to plan? The skills to make money are vastly different than the ones to keep it. Beginning to diversify a portion of your assets and income streams away from your business will help you to preserve the wealth you've worked so hard to build.<sup>2</sup>

Here are some tips to help you get started:

1. Have a plan. Without a plan, it's easy to make impulsive decisions that may not be in your best interest. By having a clear investment plan, you can make sure that your money is working for you.
2. Diversify your portfolio. Don't put all of your eggs in one basket. By diversifying your investments, you can reduce risk and protect yourself from market volatility. It can be hard to diversify away from something that feels like a "sure thing," so we recommend doing so slowly and in steps.
3. Stay disciplined. It can be tempting to sell when the market is down or to buy when the market is up. But if you want to be successful, you need to stick to your plan and resist the urge to make emotional decisions.
4. Be patient. Good things come to those who wait. If you're patient and invest for the long term, you'll be more likely to achieve your financial goals.

**Conclusion:** As a business owner, it's important to think about your financial future. By taking some time to plan for the upcoming year, you can set yourself up for success both personally and professionally.

*If you read this article and are interested in learning more about the unique business owner opportunities available to optimize investments and reduce your tax bill, contact me via e-mail.* 



## Melrose Market makes its debut >

"It's about time," was a familiar comment as local residents waited for a ribbon cutting last month. The new **Market on Melrose**, the first full-service grocery store in northwest Roanoke in decades, has made its debut. Roanoke Mayor **Sherman Lea Sr.** received the key to Melrose Plaza, home to the grocery store, and was one of the speakers before they opened the doors: "[It] stands as a symbol of what we can accomplish together, a testament to the importance of a collective effort and community-driven solutions."

The 15,000 square foot Market on Melrose is located on the **Goodwill Industries of the Valleys** campus and is part of the Melrose Plaza redevelopment that will soon include a wellness center and a bank. **Richmond Vincent** is President and CEO for Goodwill Industries of the Valleys: "data doesn't lie. The data said this community needed a grocery store and it deserved a grocery store. That inspiration ... is why we are here today." Vincent said a project called the Northwest Food Access Initiative helped

convince Goodwill to move forward.

That winning data was assembled and crunched by a team at Roanoke College, led by Dr. **Liz Ackley**, director of the center for community health innovation at Roanoke College, who became emotional what talking about how number-crunching turned into a store we local northwest residents can find fresh produce, meats, pantry staples and everything else needed – without having to travel miles by car or bus to the near grocery store elsewhere. "I've had the privilege of working alongside northwest residents and diverse community partners, guiding more than six years of pre-development efforts that led Goodwill Industries of the Valleys to where we are today."

Roanoke College faculty and student researchers worked on that initiative, supplying data that supported the feasibility of building a full-service grocery store in what is called a "food desert," by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Goodwill Industries of the Valleys hopes the Market on Melrose can serve as a successful prototype for similar grocery stores in other food deserts over their wide service region.



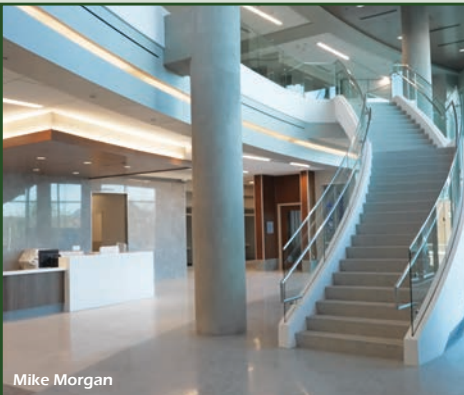
## Carilion's new tower closer to opening >

Construction continues on the **Carilion Clinic** Crystal Spring Tower. During a recent hard hat tour, Registered Nurse **Dan Freeman** said the new facility's helipad is improved over the original one for Lifeguard helicopters ferrying critical patients. "From a trauma perspective we've expanded from two trauma bays to five, one being pediatric specific – which is the only one in the region. We've been able to work on the design from the get-go, which will help with the team's ability to take care of patients."

Carilion will now have three helicopters and two helipads. Nursing Senior Director **Sarah Henshaw** also says the patient experience will be upgraded: "patients will have I pads at the bed side to get information about their tests sooner, to be able to order food and a lot more drug access for them [as needed]."



Sound barriers around nursing stations will also help lead to improved sleep for patients that are in the new Crystal Tower, named for the natural spring and city water source right next door. The Carilion Crystal Spring Tower, which will feature a second emergency room and a new access point for incoming ambulances, is expected to be completed in full sometime next summer.





## ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

### Executive Summary:

*Time of year when  
you think ho, ho, ho?  
Try ha, ha, ha.*

## LOL


Sometimes, we can be so serious in business; am I right? Professionalism rules. I get it. Silliness has little place in commerce when we're trying to deliver a service, make a product, earn a living. That's the primary purpose of business, after all. Fun and games are for after hours. The fact that we even have the phrase "after hours" is a testament that those aren't the real hours. Work comes first.

I rather disagree. We're fortunate to live in a time and a day and age where we can entertain fun and humor alongside our vocational pursuits. Laughing right along with our first priority responsibilities. If we're that lucky—to be able to smile (there have been times throughout history for various peoples where it was near impossible to have any levity)—I think we should embrace and take advantage of that environment.

When I first started this very publication, I injected metaphors and characters and quite a bit of non-business-like visuals on our FRONTcovers. I recall two individuals, specifically, who questioned that practice. Not everyone is going to appreciate such an approach; but we certainly got more positive comments and reaction to our unconventional presentation than anything else we did. We mix the visuals up more in our latest volumes (fewer metaphors and thematic characters, for sure); but I still love that lineup of creative direction from the early years.

As you move into the new year, I'd like you to consider the value of levity and humor. Here are a few things I do—YES, DURING WORKING HOURS—to keep the lighter side alive during my labor:

- My "Far Side Gallery" by Gary Larson tear-off daily comic calendar (a required staple in my office)
- New comedian hits on social media (once you hit one, you get regular feeds and meet new funny peeps)
- Read, Watch, Listen to Satire and Parody sites (like The Onion, Saturday Night Live, humor genre books, bloggers and podcasts)
- Work With or Gravitate Toward Funny People (and book or invite these people to your business functions)
- Prank people (the ones you care about; not strangers) (don't cross the line though; you're a jerk if you do that)
- Send a joke to a coworker, associate, vendor, client (I've been told NOT to do that; I do it anyway; but yeah, don't be crass)


This wasn't a very professional editorial.  
That's the point. 

## Roanoke Cement, Virginia Tech team up to help solve a storage problem

Virginia Tech and a local company that pumps millions of tons of carbon dioxide – a greenhouse gas - into the atmosphere every year are taking a next step. A nine million dollar grant from the US Department of Energy's Carbon Safe Program will help with research on carbon capture and underground storage says Ryan Pollyea, a professor of geosciences at Virginia Tech: "this is why we get oil and [natural] gas accumulations that we can pump out of the ground. We know the rocks can hold the fluids. Now we're looking for other places where the rocks can hold CO<sub>2</sub>, that maybe aren't full of oil and gas. We're looking up and down the Appalachians to see if these types of rocks have the potential for storing CO<sub>2</sub>. " In other words, it's not about building gigantic underground storage caves. "All of our research says its quite possible."

