

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 203

AUGUST 2025

BOCO Google

BiblioPub

Oransi

Electric Eye Tattoos

Clover Hill

VWCC's President

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the Farmer on the Go



MK Williams-Sink
Clover Hill Farms / Clover Hill Angus



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Today's FRONT you're holding or scrolling provides a lot of insight. The stories represent the best of what we do—talking with businesses simply to learn what they do, how they do it, and why. Six examples: a farmer who clearly takes pride in what she produces; a manufacturer who survives by onshoring, automating, and diversifying its product; an educator who focused on practical workforce needs; and two creative shops—for the love of body art and bodies of literature.

You could learn something. Or just enjoy the journey of our subjects.

Or do both.
We do.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

““
For her, this work is sacred. — Page 13






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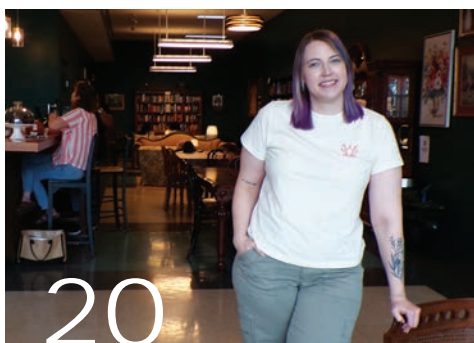
Google's decision
will likely accelerate tech-sector
diversification. — Page 14

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A Life Reclaimed

It's more than a business at Clover Hill

By Laura Wade



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AUGUST



Aila Boyd



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Emily Field



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Gene Marrano



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.

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construction

“In 2025, US manufacturing is projected to experience a significant rebound.

— Page 28

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“It's kind of bittersweet.
— Page 60





MK Williams-Sink

All photos: Tom Field

A Life Reclaimed

It's more than a business at Clover Hill

By Laura Wade



Located in Bent Mountain, Clover Hill Farms and Clover Hill Angus are more than produce and pasture-raised livestock. For owner MK Williams-Sink, it's a deeply personal journey of resilience, purpose, and rediscovery.

Williams-Sink says her radio days shaped how she runs the Mobile Farmer's Market. Those radio days shaped not only her voice, but her vision.

"Every sale feels like a live remote broadcast," she shares. "I put the same energy into promoting the business hosting us and creating a fun, memorable experience for our customers." That sense of showmanship, connection, and presence is the heart of the Clover Hill Mobile Farmers Market, one of the farm's beloved and impactful services.

But the real roots of Clover Hill run deeper than agriculture. After a long career in radio, higher education, and corporate America – and after enduring personal tragedies that included the death of her husband in her 30's and the heartbreaking loss of her eldest son in her 40's – Williams-Sink could have stepped away from the spotlight altogether.

Instead, in her 50's, she found love again, marrying Harold Sink – a man now known across social media as "Farmer Man." "Everyone calls him Farmer Man because that's what I affectionately call him online," Williams-Sink says.

Sink assists with the Mobile Market setups and livestock transportation. Currently, there is no other full-time staff, however friends and family occasionally help with special events.





CLOVER HILL FARMS WINS THE GAUNTLET COMPETITION



"Clover Hill Farms was a clear winner of The Gauntlet with an outstanding business plan and a compelling pitch presentation to the judges," says Annette Patterson, President of The Advancement Foundation. The Gauntlet is an annual business development program and competition that connects businesses to resources and helps them plan for success.

Patterson said Clover Hill is positioning to scale, and their plans for more value-added products demonstrated a readiness and experience that will lead to successful growth. Clover Hill Angus and Clover Hill Farms operate with no debt, ensuring financial stability and sustainable growth. The first-place award amounted to a value of \$33,203 and included cash, public relations support, and a customer service and marketing plan contributed by Eddy Alexander. Additionally, grant writing, media and advertising as well as ongoing strategic consulting to help them advance operations are part of the package.

"The agriculture sector contributes about \$30 billion annually and supports more than 300,000 jobs across Virginia," Patterson explains. "The Advancement Foundation is proud to attract and contribute to the retention of agricultural businesses in central and Southwest Virginia. Not just for producing food but for preserving the region's economy, heritage and a platform for entrepreneurship and innovation, especially through value added products and sustainable practices."

Clover Hill Angus began as a part-time beef operation and quickly grew into a full-time endeavor and mobile marketplace, offering not just USDA-certified meats, but local vegetables, jams, sauces, wildflower honey and even seasonal gift boxes.

"Our ideal customer is someone who wants to know their farmer," she explains. "They appreciate the care and responsibility that goes into raising animals and growing produce the right way. They're not just looking



Everything
we do is rooted
in our mission
of neighbors
serving
neighbors.

for groceries; they're looking for trust, consistency, and a relationship with their food source."

That philosophy is resonating. Clover Hill's customer base includes families, restaurants, small businesses and institutions like schools and colleges. Over the next three years, plans include expansion in three major areas:

- Increased Production – boosting beef, pork and chicken output while growing more seasonal produce.
- Mobile Market Expansion – adding more rural and underserved stops to the Clover Hill Mobile Farmers Market to increase food accessibility in regions that need it most.
- Value-added Products – scaling up their signature sauces, dressings, and honey to reach new wholesale and retail markets, including cafes and gift basket curators.

"Everything we do is rooted in our mission of neighbors serving neighbors," Williams-Sink says. "Our vision is to create a thriving marketplace that goes beyond great food – it's about education, engagement, and fostering a deeper appreciation for local farming."

The heart of Clover Hill is intertwined with the Sink family legacy. The Sink family has been farming the region for generations. Historically, they were mountain truck crop farmers supplying fresh fruit and produce to local markets. Williams-Sink says that quality farming is in their blood.

"Four years ago, I married into the Sink Family and started Clover Hill Angus," she says. "Since then, I left my corporate job to grow our Roadside Stand, Mobile Farmers Market, and the Clover Hill Farms line full-time."

At the core of it all, Williams-Sink says there are four values that guide the farm:

- Resilience and Purpose – Clover Hill is rooted in the belief that good can grow from hardship.
- Passion and Tradition – They are proud to carry on time-honored farming practices rooted in generations.
- Integrity and Quality – What they offer is real, premium, and raised the right way.
- Community – They are building more than a business. They are building relationships.


This spirit of connection is what makes Clover Hill Farms and Angus stand apart. Every visit to the Roadside Stand or Mobile Market is like stopping by a friend's home.

"We want every interaction to feel personal, memorable, and meaningful," says Williams-Sink. And it's not just a catchy tagline. For her, this work is sacred.

"For anyone who's lost a child, it can feel like happiness is no longer available to you," she shares. "But I believe we have to be brave enough to face the pain and open-hearted enough to allow joy back in."

That sense of purpose runs through her work. It is about presence and building something meaningful.

"We can be victims of our circumstances or victors over them," reflects Williams-Sink. "The difference is perspective, and the strength to move forward even when joy feels out of reach."

Clover Hill is a life reclaimed through love, through land, and through community. 

“

I left my corporate job to grow our Roadside Stand, Mobile Farmers Market, and Clover Hill Farms.



Google is a big get for Botetourt

By Aila Boyd

Botetourt County has landed what may be the largest private investment in western Virginia history, with Google announcing in June its purchase of land at the Botetourt Center at Greenfield for a potential data center campus.

Local leaders say the project could provide transformative economic growth, a strengthened tech pipeline and long-term stability for community services—all without compromising the county's rural character.

The deal is the result of more than a year of collaboration among county officials, the Roanoke Regional Partnership, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and utility providers like Appalachian Power. While the tech giant has not yet revealed detailed development plans, officials are already optimistic about what the project could mean for the Roanoke region.

"This is a by-right use in the Botetourt Center at Greenfield," said Tiffany Bradbury, the now-former director of communications for Botetourt County. "The county welcomes clean businesses that grow our economy,

create good jobs and enhance our community. A Google data center campus would create high-paying jobs and provide significant new tax revenue to support local services."

According to the county, the tech company will pay to extend utility services to the site, and the eventual tax revenue could fund school improvements, first responder equipment and infrastructure upgrades. Officials also say Google's track record in other communities suggests that local partnerships in education and workforce development could soon follow.

John Hull, executive director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, called the announcement a "signal of success" for the region's Thrive 2027 economic strategy, which prioritizes innovation and technology sector growth.

"Google found the Roanoke Region to be a fit that offered a market of sufficient size, access to labor and higher education assets and a regional infrastructure solution," Hull said. "The Botetourt Center at Greenfield was the one spot where available acreage, zoning entitlements and infrastructure intersected to meet Google's requirements."

Hull emphasized that the partnership had spent years cultivating relationships with industry leaders and regional utilities to prepare for an opportunity like this. "Over the past five years, we've diversified our pipeline, launched targeted advertising and partnered at the state level," he said. "Attracting Google reinforces our region's reputation as a growing technology hub."

He added that Google's decision will likely



Submitted

accelerate tech-sector diversification and talent retention efforts. "With Virginia Tech and 24 other colleges and universities within an hour of Roanoke producing high-skilled graduates, this project creates new opportunities to keep talent here. It also sends a strong signal to other tech firms that the Roanoke region is open for business."

That message is already being embraced by local education leaders. Mike Ketron, supervisor of career and technical education for Botetourt County Public Schools, said the announcement offers a rare opportunity to align education with high-tech careers.

"Google's presence in our county represents a transformative opportunity to elevate STEM education and reshape the local workforce landscape," Ketron said. It shows students that world-class tech careers are possible right here at home, he added.

Ketron noted that the district already offers a robust slate of computer science, cybersecurity, coding and engineering courses, as well as dual-enrollment options and industry certifications in partnership with local colleges. "We're also working to provide more work-based learning, including internships and job shadowing. A collaboration with Google could amplify those efforts."

He said early STEM exposure is a priority even at the elementary level. "Ultimately, we see Google not just as an employer, but as a potential strategic partner. By aligning our curriculum with the needs of the tech economy, we can ensure our students are not just ready for the future—they are leading it."

Despite the scale of the project, county leaders don't anticipate an immediate strain on housing or public infrastructure.

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John Hull, Roanoke Regional Partnership

"This is not an anticipated problem we are expecting with this potential data center project at this time," Bradbury said, noting that the nature of data center operations doesn't typically involve large influxes of employees. The Greenfield business park was designed to accommodate advanced technology industries without

disrupting the surrounding landscape.

