

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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OCTOBER 2025

Shrewd Outdoors

Boundless ABA

4-H Mobile Life
Sciences Lab

Rideshare Driver
Workspace

Bob Rotanz

vbFRONT.com



designer

author

celebrity

Edith-Anne Duncan
Edith-Anne Duncan Design



PRESENTS



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WELCOME TO THE FRONT

Grab your fabric swatch, your bow and quiver, your microscope, your playground pass, your calzone, and hop in the rideshare—won't you? These are the props and stories in your very own FRONT this month.

Sure, they're all business profiles, but more than that—each one has a person behind the story. Not a phantom (*Happy Halloween month!*)... a real person. Years ago, we carried a tagline with Valley Business FRONT that said your business journal was about "people you know—and people you'd like to know." We still emphasize the local connection. And the 'stranger' who's in business that turns out to be—your neighbor.

So, climb on in and share our ride. Face forward as you flip through the pages. We wouldn't want you to miss anything.



Tom Field
Publisher



Gene Marrano
Editor

“We can get them a stick early. — Page 37



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LEAD STORY PAGE 8

"Sophisticated—Casual"

Edith-Anne Duncan Design gets national attention, regional acclaim, and our local pride

By Tom Field



“Make communication a two-way street, not a quarterly newsletter.”
— Page 38



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OCTOBER



Aila Boyd



Bonnie Chavez



Dan Dowdy



Emily Field



Olivia Marone



Gene Marrano

Advisory Board

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

2025 CONTRIBUTORS



Jennifer Poff Cooper



Carrie Cousins



Doug Doughty



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



Alicia Smith
F&S Building Innovations /
construction

“”
You can turn
uncertainty
into
confidence.

— Page 25

“”
I figure I've
worked 12
hundred
weekends
in my life.

— Page 36

Biographies and
contact information
on each contributor
are provided on Page 56.

“”
I want something
that nice in MY home.
— Page 9





Corey Watkins, Skyryder Photography

"Sophisticated—Casual"

Edith-Anne Duncan Design gets national attention, regional acclaim, and our local pride

By Tom Field



Dustin Peck Photography

A dream book.

That's the reaction from readers of *Southern Sensibility*—the interior design book showcasing elegant homes. The kind of book you flip through for inspiration. Or just for viewing the pure beauty of what's possible.

And for many, the book with page-stopping ability to make one cry out, "Oh, my. I want something that nice in MY home."

Meet the author: Edith-Anne Duncan. Right out of Blacksburg, she might surprise you. Not so much, perhaps, in a metropolitan setting or a social affair in a swanky museum. But here, from her home studio adjacent to a golf course and artfully placed for the mountain ridge backdrop and stunning natural environment of southwest Virginia?

“ ”

What are the things that you are missing?



Submitted



Submitted



Submitted



Submitted

Just a few examples from Edith-Anne's rug collaboration with KES Collection



Submitted

One example from Edith-Anne's furniture collection, complementing her "sophisticated-casual" approach

Let's just say the *quaintrelle* persona, the radiant presentation... is serendipitous.

Pleasantly striking. Yet approachable.

Indeed, if you asked AI or a sketch artist to produce a portrait of "an avant-garde interior designer" it might look exactly like Edith-Anne Duncan.

It's a good thing she looks the part. Because she's owning it.

"I had four goals," Duncan says.

"First, I wanted to be successful [as an interior designer]." *She maintains a robust clientele and impressive lineup of installations.*

"Second, I wanted to be in a national magazine." *Check that. A half-dozen years ago, a top shelf shelter magazine published her work.*

"Third, I wanted to be on the cover." *Again, check. Her work has been the cover feature showcase on two editions of Southern Home.*

"And fourth, I wanted a book."

Southern Sensibility releases this month (October 2025). And it's a dandy.

It's available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and her website: edithanneduncan.com.

Duncan—who has 60,000 followers on Instagram—has established herself as a celebrity-level professional. The book features a compilation of nine homes (located in our own region of Blacksburg and Roanoke, and in Richmond, Williamsburg, and South Carolina) in urban and suburban settings, from the mountains to the sea. And it goes beyond the stunning photography showcasing the interiors. She provides the how and why of her artistic approach.

“Whether we use intense colors or serene tones, classic, traditional, or modern—I believe in function first; and it has to be comfortable for everyone.”

Duncan says one of the first questions she asks is, “what are the things that you are missing?”

The resulting production is what she calls, “not too fine or too formal... sophisticated casual.”

Another approach Duncan utilizes, is to work from an existing singular element—not a “blank canvas” as some designers attest.

“It could be a unique piece of artwork—or a family heirloom—or even an item from a hobby,” Duncan says. She tells of one homeowner who loved mountain vistas; and she crafted an environment all around a favorite work of art that showed such a view beautifully, drawing in the eye. The art was one small piece, but it set a stage to complement the entire room, the style, the feeling, the reassuring luxury.

Duncan was raised in Raleigh, NC and has lived in Blacksburg for 30 years. She met her husband, David (of Duncan Automotive Network) at college, and the couple has twins (son, daughter, 22). She got her undergraduate degree from High Point University, and her master’s in interior design at Virginia Tech.

“We do high-end residential... everything from home furnishings to artwork, décor, wallpaper, rugs...”

Duncan says her business offers “full service” design, for new or renovated homes; and “lighter end” services, such as a “design-in-a-day” (one room) and 50-minute consultations.

MEET THE AUTHOR



Edith-Anne's book not only showcases nine homes—it describes the why and how

Roanoke, VA

Punch Boutique (tbd)

High Point, NC

Chelsea House Showroom (Oct 26)

Winston-Salem, NC

Monkee's of the Village (Oct 27)

Abingdon, VA

The Virginian (Nov 8)

Charlotte, NC

Schumacher Boutique (Nov 13)

Columbia, SC

McIntosh Cottage Antiques (Nov 21)

Richmond, VA

Hampton House (Dec 16)

Raleigh, NC

Carolina Country Club (Apr 23)

Wilmington, NC

Cape Fear Garden Club (Apr 24)



"We go into a partnership," Duncan says, when describing her process with a homeowner or client. "It starts with discovery."

She also enjoys the teaching aspect of her line of work.

"It's not like DIY," Duncan says. "But I teach people how to measure, for example. How to select art. How your ceiling is 'the fifth wall,' how to balance for couples so your environment is not too masculine or too feminine..."



“

I believe in function first; and it has to be comfortable for everyone.

Dustin Peck Photography

Duncan's studio takes up an entire wing of her own house. With generous windows inviting sunlight, the large worktable commanding and centering the room, computer station sequestered off to the side, countertops and shelving enveloping her collection of material samples, swatches and sketches adorning the surfaces—the room embraces her notion that function comes first.

And yet, it's still all stylish and comfortable.

"A sophisticated, casual approach to today's lifestyle," as our own, local, celebrity-designer-author describes it. 



Submitted photos

Laven Newsom and Riley Newsom. Partners and brothers

Shrewd Outdoors brings archery, adventure to downtown Salem

By Aila Boyd

Since opening its 12,000-square-foot retail and recreation space on Main Street in Salem, Shrewd Outdoors has quickly become a go-to destination for archery enthusiasts and outdoor adventures.

More than just a store, Shrewd Outdoors blends retail, community, and experience under one roof, offering everything from high-end gear to a 6,000-square-foot indoor archery range and a lounge where visitors can unwind with beer, coffee and food.

For co-owner Laven Newsom, the expansion is the culmination of years of planning. “We’ve always believed that Salem is the perfect home for Shrewd and have been on the search for some time for a space that would better allow us to connect directly with our customers,” he said. “The new space allows us to showcase gear in a way that feels inviting and accessible, while also making room for unique features like our range, bar, and lounge.”

Shrewd Archery has long been known for designing quality gear, but the new space offers customers much more than products. The goal, Newsom explained, was to create an environment where both beginners and seasoned archers could feel at home.

“Beginners will find a welcoming environment with knowledgeable staff ready to help them get started, while

seasoned archers will appreciate the opportunity to test equipment in our indoor range, attend workshops, and connect with a community of like-minded shooters,” he said. “It’s not just about selling gear—it’s about giving people a place to learn, practice, and belong.”