Virginia Tech has now partnered with the Roanoke Cement Company plant in Botetourt County - making concrete produces significant amounts of carbon dioxide says Pollyea. Roanoke Cement, a division of Titan America, has chipped in \$2.6 million towards the carbon storage project - if successful sequestration could remove and store enough CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent to taking 360,000 passenger cars off the road annually for the next 3 decades says Pollyea, who has been researching carbon sequestration for almost 20 years. In the next year or so it could get real: "when we talked to Roanoke Cement, they said they have that interest and are willing to let us use their site.

Fun facts: according to its website, Roanoke Cement Company states it is the only cement plant in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is ranked among the Environmental Protection Agency's "Top Performing Plants." Nearly all CO<sub>2</sub> produced by humans winds up in the atmosphere; it is long lived and in 2023 Climate.gov says the atmospheric global average measured in parts per million hit an all-time high. There are good uses for carbon dioxide – as a refrigerant, in fire extinguishers, for inflating life rafts and life jackets, blasting coal, foaming rubber and plastics, promoting the growth of plants in greenhouses, immobilizing animals before slaughter, and in carbonated beverages.

But says Ryan Pollyea, human activity produces too much as opposed for the demand for it. Storing CO<sub>2</sub> underground and accessing it when/if needed sounds like a better option than just pumping it in to the atmosphere at record levels. The Virginia Tech/Roanoke Cement joint project could help solve the riddle of that storage problem. 



## THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

**Executive Summary:**  
Storing Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) underground instead of venting it out into the atmosphere - carbon sequestration - has been a mostly theoretical exercise up to now.




## An econ review—and forecast

Dr. Alice Kassens provided what felt like a semester's worth of knowledge in one hour during The Economic Forecast Update at The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber Business Advocacy Breakfast. The content was enlightening, such as what comprises the GDP (consumption, investment, government, and trade) and surprisingly, what makes up most of the spending: us! (aka consumption) at about 70% of the total GDP. Dr. Kassens highlights we are a service-based economy but during the pandemic, we needed to pivot to goods based, which we were able to after a short while.

Next, Dr. Kassens tackled inflation. The ideal percent, which we are currently near, is about two percent. You may be thinking why have any percent of inflation at all? A negative inflation would actually push us into a recession, because during that time, individuals don't spend as much, because they are waiting for a deal due to the lowered prices from before. Given we make up most of the GDP, it's not good if we aren't spending.

The labor market came next. Again, there is an ideal rate of about 4-4.5%, which we are currently hitting. This rate is really the natural rate of unemployment, because not every job opening is a good fit for every individual without a job.

In addition to all these important, substantive subjects, Dr. Kassens managed to also discuss Trump's upcoming plans regarding tariffs, immigration, and tax cuts. What was highlighted here was the "seen and unseen" of tariffs. While the "seen" is taxing goods from other countries to promote purchasing those same goods from American based companies, the "unseen" is the possibly higher price for that good and less diversification of the spending within the country. Meaning, if more funds are needed to purchase the same good, then less funds will be used to purchase other goods to support other companies in America. The money is distributed differently with higher tariffs.

I could listen to Dr. Kassens all day. She's a dynamic speaker who conveys challenging topics in a way that makes you want to learn more; and she makes you think that maybe you can. 

## GUEST COMMENTARY

**By Kimberly Skellington**

**Executive Summary:**  
*Roanoke College's Alice Kassens addresses economic influences over breakfast by Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce.*

The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce Business Advocacy Breakfast: 2025 Economic Forecast on Nov. 13 with Dr. Alice Kassens of Roanoke College.



Kim Skellington

## Reducing Holiday Chaos with Converged Services

According to the American Psychological Association, 38% of people say their stress increases during the holidays. A survey by the American Heart Association found that the holidays are more stressful than taxes. Sources of turmoil include lack of time, juggling holiday gatherings and family activities, and the list goes on. There's already plenty of stress this time of year – why not simplify where you can?

Companies like Cox are trying to reverse some of the unintentional chaos that came with giving consumers too many choices. Think of it this way: the more convergence of services under one umbrella, the more your convenience increases. It's clear the prevalence of choice doesn't necessarily translate into an abundance of convenience.

With mobile phone plans that can yield significant savings compared to standalone mobile and data packages and the ability to integrate many of the most popular streaming services into one video plan, it's safe to say we've got your back when it comes to saving money and simplifying things. Now those rare moments of peace and tranquility can be spent with your loved ones rather than remembering another password.

This holiday season, focus on the things that matter the most and let Cox handle the multimedia and mobile so you can enjoy the time that is precious and the people that you love.



# The savings stack up.

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Tom Field

## Holiday in the vines >

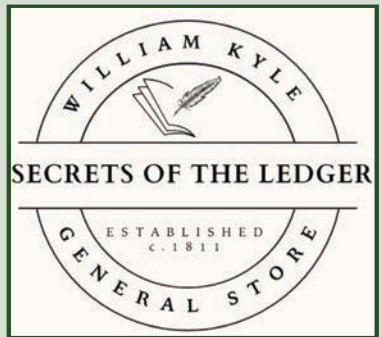
**Virginia Mountain Vineyards** held its Yuletide Market on Nov. 2 on an outstanding Fall day, featuring lots of folks enjoying craft and local goods for the holiday season, food trucks and music by Midnight Blue, and of course... wine.



Tom Field

## Explore and exchange >

**The Advancement Foundation** held its newest, upcoming **Gauntlet Business Competition and Program** exploratory meeting and networking session at the Vinton War Memorial on Oct. 30. The program announced the next season (2025) for entrepreneurs and startups, as well as enrollee benefits from alumnus **Jason Bishop** of Twin Creeks Brewing, a talk on AI applications by **Randy Lowman** of LakeTurn Automation, and challenges from TAF reps and director **Annette Patterson**. Two more exploration and exchange events were held in November in Clifton Forge and Wise. Valley Business FRONT was a sponsor.



## What did he write? >

Here's an interesting local museum exhibit that puts business in the mix. **Montgomery Museum of Art & History in Christiansburg** presents "Secrets of the Ledger" that takes you back to the 1820s to a ledger book meticulously written in William Kyle's intricate script. It reveals details about running the general store in Christiansburg, including notes on commerce and the town's residents, businesses, and daily life two centuries ago.



## From Kansas to campus >

**Sarah Smarsh**, author of *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth*, spoke at **Roanoke College** Henry H. Fowler Lecture Series on Nov. 12. Smarsh describes herself as a first-generation college graduate from a family farm in Kansas, and is a journalist, political commentator, writing professor, and award-winning author of a book on Dolly Parton and her newest book, *Bone of the Bone: Essays on America from a Daughter of the Working Class*. She addresses classism in American society and says she offers no solutions but points out the problems as a journalist and that public policy could do much better.