Still, regional leaders are keeping an eye on housing demand. Hull said that while unit development is already at record levels across the Roanoke region, local governments are actively planning to ensure quality housing



Submitted

Mike Ketron, Botetourt County Public Schools

is available at various price points.

Cathy Benson, a realtor with Century 21 Wampler Realty, noted that Botetourt's housing market still reflects regional dynamics. "Housing prices still have to compete with Roanoke Valley," she said. "The current home market here shows that low inventory isn't necessarily bringing higher sale prices."


For Botetourt, balancing progress with preservation remains a top priority. "Botetourt County believes in balanced growth and our rural character is important to not only our Board of Supervisors but also our County Administrators," Bradbury said.

Hull credited the success of the project to the long-standing relationships and strategic planning among public and private partners. From Botetourt County administration to Appalachian Power

and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, this was a team effort involving hundreds of professionals, he said.

He also noted that the regional team's experience with complex projects, including the Wells Fargo expansion in 2023, helped lay the groundwork. Hull said that years of collaborative effort and strong partnerships helped make the Google project possible, adding that professionalism and regional alignment were key to its success.

As Botetourt County waits for the next steps from Google, officials are preparing for what could be a long-term shift in the region's economic landscape.

Hull said that while the announcement is a major win for Botetourt, it also signals to the broader business community that western Virginia is ready to compete in the digital economy. 



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LEAD BY EXAMPLE

**By Carrie Cousins,
Lead Point Digital**

Executive Summary:
*Most businesses need
a combination of long-
term marketing and
short-term advertising
for maximum impact.*

But I want it now! (aka when to add advertising to your marketing mix)

Each morning when I get up, my Garmin watch lets me know how to “beat yesterday.” It’s a little competition I have with myself. Can I take more steps, run that extra mile, sweat another 5 minutes at the gym, or even sleep a little more?

In marketing, a lot of what we do is also designed to beat yesterday, applying the 1% rule to grow consistently and incrementally, so that over time results are improving and business is growing on a manageable scale.

Long-term marketing activities such as continued brand building and storytelling, search engine optimization, and website updates and development will all have a solid impact on your bottom line, but it’s something you will see over time.

Sometimes this long game isn’t fast enough. What about those times when you are feeling pressured to see results now?

That’s when it may be time to add advertising into the mix.

A solid advertising plan adds immediate gratification goals to your overall marketing strategy. You can spend part of your budget to ensure that your product or service – and a direct sales call to action – get in front of the right people when they have intent to make a purchase.

Most businesses need a combination of long-term marketing and short-term advertising for maximum impact. This is the part of my everyday role at LeadPoint Digital that I love. There’s nothing better than seeing your business beat yesterday while bumping up efforts during key sales seasons.

Marketing and advertising are important investments in your business future. It’s important to find a partner with the same



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values and goals, and while it might be cliché, you also must trust the process.

If you want to grow slowly over time, a marketing plan with a focus on brand, content, and SEO is important.

If you need to move the needle now, the right advertising plan can get you there. High impact advertising activities may include out of home, search advertising, social media advertising, traditional TV or print advertising, or streaming TV.

Whether you want to “beat yesterday” or just “want it now,” I’d love to chat about your needs and strategy as you plan for the coming year.

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

“

Find a partner
with the same
values and goals.



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Gene Marrano

BiblioPub

A Novel Approach to the Restaurant/Bar concept

By Hart Fowler

A unique new small business in downtown Roanoke for those who love books ... with a side of beer or wine perhaps.

With the modern American cultural shift in bars towards wall-to-wall flat screens and breweries installing playgrounds for the kids, BiblioPub owner Ellen Seay brings a literary sense with a second-hand feel and mellow vibe to the downtown Roanoke bar and coffee shop scene.

"I wanted to create the kind of space I'd love to hang out in myself. Roanoke has plenty of bars, breweries, and restaurants, but not many places that are quieter and more laid-back," Seay said. "I envisioned a spot where you could come solo with a book, meet a friend for coffee, or gather with a group over dinner and wine." They also serve beer on tap, including some local craft brews at their Campbell Avenue location.

The best things are built to last, from books to furniture, and the BiblioPub showcases Seay's taste for the second-hand. Thrift-store goers will appreciate the well-organized selection of hardback, paperback, and coffee table books that line the walls, available to read and buy. She has curated a great collection of mostly fiction, but also new books from underserved or marginalized communities. The familiar couches and chairs from different eras bring forth memories of previous lives, and certainly make one feel at ease to lean back and turn a few pages or have a conversation. Readers will appreciate the strategically placed lamps; the bar seats about ten.

Seay said the best way to enjoy a book is "curled up under a cozy blanket with a hot



Hart Fowler



Hart Fowler

coffee or a glass of wine, depending on the time of day," though she does believe, "reading under a shady tree is hard to beat." And while drinking and eating is not allowed in libraries, both are certainly encouraged in the Bibliopub, and they serve tea, soup, sandwiches, and pastries along with beer and wine. Coffee is locally sourced from Two Roosters.

Seay was encouraged one month after opening The BiblioPub in May, looking towards future events and working with local authors. "Business has been great. The community has really shown up, and I'm so grateful," she said. "I'm hoping to introduce some special menu items and host more community events, to give folks even more



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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.

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Laura Wade is founder of Thrive by Heart, a Soul to Goal Guide, Reiki Master and best-selling author. She is passionate about empowering people to live their best lives, her family, the beach, dark chocolate and Zumba. [soultogoal@gmail.com]





reasons to come out and enjoy the space.”

There’s certainly an opportunity to minimize your screen time at BiblioPub, and research shows that what you retain from reading a book (or magazine) far exceeds that from a digital source.

Any reading recommendations from the owner? “Anything by S.A. Cosby—*All the*

Sinners Bleed is my favorite. I also just finished *The Reformatory* by Tananarive Due and can’t recommend it enough!”

The BiblioPub is located at 416 Campbell Ave. S.W. and is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesday and Thursday, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, and from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. They are closed Monday and Tuesday. 



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BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake

Executive Summary:
Smart employers are discovering that purpose, trust, and consistent leadership are the real keys to keeping great people. Use the QR Code to download a 7 Smart Steps Checklist.



How smart employers win the talent battle

Attracting and keeping great employees has never been harder. Gallup's January 14, 2025, report shows that U.S. employee engagement hit a 10-year low in 2024, with just 31% of workers classified as 'engaged'—matching levels not seen since 2014—while 17% were actively disengaged.

Many mistakenly believe that perks—bonuses, flexible schedules, casual offices—are enough. But today's workforce demands more: purpose, growth, and genuine human connection. Without these, employees quietly disconnect or start looking elsewhere. The cost? According to SHRM, replacing a single employee can cost 50–200% of their annual salary.

To stay competitive, business owners must elevate engagement as a strategic priority. Gallup's data also shows sharp drops in fundamental engagement drivers:

- Clarity of expectations: only 46% of employees strongly agree they know what's expected, down from 56% in March 2020.
- Feeling someone cares personally: just 39% feel cared for, down from 47%.
- Encouragement toward development: only 30% are receiving support, down from 36%

These areas are critical—engaged workplaces often see up to 23% higher profitability and 18% higher productivity.

Here are seven practical, high-impact steps business owners can take today, regardless of size or budget:

1. Stay interviews – Instead of waiting for exit feedback, ask current employees what makes them stay and what could push them away.
2. Frequent feedback loops – Shift from annual reviews to monthly check-ins that reinforce progress and tackle issues early. Pulse surveys are a good way to do this.
3. Targeted leadership training – Even a few hours of coaching can help managers set clear expectations, communicate with empathy, and recognize achievements.
4. Career-growth planning – Offer mentorship, stretch assignments, or short learning courses to show employees they have a future with your company.
5. Consistent recognition – A handwritten thank-you, a public praise, or a small token of appreciation goes a long way.
6. Define and champion a purpose – Articulate your mission clearly and connect everyday work to that purpose.
7. Flexible work options – Where possible, offer hybrid schedules or flexible hours. Research shows flexibility boosts engagement more than mandatory return-to-office policies.

Engagement isn't about perks—it's about people. When employees feel seen, supported, and challenged, they don't just stay, they invest their best selves in the work. Ready to

7 SMART STEPS TO BOOST EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

1. CONDUCT STAY INTERVIEWS

- Schedule brief, one-on-one conversations with your employees.
- Ask what keeps them here – and what might cause them to leave.
- Capture themes and act on the most common issues.

2. INCREASE FEEDBACK FREQUENCY

- Replace annual reviews with job expectations and monthly check-ins.
- Discuss progress, roadblocks, and development goals.
- Recognize contributions regularly.

3. INVEST IN LEADERSHIP SKILLS – BUILD A BENCH AT ALL LEVELS

- Provide basic training for managers on clear communication and coaching.
- Teach leaders how to set expectations and show empathy.
- Encourage consistent recognition and accountability.

4. OFFER CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Help employees map a growth path inside your business.
- Provide access to mentoring, stretch assignments, or learning resources.
- Celebrate milestones in their progress.

5. RECOGNIZE and APPRECIATE

- Make a habit of saying thank you – in person, in writing, publicly.
- Celebrate both big wins and small efforts.
- Encourage peer-to-peer recognition among team members.

6. DEFINE and SHARE YOUR PURPOSE

- Clearly communicate your company's mission and values.
- Connect everyday tasks to your bigger purpose.
- Reinforce this message regularly in meetings and updates.

7. BUILD FLEXIBILITY WHERE POSSIBLE

- Explore options for hybrid schedules or adjusted hours.
- Ensure policies are clear and consistent.
- Show trust by focusing on outcomes over hours logged.


TIP: START SMALL

You don't have to do everything at once. Choose two or three priorities to focus on this quarter, then build momentum.

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

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build a workplace culture that your best people never want to leave? Let's connect to plan your next steps to build a Best Job Ever! 



Submitted photos

ON THE FAST TRACK: MANUFACTURING BETTER AIR QUALITY IN RADFORD

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

An entrepreneur's asthmatic son was the genesis of Oransi, a Radford-based company with \$15 million in annual sales that is one of the fastest growing businesses in America (Inc. magazine via Onward NRV).