That focus on accessibility extends to the store’s inventory strategy. Rather than carrying a broad but shallow selection, Shrewd Outdoors stocks fewer brands but offers a deeper range of products from each. Customers will find gear from respected names like Mathews Inc., Hoyt Archery, Easton Archery, Garmin, and Vortex. “We wanted to make sure we had the items in stock, and our customers didn’t have to wait for us to order them,” Newsom said.

The centerpiece of Shrewd Outdoors is its sprawling indoor archery range, one of the largest of its kind in the region. With space for lessons, youth leagues, casual practice and competitive shoots, the range was designed to serve a wide cross-section of the community.

“The range opens the door to so many





possibilities—lessons for beginners, youth leagues, competitive shoots, and casual drop-in practice,” Newsom said. “We’re especially excited about hosting events that bring archers together, from local tournaments to community nights, and providing a safe, fun environment where people of all ages can discover archery.”

By creating a facility that doubles as both a retail space and an activity hub, Shrewd Outdoors hopes to draw enthusiasts from across Virginia and beyond. “With the addition of the range and our expanded offerings, Salem has the potential to become a destination for archery in the region,” Newsom noted.

While archery remains the company’s foundation, Shrewd Outdoors reflects the full breadth of outdoor recreation

that defines life in Southwest Virginia. The store now carries gear for hiking, trail running, and other pursuits popular across the Blue Ridge and surrounding areas.

“Southwest Virginia is an incredible place for outdoor recreation—whether it’s the trails along the Blue Ridge, the Greenways, or local parks,” Newsom said. “By expanding into hiking, trail running, and other pursuits, we’re creating a store that celebrates the outdoors in all its forms.”

Tommy Miller, Salem’s director of economic development, said that the city is fortunate to have Shrewd in the downtown area. He added, “Not only are they a destination retailer for the niche archery community devoted to the Shrewd brand, but a casual shopper, with no archery experience, can have fun at their indoor range and enjoying

a great retail and dining experience.”

The addition of a lounge gives the space a unique twist. Customers can grab a coffee before hitting the range, relax with a beer after a tournament, or simply hang out while friends or family shop. “We want people to feel like they can slow down and stay awhile,” Newsom explained. “The lounge makes Shrewd Outdoors more than just a store—it makes it a gathering place.”

Shrewd Outdoors is more than a new business—it’s a continuation of a family tradition. The Newsom family has deep ties to Salem, with the Damon Company, their parent business, operating in the community since 1964.

“Growth isn’t just about numbers—it’s about building something sustainable that adds value to Salem and provides job security to our employees,” Newsom said. “Being family-owned means every decision carries the weight of legacy, but it also enables us to make decisions without worrying about how it impacts our stock price.”

That long-term, community-centered mindset is evident in Shrewd Outdoors’ outreach goals. From partnering with schools and

youth groups to organizing local events, the company sees the store as a platform for deeper engagement. “Archery is a sport that teaches focus, discipline, and confidence, and it’s accessible to a wide range of ages and abilities,” Newsom said. “We’re eager to partner with schools, youth groups, and local organizations to introduce archery to young people and give them a safe, supportive environment to learn.”

While the new store and range mark a milestone for the company, Newsom emphasized that Shrewd Outdoors is just getting started. “Our long-term vision is to keep innovating—whether that’s in the products we design under Shrewd Archery, the experiences we offer in the store, or the community programs we create,” he said.

By combining high-quality products, a state-of-the-art range and a welcoming community space, Shrewd Outdoors hopes to set a new standard for outdoor retail. “We see Shrewd Outdoors as a model for how retail can be immersive and community-driven,” Newsom said. “Looking ahead, we’re excited to expand our programming, grow our events calendar, and continue making Salem a destination for archery and outdoor recreation.” 





LEAD BY EXAMPLE

**By Carrie Cousins,
Lead Point Digital**

Executive Summary:
*Marketing is a lot like
Halloween. You can
hand out tricks or treats
with your campaigns
and tactics.*

"Trick or treat!" marketing

We've all seen those ads that you can't click off the screen and then click into by mistake (trick) as well as those that are so clever that you smile in delight every time you see it (treat).

What do marketing tricks and treats look like? Let's break them down.

We'll start with the tricks. These are common worst practices that you see commonly but should avoid because they are designed to deceive, frustrate, or even mislead users.

- **Dark patterns:** Any type of element that pops up on the screen with unclear instructions, buttons that do something other than what you expect or are unclickable, popups that won't close, or difficult cancellation/unsubscribing processes are all considered dark patterns because the only way to get rid of them is to interact. (I have downloaded and deleted Royal Match 10 times!) These are examples of deceptive marketing.
- **Hidden costs or fees:** Advertising one price only to get to the cart and see that it is something else is not just frustrating, but it will create a lack of trust with customers. The only acceptable price addition at the cart level is a reasonable shipping fee.
- **Clickbait:** Some headlines that overpromise and underdeliver are often easy to spot – "Lose 5 Pounds in 24 Hours!" Others are a lot harder to pinpoint until after the click – "5 Ways Eat Candy and Still Lose Weight by Halloween." The problem is that neither can deliver on the promise.

Good marketing is full of treats that are delightful for users and can help build greater brand value and loyalty.

- **Authenticity:** Brands that exemplify the same messaging they amplify resonates with users and help them feel connected. Patagonia placed ads in 2011 with the headline "Don't Buy This Jacket" with an image of their product, noting that their products last so long you



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should not buy multiples. In a cluttered world, any brand that has the same values as I do feels like home.

- Unexpected extras: BarkBox recently sent my dog a free toy because my box was delayed with a note that apologized. I didn't ask or complain; someone their noticed the tracking problem and fixed it in advance. This extra touch was such as delightful treat that's made me an even more loyal customer.
- Plays on words or seasonal elements: There's nothing like a good pun or fun element. In 2023, Angel Soft encouraged trick or treaters to create their own mummy costume using their product. The simple advertising animation is nothing but fun and definitely a marketing treat.

This season as you engage in fourth quarter marketing and beyond, consider dropping more treats for your followers and customers, and eliminate the tricks.

Remember how sad you were when you got a black licorice bottle candy in your trick or treat bag? Be the marketer that drops a full-size Snickers in the hands of your audience. 🍬

“

Good
marketing is
full of treats.

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Photos: Gene Marrano

Making a difference, one child at a time

By Gene Marrano

For this couple who moved to Roanoke in order to provide services for autistic children, the opportunities and the need for more therapy alternatives is indeed Boundless.

A husband and wife who relocated from Orlando, Florida to Roanoke are putting the finishing touches on renovations of an old church sanctuary they purchased in Roanoke's Norwich neighborhood, where they have launched Boundless ABA. As an early intervention clinic, they are focused on autistic children 12-13 and under, using ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) to produce personalized plans for that child and their parents.

Boundless ABA, operated by Richard and Shelby Gooden (she's the licensed clinician, he's an engineer and the operations person) plan to treat children across the entire spectrum of autism, teaching adaptive living, communication, social, play and community safety skills. A large indoor playground and

brightly decorated classrooms provide the settings for those therapies.

"With every single one of our clients no matter where they are on the autism scale, we try to get them together to build some type of social interaction. It's really important to building friendships and relationships as they grow," says Shelby Gooden. She's been in the field for about ten years and new from the beginning, "I eventually wanted to [operate] my own center – to do things exactly how I envisioned it."

Boundless ABA is also hiring a certified, trained staff to work with young clients as they grow. She is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and will evaluate each child that comes up, devising a plan that behavior



technicians at Boundless ABA will then follow. Those technicians must go through a 40 hour class first. Clients will come from referrals, including local hospital pediatric departments and the schools.

Richard Gooden notes how children somewhere on the autism spectrum were often undiagnosed

or misdiagnosed in the past; they were considered loners who didn't interact, or just had a particular obsession, with trains for instance he notes. Gooden, 37, has focused on remodeling the sanctuary inside and out, getting ready to handle autistic children who may also have some motor skill issues. The new entrance ramp to the building provides

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ADA access for those dealing with the physical aspects of autism.

The *boundlessaba.com* website states that, "focused ABA therapy allows Boundless ABA to partner with children who only need a selected concentration of therapy. Removing

distractions allows them to concentrate on that task ... to produce positive changes and results in a relatively short period of time."