## Chamber tradition preserved >

The **Preserve at Crooked Run** retreat served as the venue for the **Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce** 2024 Annual Dinner and a "Golden Age of Botetourt" Hollywood theme on Nov. 14. **Scott Crawford** of Virginia 811 was the guest speaker, and Chamber president **Maiya Ashby** presented awards, which included: **Sarah's Petals** (small business); **Capps Home Building Center** (large business; **Allison Szuba** shown); **Brittany Turman Digital** (rising star); and **Good Samaritan Hospice** (nonprofit). County awards included: administrator **Gary Larrowe** (community impact) as well as four public safety personnel (law enforcement, Fire/EMS). Chamber awards included: **Sandra Craft** (president's award); **New Day Office** (vendor champion); **The Reserve at Daleville** (friend of the Chamber); and **Christina Taylor Koloda** (ambassador).



## One city beats four >

**Roanoke Rail Yard Dawgs** hockey team draws large crowds and fan base, even at early season, with nearly 6,000 at the Berglund Center on Game 8, Nov. 15. Goalie Austyn Roudebush saved 20-of-23 shots from Quad City Storm (Illinois/Iowa); while Roanoke's offense dominated a 6—3 win with goals by Nick Ford (2); Joe Widmar; Tommy Munichiello; Gustav Müller; and Mac Jansen.



## Getting in the Halloween spirit >

Nurses at **Carilion Clinic** who take care of newborns dressed up in Halloween costumes, but they didn't stop there – the babies were also decked out for the occasion in costumes of their own. They also delivered treats to patients at the hospital on Halloween. The festivities included: NICU Costumes: Staff, alongside the hospital's Family Advisory Board, assembled handmade costumes for infants in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Patients were dressed in various costumes, including a lamb, superhero, avocado, and gumball machine. Reverse Trick-or-Treating: Staff brought the trick-or-treating to patients admitted to **Carilion Children's Hospital**, dressing up in costumes and delivering goodies room-to-room.

"A hospital stay can be incredibly stressful for kids and their families," said Certified Child Life Specialist **Sarah Kress**. "This is an important opportunity for families to feel a sense of normalcy and joy as they celebrate the holiday together." Carilion Children's Hospital is the only pediatric hospital in the region.



## Elevator for local biz + npo >

**FreedomFirst Credit Union** held its "Elevate" summit on Nov. 7-8 at its corporate headquarters and training facility in downtown Roanoke, where about 60 attendees from small businesses and nonprofit organizations heard from a variety of experts, community leaders, panelists, and more on operational ideas and improvements to advance their missions. The summit featured FFCU moderators and addresses from **Paul Phillips**, **Shon Agüero**, **Alisha Childress**; and speakers / panelists **Walter Virgil, Jr** (Virgil & Associates); **Michelle Dahl** (Her Idea Collective); **Bonnie Chavez** (Building Beloved Communities); **Tommy Battle** (Financial Designs); **Jeff Roberston** (Greater Roanoke & NRV SBDC); **Shannon Watts** (Key Fundraising); **Jeff Barbour** (Brown Edwards); **Annette Patterson** (The Advancement Foundation); **Tony Pearman** (AccessU); **Sheri Winesett** (John Mattone Global); **Xavier Duckett** (Humble Hustle); **Alisha Meador** (City of Lynchburg); **Kevin Byrd** (NRV Regional Commission); **Pete Eshelman** (Roanoke Regional Partnership).



## DisruptUP revealed the future >

The “Disrupt Up” event hosted by the **Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council** and held at Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center Nov. 14–15, showcased the transformational power of AI across academic research, biomedical technology, robotics, and government policy. Experts talked about many different applications of AI including autonomous trucking (from **TORC** and **Virginia Tech**); AI Agents with the LangChain framework to fill in the gaps where traditional Large Language Models fail (e.g. asking a general LLM “What’s today?” gives bad results) presented by **Anna Gutowska** (from IBM); and practical AI applications in customer service, like fraud detection which humans are historically bad at (**Lee Adcock** from Capital One, **Todd Cube** from CarMax). **Michelle Maldonado** from the Virginia House of Delegates (who also founded the General Assembly’s Technology & Innovation Caucus) encourages us to embrace AI even when many jobs might be lost to AI, because many more will come with it. She encourages us to support policy that will help drive innovation, but in an ethical manner that doesn’t discriminate. Overall, “Disrupt Up” reaffirmed AI’s potential to shape a smarter, more ethical and secure future.



## Another standalone ER for LG >

LewisGale Hospital Montgomery held a ribbon cutting and open house for LewisGale Hospital Montgomery Christiansburg ER, the company’s newest freestanding emergency room located at 1145 West Main Street, Christiansburg. “Above all else, we are committed to the care and improvement of human life. Access to emergency services close to home is paramount to a thriving community,” said Lauren Dudley, LewisGale Hospital Montgomery, chief executive officer. “We are excited for patients to use this new \$14 million community resource and demonstrate our continued commitment to the New River Valley.”

The nearly 10,000-square-foot freestanding emergency room will be staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by more than 30 employees, including board-certified emergency room physicians and nurses. The new facility will provide the same services as an emergency room housed within a hospital. Christiansburg ER is the company’s third freestanding ER in southwest Virginia, joining Cave Spring ER and Blue Hills ER.



## JVG Grant >

**Alleghany Highlands Public Schools** has been awarded a Jobs for Virginia Graduates Incentive grant, commonly called a JVG grant. The grant will help Alleghany High School seniors work toward graduation and prepare for college or career opportunities.

**Seth Bradley**, work-based learning coordinator for AHPS, will coordinate the JVG program. Students in the program will participate in activities such as career planning and decision-

making, job seeking, and basic academics. Jobs for Virginia's Graduates is an extension of the grant-funded national Jobs for American Graduates program. JVG is a non-profit organization with four main goals: helping students graduate, helping them seek post-secondary education, helping them obtain a job, and getting them started on a solid career path. Since 1998, the organization has helped thousands of students succeed and graduate.

## Championship city announces more events >

**Salem** is set to host 7 NCAA National Championships between December 2024 and December 2025. "This will be an exciting time for all of us involved with these championships," said **Carey Harvey Cutter**, Salem's Tourism Director. "We have been hosting these marquee events for more than three decades and we know it takes a village to create a memorable championship experience for the student-athletes, the coaches, and fans."



The ODAC and the state-of-the-art Cregger Center at Roanoke College will begin host duties for this string of 7 national title events in 12 months this December when Women's D-III Volleyball returns to Salem for the first time in nearly 20 years. In 2005 and 2006 Salem and the ODAC hosted these contests at the Salem Civic Center. The NCAA championships bring thousands of visitors to the valley every year and are an economic boost for hotels, eateries and retail shops. The Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl Division III football title game returns in 2007.



## The Revive Center >

What used to be known as "TotalYou" on Starkey Road in southwest Roanoke County is now **The Revive Center**, a collective of six businesses offering various alternatives to a holistic health approach. Co-owner Dr. **Kirsten DeGonzague** focuses on chiropractic: "so maybe we're starting with red light therapy and if we get to a certain point and we hit a plateau, then we might say, lets try some chiropractic. The thing that's really nice about it is that there are so many options to let people holistically heal." Other options at the Revive Center – formally Revive Esthetics - focus on muscle therapy, esthetics and mental wellness. The Revive Center held an open house last month after several months of operation. **Donna Graham** is DeGonzague's business partner.