When Peter Mann founded Oransi in 2009, it was an e-commerce website for HEPA (high energy particulate air) air purifiers with 10 to 15 competitors, according to Ben Barani, Chief Operating Officer. Enter Covid (2020), when there was a significant push for indoor air quality, and the number of competitors ballooned to over 100, with 98% of those being Chinese.

It became "survival of the fittest," said Barani, and Mann began looking for a way to separate his product from the pack. One way to differentiate was with a made-in-the-USA product. So, Mann's goal became "reshoring."

It was Mann's second foray into stateside manufacturing. After initially selling China-made air purifiers, Mann had contracted with a Connecticut company in 2013 to manufacture two Oransi-designed models. But that stopped because too few customers were willing to pay made-in-the-USA prices. Consumers like the idea, Barani said, but

a 5% higher price is the threshold of what they are willing to pay.

In addition to creating a marketing niche, Barani said manufacturing stateside also gave better control of the supply chain, which became particularly important with the advent of Covid.

In April of 2021, Oransi, then based in Raleigh, North Carolina, invested \$5.6 million to establish a 156,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Radford.

That August, Mann's Oransi and Moe Barani's Aviemore Technologies, Inc., "vertically merged with each other," said Ben Barani. Aviemore was a Radford-based manufacturer of motion control products, and Moe Barani had worked in the industry since 1984, said son Ben Barani.

After the merger, Oransi expanded from air purifiers into electric motors. Entrepreneur

Moe Barani, who became Chief Technology Officer, and Mann “built from scratch” the design for a proprietary technology that yields “high class motors,” said Ben Barani.

“It’s all in the design,” said Barani, and for Oransi that means keeping it simple.

Imported products have lots of screws, which take labor for assembly. Importers “throw labor at manufacturing,” said Barani, because it is cheap and available.

In order to use fewer resources, including labor, Oransi’s smart automation eliminates screws. It solves the problems of high cost and manufacturability by making motors “scalable,” producing a high volume at a low cost, said Barani.

Innovation and R&D create a path forward for Oransi. Electric motors are “the third leg of a stool,” that also includes batteries and chips, Barani said, but the company



Ben Barani

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is not just motors and drives. It is pivoting to other markets such as liquid cooling solutions for AI data centers and unmanned systems like drones.

"We love when problems hit us because it's fun to solve them," said Barani.

In moving its operation to Radford, Oransi saw an opportunity. Radford and Oransi entered into an agreement for incentives to bring the company to the city, but the labor pool was its own incentive. Barani said that between Virginia Tech and other electric motor companies, a lot of knowledge and talent already exist in the area. He calls it the "Silicon Valley of electric

motors." Manufacturing in the New River Valley began with Inland Motors in the 1950s, and today it is a "big manufacturing hub" that is largely undiscovered, Barani said.

In 2025, the US manufacturing sector is projected to experience a significant rebound driven by factors like reshoring, smart factories (AI), and ESG (environmental, social, governance) practices. However, challenges remain, including persistent inflation and potential impacts from policy changes.

Like tariffs. "Tariffs hurt US manufacturers," said Barani. Oransi is "very affected" because it obtains components such as ball bearings and magnets globally.



All manufacturers are facing fear of the unknown on a macro level, said Barani, but “we focus on what we can control.”

That includes Oransi’s competitive advantages. Oransi can sell at a low cost because of its proprietary technology and lean operating model of eliminating waste. Another selling point is after-market support; Oransi provides US-based customer service with representatives who speak English, Barani said.

Quality is also paramount. Barani said Oransi is constantly improving their products to stay in front of the competition.


“We make the Louis Vuitton of electric motors,” he said.

The company’s marketing plan, which is being retooled, uses different media and vehicles. Those include events such as trade

shows, mailers, and the all-important word of mouth. Barani said they have not found social media ads to be cost-effective, especially since the price has soared from \$.05 per click several years ago to \$5 per click today.

As for Oransi’s target markets, consumers make up about 70% of its air purifier customers, with the rest being businesses and government procurers.

Oransi was named 2024’s Leading Technology Company by the Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council because of its growth and R&D, said Taylor Spellman, RBTC Director. She added that the company’s technology could “create a pathway for other tech companies.”

With Oransi’s location and innovation in this region, Spellman said, “It is a hidden gem.” 






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SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

**By Bonnie Chavez ,
CEO of Building
Beloved Communities**

Executive Summary:
*We've all been there,
having a disagreement,
albeit a professional one,
with someone from a
different generation. Or
we have caught ourselves
thinking, these kids today
don't want to work,
or these old timers
hate change.*

*Bonnie Chavez is the
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Boomers to gen Z, a multigenerational workplace

The reality is, we all have some incredible strengths and should leverage them! In our workforce today, we have four generations making the gears turn:

- Baby Boomers: Born between 1946 and 1964
- Generation X: Born between 1965 and 1980
- Millennials: Born between 1981 and 1996
- Generation Z: Born between 1997 and 2012

Here are some tips to help each generation be their best.

Baby Boomers: They love structure and clear reporting lines. They value stability and loyalty within an organization. While they can navigate the digital world, an in-person meeting goes a long way. Although they may have settled in their last or next-to-last role at the company, they would really enjoy mentoring and providing structured training to the up-and-coming generation.

Gen X: These folks started the work-life balance revolution; they are open and transparent in their communication, some might say, no sugar coating allowed. They enjoy both teamwork and independent work. These are the Swiss Army knife of the job - flexible, adaptable, and get it done!

Millennials: These folks thrive in collaborative, inclusive environments! They were born to work remotely and prioritize work-life balance. They love learning new things and use technology to work smarter; they know all the shortcuts and love to show others. These folks are dynamic and compassionate when put in leadership roles.

Gen Z: They have taken work-life balance to the next level - they added mental health to the mix. They like hybrid work options (yup - remote and in person) - for the plot (aka the flexibility). They love flat organizational structures and opportunities to make an impact early in their careers. Give them something challenging paired with opportunities to ask questions, and they will amaze you.

There are a few universal tenets that all generations should follow in the workplace. EVERYONE should:

- Say "thank you" (no exceptions - thank you!)
- Be on time (Millennials - looking at you)
- Be aware that body language and facial expressions carry weight (Respectfully: Boomers)
- Always be conscious of your tone (The sarcastically witty Gen Xers)
- When writing, punctuation matters (no cap, Gen Z)

With a mix of generations, your company can learn new ways to be productive and innovative, while still maintaining your ethos. Your coworkers are untapped resources that will help the company thrive. 📖



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Munters expands for data center chiller production >

A 30 million dollar investment by **Munters Global** in Botetourt County is a regional win for the Roanoke Valley as well. Munters has operations in 30 countries; the Sweden-based company will build a second facility 200,000 sq. ft. at the Greenfield Industrial park and is planning to hire another 270 people to staff it when "Munters 2" is completed next year. Munters is, "an amazing corporate partner" for the region says **John Hull**, executive director for the Roanoke Regional Partnership: "they're on a continual growth path. That's really encouraging. They're in an industry that's in high demand. It translates into economic opportunity for the Roanoke region, for the residents, and for the businesses here that might supply Munters. It's just a fantastic story."

Munters manufactures climate control solutions, and the expansion will enable it to focus on high-efficiency chillers used to cool the multiple servers used in data centers. Botetourt-based delegate **Terry Austin** says landing a "big fish" like Munters is a competitive process: "we have to step up. They're going to go somewhere – so why not here? Why not in Botetourt County?" Austin was on the Botetourt County Board of Supervisors when they purchased property for the Botetourt Center at Greenfield business park – which is now full with this latest announcement.

Munters landed at Greenfield in 2021, after purchasing a local competitor in Rockbridge County that was also in the high-end cooling business, Des Champs Laboratories. One possible future customer is Google, which has purchased 300 acres nearby and will need chillers to cool the data centers it could build there, to support its AI, if it goes ahead and builds them in a campus-style development.





Noke Van Co rises like a Phoenix from the ashes >

More than three months ago the **Noke Van Company** saw their 9th Street Southeast Roanoke base of operations destroyed by a fire - the sprinkler system was not working, which also meant the alarm system wasn't activated. Customers who had stored vehicles there waiting for them to be customized also suffered losses. Last month, with a big crowd of supporters and well-wishers on hand, Noke Van Co. cut the ribbon on its new home in another building at the Riverdale development. **Justin VanBlaricom** is a co-owner: "we were able to open and get our temporary CO (certificate of occupancy) and get our business license in 26 business days, which is a miracle. And also, a lot of hard work by a lot of people to get up and running." That included the Riverdale development team, who VanBlaricom says "put in a ton of money. Everybody has been great."

VanBlaricom is also working with his wife to open the Fishburn Perk coffee house in a historic building they are renovating elsewhere.

Roanoke Mayor **Joe Cobb** praised the city's economic development department for helping Noke Van Company get back on its feet. They are still putting things in place at their new home on Industry Circle SE; some employees were still without their own tools last month, after losing them in the fire.

Noke Van Company co-owner Josh Yerton calls it a "miracle and the product of a ton of people," rallying to them that enabled them to reopen 3 months after a major fire that destroyed their former home at the 9th Street SE industrial park also known as "Riverdale." Roanoke City officials, customers, neighbors and other supporters came out for a ribbon cutting today at another Riverdale building that's now home to the custom van manufacturer. Yerton has high praise for developer **Ed Walker** and his concept: "we feel like the vision for this place, what they're trying to do is really in line with who we are as a company. We want to help people experience life to the full [with customized vans equipped for long range travel], to help people live their adventure." Noke Van Co. was still negotiating with their insurance company in July on a settlement for the loss of vehicles, tools and equipment. The sprinkler system was not working at the former location; the building was a total loss.





Body art catered to ladies

Electric Eye Custom Tattoos is a woman owned tattoo studio serving our southwest Virginia region since 2014. Shop owner Monica Moses says the team of ladies

“work hard to sustain a safer, more inclusive space in what can typically be such an intimidating setting.” EECT is located at 1322 Grandin Ave SW in Roanoke, open Tuesday - Saturday 12pm - 6pm, and has six full time artists on staff. More info (including events) at electricyecustomtattoos.com, Instagram, and Facebook, and by phone at 540-467-8578.

Photo by Olivia Marone





THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
*A tale of resurrection
here in the Star City.*

Roanokers help Noke Van Co. get back on its feet


"This wouldn't have happened in any other city," said Noke Van Company co-owner Josh Yerton when Noke Van cut the ribbon on its new home at Riverdale, the 9th Street Southeast industrial park that long ago was the American Viscose manufacturing plant.