That could mean enhancing verbal skills or teaching sign language to autistic children who have not yet mastered language skills –




or may not be able to. “We do what we can to able them to live independently.” Applied Behavior Analysis, he notes, is a methodology used in a variety of scenarios, not just for those with autism.

Shelby Gooden says the relationship with Roanoke City Public Schools is off to a good start. “We’re going to get a lot of afterschool kids, because the schools are able to meet their needs. With kids on the spectrum, they have a lot more support from [Roanoke City] schools.” Richard Gooden says down the road they would like to open another ABA clinic for older children and teenagers, and perhaps young adults dealing with autism. He says studies show that even those who seek that therapy later in life see benefits in the way they communicate.

The Goodens have already joined the Regional Chamber and met with city officials, getting Boundless ABA on the radar screen. In fact,

their relocation to Roanoke after scouting out other eastern U.S. cities is the stuff of Chamber ads; they stopped for the night in Roanoke, saw the Mill Mountain Star aglow and were charmed. They also found that in Roanoke people were waiting for six months or more to receive services and figured they could help fill that void.

“We want the kids to be excited to come [to Boundless ABA] and comfortable working with our therapists and technicians. We’re going to be playing with them while we work on specific skills, in the playground to work on motor abilities,” says Richard Gooden. “It’s really about initially making that connection. Our focus is really to get results that will help the kid be independent – and to help the family.” After all, the Goodens believe the possibilities are Boundless. “Our [ultimate] goal is to kick all our clients out and have them be with their peers at school. We want them to not need to be here any longer.” 



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BEST JOB EVER

By Jennifer Leake CMC®
AssessmentPros.com

Executive Summary:
Halloween may come once a year, but for business owners, the "scary stuff" often shows up in the workplace. Forget haunted houses and horror movies—the real nightmares are tied to employees.

The 7 nightmares that keep business owners awake at night

Whether it's lost productivity, legal risks, or cultural damage, these fears can spook even the most seasoned entrepreneur. Here are seven workplace nightmares—and how to keep them from haunting your business.

1. The Wrong Hire

Every owner dreads hiring someone who looked great on paper but proves to be a poor fit. The cost is frightening. Studies estimate a single bad hire can drain 30–50% of the position's annual salary in wasted time, training, and disruption.

Antidote: Utilize structured hiring practices such as benchmarks, assessments, and reference checks to prevent costly mistakes.

2. The Zombie Employee

These are the disengaged workers who show up but lack energy or initiative. They do only the minimum and spread apathy to others.

Antidote: Set clear expectations, recognize effort, and invest in employee growth. Engagement is the best cure for workplace zombies.

3. The Disappearing Act

Turnover or key people leaving without warning terrifies owners. Valuable skills and client relationships vanish overnight, leaving the business scrambling.

Antidote: Create strong onboarding, career pathways, and stay interviews so employees feel invested for the long term.

4. The Legal Trap

Few things strike fear like lawsuits tied to harassment, discrimination, or wage disputes. Even unfounded claims can drain money and tarnish reputation.

Antidote: Stay current on employment law, maintain clear policies, and train managers to prevent missteps.

5. The Culture Killer

One toxic employee can poison an entire team. Negativity spreads fast, dragging down morale and driving away top performers.

Antidote: Address bad behavior quickly and consistently. Protecting your culture is protecting your business.

6. The Blame Game

Employees who dodge accountability often result in missed

deadlines, poor quality, and frustrated customers. A workplace without responsibility quickly unravels.


Antidote: Build accountability into job expectations, performance conversations, and reward systems.

7. The Thief in the Night

From stolen data to misused company credit cards, dishonesty is every owner's worst betrayal. Trust, once lost, is nearly impossible to restore.

Antidote: Put safeguards in place, monitor carefully, and build a culture of integrity.

Final Thought:

Workplace nightmares don't have to keep you up at night. With the right systems for hiring, engagement, and leadership, you can turn uncertainty into confidence and create a workplace where employees LOVE what they do, ENJOY who they work with, and RESPECT who they work for. If you're ready to turn HR nightmares into your Best Job Ever™ culture, contact me to start the conversation. 

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hiring
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Todd Ross



Sandra Craft



Teresa Fridley



Adam Alexander



Peter Jessee



Jay Gilliland



Va Cooperative Extension

Science on Wheels

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

With Virginia facing a critical shortage of healthcare workers, this rolling lab's goal is to help kids understand health careers that are available to them in their communities.



Mobile Learning Wagon

Since kids in underserved areas often lack access to high-quality learning experiences, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) decided to “bring the museum to them,” said Erika Bonnett, VCE Specialist / 4-H Program Development.

The Virginia 4-H Mobile Life Sciences Lab, a 43-foot interactive classroom, is bringing hands-on science education to K–5 students across the commonwealth, with a goal of driving interest in health care careers. The emphasis is on rural communities, with southwest Virginia being the first focus area, but the lab has also visited more populated areas like Fairfax County.

The concept was born three years ago, when the Virginia-based Claude Moore Charitable Foundation put out a call asking for a health care career development program geared toward elementary students (programs already existed for middle and high schoolers). When generating ideas, VCE mined its history, thinking about how information has gotten into rural area in the past. One of its partners, Virginia State University, had seen success with a mobile agriculture lab.

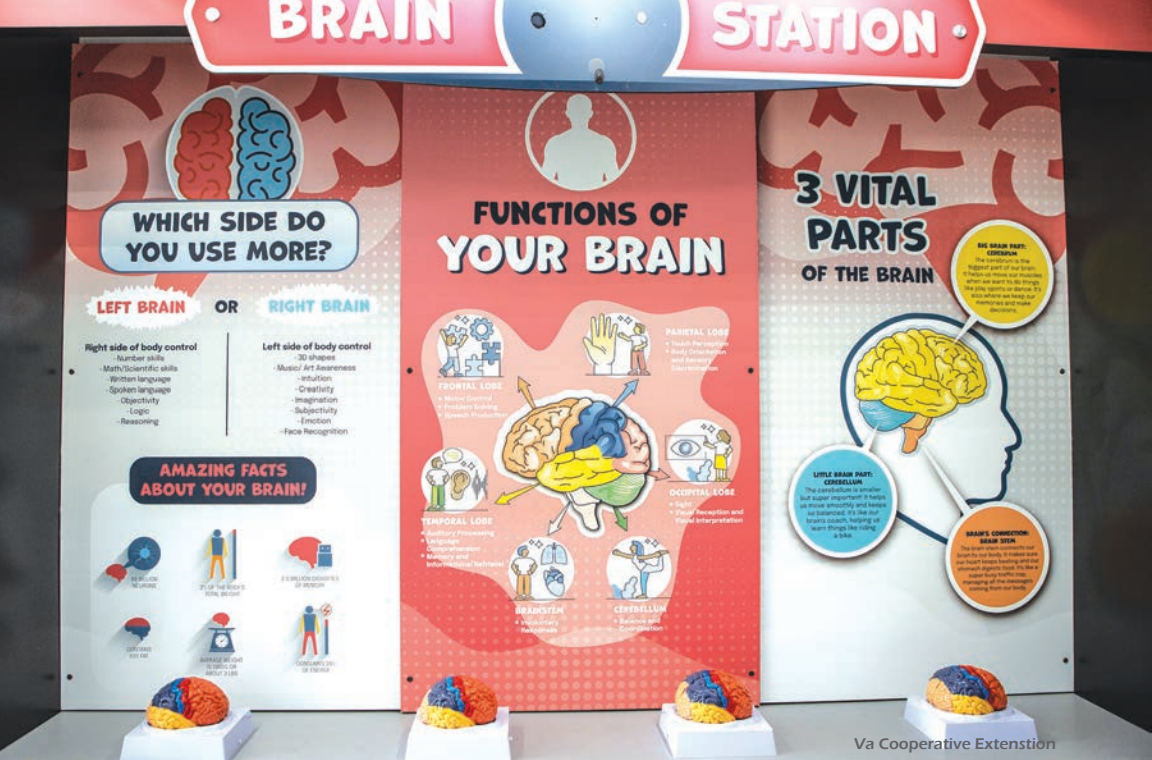
The \$750,000 grant award from the foundation was not a given, Bonnett said. VCE “pitched and workshopped” the idea as part of the application process.

The key, she said, was looking at “their needs versus our needs, and where the cross-section was.”