Gene Marrano

## Wali's World at Carilion Children's >

One of the more recent hires at **Carilion Children's Tanglewood** is a bit furry, likes to wag his tale and is very obedient. "Wali" is a facility dog - think service dog but for a whole building - and the black lab made his media debut last month. **Cabell Youell**, executive director for Roanoke-based **St Francis Service Dogs**, says Wali and those trained like him have proven to be effective "staff members," in other health care environments, which can be stressful - especially for younger patients, "where they are subject to doctors and all kinds of [procedures] and have lost their agency. To have a dog there where they can give a command, ask the dog to sit, to speak, gives them a modicum of control over a situation where they have none. That's really empowering."

St Francis handed off Wali after two years of training to Dr. **Tara Mitchell**, a clinical psychologist in pediatric behavioral health at Carilion Children's: "he helps motivate [child patients], encouraging them, its instant rapport. [Wali] will also model for them, like focusing, walking up steps - encouraging kids to walk that might be working on physical therapy."

Youell says facility dogs also have a positive impact on health care staff members - helping relieve job-related pressure and secondary trauma. And yes, Wali has his own Carilion employee badge and works 40 hours a week. Since 1996 St Francis Service Dogs has placed 178 service and facility dogs to assist people, the dogs are typically trained in more than 40 different skills.





## New Cancer Center breaks ground >

Carilion Clinic has broken ground on the new, 6-story, 257,000 -thousand square foot **Carilion Taubman Cancer Center**, which it hopes to have open by 2027. It would replace and upgrade a 41-year-old cancer facility on South Jefferson Street. Carilion CEO Emeritus **Nancy Howell Agee** - who in semi-retirement has agreed to stay on for another year to help with fundraising for the Carilion Taubman Cancer Center, spoke at the groundbreaking: "research is critical to cancer care. Today's clinical trials become tomorrow's therapy. We'll expand research and provide greater access to groundbreaking clinical trials for patients through collaborations with many of the oncology groups across nation, as well as Blue Ridge Cancer Care and the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC." **Steve Arner** succeeded Agee as President and CEO at the beginning of October

Carilion Clinic has raised \$74 million towards the \$100 million dollar goal for the new cancer center on the Virginia Tech-Carilion Riverside campus. It will be named for **Nicholas and Jenny Taubman**, who contributed 25 million towards the project. Several people told their cancer survival stories at yesterday's groundbreaking, vouching for the care and treatment they received recently at Carilion - including **Mike Goforth** - Virginia Tech's Associate Athletics Director for Sports Medicine - who was diagnosed and treated successfully for a brain tumor last year: "I've been around some great teams led by some great leaders, but I've never experienced such a great team as I did when I was in the Carilion System. This project becoming a reality, you're saving lives. This is a [new] building, but it's more than that, it's changing the lives of people in southwest Virginia." Under the 6-story structure will be a parking garage.



Tom Field



## New HQ event stresses local ties >

Ridge View Bank held a ribbon-cutting for its new 16,000-sq-ft, \$20 million headquarters building (Franklin Rd, Roanoke) on Nov. 12 to a large gathering. In addition to appreciating her 30 employees, board of directors, and parent bank CNB, president **Carrie McConnell** cited the Bank's commitment to local business, including those that helped with RVB's growth and new HQ: **Bruce Bryan** and **5 Points Creative** (ad agency); **Balzer & Associates** (architect); and **G&H Contracting** (builder). Further demonstrating local support, RVB presented checks to local charities Chris's Coffee & Custard and LEAP (Local Environmental Agriculture Project). McConnell – the face of Ridge View even before it opened its first branches in Salem and at Smith Mountain Lake – says the bank's client base helped get to this moment. "The fact that you guys took a chance on us really almost before we had a bank name – we had a staff of many people [come aboard] – we're just super, super thankful. I've been fortunate enough to have front row seats for that." She also said the bank plans to expand into four states, but Roanoke will always serve as home base.

*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**



**Brandon**

**Dr. Robert Brandon** has been appointed the seventh president of New River Community College, effective Jan. 1, 2025. Since 2018, he served as vice president of Academic and Student Services at Southwest Virginia Community College in Richlands, VA; dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education at Cleveland State Community College in Cleveland, TN; and associate professor of English at Rockingham Community College in Wentworth, NC, where he also chaired both the English and Student Success departments.

The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine has named



**Murchison**

**Amanda Murchison**, an experienced obstetrician-gynecologist and educator, its new associate dean for student affairs. Murchison came to Roanoke in 2007 to take an OB-GYN position with Carilion Clinic and became a founding faculty member of the medical school. She served as the school's first OB-GYN clerkship director.



**Austin**

**Ela Austin** is the first associate dean for public health programs in the Virginia-Maryland

College of Veterinary Medicine, coming to Virginia Tech after serving as associate dean, professor, and senior scientist in the School of Public Health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.



**Staples**

Mike Staples has been named assistant vice president for housing, dining, and facilities within Student Affairs at Virginia Tech. Staples leads a team managing housing, dining, and divisional facilities that includes nine dining centers and nearly 50 dining concepts and Virginia Tech-operated franchises. Additionally, his team is responsible for the operation and maintenance of 48 residence halls, accommodating approximately 10,500 students. Before joining Virginia Tech, Staples dedicated over 29 years to the U.S. Air Force as a civil engineering officer, achieving the rank of colonel. His global career involved managing extensive and intricate portfolios, including the maintenance of



**Folkart**

**Jessica Folkart**, a professor of Spanish, was named the new chair of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures this summer. She joined Virginia Tech in 1998. After Folkart earned her bachelor's degree from William & Mary, she received her master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Kansas. Folkart has won numerous teaching awards and is a member of the Academy of Teaching Excellence at Virginia Tech.



installation infrastructure, community and employee support programs, and emergency services.



**Cano**

**Alberto Cano** has been named associate vice president for research computing at Virginia Tech. Cano will lead the Advanced Research Computing unit within the Division of Information Technology, providing centralized research computing infrastructure and support for the Virginia Tech research community, offering high-performance computational systems, large-scale data storage, visualization tools, and consulting services. He previously worked at VCU in research computing services where he secured significant funding. Cano earned

his Ph.D. in computer science from the University of Granada, Spain, and also holds a master's degree in intelligent systems from the University of Cordoba, a master's degree in soft computing and intelligent systems from the University of Granada, and a double bachelor's degree in computer science and computer engineering from the University of Cordoba.



**Watson**

**Anthony Watson** has been named assistant vice president for

facilities operations, one of four business lines within Virginia Tech's Division of Facilities. He has worked for Virginia Tech since 1989 as a carpenter, superintendent of the carpentry shop, superintendent of building trades, director of buildings and grounds, director of facilities operations and deputy to the assistant vice president, and interim assistant vice president for facilities operations. Leading a team of approximately 300 people, Watson will be responsible for the building and grounds on campus to keep the campus safe and fully operational.

**Dr. Robert Sandel**, president of Virginia Western Community



**Sandel**

College, received the Virginia Community College System Expanding Opportunities Award, recognizing him for going the extra mile to promote student success and equitable access in VCCS workforce and career training programs. The award is the highest honor by the Hire Education Conference and was presented at Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center on Oct. 24.