Since the 1960's its been home to a hodgepodge of tenants, but in the past few years some of them have moved on as developer Ed Walker has led the transformation with other partners on a long range plan, looking to turn the industrial park into a mixed use development featuring living spaces, artist studio spaces and retail options. Completion could be decades away according to Walker of a (at least) 50 million dollar investment.

But on this day, the Noke Van Co. ribbon cutting in mid-July, a hundred people or more came out to wish Yerton and co-owner Justin VanBlaricom well. Roanoke City Mayor Joe Cobb, members of the city's economic development department (credited with helping cut the red tape on a new business license for a new Riverdale location), Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce officers – and those who had their vans destroyed during a fire more than three months ago, came to show their support for Noke Van.

Would this have happened in other cities across the country?

Maybe, but the outpouring of support was heartwarming to see, and was an example of that in a smallish city like Roanoke, people came together (including Ed Walker), who as usual stayed in the background and let the Noke Van owners have their day in the sun. Walker put some of his own money into the Noke Van revival; a faulty sprinkler system did not help put out the fire on that fateful night, one which also destroyed a number of customer vehicles waiting to be worked on, for conversions to their dream van fully equipped for long trips – even to live out of them.

Kudos to all the Roanokers who rowed their oars in the same direction, to help get this thriving small business back on its feet. Heartwarming indeed. 

“A hundred people or more came out to wish Josh Yerton and Justin VanBlaricom well.

When life gives you lemons

It's been a hot summer. In a timely fashion, I've noticed a few extra lemonade stands throughout our neighborhoods. We don't often address younger children in this business journal, unless it's an event or organization that serves the education or training or entrepreneurial activities for our youth. Maybe we should pay more attention to the very demographic that's going to manage our commerce in the near future and next generation.

What lessons would I impart to our dear lemonade stand owner/operators? Well, guess what? The lessons are no different than those I would give to anyone running a business. The Five Ps:

Product

Kid, you can make whatever lemonade you want, however you want to make it. Stir in a packet of generic Kool-Aid if you want. But I would advise a little more care. Why? Because the quality of your product offering affects two things: 1) your customer's appreciation; and 2) how you feel about what you're serving. Fresh, cold water and ice; paired with actual lemons (whether you use them for the beverage or mostly for adornment) ... that's much different than stirring powder in lukewarm tap water in a tiny, waxy Dixie cup. Make your product stand out.

Price

Kid, whether you charge a measly 50-cents or three-dollars isn't as important as what your market will bear. I'd advise to keep it reasonable. (And maybe "reasonable" is a higher price in your neighborhood.) Do some math to determine your profit against ingredients and any other operational costs. Pricing your lemonade as simple as you can (preferably in whole figures requiring little or no change) is smart, too. Will you accept tips or offer discounts? If so, you'll have to watch those margins even closer. Remember supply and demand, too. Hot afternoons yield higher demand.

Place

Kid, if you're in a commercial space (i.e. store entrance) you'll want some distinction that competes with all the offerings around you. If you're at your house or neighborhood, leverage your local advantage, such as including the name of your community or school logo on your signs—or even your own name. Make sure it's easy for folks to pull up or walk up to your stand. Be obvious with your stand—including the table, chairs, maybe an umbrella, strategically placed coolers, pitchers, cups, and prep supplies.

Promotion

Kid, first and foremost, you have to be visible to the traffic—whether that is roadside vehicles or walk-by. If mom tells you to stay away from the road, you better have prominent signage that can be seen in all directions. This is no time to



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
Lessons for young entrepreneurs.

be shy. Kids waving and smiling and holding up signs get more business. I've seen kids at lemonade stands that miss the boat, because I don't notice them until it's too late. Most people don't slam on brakes or conduct aggressive U-turns because they see you in their rear-view mirror. Even better (few do this), is if you put something advertising Lemonade Ahead up and down the road. Don't give your prospective customer any reason to say, "I didn't know you were there."

One more neat "P" idea: Piggybacking

Lemonade stands at yard and garage sales, carwashes, ballgames... brilliant!

Okay, Kid—got it? Got all those Ps?

Well, there's one more. Six Ps. Yeah, that's a lot—but this one is most important. This one—is just for you.

Positivity

Do you remember when you wanted to do this lemonade stand? That excitement? Hold on to that feeling. You see, kid, we're in a special place right now. A place where you can do this. Reach out for the things that make you curious. Grab on to the things that bring you joy. There are places and times where you can't do what you're about to do—and you'd have to seek out some other fulfillment. And those times and places aren't always far away or way back in the past. So, embrace your opportunity! Be positive. Thank your customers. Enjoy your work. Celebrate your successes. Learn from your failures. Have fun in your business.

It's not just a lemonade stand, kid.
It never is. 

“This is no time to be shy.”

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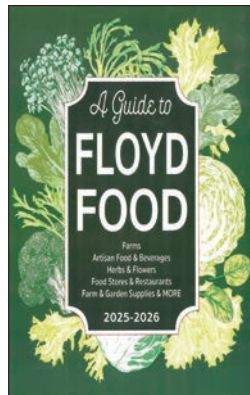
“Botetourt believes in balanced growth.”
— Page 17

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Floyd's delicious directory

Great job, Sustain Floyd [sustainfloyd.org]
Your seventh print edition of *A Guide to Floyd Food: Farms, Artisan Food & Beverages, Herbs & Flowers, Food Stores & Restaurants, Farm & Garden Supplies & More / 2025—2026* is a fabulous and most useful resource. All Floyd County stakeholders and fans should be proud of this 32-page publication, as it showcases the incredible offering on the foodie front in the rich eco-community. It's rather unbelievable how comprehensive this guide is. Mercy! The best part is—it's all local—and it all looks (and tastes) so good. If you go to Floyd just for the homegrown food, you're going to be well-served and rewarded for the trip. Beautiful samplings are also on display at the not-to-be-missed Farmers Market.

—Tom Field

From school of hard knocks to award winner

Larry Charles wanted nothing more than to write comedy. He also wanted to direct movies. It was a bumpy road to success, one he details in his new autobiography, *Comedy Samurai: 40 Years of Blood, Guts and Laughter* (Grand Central, 2025). From a stint on the ABC late night knockoff Fridays that ended badly, Charles nevertheless came away with an enduring friendship with Larry David, who later invited him to write some of the classic early *Seinfeld* episodes; he later went on to direct for *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. He also met Michael Richards (Kramer) while working on Fridays and used those encounters to help

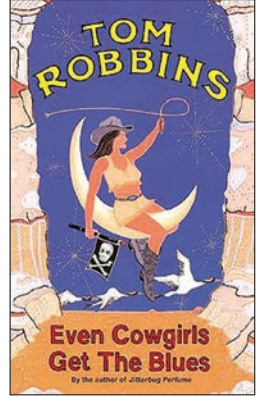
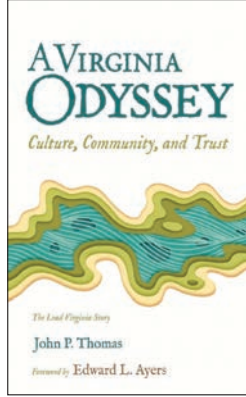
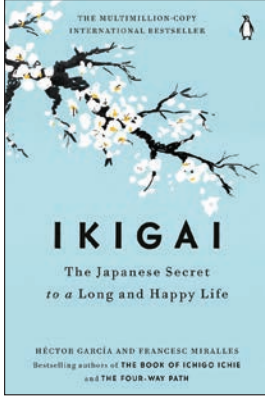
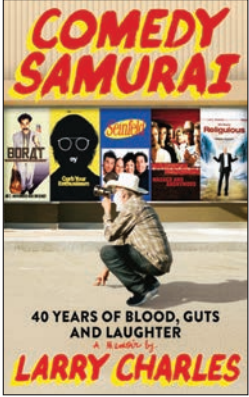
define Kramer's character on *Seinfeld*.

From the mean streets of Brooklyn – where Charles grew up in working class housing projects built by Fred Trump – Donald Trump's somewhat notorious developer father - to comedy writer and the director of films like *Borat* and *Religulous*, a project he worked on with Bill Maher, the Peabody, Golden Globe and Emmy winner (for a *Seinfeld* episode) beat the odds and tells all in the very readable *Comedy Samurai*.

—Gene Marrano

Hanging around a long time

Wonderful book is *Ikigai* (Penguin; 2016) by Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles. My daughter (who is most passionate about organic clean-living) passed it along, then my wife intercepted it and placed sticky tabs in all her favorite places (turned out to be mine, too, so—no bother!). The subtitle describes it: *The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*. There are so many nuggets of wisdom in this quick read, you'll be surprised how significant each is, even though all of them are so simple and reasonable. You can put some, most, or all of the ideas into practice—and then maybe you'll surpass one hundred years, too. Like sticky rice, the ideas that especially grabbed me (too many to mention) include: don't retire (or if you do from your profession, continue to stay busy); have a side gig that brings you joy (one-hundred percent of the oldest Japanese people living in the "Blue Zone" villages maintained at least a small vegetable garden); eat at eighty-percent of your fill (stop, before



you're full); always keep moving (the sedentary life will do you no good); smile; and have friends and a social life. You could climb a high mountain to seek out your guru—or, I mean, this book seems to possess all you need to know. I also like how it embraces many religious and philosophical ideas; not just traditional Japanese. (Yes, it covers your purpose in life, as well... most important.)

—Tom Field

Trekking Lead Virginia

What happens when leaders step outside their comfort zones, engage with diverse perspectives, and commit to strengthening their communities? John P. Thomas answers that question with depth, warmth, and wisdom in *A Virginia Odyssey: Culture, Community, and Trust* (Larimar; 2025). Through rich storytelling and sharp analysis, the author captures the essence of what makes great leaders: a deep understanding of place, a commitment to trust, and the courage to build bridges across differences. More than a history, this is a journey—one that immerses the reader in the challenges, triumphs, and lessons of Lead Virginia. In this compelling testament to the power of social capital, trust, and leadership, John Thomas reveals how one visionary program has transformed Virginia's leaders—and, in turn, its communities. A must-read for those who believe in the power of experiential learning and meaningful connections. For twenty years, Lead Virginia has shaped Virginia's leadership landscape. This book is not just a chronicle of that journey—it's a guide to

building lasting influence and trust in any community.