Bonnett and Dr. Tonya Price, Extension Specialist for 4-H Youth Development in the Northern District VCE Office, then worked together to create curriculum and ideas for immersive exhibits. Collaboration between researchers and practitioners kept the focus from being too narrow. They divided health care careers into four areas – environment and ecology; agriculture, fisheries, and food; behavioral health; and physiological health – and produced modules in each area.

“It’s Virginia Tech researched and created,” Bonnett said. Other partners include the U.S. Department of Conservation.

Creative exhibits and activities utilize virtual reality, touch screens, and puzzles. They help children understand concepts such as the digestive process, the importance of river species, and emotional identification and



Va Cooperative Extension

regulation. There are “tips and tricks” that kids can do or use, but everything is linked back to health care careers.

It was “really important,” said Bonnett, that the modules were SOL (Standards of Learning)-aligned to ensure teacher buy-in. Indeed, VCE is excited about feedback so far. Bonnett cited anecdotal evidence from a pilot program in Buckingham County,

a rural county in the center of the state.

“They were blown away. Kids had a blast, and teachers asked to have it back,” Bonnett said. A principal there said it was “worth every moment.”

Teachers can even check out extended learning kits that have ten lessons for classroom use.



Erika Bonnett, Mobile Learning Wagon

Va Cooperative Extension

The lab visits fairs and festivals, as well as schools. VCE uses its existing network of county extension agents, who already have relationships with these entities, to market the lab and train those who staff the lab – a mix of volunteers and agents. The idea is for locals to set up and man the lab in their own community after the driver drops it off. The lab requires six to eight volunteers for each station to be staffed, which helps increase the connection of youth with the material being presented. In non-school settings, parents can lead children through the lab.


The lab launched in November of 2024 and was fully out with agents for a summer kick-off in June of this year. Bonnett estimates it has reached 2,500 kids so far. The stated goal is to reach 5,000 students.

The idea is connecting classroom learning to real-world careers, and Bonnett says they

want to make sure the career connection piece is not lost in the fun.

Several metrics will measure success. Numbers and demographics are collected. An educator feedback form asks about experiences in the lab, and they also look at volunteer experiences. Were youth engaged? Did they have fun? Are they asking questions? Respondents are also asked to list one good thing and one challenge.

So, the lab will “change as it goes.” Future goals include having the lab fully booked and taking it across the state over the next three years. Ultimately, depending on funding, Bonnett would like to see trailers in all four 4-H focus areas: agriculture, healthy living, STEM, and civic engagement.

As she espoused, it’s all about making kids “beyond ready” with life and career skills. 



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REAL ESTATE MATTERS

By Frazier Hughes

Executive Summary:

If you ask any realtor who is in the trenches they will say "It's a weird market." That is because some homes are going under contract with multiple offers - and some are taking longer to sell.

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

How is the market – and do you wait for the rate cut?


So, what is the difference? Is it the mortgage rate? Let's discuss both. I am selling homes all over the valley and our market is really strong. Is it a buyer's market ... yes and no. Homes were going under contract for market value opposed to over value during the Covid peak times. During these times I could list homes and have many under contract in a week if not the same day over asking price or close to it. I even had a client offer \$50k over and get beat out on a home in Wasena.

Rates during that era reminded me of 0% financing option for a new car, which happens once a year when a dealer runs a special. Well for homes that was a once in a lifetime deal. It will more than likely never happen again.

I have heard for the past four years, "Why move when my rate is so low?" – I get it. But I am still selling tons of homes, and the demand is high. Why? People need homes, people die, and their living situations change. Example: 60+ year olds don't like steps and prefer one level living.

Many are saying as you read this isn't the rate going to change? The Fed to the rescue? How does it change things for a buyer? Is it a big difference? Well, for a \$400k home one point (depending on terms) for a 30 year mortgage will save you roughly \$253 a month. Is that worth it to you?

Now let's discuss time on the market. It's price and location. After two days on the market at a listing in Botetourt we had five offers in two days and for a listing in Cave Spring 40+ people came to the open house but no offers - because the price was too high.

The five offers in two days is rare but it's happening, and location is a big deal. Instead of 3-10 days on the market according to The Roanoke Valley Association of REALTORS current days on the market is 38 days (as of last month), unless the property has been re-listed and that pushes it to 44 days. Don't worry, your home will still sell and if the mortgage rates improve it will help your cause. 

“Current days on the market is 38 days... don't worry, your home will still sell.”



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Your Driver's Here

Chris Colon's work space is his car. His car with... wait for it... 368,000 miles. The Uber

and Lyft rideshare driver says he enjoys the flexibility of creating his own schedule. Colon is known for wearing sports jerseys; has high ratings with both apps, driving for Lyft (6 years) and Uber (2 years).

Photo by Olivia Marone







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City of Salem

A Changing of the Guard at Mac and Bob's

By Doug Doughty

From Roanoke College hero to the iconic Mac n'Bob's restaurant and sports bar. Bob Rotanz calls it a day.

Said Long Island, NY native Bob Rotanz, "we actually closed on August 6. They are going to keep our staff intact. This is their 14th restaurant." Rotanz is talking about Dave Nagrogan; his partner is Jeff Larsen. "I am consulting, which is great. I can pick my hours and take as many as I want. I get paid by the hour," says Rotanz. "I am here for the transition, to make sure customers know that Mac n' Bobs is still going to be the same. It is actually going to be better, I think. and my staff. too, after the

transition." (Giant calzone lovers rest easy).

Rotanz swears he will pump the breaks in his role as a consultant: "so, it is really saying what's up to me, which I really like, because I figure I've worked 12 hundred weekends in my life. So, no more weekends for this guy. It is still going to be here, and I think it's going to be better."

In fact, says Rotanz, who scored the winning goal for Roanoke College when they won

the 1978 NCAA men's lacrosse title. "Obviously, they're going to put money into the place. We have those booths up stairs that have been here since 1982. They'll probably put two new booths in. They'll put some dining out on main street. As far as technology goes, they'll be getting up to par – things that customer won't see but our staff can use."

Bob Rotanz started in Mac n' Bobs with his partner Jim McEnerny (and Roanoke College teammate) in 1980 - 45 years ago. "Looking back on it, which was kind of crazy; we had \$600 bucks a month in rent. " By the time we bought our inventory, we might have had \$500 in our drawer. And that's all we had."

"But 18-year-olds could legally drink. There was no place in town to get a beer. So, with the college there [Roanoke College, in Salem], we were busy right away." It's never stopped. The restaurant holds a luncheon just before the Salem Red Sox season begins each April, with all the players and coaches present.

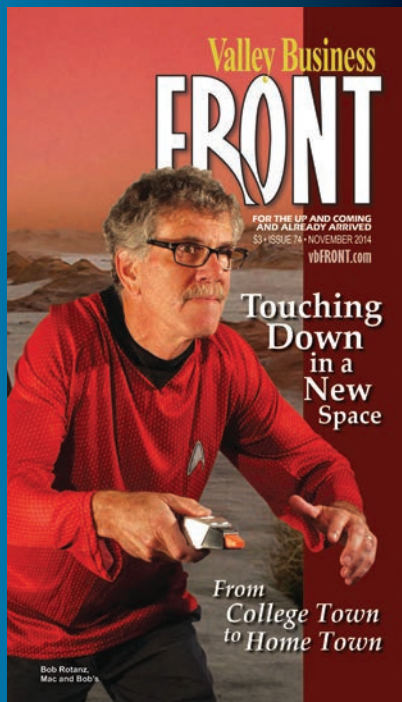
Lacrosse sticks with Rotanz to this day (his daughters played in high school and college). He helped coach the Salem High School lacrosse team to a state title this year. "I coached the first team here," Rotanz said. "With all the lacrosse sticks hanging around, it's kind of fun."

Rotanz played at Ward Melville High School in Long Island, N.Y., and was recruited to Roanoke College by then head coach Paul Griffin. Griffin now lives in Florida, and they keep contact. They recently had dinner in Atlanta.

Rotanz no longer coaches for the lacrosse team, but he goes to games. "I've got some grandkids," he said. "Who knows? We can get them a stick early." Looking back on his career, Rotanz said, "the community reaction was really unbelievable and how they supported us."