## 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.

## FOCUS ON MOMENTS THAT MATTER.



# Bank of Botetourt



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WELLNESS  
FRONT



Tugman

**Richard Tugman** has been selected president and CEO of Lynchburg-based Centra health system, after serving as interim CEO since March (and serving as interim CEO previously in 2021). Tugman was the CEO of Piedmont Community Health Plan, a subsidiary of Centra Health, from 2016 to 2021.

TECH/INDUSTRY  
FRONT

**Larry Vicari** has been appointed president of MELD PrintWorks, a spin-off of MELD Manufacturing Corporation. The company does 3D printing of large metal components. Vicari's background includes vice president of



Vicari

operations at Luna Innovations and more than 30 years in operations, engineering, and strategic leadership. He directly managed operations for four North American locations—in Blacksburg; Atlanta; Chino and Santa Clara, California—overseeing more than 200 employees. He helped secure a \$6.2 million deal with Lockheed Martin and a multi-million-dollar order from Northrop Grumman; led the sale and implementation of two advanced sensor technologies into electric vehicles (EVs) for the world's largest EV manufacturer; and worked with the Department of Defense. Vicari has a bachelor's degree in business management from Coastal Carolina

University and a Lean Six Sigma (LSS) certification from Purdue University.

**Tony Chivari** has been named chief marketing officer for Bassett Furniture. Chivari's experience includes marketing positions with 1-800-Flowers.com; Gem Shopping Network; Things Remembered; and CEO of Whimsical Gifts. Chivari will lead Bassett Furniture's brand strategy and media placements for the company's transactional and custom-designed products.

HOSPITALITY  
FRONT



Wells

**Brian Wells**, the general manager at The Hotel Roanoke &

Conference Center was awarded the "General Manager of the Year" by the American Hotel and Lodging Association.



Spadoni

**Mark Spadoni**, managing director of The Omni Homestead Resort was awarded the "General Manager Lifetime Achievement Award" by the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

SENIOR LIVING  
FRONT



Dixon

**Tandra Dixon** has been promoted to the

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position of Vice President of Philanthropy and Strategic Growth at Warm Hearth Village. Dixon will work to integrate philanthropic efforts of the Warm Hearth Foundation into strategic plans for growth that include advocacy, innovation and expansion of programs and services for seniors as well as infrastructure needs

for the senior living community now celebrating its 50th anniversary. An employee at Warm Hearth for nearly 25 years, Dixon was formerly the Director of Marketing & Philanthropy and responsible for Village Center operations. She holds an undergraduate degree in marketing from Mary Baldwin

College, an M.B.A. from Virginia Tech and an M.S. in Psychology in Nonprofit Management and Leadership from Walden University.

## MUNICIPAL FRONT

US Congressman **Ben Cline** (R-VA 6th District) received the 2024 Hero of Main

Street Award from the National Retail Federation.

Delegate **Sam Rasoul** (D-Roanoke) was recognized as one of the state legislator recipients for the 2024 Free Enterprise Award by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.*

““ Since opening the center, demand has steadily grown. — Page 25



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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.

**Daniel Colston**, CFP®, CEPA runs a tax and investing firm in Roanoke, Upward Financial Planning, specializing in helping business owners and retirees. [daniel@upwardfp.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

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

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

**Jennifer Leake** is a seasoned Certified Management Consultant (CMC®) with over 30 years of business and consulting experience. She is a certified trusted advisor in the areas of employee assessments, engagement, and emotional intelligence. She offers ideas and best practices to help you hire the right people, engage employees, and lead effectively to enhance workplace performance and drive overall business success. [Jennifer@AssessmentPros.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]

**Jeff Merritt** is vice president of Roanoke operations for Cox in Virginia. He is responsible for leading employees and the day-to-day operations across the Roanoke market. He holds leadership roles in a variety of organizations including Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Virginia, Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, and Virginia Cable Telecommunications Association. He resides in Roanoke with his wife and two children.

**Mary Ann L. Miller** is vice president of business banking and community relations at Bank of Botetourt. A graduate of Bridgewater College, she has been in the banking industry for more than fifteen years and currently serves on the board and executive committee as past-president with the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce, a board member with the Daleville Institute, and is vice chair of the board of with the Botetourt Family YMCA. A native of Botetourt County, she resides in

Daleville with her husband and two children.

**Shawn Nowlin** is an award-winning writer, photographer and content creator. In addition to the Roanoke Tribune, his byline has also appeared in ColorsVA Magazine and the Salem Times Register, among other publications. Born and raised in Roanoke, Virginia, Shawn is a proud product of the Star City. [shawnnowlin1989@aol.com]

**Carrie Poff** is the owner and CEO of Brown Hound Tree Service. She is also a mother of two slightly feral children, a part-time artist, and a small business advocate. [cp.brownhoundtreeservice@gmail.com]

**Kim Skellington** is a genetic counselor, former adjunct professor, and founder of modernreproduction.org. She was recently appointed as business development and account executive for the new Around SALEM magazine (2025) and will also serve as AE for Valley Business FRONT. She lives in Salem.

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

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

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*Southside charged*

**Microporous** (Tennessee HQ plant near Bristol shown) is now moving ahead with its \$1.3 billion lithium-ion battery manufacturing plant in Pittsylvania County at Berry Hill industrial site. This project is expected to create over 2,000 jobs and two 500,000-sq-ft plants for its first phase. China is currently the leading supplier of lithium-ion batteries by far; and Microporous also owns a plant in Austria--positioning the company to capitalize on electric vehicle and other markets.

*Building up the trades*

**Virginia Community College System** held its first Skilled Trades Summit in October at Hotel Roanoke Conference Center to address the Commonwealth's skills gap and how the 23 community college's can help. Industry leaders participating in the Summit included Southern Air, Heavy Construction Contractors Association, Altec, and educational and government officials from VCCS and Virginia Workforce Development.

*Roanoke's new artsy 'hood funding*

**Artspace**—a mixed-use residential and commercial community designed for artists and craftspeople (at the new **Riverdale** development in southeast Roanoke City at the foot of Mill Mountain)—is receiving \$150,000 from Roanoke

Economic Development Authority. This is to initially comply with the \$300,000 pre-development costs Artspace seeks by January 2025 for the project that is estimated to cost \$20 million. The massive “city within a city” project is a collaboration between developers (including principal Ed Walker); Roanoke City; and Minnesota-based Artspace (currently operating about 60 existing developments in the US; and about 10 more under construction).

*All about that bagel*

After a long wait and unexpected delays, the popular Botetourt (Daleville) **Donnie D's Bagels & Deli** has opened its new location (20 miles apart) in Roanoke on Brandon Ave. Donny D's offers fresh bagels in a variety of types and bagel sandwiches featuring Boar's Head meats. It took more than a year of permitting and construction to make the second store a reality. Owner Donny DeGeorgus says it's a family affair: “my wife and I, my brother, my three sons that work here, my daughter on the weekends.”