—Laurie Head

Two big thumbs up

Hey, kids, what's a unique physical attribute you might want in order to be a successful hitchhiker? How about a big thumb? Not just a big one, but both thumbs that are HUMONGOUS and shocking. Not kidding... that's the setup of our primary character in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* by our comedic author with strong Richmond ties, Tom Robbins (Houghton Mifflin; 1976). What a plot; you'll want to hold on tight to your spurs for this one, partner. Our narrator (who doesn't refrain from inserting himself) goes deep with sex and psychology and philosophy with this outrageous feminist folktale (because, well, that's always his style); so, there are a few spots that get a little clunky. But these cowgirls will keep you entertained, if not hogtied the whole venture. (I have not watched the film iteration of this, with Uma Thurman; but I intend to. It got absolutely terrible reviews, which doesn't surprise me—as Robbins is best left alone as a wordsmith who paints in your head—under your cowboy hat, as it were.)

—Tom Field

The reviewers: Tom Field is a creative director, writer, and publisher; Gene Marrano is a news reporter and FRONT editor; Laurie Head is co-owner of AIS Network in Ashland and board chair of Lead Virginia.



Higher scores >

Roanoke Higher Education Center held its 2025—2026 Scholarship Awards Ceremony in early June, honoring 17 exceptional adult learners with a total of \$35,500 in scholarships (with support by Appalachian Power Foundation and RHEC Foundation). Recipients included students in nursing, diagnostic medical sonography, social work, counselor education, and educational leadership. RHEC’s Kay Dunkley welcomed guests and recognized contributions by Brad Hall of Appalachian Power as well as RHEC Foundation Board and the RHEA Board of Trustees.



Camaraderie in B’burg >

YMCA at Virginia Tech and **New River Valley Time Bank** came together to host a *Public Living Room* on June 22. The community connection event coincided with the 10th anniversary of *Camarados*—a grassroots UK-based movement inspired the event. Approximately 20 community members stopped by the YMCA to enjoy conversation, cupcakes, laughter, and a welcoming space designed to encourage authentic human connection. Participants shared stories, played board games, and relaxed with homemade treats and good company—an experience that felt both refreshing and restorative.



Mural goes to school >

Virginia Western Community College (Chapman Hall) sports one of the newer murals popping up all over the Roanoke Valley. This one was created by VWCC visual design graduate and alumnus **Cory Thrasher**.



50 years in NRV >

Duncan Mazda was recognized by Mazda for serving the New River Valley market for five decades. **David Duncan** (left) accepted the plaque from Mazda's **Michael Gasser**, honoring the "legacy and excellence" of the dealership, sales, and service at its primary location in Christiansburg.

ROA makes branding changes >

A shortened name, a revised logo and a more user-friendly website. The official name in the FAA files remains **Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport**, but for marketing purposes it's now just Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport. The airport logo featuring the letter R and a plane got a facelift as well - sending a subtle message says **Mike Stewart**, ROA's executive director: "the new aircraft in the middle of the 'R' [on logo] is now going up, and it's a jet, and its going forward." Taking "Regional" out of the name makes ROA less confusing perhaps about how big it is; perception is important says Stewart, who constantly pitches the airport to carriers like American - which is adding a non-stop flight to Chicago-O'Hare in August. "A lot of times I don't have more than 20 minutes to convince an airline that we ought to have further discussions about flights. That's where the idea came in - well maybe we drop regional from the branding name. We're just going to say Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport. Sometimes regional has a negative connotation." Stewart says the revamped website for Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport includes a flight reservation tool making it easier to book flights out of ROA. "Our website was dying as far as support goes - so we had to get it done. That was old technology."





Rising 8th grade student program wins >

Roanoke City Public Schools received an honorable mention (2nd place) award for its Community Builders program (a pilot program for rising 8th graders featuring beyond-the-classroom growth experiences) at the Virginia School Boards Association inaugural Showcasing Innovation Award. RCPS was selected in the category of school divisions with a student population above 10,001.



Ch-Ch-Charming, indeed >

Funny. “Charming” is exactly the word many folks have used to describe **The Palisades Restaurant** in Giles County’s Eggleston. And that’s precisely the award this favorite destination received, by LoveFood.com—a national outlet on “all things culinary”—which named The Palisades the “Most Charming Restaurant in Virginia.” The report ranked the most charming restaurant in every state, saying Palisades “retains the original character of the former general store” since the 1920s. “It’s still a bustling location today, serving as a community hub with a seasonal menu of pizza and modern American food. A full calendar of events – including regular live music nights – adds to the exciting, welcoming atmosphere.”



Submitted

The rite stuff at RU >

Radford University celebrates its 32-year partnership with the **Scottish Rite** summer programs (including this year's RiteCare Childhood Language Program), which helps children with speech and language disorders. An annual reception and luncheon was held on June 26. The Scottish Rite, a Masonic organization, has donated more than \$1 million to the university since the partnership began. This year's summer camp was managed by volunteers and RU graduate students in the Department of Communications and Disorders, who utilized the new Artis Center for Adaptive Innovation and Creativity.



Submitted

Milestone observed by LewisGale >

LewisGale Medical Center in Salem celebrated a five decades of healing, compassion and community support—the 50th anniversary of its behavioral health program. More than a hundred people attended a celebration last month that included state and local elected leaders, community partners and support agencies, and current and retired behavioral health staff. One of the region's longest standing and most comprehensive mental health care providers, the program opened as Roanoke Valley Psychiatric Center on June 23, 1975, when Dr. John Hurt, who attended today's anniversary celebration, admitted the facility's first patient. The name was changed to Lewis-Gale Psychiatric Center in May 1991 and is today known as LewisGale Behavioral Health. Over the past half century, the facility has treated an estimated 75,000 individuals. "We've been called a 'center for medical excellence,' and that legacy remains strong today," said **Collin McLaughlin**, chief executive officer at LewisGale Medical Center, "this facility is more than a treatment center—it's a cornerstone of hope in our community, a safe harbor for individuals and families navigating some of life's most difficult moments."



Buc-ee's is here >

Governor **Glenn Youngkin**, First Lady of Virginia **Suzanne S. Youngkin**, Lieutenant Governor **Winsome Earle-Sears** along with federal, state and local officials joined **Buc-ee's** founder and CEO Arch "Beaver" **Aplin III** for the official ribbon-cutting of Virginia's first Buc-ee's center in late June, celebrating another major economic investment into the Commonwealth. Located at the intersection of Friedens Church Road and I-81 in Rockingham County, the new 74,000 square-foot facility represents Buc-ee's most northeastern expansion. "I'm proud to give Buc-ee's a warm Virginia welcome as they open the next chapter of their story here in Virginia, bringing 200 jobs and an investment of more than \$60 million into Rockingham County," said Youngkin.



MGCC's new workforce center >

Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) in Clifton Forge has celebrated the grand opening of the **Joe Wilson Workforce Center**, marking the completion of a \$7.3 million, 18,750-square-foot facility focused on workforce development. The center triples the college's training capacity and is expected to boost enrollment in career and technical programs by more than 120%. It will provide hands-on training in welding, diesel technology, CDL, precision machining, construction, plumbing, electrical and other trades. Additional workforce programs include massage therapy, and NCCER training in core, electrical, HVAC, plumbing, carpentry and industrial maintenance. This fall, MGCC will launch the **MG-TEC IT Academy** to prepare students for careers in IT, cybersecurity and cloud computing. Credit classes range from biology, anatomy and physiology, and U.S. history, to psychology, film appreciation, theatre and college composition. New programs on the way include truck service technician-diesel, heavy equipment operator, machine operator and OSHA outreach training.



Big crowd for mountain bike >

Around 2200 cyclists were expected to take part in the **USA Cycling Endurance Bike National Championships** last month, with races at Explore Park, Carvins Cove and at Elmwood Park in downtown Roanoke. At Elmwood Park - part of which was turned into a short track course - elements like rock formations will remain in place for the public to use in the future. A swarm of local youth mountain bike riders attended the press conference when the six course layouts were revealed; some of those young riders may have also raced in one of the many divisions at the championships. **Whit Ellerman** owns Cardinal Bike; he also chairs the local organizing committee that helped bring the Endurance Bike National Championships to the Valley: "this is a chance to show riders from all over the country what we have here. There's equal value in getting people here locally more excited and reengaged in the quality of what we have." The USA Cycling Endurance Bike National Championships are committed to the Roanoke Valley for this year and 2026; if all goes well the event could be extended to five years.



Mast 5th anniversary >

The Roanoke **Mast General Store** observed its 5-year anniversary celebration in Roanoke recently, with candy sampling, free bags of popcorn, gift card giveaways, and an in-store adoption event. Beginning with their original location in Valle Crucis, North Carolina, Mast General Store has expanded to 11 locations across the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Virginia. **Olivia King**, general manager of the Roanoke Mast General Store, says the eclectic inventory attracts tourists, some who like to visit Mast General Stores while they travel: "it's definitely destination shopping. We get a lot of people, tourists, and people here for conferences and they make the Mast store one of their stops." One week before their official opening in 2020, COVID-19 swept the nation, forcing the Roanoke store to delay its opening. "We had our staff all hired and trained, and we had to shut everything down," says King. **Jeff Meadows**, vice president of branding and development for Mast General Store, said while in town for the five-year anniversary that the Roanoke location on South Jefferson Street has met company expectations.



College in a box >

Roanoke College is placing industrial shipping containers at the north end of campus, retrofitted as residential student apartments. “Maroon Village” as it is being called, is an eco-friendly micro-compound that the College says, imitates “metropolitan lofts, tiny homes” and boutique hotels, restaurants, and galleries. Sustainability design principles were used, and the units feature solar panels and renewable energy. The 16.5 x 7-foot (8-foot ceiling) units will accommodate 157 residents (including “community leaders”) with bunk bed for two; and there are also laundry units. The containers are stacked two-high; and yes, each resident unit includes a small bathroom.