After his jersey was retired in 2022, he was named to the Roanoke College Hall of Fame and subsequently the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame. "If you had asked me as a freshman when I came here, would I be here for the rest of my life, I would say, 'I don't think

BEAM ME UP



Bob Rotanz graced our FRONT cover in November 2014 as one example of people who "made their college town their new home town." The Star Trek parody placed people in a new space, sometimes a culture shift that felt like an entirely new planet. Rotanz's story "transported" him from Long Island, New York to Salem, Virginia—where he earned captain rank of the town's most popular and iconic local downtown restaurant / college pub.

so," Rotanz continued, "as a matter of fact, I can see the college from my house or from where I work. I've been in a four-block area since 1978. It's crazy to think about that. Broad Street is one street over from the college."

Rotanz feels good about the passing of the guard to new owners and a possible refresh. Now, for the most part he'll just be a paying customer. "If you had said this is going to be where you are for the rest of your life, I would have said, 'I'm not sure about that, but it was the best decision I ever made. I'm not going anywhere.'" 



SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

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

Executive Summary:
*It's all about strategic
planning, the kind that
turns uncertainty into
opportunity, not panic.*

*Bonnie Chavez is the
CEO of Building Beloved
Communities, a local
consulting firm specializing
in community-centered
business solutions.
bonnie@building
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Navigating uncertainty: strategic planning for nonprofits and small businesses

Let's be real: If you lead a nonprofit or small business in Southwest Virginia, you already know year-end can be uncertain. Oh yeah, and to add a little more chaos, 2026 is an election year, which can feel like walking a tightrope, blindfolded, in the middle of a thunderstorm. Policy pivots, increasing or decreasing regulations, and community needs never take a break. So, how can your organization keep its footing (and sanity) as 2026 approaches?

Here's a toolkit to prep your crew for whatever the next fiscal year might throw your way:

1. Scenario Planning, Not Doomscrolling

Gather your team for a "what if" workshop. Brainstorm the best, worst, and most likely scenarios for your funding/sales, staffing, and community impact based on known election-year issues and past performance. Get granular: Will grants/target markets shrink? Will the demand for services spike? Are there regulations on the horizon? Write it down, talk it out, and make friends with contingency plans. This isn't just insurance against crises—it's a way to build muscle for creative problem-solving when changes hit fast.

2. Stay Agile

Rigid structures crack under pressure. Instead, foster flexibility in your operations. That might mean training staff to wear multiple hats, automating key processes, or using digital tools to quickly pivot programs/services. Encourage agile leadership, experiment and learn from wins (and misses), and don't be afraid to course-correct.

3. Communicate Like a Pro


Transparency fosters trust; keep your stakeholders and staff informed about risks and plans. Share updates, ask for feedback, celebrate wins. Make communication a two-way street, not a quarterly newsletter. Authentic, ongoing dialogue makes supporters/customers feel like part of your team.

4. Diversify Funding Streams

If federal funds are shaky, don't wait to get creative. Explore local foundation grants, new corporate sponsors, crowdfunding campaigns, or hybrid fundraising events. If you are a small business, try a new service or product, or tackle the other side of the equation and cut costs by partnering with another business to buy in bulk. Change up your marketing or involve your loyal customers. Every diversified dollar reduces risk to the organization/business.

5. Tap Into Community Wisdom

No one has all the answers. Set up informal collaboration sessions with peer organizations/colleagues. Swap stories about what’s working (and what isn’t). Sometimes, the best strategy comes from the collective experience of businesses and nonprofits right down the street.

A new fiscal year, especially an election year, can feel like chaos, but it’s also a chance to refocus, re-energize, and reinforce your mission. With a strong, flexible plan, your organization can thrive in 2026. You’ll be ready to navigate uncertainty; your community is counting on you. 

“Gather your team for a 'what if' workshop.

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THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:
Some good signs from Virginians on how they feel about the economy in somewhat uncertain times.

Keeping up on the economy. Or trying to.


A more upbeat Consumer Expectations report for the third fiscal year quarter as conducted by Roanoke College was released in mid-August. The Virginia Consumer Sentiment and Inflation Expectations report found that consumer sentiment rose by 1 point since the second quarter survey - reversing a downward trend but still the third lowest reading since the index was established in 2011.

Dr Alice Kassens is a professor of Economics at Roanoke College; she says the true impact of tariffs on inflation is yet to come: "there's so much uncertainty. It takes a while for any tariff, once its in place, to actually have its full effect. Can the producers bear the brunt of the tariffs? It can't do that forever."

The labor market remains relatively strong, said Kassens in late September. (Federal stats that came out after the survey revealed that job growth slowed considerably however in recent months). Other reports say people are more hesitant about leaving a job right now, even if they are not all that happy. "If you're worried you may lose your job or lose hours, you're going to cut back on buying things. If the labor market remains strong, then people will be cutting back less on their consumption. If they feel fairly confident about keeping their job that can bolster the economy."

Some hope a Federal Bank drop in interest rates will spur lower mortgage and loan rates that could heat up the housing, auto sales and major purchase market again. Others say uncertainty over tariffs has meant a pause on growth plans for some companies as they wrestle about passing on those tariffs to consumer, partially or otherwise.

Improving household finances and wage growth that is keeping ahead of inflation drove the uptick in consumer sentiment, says Dr. Kassens, who is also a senior analyst for the Institute for Policy and Opinion Research at Roanoke College. She will deliver a report to the Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce on the economy this month.

With rapidly changing and revised numbers (see the dustup over recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports on job growth, which often lag and have announced a major correction over 2024 job numbers) and new economic news almost every day, it seems she could be reworking her Power Point a number of times. 

“There's so much uncertainty.

Scary People

I like how some of our FRONT Perspectives columnists will hit up a holiday or relevant theme to the month at hand (such as Halloween this month). In like fashion, I'll do the same this time.

I guess you could say my Halloweenie-spirity-goulisly topic is... business advice-related. I'm talking about scary people.

If you're running or managing a business in any respect, you might want to avoid tramping through the local graveyard of discontented spirits. In Jewish mythology, such a malevolent spirit is called a dybbuk. In Ireland, the banshee. Beelzebub, Daevas, Rusalka, and Oni aren't too pleasant, either.

In our local region, I think we have a few malcontents, too. Maybe not to the supernatural folklore level—but I don't see a lot of good for your organization to associate with them.

I'll name 'em.

The first is the agitator.

I'm thinking of a specific person. She is a professional protestor. I don't unfollow or block my social media feeds; but I just immediately scroll past her posts. She is always protesting. I have never seen her advocate anything (or even smile, for what it's worth). I would not associate my business with someone who only shouts and points fingers. She never has anything good to say or celebrates any progress. I stay away from the placard packing phantom.

The next is the radical.

I'm thinking of a specific person. This one is similar to the agitator, but he's the proverbial keyboard warrior. He's one to scroll past, too, because he'll never share anything truly original or open-minded. It's always going to be the expected garbage (or worst and most extreme) partisan balderdash from his revered political party. His side is always right; the other side is not just wrong—but evil. He's in a B2B profession, too; which is amazing—because I would never hire this zeitgeist zealot.

The last is the delusional.

I'm thinking of a specific person. She does two things. Mostly, she hyperbolizes every situation. She exaggerates things that happen, things people do, and things people say. The drama with this person is Broadway-level-batshit-crazy. A rude driver didn't just cut her off, he nearly KILLED her—he raced through the red light at top speed—he needs to be hunted down and taught a lesson. And the second thing she does? The opposite. If she happens to make an error, she trivializes it. There's no need to get up in arms over her mistake, because... well, she certainly didn't mean it. This gullible, gaslighting ghost is one to avoid.



ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:

In the spirit of Halloween, may your business be treated—not tricked.

There are plenty of other misinformed malignant monsters, impending imps, and dreadful demons out there. Unless you have a silver bullet or wooden stake, I'd say you should keep your distance between them and your business.

Your business needs all the positive good spirit it can find. Scary people, begone! 🖤

“Don't associate with the:
placard packing phantom;
zeitgeist zealot; gullible,
gaslighting ghost.