*Steering the NRV*

**Partnership for Progress: Shaping a Shared Future**—an initiative to tackle challenges and seize opportunities in the New River Valley—has been established and involves a collaboration with

leaders from Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery County, New River Valley Regional Commission, and Virginia Tech, as well as representatives from the business community, nonprofit organizations, and education. Goals include addressing housing, jobs, and education; supporting new and existing business, and improving the general quality of life in the NRV.

*Stars and checkers*

**Primland** resort in Meadows of Dan was listed as the Virginia selection for “Most Unique Hotel in Every State” by Thrillist.com, citing its silo-converted observatory and nearby Audi race car driving experience at the Virginia International Speedway.

*New magazine for SALEM*

**Berryfield**—publisher of *Valley Business FRONT* and **Botetourt Living** magazine—has announced a new magazine for Salem and Roanoke County, called *Around SALEM*. It is expected to release at the first of the new year 2025. Details at [www.aroundSALEM.org](http://www.aroundSALEM.org)

*Hooah, RC*

**Roanoke College** will have an ROTC unit (Army Reserve Officer's Training) beginning in the new 2025 academic year. It will be part of the New River Valley Battalion of cadets and was

announced on Veteran's Day 2024.

*Sequestering our CO2*

**Virginia Tech** has been selected by the US DOE Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management to lead a \$11.6 million feasibility research study for developing “Project CARDINAL”—a regional carbon dioxide storage complex in the Roanoke Valley. The funding consists of a \$9 million DOE grant and \$2.6 million from **Roanoke Cement** in Botetourt County.

*Plaza checked*

**Member One** (Virginia Credit Union division) contributed \$150,000 to the new **Melrose Plaza** complex (79,000-sq-ft community hub, grocery store, adult high school, financial services and banking center, health and wellness center) under development by **Goodwill Industries of the Valleys**.

*Keep on truckin' safer*

**Virginia Tech Transportation Institute** received nearly \$1 million (from two grants) from the US DOT Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to develop and enhance tractor-trailer educational programs.

*Percolating businesses*

A number of coffee shops has opened within weeks of each other in Roanoke, including **Take**

**A Second** (downtown Roanoke); **Aromas On Oak** (Oak St); **Second Café** (Marshall Ave); **Asher's Coffee** (5th St); **Albemarle House** (Albemarle Ave); **Our Daily Bread** (5th location, on S. Jefferson).

**Creative Occasions; Fit Studio VA; Fleet Feet; Roanoke Keltech; Magnets USA; Optical Cable Corporation; Pok-e-Joe's BBQ; Ride Source; RND Coffee; Beltone; Varsity Landscaping & Grounds; William H. Moore Dentistry.**

*Women grant NPOs*

**Roanoke Women's Foundation** has awarded its 2024 grants to: **DePaul Community Resources** (\$32,400); **Huddle Up Moms** (\$100,000); **LEAP for Local Food** (\$65,000); **Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley** (\$55,617); **Restoration Housing** (\$94,000); **West End Center** (\$65,000).

*BEAP beep, here's money*

The following thirteen businesses in Roanoke County received allotments from a \$115,000 grant by the Economic Development Authority Business Equipment Acquisition Program for 2025: **Children's Castle Early Learning Center;**

*New Peaks operator*

**Peaks of Otter Lodge** on the Blue Ridge Parkway will get a new operator for its visitor services (lodging, food services, retail outlet, shuttle bus) in early 2025. A subsidiary of **ExplorUS** will take over the operations from DNC Parks & Resorts to manage the attraction, which includes the three-building, 63-room lodge, restaurant, lounge, gift shop, nearby Country Store, and Sharp Top store.

*Ten printed homes*

**Virginia Housing** (virginiahousing.com) awarded a \$1.1 million Community Innovation Demonstration grant to the **Virginia Center for**

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**Housing Research at Virginia Tech** for purchasing an advanced, mobile 3D construction printer for "printing 10 affordable homes across Virginia by 2026." The projects will involve VT faculty, staff, and students (Myers-Lawson School of Construction, School of Architecture and Design, Dept of Civil and Environmental Engineering). Site selections have not been identified at this time. A major objective of the collaboration is to provide affordable housing solutions.

*BIL applied*

Virginia has received over \$10.5 billion over the past three years from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) that was applied to "over 350 specific projects" according to a recent

statement from Senator Tim Kaine. In our region, those include the new Microporous manufacturing complex (Pittsylvania County); Dublin Industrial Park cleanup (Montgomery County); rail service expansion (Bedford); and broadband expansion (Southwest VA counties).

*Workforce Housing*

Governor Glenn Youngkin has announced the **Workforce Housing Investment Program**, a new initiative at Virginia Housing that will invest \$75 million over five years with the potential to catalyze \$750 million and build 5,000 units of workforce housing in conjunction with economic development projects in the Commonwealth. Executive Order 42

## Notable Transactions

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- **Sheetz** fuel and convenience store secured 3.57-acre site for development at Rte 460 / Laymantown Rd in Botetourt for \$787,500
- **147-Lot development in Hollins** (Sanderson Dr) for single family and townhouses was approved by Roanoke County
- **23,000-sq-ft FritoLay** facility in NW Roanoke sold and leased-back to **Star City Realty** for \$2.1 million

- **Apricot Lane** leased 1,600-sq-ft space at University Crossroads in Blacksburg
- **Ivy Rehab** expanded and leased 1,600-sq-ft space at Huntin Hills Shopping Ctr in Roanoke
- **540 Social**—new entertainment venue with restaurant, arcade, mini golf, bowling, pickleball—planned for 2025 groundbreaking on Challenger Ave in Bonsack area of Roanoke County

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

formally ties economic development to workforce housing supply by enhancing the alignment between economic development announcements and housing availability in the Commonwealth. Under the program, Virginia Housing will provide loans, loan subsidies, and grants up to \$3 million to localities and nonprofits to develop housing for workers earning 80-120 percent of area median income, or up to 150 percent in rural areas. To be eligible for investment, a locality must be within a 30-minute drive of a business adding new jobs: 100 for a non-distressed locality, 50 for a distressed locality, and 25 for a double-distressed locality.

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## *Youngkin appointments*

Board of Social Work: Joan R. Landolt of Roanoke, Licensed Clinical Social Worker; Student Advisory Board: Landrie Bell of Roanoke, student; Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Commission: Margie Shaver of Roanoke, retired marketing executive; Board of Conservation and Recreation: John "Jay" Inge of Roanoke, retired financial advisor.

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## *Outdoor assets relief from Hurricane Helene*

Governor Glenn Youngkin has recommended \$1.3 million in funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to support the Hurricane Helene Outdoor Recreation Recovery

Planning Project in Virginia's Appalachian region. The initiative aims to assess the damage caused by Hurricane Helene to vital outdoor recreation assets, develop detailed cost estimates, and create a strategic plan for rebuilding critical infrastructure. The impacts of Hurricane Helene on Southwest Virginia's outdoor recreation assets include damage to the Virginia Creeper Trail, the New River Trail, Claytor Lake, storm-related debris buildup, bank erosion, and damage to boat ramps along the Clinch and New Rivers. Many recreational areas are also dealing with downed trees, washed-out trails, and hazardous conditions, creating significant challenges for restoration efforts and safe public access. This project will target 17 counties and four independent cities in Virginia's ARC region that were included in the Governor's Virginia Disaster Declaration following Hurricane Helene. The project, led by Friends of Southwest Virginia, is designed to support a timely and effective recovery, restoring safe access to trails, parks, and other outdoor resources that drive tourism and economic growth in the region.