Last hurrah for Awful’s Downtown >

After 30 years in business the **Awful Arthur’s** Roanoke restaurant in downtown Roanoke has shut its doors. Co-owner **Todd Lancaster** says he wants to focus on family and the four other restaurants he operates – including Awful Arthur’s in Salem, which will remain open. The place was packed on June 29, closing day, with loyal patrons coming to say goodbye – and the staff doing much the same from the bar top. Lancaster said the meals tax increase recently approved by Roanoke City council did not factor into the decision to close the restaurant. Lancaster is also rooting for the next business that takes over that prime City Market area location.



Gene Marrano

Greenway extension >

Vinton officials have cut the ribbon on a small extension of the **Tinker Creek Greenway**, which now extends to Gus Nicks Boulevard, across from the Gish Mill redevelopment. The Tinker Creek greenway connects to the Roanoke River Greenway, allowing runners, walker and bikers to make it to Vinton, where the town hopes they stop to eat or take in the sights before heading back.

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



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EDUCATIONAL FRONT



LeVallee

Katie LaVallee has been appointed Virginia Tech's university attending veterinarian and director of the Animal Resources and Care Division. She has served in this role in an interim capacity since December 2024.



Beck

Shannon Beck has been appointed by Virginia Tech's Division of Information Technology as director of the Virginia Cyber Range. Beck will lead statewide efforts to

support and expand cybersecurity education across Virginia's public high schools, community colleges, and universities through scalable, cloud-based learning environments and instructional resources. Beck joins Virginia Tech from the United States Air Force Academy, where she serves as an associate professor in the Department of Computer and Cyber Sciences.



Berger

Ed Berger has been appointed head of the Department of Engineering Education, effective July 25. Berger comes to Virginia Tech from Purdue University, where he served as professor and interim head for the Department of Engineering Education, as well as associate vice provost for learning

innovation and director of the Innovation Hub.



Hinton

Tiffany Hinton, Ed.D. has been appointed by Hollins University as acting vice president for Student Success, Well-Being, and Belonging. Prior to joining Hollins in 2024, Hinton served as assistant vice chancellor and chief diversity officer at Elizabeth City State University, where she led six functional areas. Her leadership resulted in national recognition for civic engagement and diversity innovation, and she played a vital role in improving retention and support services for underrepresented and military-affiliated students.

Renee Boyer has been named assistant



Boyer

dean for graduate research programs in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) after five years heading Virginia Tech's Department of Food Science and Technology. The new position will leverage her experience as a longtime mentor of graduate students and as Virginia Cooperative Extension specialist.



Wamsley

Tom Wamsley has been named Virginia Tech's next senior vice president for advancement. Wamsley currently serves as vice chancellor

for advancement at the University of Illinois Chicago and senior vice president at the University of Illinois Foundation.



Brown

Stephanie Brown has been named assistant vice president for administration for the Division of Human Resources at Virginia Tech. Brown had been serving as the interim assistance vice president since July. She leads a number of human resources administrative functions, including benefits, employee administration, employee programs, leave, policy and compliance, and retirement.

FINANCIAL FRONT

George (Ned) Honts



Honts

has been promoted to executive vice president, chief operating officer for Bank of Botetourt. Honts is a graduate of Hampden-Sydney College and completed studies at Virginia School of Bank Management, University of Virginia, and the Graduate School of Banking at Louisiana State University. He's an active community member, serving on the board of Botetourt County Public Schools Education Foundation, executive board of Virginia State Chapter

of the National Wild Turkey Federation, and is a treasurer and board member of Appalachian Habitat Association.



Anderson

Barbara Anderson has been promoted to executive vice president, chief administration officer at Bank of Botetourt. With over 35 years of experience in the financial industry, Anderson graduated from Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management and the University of Virginia. She is a Certified

Regulatory Compliance Manager and serves as chairperson for the Virginia Bankers Association Security and Enterprise Risk Management Committee.



Bays

Dustin Bays has been promoted to executive vice president, chief financial officer for Bank of Botetourt. He graduated from Emory & Henry College (BA business administration) and Union College of Kentucky (MBA). Bays serves as treasurer for Kiwanis Club of Botetourt and Botetourt

Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to 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



BANKOFBOTETOURT.COM

Chamber of Commerce, where he also serves on the board of directors.



Shotwell

Andrew Shotwell has been promoted to executive vice president, chief technology and innovation officer at Bank of Botetourt. Shotwell has served Bank of Botetourt over 35 years. He graduated from Radford University (finance) and furthered his education at Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management, University of Virginia, and the Graduate School of Banking at Louisiana State University. He also serves as vice chairman of Virginia Bankers Association operations and technology committee.



Caldwell

Kathy Caldwell has been promoted to vice president, senior commercial loan officer for Bank of Botetourt. She has over three decades of experience in the financial industry, 22 of which have been with Bank of Botetourt. She graduated from Dabney S. Lancaster Community College (now Mountain Gateway

CC) and furthered her education at the Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business.



Harris

Pamela Harris has been promoted to vice president, deposit services and BSA officer at Bank of Botetourt. She has over 20 years of experience in the financial industry, all with Bank of Botetourt. She is an active volunteer, participating in TAP Early Learning Center program, Habitat for Humanity, and Roanoke's Bank on Wellness Series.



McClure

Shannon McClure has been promoted to vice president, enterprise risk management officer at Bank of Botetourt. She has over fifteen years of financial industry experience and received her bachelor's degree in history from Liberty University and her MBA from Western Governors University.

Jerrica Seay has been promoted to vice president, operations



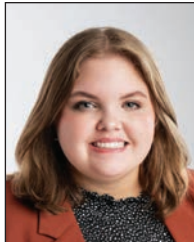
Seay

officer at Bank of Botetourt. She has been with the Bank for over a decade. She graduated from Mary Baldwin College (now MBU) where she earned her bachelor's degree in business sustainability.



Coffey

T. Rosa Coffey has been promoted to assistant vice president, cybersecurity officer at Bank of Botetourt. She has been in the financial industry for over three decades and with the Bank for 18 years. She is a graduate of National Business College (now American National University) and is a Certified Banking Cybersecurity Manager as well as active in the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council.



Phillips

Melissa Phillips has been promoted to

marketing officer at Bank of Botetourt. She will help lead the planning and execution of marketing initiatives and also oversees internal and external communications and social media for the Bank and Virginia Mountain Mortgage.



Vassar

Brandine "Brandy" Vassar has been promoted to physical security and facilities officer at Bank of Botetourt. She has more than 25 years of experience in the financial industry, over 17 with the Bank. She graduated from Lord Botetourt High School and is a former council member of the Town of Troutville.



Barnes

Justin Barnes has been appointed senior vice president, commercial banker, and credit officer at Ridge View Bank. He brings over 25 years of retail and commercial lending experience from various financial institutions across the region, including manufacturing, operating, and fleet

and equipment leasing clients.

WELLNESS FRONT



Tucker

Nicole Tucker was appointed chief executive officer of LewisGale Hospital Alleghany. Tucker's experience with HCA Healthcare since 2009 includes emergency service nurse, emergency services manager, department director, and chief nursing officer. She served as interim CNO at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery and twice at Terre Haute Regional Hospital (IN); she assumed interim CEO at Alleghany in 2024. Tucker has a doctorate degree in strategic leadership and a master's degree in nursing administration from Liberty University and

undergraduate degrees from Mary Baldwin College and Dabney S. Lancaster Community College and is also a graduate of the Sorensen Institute for Political Leaders from the University of Virginia. She is on the board and involved with numerous local community service organizations.

SENIOR SERVICES FRONT



Grove

Dr. **Lucian Grove** has been named chair of Friendship board of directors. Grove is a well-known leader in healthcare who brings decades of internal medicine experience. He's a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Virginia, earned his medical degree with honors from UVA, and practiced in Salem for

35 years, as well as served on Friendship's board since 1999. Grove also served as president of Roanoke Welding Co, vice president of Contracting Enterprises, and is currently a medical advisor for Chorda Pharma.



Bishop

Dr. **NL Bishop** has been appointed vice chair of the board of directors at Friendship. Bishop has been a leader in higher education, with additional experience that includes a licensed nursing home administrator and long-time supporter of elder care initiatives. He has degrees from Radford University and Virginia Tech, and a doctorate from Wesley Seminary. He retired from Carilion Clinic and currently serves as a community ambassador for Virginia

Tech School of Medicine.

RECREATION FRONT

James Wright has been named the new park manager for Smith Mountain Lake State Park. He has ten years of experience in park operations, natural resource management, and public service, and served as chief ranger at Westmoreland as well as manager positions at Shenandoah River and Staunton River. Wright's responsibilities will cover the operations, management, and planning of the 1,250-acres at SMLSP.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

Meredith Jones joined Montgomery County as County Engineer. Prior to joining Montgomery County, Jones was the Assistant Director of Engineering at the Town of Christiansburg.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

JUL 11

THE DELANEYS

AUG 1

SOUL EXPRESSIONS

SEP 5

BANANAS AT LARGE



FIRST FRIDAYS



Tea time at the Summit

Traditional Medicinals is moving into the Summit View Business Park in Franklin County—a \$47 million investment that's expected to break ground soon and create 57 jobs with an average salary over \$70,000. The California company (founded in 1974) primarily makes herbal teas for retail.

Addison recognized

Lucy Addison High School in Roanoke has been designated on of nine historic places recently listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register following approval by the Commonwealth of Virginia's Board of Historic Resources on June 12. The Board also approved a highway marker for Lucy Addison to be installed in front of the building. The original Lucy Addison school as built in 1928 as a segregated high school for Black Roanokers.

Blacksburg branch

Virginia Credit Union is opening a new branch office at 200 N Main Street in Blacksburg—expected early 2026, after an extensive renovation of the property.

Hubba hubba Radford

CoWorks@The HUB has opened in downtown Radford. The coworking space was designed to attract freelancers, startups, remote workers, and small businesses. It is part of The HUB at Radford University, and resides in proximity to

local restaurants, public transit, and the RU campus.

Easy to hold and eat

Birdogs—a food truck specializing in chicken in a hotdog bun (and breakfast and vegetarian options)—has opened in the Roanoke area. It's owned and operated by Stan Myshkovskiy of HelloRoanoke social media outlet.