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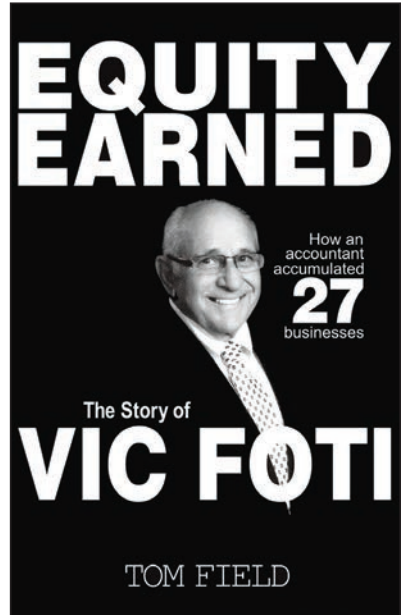
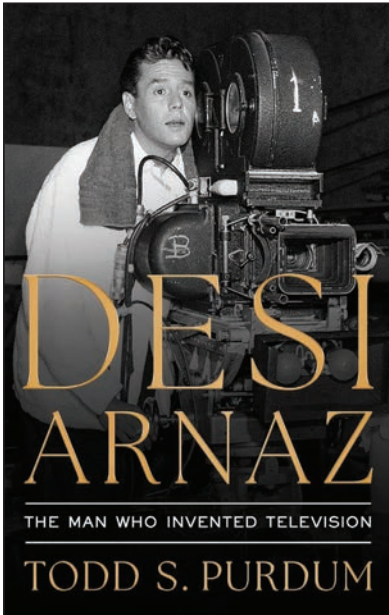


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FRONTReviews >

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

Groundbreaker Desi Arnaz

From Cuban refugee with his family to a Conga band of his own in the states, to movie roles and finally meeting his future wife and business partner – Lucille Ball. Lucy and Desi left fading film careers behind and created *I Love Lucy* in 1951. As executive producer, Arnaz veered away from the single camera live television mode of the late 1940's/early 1950's and put *I Love Lucy* on film.

That created reruns, which led to syndication, and Arnaz's three synchronized camera set up became what is still the norm. It's all there in *Desi Arnaz: The Man Who Invented Television* (Simon & Schuster, 2025), by Todd S. Purdum. So is the tempestuous Arnaz-Ball relationship, Desi's battle with the bottle, the Desilu production company, their divorce

and Desi's fade from public view. They were TV's first power couple, and he may very well have been the man who invented television.

—Gene Marrano

Our own accountant-entrepreneur

I can't write a review (since I wrote this book). However, I can describe it and invite you to check it out. We just published *Equity Earned: The Story of Vic Foti* (Berryfield; Sept. 2025); and the timing is bittersweet. Unfortunately, Vic Foti—a prominent Roanoke businessman and founder of a leading accounting practice—passed away Aug. 14. Fortunately, he was able to read his book and give it his blessing just prior to publishing. The biography—a quick read of selected vignettes—tells the story of how Vic came to own and operate many businesses... a rather uncommon feat for accountants. We hope it also presents Foti's legacy and contributions, on top of the respect he earned as a leader in Roanoke. I can invite you to do one more thing if you're so inclined: review it. EE is available on Amazon.

—Tom Field

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



\$75K to Kids Square >

Virginia Credit Union (and its **Member One** division) contributed \$75,000 over the next five years to the **Kids Square Children's Museum**, **Kids Square Express**, and mobile outreach STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) program for elementary school-aged students in the Roanoke Valley. The sponsorship offers hands-on and play-based learning and will be delivered to schools, daycare centers, public libraries, and community events throughout the area. "What an exciting opportunity to support the fantastic work of Kids Square Children's Museum," said **Cherry Dale**, VACU's Senior Vice President of Financial Education. "At VACU and Member One, two critical focus areas for our community engagement work are children's well-being and financial education. Through this partnership, we're supporting a unique learning opportunity for elementary school students that could open a world of career possibilities while also providing real-world lessons to kids on being smarter about money and how they spend it, save it, and share it."



Melding down under >

MELD Manufacturing Corp—in Christiansburg—has installed its first MELD Machine, adopting the ability to produce large-scale metal components with exceptional properties and performance at the Sydney Manufacturing Hub's Metallurgical Facility for Solid State Additive Manufacturing, where it will be operated by Dr. **Anna Paradowska** and the team at the Sydney Manufacturing Hub. MELD 3D printers for metal are well suited for infrastructure repair and improvements, using Additive Friction Stir Deposition (AFSD), invented by MELD Manufacturing Corporation, to print metal alloys in solid state. The process yields parts with properties exceeding forging requirements and will support Australian initiatives in circular economy and shipbuilding.



Green apron champs >

Family Service of Roanoke Valley held its 11th Annual VIP Dinner at Hidden Valley Country Club on Sept. 11. Part of the fundraising campaign featured a lineup of ten Team Champions who competed and raised funds for a goal to supersede previous campaigns (partly in response to recent decreased federal funding). The 2025 Champion pairs included: **Daniel Brooks** (Motivate the Game) and **Briana Taylor** (ADHD Specialist); Delegate **Sam Rasoul** (Virginia House of Delegates) and **Tom Field** (Valley Business FRONT); **Genya Kalinina** and **Stan Myshkovskiy** (Hello Roanoke); **Amanda Kenney** (Access U) and **Margaux Bellinger** (content developer and physical trainer); **Donna Littlepage** (candidate for House of Delegates) and **Kim Brattic** (Friendship); **Stephanie Moon Reynolds** (retired Roanoke City Council member) and **Jamie Starkey** (FSRV); **Dave Ross** (sportscasting) and **Jeff Sluss** (voice of Salem Spartans); **Dave and Donna Spangler** (Dancing Duo); Dr. **Courtney Watson** and **Jessie Coffman** (Junior League of Roanoke Valley); **Britt** (Branch Group) and **Brittney Wyrick**. The campaign was sponsored by many, including: Integrated Technology Group; Commonwealth Savers; First Citizens Bank; Member One; Gentry Locke; Marsh McLennan Agency; Pinnacle Financial Partners. Entertainment by Beat Street Jazz Ensemble and Kyle Edgell caricatures. FSRV "supports individuals and families as they journey toward lives of emotional wellness, healthy relationships, and a future filled with hope."



Emily Field



NW Roanoke excels >

The Excel Center, Virginia's first adult high school, opened its doors to students for the first time on Monday, August 25, welcoming an inaugural class of 50 students, making history as the first in the Commonwealth to pursue a state-recognized high school diploma through this groundbreaking education model. "A high school diploma is more than a piece of paper; it opens doors to jobs, future education, and life opportunities," said **Kelley Weems**, senior director of community impact at Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. Local and state leaders, including Governor Glenn Youngkin, Senator Chris Head and Roanoke City Council Member Phazon Nash, joined the event to mark this historic milestone.

The Excel Center in Roanoke joins more than 40 others nationwide that have helped thousands of adults return to the classroom and graduate. In addition to thousands of diplomas and industry-recognized certifications earned, The Excel Center says it provides a tangible economic impact with every dollar invested returning more than \$20 in benefits to society. Each Excel Center is operated by its local Goodwill organization. The Roanoke school stands out as one of the first in the network to feature a fully equipped science lab, and the only one housed in a hub designed to eradicate poverty by addressing social indicators. "It's a day to celebrate the future," said Governor Youngkin, "a future that will be filled with unlimited opportunities ... with achievement. We did this together."



Cigar, anyone? >

In downtown Roanoke, the **Bison Head Cigar & Lounge** should be open by October inside a space located across from Center in the Square on Campbell Avenue. Owner **Jimmy Lewis** says inspiration for this lounge started several years ago while working at a cigar lounge in Lynchburg. "We had people driving all the way from Roanoke to get cigars from us." Even 10 years ago he says they recognized, "there was a huge need in the Roanoke area for something like this." Lewis also says a lot of the time patrons say it's more about the company than the cigars. "It's [about] the company and the conversation, and that's what cigars are about – it's about community, about building relationships."



RCPS opens new center >

The former Roanoke Public School central office just off Orange Avenue in northwest Roanoke has a new name and mission – the **Community Empowerment Center at Booker T. Washington** will provide support from enrollment assistance to health services, family workshops, adult education and more. The Community Empowerment Center at Booker T. Washington had a soft opening in July and had already assisted around 200 families before it held a ribbon cutting. Renovations to the building (now on the National Historic Register) cost three million dollars. At the ribbon cutting ceremony in late August, School Board chair **Franny Apel** spoke: "to fully access resources or integrate into our community they have to know what is available to them, and how to connect to it. This center makes that happen. It is a place where education empowers not just our students, but entire families, because we know that when families are strong our students thrive." The board had the final say on approving the makeover. Roanoke City Public Schools relocated its central office to the former Roanoke Times building last year.