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## *Helene disaster relief*

The Virginia Small Business Finance Authority in partnership with the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission will offer disaster loans to farmers

and agricultural and forestry small businesses located in counties affected by Hurricane Helene in Southwest Virginia. The

## **Agricultural Disaster Microloan Program**

will provide financial assistance to Virginia small businesses impacted by Hurricane Helene. The program offers loans of up to \$50,000 to help farmers and owners of agricultural and forestry businesses recover from the storm's effects, from revenue loss to the repair and replacement of damaged equipment. The loan fund of \$6 million will be available to any small business in the agriculture and forestry industries within the counties and cities of: Appomattox, Albemarle, Bedford, Bland, Botetourt, City of Bristol, Buchanan, Buckingham, Carroll, Charlotte, City of Covington, Craig, City of Danville, Dickenson, Floyd, City of Galax, Lee, Giles, Grayson, Greene, Madison, Montgomery, Nelson, City of Norton, Patrick, Pittsylvania, Pulaski, City of Radford, City of Roanoke, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe.

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## *RVARC agenda for General Assembly*

For only a second time, the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission has shared legislative priorities for the 2025 General Assembly session, representing what it calls "areas of critical investment needed to support infrastructure,

economic and community development, and education in the Commission's 11-member region." Highlights include a special focus on the Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport, Route 220, and career and technical education needs. Included is legislation for runway safety improvements and expansions at the Roanoke Blacksburg Regional Airport, innovative funding strategies for I-81 which will sustain investment beyond 2033 and account for inflation-related shortfalls, support for targeted capacity investments along the Route 220 corridor between Roanoke and the North Carolina border to support the growth of freight and commuter transportation, continuing investment in Amtrak service from Southwest Virginia to DC, and the feasibility of a Roanoke to Richmond Amtrak connection. Also: regional economic development investments focused on industrial site development and the reduction of regulatory burdens and economic development programs and incentives to expand affordable housing options for the region's workforce, and further investment to enhance and expand the region's growing bio-medical and life sciences research programs and related spin-off ecosystems.

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## *Salem wings*

**Wings, Etc. Grill and Pub** is opening in Salem at I-81 Exit 137 Wild-



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wood Road in the former Mexican restaurant barn-like building. This will be the first location in Virginia for the franchise that offers jumbo wings, a sports bar, and outdoor patio (live entertainment planned).

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*FCV grant for  
Ferrum Ag programs*

**Farm Credit of the Virginias (FCV)**, a lending cooperative that serves Virginia, West Virginia and western Maryland, announced the Association would award a total of \$9,970 in grant funding to Ferrum College through the Agricultural Career Enhancement (ACE) grant program. FCV's ACE grant program was launched in 2024 with the goal of supporting agricultural career development programs at postsecondary education institutions, including those in agricultural sciences, agricultural technology, agricultural education, agribusiness, conservation and more. The ACE grant program allows the Association to meet their mission to serve the agriculture industry by investing in the growth of agricultural education. The program offered up to \$10,000 grant opportunities for eligible institutions that serve the Association's 96-county territory and align with FCV's mission.

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*MOVA money*

U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture

(NIFA) has awarded **MOVA Technologies**, based out of Pulaski, a \$649,968 grant. The funding will support new research to address critical scientific challenges and opportunities in agriculture. The funding is made available through the USDA Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs. The goals of the project include reduction of indoor ammonia concentrations to improve animal performance and lowering environmental emissions to the atmosphere. MOVA Technologies features a team of engineers, scientists, business leaders and advisors to produce technologies related to advanced air emissions filtration.

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*Ridge View teams  
with Ed Walker*

**Ridge View Bank**, based in Roanoke, will support the revitalization of the Schoolfield District in Danville by providing financing for **The Laurels**, a new boutique hotel set to open on Main Street. The bank will provide the financing to renovate an existing historical building into a 36-room full-service boutique hotel, as well as bridge financing for the Historic Tax Credits associated with the renovation of the building. Roanoke-based developer Ed Walker called it, "a phenomenal hotel and this first project marks the beginning of an 18-month process that will transform and

preserve the historic Schoolfield Village buildings into the 21st century." Walker purchased the property in 2020, and The Laurels will be the third boutique hotel he has developed in Danville, following The Bee and The Holbrook. Strategically located adjacent to the Caesar's Casino, The Laurels is currently under construction and set to open later this year. Built in 1903, the Italian Renaissance Revival-style brick building housed the offices of textile mill executives and has been vacant since the textile mills were demolished. The Schoolfield Village has historical significance, as was once a thriving textile mill community.

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*Broadband expansion  
in the NRV*

**GigaBeam Networks**, a regional, locally owned and operated internet provider, has announced that broadband service is now live in two sections of the fiber construction project of the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) project in Montgomery County, delivering symmetrical upload and download speeds with advanced fiber internet technology to previously underserved areas. These areas are in the Shawsville area of the county. By the end of the year, GigaBeam anticipates that sections 3 through 10 in the VATI project, including portions of Alleghany Springs, Dark Run Rd, and George's Fork, will be serviceable. The progress has been

made possible through key partnerships with Appalachian Power Company, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the New River Valley Regional Commission (NRVRC), and Montgomery County.

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*Money for Bedford  
Amtrak station*

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has awarded the **Town of Bedford** a \$1,481,000 grant, to support the potential development of a new intercity passenger rail stop in Bedford. This project is supported with grant funds from DOT's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program. The station would be located along tracks owned by Norfolk Southern, with Amtrak also operating along the corridor. In August, Norfolk Southern reached an agreement with Virginia Passenger Raily Authority to extend Amtrak service to the New River Valley.

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*ARC grant aids recovery,  
job prospects*

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has awarded **Piedmont Regional Community Services** Board a \$500,000 grant. The funding will support expanded access to recovery services and increase employment opportunities. The ARC grant will help the Piedmont Regional Community Services

Board improve greater access to substance use disorder recovery services and enhance the job prospects of recovery-based applicants in the region.” Piedmont Community Services serves communities in Franklin, Henry and Patrick Counties, as well as the City of Martinsville.

## *Tartan Transfer*

**Radford University** has announced the launch of the Tartan Transfer program, a new initiative designed to streamline the transfer process for students from eight Virginia Community College System (VCCS) schools, including New River Community College (NRCC), Mountain Empire Community College (MECC), Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC), Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC), Southwest Virginia Community College (SWCC), Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC), Virginia Western Community College (VWCC), and Wytheville Community College (WCC). Radford and community college representatives signed the transfer agreement at a ceremony on November 6 on Radford’s campus. This program will create an accessible pathway for community college students seeking to continue their education and earn a bachelor’s degree at Radford. The univer-

sity is the only four-year public institution in the commonwealth that has partnered with this many community colleges to provide a seamless experience.