Google selects Botetourt

Botetourt County officials announced in late June that that Google has purchased land zoned for industrial use and data centers in the Botetourt Center at Greenfield. County officials say Google will pay for any expenses associated with bringing utility services to the site as part of the project plans. The Botetourt County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and the Economic Development Authority (EDA), along with Google, agreed to a performance agreement that will cover 20 years of taxation for the server equipment associated with the potential project. If developed, a Google data center campus would yield significant revenues for the future and opportunities to expand community projects across Botetourt County. Anyone who sends an email, processes a credit card transaction, or uses a cell phone connects to a data center somewhere in the world. Botetourt County worked with the Roanoke Regional Partnership, the Virginia Economic Development

Partnership, and Appalachian Power to secure this opportunity. (see more in related article)

We got your data centers covered, too

Within a mere week of the major announcement of Google's data center in Botetourt County's Greenfield industrial park, an existing tenant announced its plan to build its own data center technologies operation as well. **Munters**—climate control systems manufacturer—broke ground to expand its production for chillers, products, and systems for elevating the energy efficiency of data centers and the big demand those facilities have for cooling. Munters will grow the facility by an additional 200,000-square feet in an adjacent lot.

Awful announcement

Awful Arthur's Downtown—a popular seafood restaurant and bar on the Market in downtown Roanoke for over 30 years—closed at the end of June. An “always changing industry” and “need to focus on ever growing areas around this wonderful city” was cited as the reason for closing. The Awful Arthur's in Salem remains open.

Famous A's Salem bye-bye

The **Famous Anthony's** restaurant in Salem is closing; the other locations remain open. A source says the formerly closed location at Brookside

(off Williamson Road, Roanoke) will reopen and may be populated by the Salem staff.

Oh, Hale, no

Hale's Restaurant in Shawsville closed at the end of June after a 58-year run. The popular roadside diner on US 460 first opened in 1967.

Bone-less

Smokey Bones Bar & Fire Grill at the Valley View Mall complex in Roanoke closed in early July. (It is unconfirmed if the restaurant will be rebranded to Twin Peaks, like other Smokey Bones across the country.)

From cookies to cheesecake

Kind Baking Co opened on Main Street in the Wasena community of Roanoke. Baked goods as well as retail products are available.

Labor pipeline citation

Virginia was ranked number one in the nation for customized workforce training for the third year in a row by Business Facilities; the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program (a Virginia Economic Development Partnership and Virginia Community College System collaboration) was cited as a most significant factor.

RBRA loses 2nd R

While **Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport** (Woodrum Field) has not changed its

official name, the brand name has been simplified to Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport (still ROA airport code; still flyROA website). The logo has been slightly modified, too, while still retaining the “R” configured with embedded airplane outline.

Comfort food on downtown street

Absolutely Delicious Bar and Grill has opened in Vinton (at the former FarmBurguesa space on Pollard St). Traditional American fare burgers, hotdogs, and sandwiches are on the menu.

Our music roots win Emmy

Virginia Roots: A Journey Through Appalachian Music video series won an Emmy for Informational and Instructional Long Form Content. It was produced by Blue Ridge PBS Tom Landon and Jay Prater in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education and supplemented with resource guides for

teachers to use in the classroom.

Salem’s new coffee fix

Seven Brew drive-thru coffee “stand” is opening in Salem off West Main Street (previous Big Lots parking lot). The installation has been so rapid, the business could be open by August. The national franchise has over 400 locations, including one in Christiansburg.

Doggin’ out a bit further

Biscuits & Bubbles dog grooming and pet services has moved out of its shop on Main St in Salem after 16 years. The business still operates (along with boarding) at its location on Carvin’s Cove Road in the Catawba Valley, Roanoke County.

Vinton’s newest hotel

Construction is expected to begin on a four-story, 94-room **Extended Stay America Premier Suites** in the Town of Vinton at Pollard Street and Virginia

Have an announcement about your business?

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

Ave. The building is projected to cost around \$12 million.

Happy stats

Deputy—a workforce management platform—released its third annual Shift Pulse Report, showing South Carolina, **Virginia**, and Utah as having the highest Net Happiness Score. The report identified pharmacy workers and delivery/postal workers as the least happy—and workers at tobacco/e-cig/ marijuana shops, catering, and coffee shops as the most happy.

Baby box

A baby box—a secured, monitored, medical bassinet designed for surrendering an infant

anonymously—has been installed on an exterior wall inside the parking garage at **Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital**. Virginia’s “safe haven laws” allow such surrendering without facing legal consequences at designated locations (around 20 states nationwide). Nonprofit Safe Haven reports about 60 babies have been deposited in these boxes.

We’re number 4!
We’re number 4!

Virginia ranked fourth in the latest “America’s Top States for Business 2025” poll by CNBC. Although 4 out of 50 is not too shabby, Virginia’s business and political stakeholders weren’t too happy with the report—since the Commonwealth has

Notable Transactions

sponsored by covenantreal.com

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

COVENANT REAL ESTATE SERVICES

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

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

maintained a top ranking (1st place for six years). Several reasons have been cited for the drop, but one consistent factor is the termination of federal jobs, particularly in northern Virginia. (Number 1,2,3 states in the report: North Carolina, Texas, Florida)

Big bike bash

The **2025 USA Cycling Endurance Mountain Bike National Championship** was held in Roanoke July 14–20. It included cross country (Carvins Cove / Hollins University and at Explore Park / Roanoke County) and short track (Elmwood Park / Downtown Roanoke), attracting pro racers and Olympian members as well as amateurs and spectators.

New shop, old stuff

Kite and Key—an antique and unique estate and vintage items shop—has opened in Salem (off Main Street beside Burger King), with hours Tuesday through Saturday.

Van go (down the street)

Noke Van Co has moved to 1009 Industry Circle, which is in the same Riverdale industrial/arts community development at the foot of Mill Mountain in Roanoke. The company (custom van retrofitter) suffered a complete loss after a fire earlier this year.

Closing the digital gap

The **New River Valley Regional Commission**

joined **Giles County** community leaders, **Pembroke Telephone Cooperative** (PemTel), and both state and local officials to break ground on a transformative broadband infrastructure project in Giles County. The groundbreaking ceremony, held on May 29, marked the official start of construction on a fiber-to-the-home network that will bring high-speed internet access to over 600 unserved and underserved households and businesses in the White Gate, Staffordville, Poplar Hill, Sugar Run, Wilburn Valley and Walker Creek Communities. This initiative is part of a broader effort to close the digital divide in rural Virginia, ensuring that residents have the tools they need to thrive in an increasingly connected world. Construction started recently, with a completion date set for the fall of 2026.

Another Salem housing development idea

ABoone Real Estate has submitted a proposal for a 171-unit town home community, initially called Creekside Park in Salem, on a 40-acre lot off Newman Drive, informally known as the site for the old Q99 radio station towers, still owned by Mel Wheeler Inc.

Radford entrepreneur is a finalist

Ferrum College announces that graduate and trustee **Greg Craddock** has been named the 2025 Mid-Atlantic Region Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst & Young LLP

(EY US). Craddock, a 1992 graduate and chief executive officer of Patriot Group International (PGI), is one of eleven regional recipients and will advance to the national competition this November. EY's Entrepreneur Of The Year® program, now in its 40th year, honors bold business leaders who drive innovation and long-term impact in their industries and communities. Craddock was selected from 36 regional finalists representing Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

Houses could cost less with red tape reductions

Governor **Glenn Youngkin** told reporters at an event last month that the regulatory reforms have netted \$1.2 billion in savings for people and businesses who no longer have to file certain paperwork or comply with burdensome rules. "We went to look at the whole building code and said there's huge regulations in the building code, let's reduce them. Maintain safety, but let's reduce them. What we found is that there was \$24,000 of cost savings to building a home. That reduces the cost of the home by nearly 6% and that means someone has to pay less to get into the home of their dream," Youngkin explained.

Governor board appointments

Labor Apprenticeship Council: William Dunn of Boones Mill, Business Agent, Local 10 Plumber & Steamfitters. Cemetery

Board: Susan Mini of Salem, President/CEO, Sherwood Memorial Park. Virginia Board of Workforce Development: Doris Crouse-Mays of Vinton, President, Virginia AFL-CIO, Jeffrey Sluss of Salem, Executive Director, SkillsUSA Virginia Foundation. State Air Pollution Control Board: Ronald Jefferson of Moneta, retired, Appalachian Power. Virginia Waste Management Board: Joseph Levine of Dublin, Executive Director, New River Resource Authority.

Board of Long-Term Care Administrators: Pamela Dukes of Paint Bank, Healthcare Consultant. Commonwealth Council on Aging: Vickie Runk of Bedford County, CEO, Runk & Pratt Companies. Litter Control and Recycling Fund Advisory Board: Barry Custer of Blue Ridge, Vice President - Sales, Blue Ridge Beverage Company, Inc. Advisory Board on Juvenile Justice & Prevention: Keith Farmer of Roanoke, Director, Straight Street. Board Of Juvenile Justice: Mike Crawley of Salem, Deputy Chief of Police, Roanoke City Police Department, Wes Nance of Bedford, Commonwealth's Attorney for Bedford County.

Virginia Fire Services Board: Abbey Johnston of Bedford County, Deputy Chief of Operations, Bedford County Fire and Rescue. Commonwealth Transportation Board: Dr. Raymond Smoot of Montgomery County, retired Chair, Atlantic Union Bank; retired CEO, Virginia Tech Foundation. Virginia

Passenger Rail Authority: Cynthia Lawrence of Roanoke, Director, Workforce Development, Carilion Clinic.

Grant awards for talent pipelines

More than \$6.8 million in **Growth and Opportunity for Virginia (GO Virginia)** grant awards will go to eight projects aimed at advancing Virginia's innovation economy and expanding regional talent pipelines to support the expansion of strategic industry sectors including energy, life sciences, information technology, manufacturing, logistics, and agriculture. More than \$3.5 million in additional local and non-state funding has been committed by participating partners to support these efforts.

"These projects represent the strategic collaboration and ingenuity that GO Virginia promotes," said Nancy Howell Agee, chair of the GO Virginia State Board, and Carilion Clinic's CEO emeritus. "These projects empower regions to respond to their unique economic opportunities and has

been successful in attracting non-state dollars to the efforts." The GO TEC Launch in the New River Valley and Roanoke County (a \$994,212 award) for Region 2: Counties of Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, Roanoke, and the City of Radford. Montgomery County Public Schools, in partnership with surrounding localities, will launch the Great Opportunities in Technology and Engineering Careers (GO TEC) curriculum across six schools in Region 2. The project will establish hands-on training labs in middle and intermediate schools, introducing students to high-demand fields such as robotics, precision machining, welding, IT, and healthcare technologies. This initiative will build early awareness and skills aligned with Region 2's key industry needs.