Haircuts and infrared ... together >

A barbershop in downtown Roanoke is offering more than just fresh haircuts - it's giving customers a way to physically feel better too. **The Corporate Image Barbershop**, located on Church Avenue near the old Fire Station 1, has introduced a new red light therapy bed – which uses low levels of red light to stimulate cellular activity in the body leading to pain reduction, skin rejuvenation, and boosted energy. Owner **Penny Farris** says she's been working with hair for 25 years and the bed has worked wonders on her upper body. "I've had ... inflammation and pain for many years now, and I love massages, but this has definitely taken the pain out. We get a lot of high-end athletes; pitchers for the [Salem] Red Sox, NFL players who come in. It's attracting that type of level of crowd, because they know how well it works, and it helps them be better athletes." Farris says the infrared therapy sessions take about 20 minutes and walk-ins are welcome.

VWCC's surg tech course >

Virginia Western Community College is enrolling now for a course in sterile processing, with the ability to receive provisional certification as a Certified Registered Central Service Technician. CRCSTs are responsible for decontaminating, inspecting, assembling, disassembling, packaging and sterilizing reusable surgical instruments or devices. "As the Roanoke region's healthcare, manufacturing, and biotech sectors continue to grow, the demand for skilled professionals is soaring," said **Brittany Boltinghouse**, Program Coordinator for Workforce Solutions at Virginia Western Community College. Currently, Sterile Processing Technicians are among the most needed open positions at local hospital systems. Virginia Western is the only provider of this hands-on training within a two-hour radius, making it a vital resource for our region. The rapidly growing biotechnology sector and advanced manufacturing facilities, such as those that manufacture medical devices, need technicians certified in sterile processing.





Submitted



Food Lion pitches in >

With its "Neighbors helping Neighbors" mission, local **Food Lion** employees and the grocery chain's Food Lion Feeds program has donated \$6000 dollars to help the **Roanoke Rescue Mission's Manna Food Pantry** improve operations and safety at its warehouse on Tazewell Avenue. **Kathy Cassels** is the Food Lion store manager on Starkey Road: "for me to be able to get out here with some of my associates and be on the ground and be a part of the process, letting everyone see the bigger picture of what we're doing and how we're serving our community. Packing the bags [and] distributing to families this afternoon – it's just amazing. Those employees also helped sort and distribute food boxes - and loaded the Manna Pantry shelves with three thousand pounds of food in mid-September. Families served by Manna Ministries come once a month to receive a box of shelf-stable food supplies. Feeding Southwest Virginia, a partner agency with the Manna Food Pantry, nominated Food Lion for the "Hunger Action Month," volunteer initiative. **Lisa Thompson** is director of development and communication for the Rescue Mission: "[this is] part of the Food Lion pantry makeover. We received a grant from them to redo our dock area for Manna Food Pantries; we put new rails up, we'll have a new canopy installed, a new concrete pad – all courtesy of the grant from Food Lion."



Dawgs are back in town >

The **Roanoke RailYard Dawgs** are gearing up for season ten at the Berglund Center beginning this month. **Mickey Gray** is the team president. The Dawgs may have bowed out in the first round of the SPHL playoffs this past spring - after winning the title the season before, but Gray says the fans are still with them: "it's been another record-breaking summer for us. We exceeded our season ticket number from last year, which was [also] a record. We're still getting a good buzz. It starting to pick up quite a bit." So far several of the returning Dawg players have been announced, including Matt O'Dea, CJ Valerian and Gustav Muller, playing for head coach Dan Bremner. Gray says while they are still lining up all the promotions, he notes one new event will help unite Dawgs fans over the first 9 seasons of the franchise's existence: an alumni game. The SPHL added two more games to the regular season schedule, so the fans will be able to see their Dawgs – bedecked in refreshed uniforms with an updated logo – 29 times this season instead of 28.

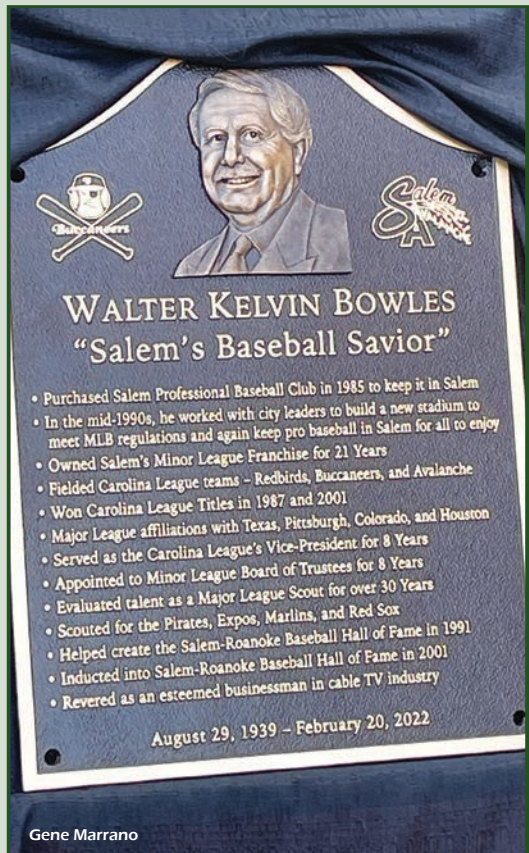


Picture perfect OSD >

Olde Salem Days held its annual street festival in downtown Salem on Sept. 13 on a most beautiful Saturday end-of-summer day. Managed by Rotary Club of Salem (with lots of help, including title sponsor Bank of Botetourt) the affair draws tens of thousands, with over 300 artisans and crafters, food vendors, (mostly) vintage car show, music and more. This year was the 45th anniversary of the popular event.

The man who saved local pro baseball >

Thirty years ago, Salem Memorial Ballpark opened, replacing what is now Kiwanis Field as home to the city's Single-A Carolina League franchise. In late August, the man who "saved" pro baseball in Salem - the late **Kelvin Bowles** - was honored with the unveiling of a plaque before friends and family, one that will be installed inside the entrance to the ballpark. General manager **Allen Lawrence** was hired by Bowles, a cable TV executive who bought the franchise in 1985: "I started here in 2002. I owe so much to Kelvin for giving me the opportunity. Getting in the business is the hardest thing. Kelvin did such a great job and was so well respected throughout the baseball industry." Bowles owned the franchise, which underwent several name changes over 21 years; he was also credited with convincing the City of Salem to build a new stadium that met major league baseball requirements for minor league baseball - thus "saving" pro baseball in the valley. Former City Councilman Bill Jones was there when Bowles convinced the city to build a new stadium, which opened 30 years ago on August 7, 1995, exceeding its proposed 12-million-dollar budget: "if it wasn't for Kelvin Bowles, we wouldn't be here. That was a man who saw the vision with the support of City Council. It's a quality of life [amenity], it's harder to put a dollar [figure] on it." Bowles, who made his money in the cable TV business, was inducted into the Salem-Roanoke baseball Hall of Fame in 2002. Walter Kelvin Bowles was "Salem's Baseball Savior," as the new plaque states. Bowles also scouted part-time for several major league teams and was awarded a World Series ring when the Florida Marlins won the championship in 2003 - a large jewel-encrusted ring he was proud to show off. The Salem Red Sox will unveil a new franchise nickname and look in November but will remain as the Low A Carolina League affiliate of the Boston Red Sox.





Tacos... and moms >

TacoFest returned last month to Elmwood Park, a fundraiser for **Huddle Up Moms**, a local non-profit that supports expectant and new mothers, offering education, support groups and diapers, wipes and other essential baby supplies at its new home on Marshall Avenue in Downtown Roanoke. At TacoFest a number of trucks offered up their best tacos to a panel of judges and the public, and the winners were: VIP's Choice- **El Gordo's Kitchen (Luis Rodriguez)**, Judge's Choice- **Birrieria La Vaca (Sandy Sifuentes)**, People's Choice- **Taqueria La G (Javier Hernandez)**. See huddleupmoms.com for more about that organization. There was also live music all day, a variety of vendors – even a magician to wow the kids.