## *Tourism is big biz*

**Virginia Tourism Corporation** has announced that meetings and conventions in Virginia generated \$5.8 billion in direct spending in 2023, with \$2.1 billion contributed solely by visitors. Meetings and conventions visitors spent nearly \$6 million per day in Virginia last year. In 2023, 4.9 million people attended a meeting or convention in Virginia, with 2.5 million staying overnight, representing 6% of Virginia’s total overnight visitors. Operational spending drove about \$3.7 billion, or 64%, of direct impact from meetings and conventions, a comparatively larger share of the \$5.8 billion relative to traditional visitor spending. The remaining 36% of impacts were from traditional tourism spending by meetings and convention visitors. Meetings-related visitor spending grew by 14% from 2022, outpacing the total statewide visitor spending growth of 10%. Of the \$2.1 billion in meetings and conventions visitor spending, lodging captured the largest share of visitor dollars

at 42%, followed by food and beverage (30%), transportation (13%), retail (10%), and recreation (5%). Lodging and food and beverage spending saw the most year-over-year growth, each increasing by 15%, followed by recreation (14%), retail (12%), and transportation (9%). In 2023, Virginia’s meetings and conventions sector directly employed 56,703 Virginians, generating \$2.2 billion in income and driving \$335 million in state and local tax revenues. The direct impact of lodging and property taxes alone at \$157 million total in 2023 highlights the sector’s crucial role in generating revenue for local governments across the Commonwealth.

## *BRANCH recognized*

**Branch**, a full-service commercial construction firm headquartered in Roanoke, has been named an Accredited Quality Contractor by Associated Builders and Contractors. This is the third year that Branch has earned this prestigious credential for its commitment to corporate responsibility. Only 525 of the nation’s elite merit shop construction contractors earned the credential in 2023. Launched more than three decades ago, ABC’s AQC credential provides recognition to industry-leading construction firms that have documented their

commitment in Quality, Health and safety performance, Talent management, including inclusion, diversity, and merit, Craft and management education and Community relations.

## *Showtimers 75th*

Roanoke’s oldest community theater is celebrating its 75th season in 2025, with a lineup of timeless favorites and newer works not produced locally on a regular basis. Two plays are musicals - *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder*, and *Monster Songs* - just before Halloween of course. Victoria Ferris is the publicity chair for Showtimers Community Theatre in Roanoke: “we all do this out of a love of theater. Anybody who has ever had any interest in getting involved in theatre – its open to people at all experience levels.” Season tickets are on sale now for five shows on the Showtimers website; a one weekend only one-act play *Circle Mirror Transformation* in August is not part of that package - *Circle* is also a pay what you can show. The 2025 season ends with Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

*Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field*

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Downtown Roanoke

# Local Holiday Shopping

## Roanoke small retailers prepare for crucial season

By Aila Boyd

**As the holiday season approaches, small retailers in the Roanoke Valley are gearing up for what many consider the most critical period of their financial year.**



Courtesy of Amanda Livingston

At right - Salem-Roanoke County Chamber executive director Amanda Livingston

Local business leaders emphasize the significance of this holiday time for the region's economy and outline strategies to support small businesses against the growing challenges of e-commerce and big-box competition. Amanda Livingston, executive director of the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce, explained, "The holiday season is critical for small retailers since a significant portion of their annual income comes from holiday shopping." The fourth quarter can often determine a business's overall profitability for the year, Livingston added.

This sentiment was echoed by Izzy Post, director of marketing and communications at Downtown Roanoke Inc., when she described the season as "bread and butter" for small businesses. "The holidays are the peak time for sales, and many businesses rely on a full holiday season as part of their yearlong business plan financially," Post says.

For chocolatepaper, a local shop in Downtown Roanoke, the season's impact is equally significant. Owner Melissa Mays shared that a considerable portion of the shop's annual revenue comes from holiday sales. "The fourth quarter is always scary for retail," Mays admitted. "Will it happen again? Have we ordered the right merchandise? Have we done all we can to prep and promote?" But her optimism is reinforced by family wisdom and a proven track record. Her uncle, who started in retail in Roanoke in 1985, reassures her that "it will happen"—a prediction supported by increased holiday sales nearly every year since 2006.

However, the season brings its share of challenges. Both Livingston and Post point to the increasing competition from online shopping and big-box stores as major hurdles for local retailers. To combat this, local organizations are stepping up their support for small businesses.



Courtesy of Melissa Mays

Chocolatepaper

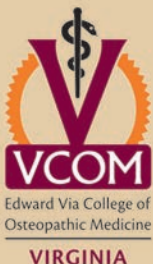
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Downtown Roanoke, Inc | Jennie Marie Photographie

## Downtown Roanoke

The Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce has partnered with Wheeler Media to host a 'Maximize Small Business Saturday' workshop. This free event offers local merchants insights on content creation, online presence optimization and targeted advertising strategies.

"Creating a community culture of 'Shop Small' is a major initiative of our Chamber and Economic Development in Salem and Roanoke County," Livingston noted.

Downtown Roanoke Inc. is taking a multi-faceted approach to support local businesses. Post outlines several initiatives, including the creation of a Holiday Gift Guide featuring downtown retailers, promotion of Small Business Saturday and encouragement for businesses to participate in the Dickens of a Christmas event, which takes place over three weekends in December.

Mays emphasizes the benefits of such partnerships and collaborations for her

store. Events like their chocolate and wine tastings with Virginia Mountain Vineyards create an engaging, communal shopping experience that goes beyond simple transactions. "The Downtown Roanoke community makes it a priority to support each other as businesses and as consumers. It's a very special place to do business," Mays explained.

Both organizations stress the importance of local events in driving foot traffic to small businesses. Livingston highlighted a series of events, including Salem's annual holiday parade, Roanoke County's Illuminights and the Gingerbread Festival in Salem's Longwood Park. Post emphasized the role of events like the Tree Lighting in Downtown Roanoke and the Dickens Christmas Parade in bringing potential customers to local shopping areas.

For chocolatepaper, seasonal elements like holiday décor, truffles and curated gift baskets play a central role in attracting



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customers. "Our greeting card and gift collection is curated for a one-of-a-kind shopping experience," Mays noted, explaining how her store offers a personalized touch that online platforms cannot match.


The economic impact of holiday shopping on local businesses is significant. Livingston points out that the majority of the chamber's membership comprises small business owners who rely on community support. "In turn, these local businesses fuel our local economy. It all comes full circle," she said.

Post emphasized the broader economic benefits of shopping locally: "Shopping small also ensures your money stays in the local economy, directly going to a friend or neighbor versus a large corporation."

Looking ahead, both Livingston and Post see small retailers adapting to changing consumer behaviors. Many businesses have

implemented curbside pickup options (which became a staple during the pandemic) and are leveraging social media marketing and online purchasing capabilities.

"We expect these trends to continue to become the new normal in the coming years," Post said. "We encourage small retailers to adapt as they are able to with these changes in order to keep existing and attract new customers."

Despite the challenges, the outlook for local retailers this holiday season is cautiously optimistic. Mays echoed this optimism, relying on years of experience and community support. For her and many others, the holiday season is about more than just making sales—it's about celebrating the Downtown Roanoke community's unique spirit, fostering collaboration and providing a memorable shopping experience that keeps customers coming back year after year. 



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“ ”  
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