Grants will boost local food production and vendors

Twelve infrastructure state grant awards, totaling more than \$497,000, have been

awarded to support local food production and agricultural facilities in the state. Administered by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the infrastructure grant program is part of the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) fund. Included were the Town of Pulaski (\$50,000) to help create a new home for The Marketplace, Pulaski's long-standing farmers market. The new permanent, open-air marketplace structure will be built on Main Street, providing a centralized space for local agricultural producers to connect with customers.

The City of Roanoke (\$50,000) will use those funds to support the fabrication and installation of new awnings on the Historic Roanoke City Market. The new awnings will provide reliable shelter for vendors to function at full capacity and increase availability for additional vendors to fill all 42 market stalls. Another Pulaski County grant (\$19,540) will help respond to increasing local demand

for high-quality, locally sourced meats, Mountain View Farm will use the funding to expand its on-farm meat processing capabilities. This expansion will allow the farm to offer customized and value-added meat products.

Record number of contractors and tradespeople in Virginia

New application data from the Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) reports that the Board of Contractors is on track to receive more than 14,000 new applications this year from contractors and tradesmen applying for licensure in the Commonwealth. The projected number is a ten percent increase from 2024 and nearly double the application volume handled a decade ago.

"The increase in license applications, especially in skilled and high skilled trades, is more proof and validation that trades jobs offer long term, well paying, family sustaining careers," said Secretary of Labor Bryan Slater.

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"In many of these fields, Registered Apprenticeships provide opportunities where someone will train you, pay to train you, pay you while they are training you, and likely give you a job when they are done training you, all without \$50,000 or \$100,000 dollars in student debt when you are done."

Museum ... and a shot?

Center in the Square in downtown Roanoke is working to bring a **Brady's Distillery** satellite tasting room to its atrium on the ground floor. Brady's distillery owners are also partners in the rooftop Six & Sky restaurant. Center president and CEO **Tara Marciniak** says the former warehouse has a historic designation, but she consulted with an architect who said it was okay to expand part of the building's façade and enclose it. This also means moving the Center in the Square box office as well.

"[Brian Brady] asked me this last November if I had any other nuggets of space at Center in the Square ... they were looking for a satellite tasting room location. Like a speakeasy." Marciniak says they are hopeful to have the atrium tasting room open by early next year. The entrance to Center in the Square's museums and theater will move as well, "and become more prominent."

More wings!

Roanoke's newest

chicken wings restaurant serves a wide variety of sauces. **Atomic Wings** has on Blue Hills Village Drive – at the former Chicago Bob's location between Starbucks and Tropical Smoothie, off US 460 Challenger Avenue. General Manager and partner Lydia Ravel says their sauce selection offers something for everyone: "we have a heat map; I encourage people to come in and check it out; it goes from sweet to heat. Honey mustard all the way to nuclear. Try them all." There is also a drive-thru window.

Carilion cuts ribbon on Crystal Spring Tower

After a delay of a few months for some finishing touches, the new state-of-the-art medical tower is ready to serve patients in Roanoke. Carilion Clinic held a ribbon-cutting in mid-June for its Crystal Spring Tower at Roanoke Memorial, which will house advanced cardiovascular care and expanded emergency services. Carilion Vice President of Cardiovascular Services, Marguerite Underwood, says the final phase before opening is a lot like the 25th mile of a marathon: "I am just so extraordinarily happy that we can offer cutting edge technology for our community. [And] you have to have excellent operators."

The Cardiovascular Institute inside the tower is expected to begin seeing patients in mid-July. Underwood also says upgraded equipment and more flexible care spaces will

help physicians perform complex procedures more efficiently - keeping patients here in the Star City. The Cardiovascular Institute was set to open last month.

City Market building scare

The Roanoke City Market Building was open for business — just days after a kitchen fire shut things down. The fire broke out inside Fork in the Market, triggering alarms and the building's suppression system in late June. Smoke made it through all three floors, but no injuries were reported. Executive Director of the Market Building Foundation, **Elliott Broyles**, said, "I just assumed the worst. I assumed we had significant damage in the common areas of the building [it didn't]. When I was able to go in, I was quite pleasantly shocked."

Poage Farm development moves forward with new plan

It appears as if there will be residential development at the old **Poage Mill** farm after all - just on a smaller scale. **Alexander Boone**, President of ABoone Real Estate, told a Back Creek community meeting audience recently that ABoone is moving ahead with plans for up to 120 single-family homes on the old Poage Farm property, just off US 221/ Bent Mountain Road. "We had some people that still don't want it developed at all," said Boone of the community

meeting; where he reminded those from the Back Creek area that the property was MLS listed – meaning anyone could have purchased it to keep it from development. A previous proposal that included townhomes and some retail spaces was scuttled after opposition from the Bent Mountain Community, but Boone says this project will move forward now "by right," - its already zoned for that level of development by Roanoke County.

Boone will not pursue the retail space development at this point. He says the single family detached homes will cost from 300 to 500,000 dollars. Engineering work is expected to be finished soon, with the plan to start building houses in spring or summer 2026. The ABoone development will consume about a quarter of the acreage at the old Poage Mill farm, which had been owned for years by Roanoke County, held as a possible school site. Home prices are targeted from 300 to 500-thousand dollars, says Boone. The original proposal would have required rezoning. Ironically, at the community meeting concerning the new housing-only plan, "we did have a few people that wanted a local restaurant or coffee shop."

Community radio comes to Melrose

96.9 FM "Radio Melrose" went on the air in mid-July after a kickoff event at the L.H. Hamlar Event Center on Melrose

Avenue. Radio Melrose, an independent community radio station, is described by Dr. David S. Points, also the owner/General Manager & News Director for Fox Radio 910, as “a platform for airing news, music, and entertainment, provide community and public affairs programing for cultural diversity

communities and for unserved or underserved groups in Roanoke.” As a 501(3)(c) non-profit radio station, Radio Melrose will be funded through program underwriting, program sponsorship and donations. Virginia Tech Foundation, Inc. and Radio Melrose, Inc. have entered a Digital Stream Program

Agreement to provide Radio Melrose programming on the WVTF HD-4 digital channel. Radio Melrose will broadcast on 96.9 FM and 89.1 FM HD4, serving the City of Roanoke, City of Salem and the surrounding communities. Radio Melrose will broadcast from WFJX's available production studio at

1848 Clay Street SE, Roanoke. Radio Melrose will provide local news, community news, religious and gospel music, health programs and financial shows and jazz.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

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

“Engagement isn't about perks—it's about people. — Page 24



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Virginia Western, Dr Sandel

Sandel: the game changer for Virginia Western calls it a career

By Gene Marrano

Program, mission and facility-wise, Bobby Sandel leaves his mark at Roanoke's community college

The fourth president ever at Virginia Western Community College, Dr. Robert "Bobby" Sandel, retired at the end of June after leading the two-year and vocational school since 2001. Seven consecutive semesters of enrollment growth since the end of the pandemic, new buildings on a rebuilt campus (more than \$138 million in new building construction and renovations) and a laser focus on workforce development are a large part of the legacy Bobby Sandel will leave behind. "It's kind of bittersweet, I've enjoyed what I've done, but I'm ready to move on. A lot of satisfaction. I've loved to see where the college has gone. We've made a difference ... and changed people's lives."

The Fralin Center for Science and Health Professions, the Strauss Family Student Life Center, a standalone STEM building and Colonial Avenue streetscape improvements to enhance safety and the feel of a true college campus are also on Sandel's resume at VWCC. Not to mention the school's increased presence at the Greenfield

Education & Training Center in Botetourt County and upgrades at the Claude Moore Education Complex, home to the Al Pollard Culinary Arts Program.

The Sandels – including his wife Jane, a school teacher in Salem, made the decision to retire together. Sandel was the most tenured president in the Virginia Community College System and spent nine years as president at Mountain Empire Community College before arriving at Virginia Western. Prior to that, Sandel served more than 20 years in the South Carolina technical college system.

Another notable achievement: when he arrived the school's Educational Foundation had around \$1 million in assets and no grants program. Since Dr. Sandel arrived, the Foundation has increased that total to around \$34 million in assets and has brought in almost 50 million dollars in grant funding. The CCAP program that provides free tuition for qualified high school students

in the Roanoke Valley was created on Sandel's watch. People and local businesses noticed. "A lot of these companies started supporting us more financially." But he also insisted on high standards for students, figuring that makes them more employable. "Then you get a lot [more] support from the community."

Preparing students for careers with two year degrees, certificate programs or aligning their associate's degrees with four year schools (VWCC signed a number of articulation agreements during Sandel's tenure that helps make that transition easier) are other highwater marks for Sandel.


Virginia Western also joined the Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program (RAMP), the region's first business accelerator in 2017, helping to run RAMP operations as the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council worked to attract startups to its twice yearly, 12 week programs for 4-6 startups looking to grow their companies. Heywood Fralin, chair of Retirement Unlimited, Inc., and co-trustee of the Horace G. Fralin Charitable Trust, serves as a Virginia Western Educational Foundation board member: "it is essential for the success of startup companies in our region and would not be in existence without Bobby Sandel," said Fralin when Sandel's pending retirement was announced.

Sandel, a South Carolina native (all three of his degrees came from South Carolina colleges), was named Roanoke City Citizen of the Year in 2013 and has served on numerous local and state boards. Dr. Laura Treanor is now the fifth president of Virginia



Courtesy photo

Western Community College. Treanor was recruited from her former role as Provost, Senior Vice President for Instructional Services, and Dean of Faculty at Vincennes University in Vincennes, Indiana.

"We want to develop even further relationships with the business community. [Treanor] is good with partnerships and things of that type." Treanor has asked Sandel to help introduce her to key people, "and get her in some doors. The next step will be really working with Carilion on these biotech and biomedical programs." Treanor also taught at Roanoke College as an associate professor at one point in her career. "I told her the stage has been set for her to take it to the next level," says Sandel. "We've got the campus, we've got the facilities, the programs, the relationships with the communities in place, money in the bank. The community responded to us and I'm grateful." Needless to say, Treanor has big shoes to fill as Bobby Sandel calls it a career – and a distinguished one at that. 

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