Look up, Nokers >

Get2KnowNoke—a mostly young professional networking group of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, held its Q3 Social on the rooftop at Salem's new Valleydale boujee apartment complex. Over 40 (under 40) showed up to meet, socialize, have a drink and refreshments, talk about the advantages of living in the Roanoke Region, swap stories, and as it turned out—engage in the sport of stomping the notorious spotted lantern flies that also attempted to join the fun.

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

EDUCATIONAL
FRONT



Davidson

Meaghan Davidson is Student Affairs' new assistant vice president and dean of students at Virginia Tech. Davidson, who began her role on July 14, has more than 15 years of experience in higher education, including leadership in student success, strategic planning, and crisis management. She most recently served as associate vice president and dean of students at Notre Dame of Maryland University, where she oversaw a broad portfolio of student life services.

Dana Roberston is the new director of the School of Education at Virginia Tech. Robertson, associate



Robertson

professor of reading and literacy at the university since 2021, is a former literacy specialist and coach whose research includes professional learning and coaching and working with teachers and children to advance evidence-based and equitable instructional practices. Robertson's appointment follows that of Gerard Lawson, who was the school's interim director since 2023.

Meng Zhu has been appointed head of the Department of Marketing in the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech. Since joining Virginia Tech in 2023, Zhu has served as a professor of marketing and a senior fellow in the Institute for



Zhu

Creativity, Arts, and Technology. She brings a strong background in marketing research with a focus on behavioral economics and human judgment and is currently working on a project with ICAT that addresses functionality of building spaces using artificial intelligence. Prior to joining Virginia Tech in 2023, Zhu was a professor of marketing at Johns Hopkins University. She received a bachelor's from Nanjing University and a master's degree and Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University.

FINANCIAL
FRONT

Pete Cypret has been appointed Chief Executive Officer of



Cypret

Farm Credit of the Virginias—a lending cooperative that serves Virginia, West Virginia, and western Maryland. Cypret brings more than six years serving and leading Farm Credit in a senior leadership position, and his appointment follows a comprehensive and competitive selection process led by the board of directors. He joined FCV as the Chief Risk Officer, and he led the risk, loan operations, compliance, information technology, reporting and project management departments. Prior to joining FCV, Cypret spent more than 20 years working in risk management for financial institutions across the globe. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri,



a master's degree in Risk Management from the New York University Stern School of Business, and numerous professional certifications from risk management, information systems control and audit associations.



Gilliland

Jay Gilliland has joined First Bank in Roanoke as Commercial Banking Officer. He has over 30 years of local banking experience. Gilliland is a graduate of George Mason University and has served over 20 years on the Board of Directors of the Botetourt Education Foundation, where he currently serves as vice president. He has been a Public Policy Council member of Roanoke

Regional Chamber of Commerce for ten years.

WELLNESS FRONT



Arner

Becker's Hospital Review has named Carilion President and CEO **Steve Arner** as one of its top 2025 academic medical center CEOs to know. The annual list recognizes 95 leaders it says are setting the pace for advancing discovery, leading clinical trials and

elevating the patient experience. Becker's defined academic medical centers as institutions that unite world-class patient care with pioneering research and innovative medical education. Their 2025 honorees are leaders at the helm, shaping the future of medicine. The editorial team accepted nominations and curated them to highlight exceptional work. A former COO and hospital president, Arner became president of the Carilion in 2023 and took on the president and CEO role in 2024.

ORGANIZATIONAL FRONT

Carly Oliver has been named President and



Oliver

CEO for Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia after serving as the Chief Operating Officer. She has been with the Community Foundation for 20 years. And leads the organization's mission to strengthen philanthropy, grow charitable assets, and support effective grantmaking.

April Haynes has been appointed Chief Operating Officer of the Community Foundation Serving

Have a career announcement?

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CONTRIBUTORS

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

Phil Barbour is proudly rooted in Southwest Virginia, graduating from Patrick Henry High School and James Madison University. With more than 25 years of experience in financial services, he has risen from teller to branch manager—ultimately becoming a leader in Private and Business banking. He gives back through volunteer work with educational and nonprofit organizations. Barbour enjoys his time with his wife, two sons, an energetic Siberian Husky, and tackling endurance challenges, like the Marine Corps Marathon, Ironman 70.3, and Virginia 10-Miler. [pwbarbour@freedomfirst.com]

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

Bonnie Chavez is the CEO of Building Beloved Communities, a local consulting firm specializing in community-centered business solutions. Her driving force is to help all organizations overcome business barriers with a lens focusing on smart solutions that benefit the community. Bonnie is a proud lesbian, Latina woman who values her family, roots, heritage, and culture. [bonnie@buildingbelovedcommunities.com]

Jennifer Poff Cooper is a senior correspondent for FRONT, and a graduate of the RB Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech with a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hollins University. She is a native of Christiansburg, where she lives and writes in

her family's home place. [cooperjp91@gmail.com]

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

Doug Doughty is retired after spending 45 years at the Roanoke Times. After graduation from UVA in 1974, he was hired as a hockey beat reporter by the Roanoke Times. Many of his early assignments involved covering the Salem Pirates Class A baseball team when he witnessed — and later wrote about — the death of Alfredo Edmead in a collision with one of his Pirates teammates. Doughty later became the UVA beat reporter, covering football, golf, lacrosse and a host of other sports, including the Cavaliers baseball team when it won the NCAA championship with one of his sons on the team. Doug Doughty is also a member of the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame. [doughtysports@aol.com]

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

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

Tom Field is a creative director, marketing executive and owner of Berryfield, Inc. in Salem, and owner of Valley

Business FRONT magazine. He has written and produced programs and materials for local and international organizations for 40 years. [tfield@berryfield.com]

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

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

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

Olivia Marone is a seasonal contemporary portrait photographer

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

Gene Marrano is FRONT editor and an award-winning anchor and reporter for WFIR Newstalk radio. "Best one on one interview" award from Associated Press of the Virginias for his interview with former Roanoke County Chief of Police Howard Hall. [gmarrano@cox.net]

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

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

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



Haynes

Western Virginia after serving as Regional Vice President. She has been with the Community Foundation for 20 years and will oversee day-to-day operations.

Alyssa Rorrer has been promoted to Program Officer at



Rorrer

the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia. She will oversee the Community Foundation's scholarship and Women in Philanthropy programs, support grants and outreach initiatives, and manage operations

for the Martinsville Regional Office.



Denson

Mary Denson has been named Investor Relations & Development Coordinator for Onward NRV. Denson will facilitate the economic development organization's investor

relations program and events, and support talent and business strategies. Denson joins Onward NRV from Virginia Tech, where she earned a BS in Agribusiness Management and built a strong background in agribusiness, philanthropy, event management, and client relations. She was a student ambassador for the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

“ ” They were blown away. — Page 28

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Newest rampers

The five newest RAMP (Roanoke Blacksburg Technology Council's Regional Accelerator and Mentoring Program) Cohort members for the Fall 2025 term have been announced:

Anthro Systems

Limited (3D-printed bicycle helmets); **Back to Eden Infant Formula** (minimally processed whole food-based infant formula); **Milkmade** (breast milk measuring smart device); **The Music Advocacy Project** (live music event programming); **Strokes of Genius** (education technology).

From blue to chill to island soul

Kirk & Soul, a Caribbean-style restaurant, has opened in downtown Roanoke on 2nd Street & Kirk Ave at the former Blue 5 / 2 Chill restaurants.

Pizza in the village

Greco's Pizza has opened at The Shoppes at West Village in southwest Roanoke County (Electric Rd), serving New York-style pizza by the slice or pie and other Italian favorites.

Top 10 highest tax

Virginia ranked 7th (out of 50 states plus D.C.) for the highest income tax (married filing jointly; ranked 8th for single filing) according to the latest analytics from Fidelity. The highest income tax in the U.S. is Oregon (by a large margin); followed

by Hawaii, Washington DC, Maine, Minnesota. Nine states have no income tax: Florida, Texas, Alaska, Nevada, New Hampshire, Tennessee, South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming.

Dirty Dancing icon celebrated

Mountain Lake Lodge in Giles County, was inducted into the Historic Hotels of America, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

No more lollygagging

The **Dilly Dally** in Salem has reopened under new ownership. Maggie Brill plans to reintroduce the neighborhood store and deli, while adding entertainment—such as music and barbeque in the adjoining outside back yard.

Best outside of town town

World Atlas placed **Floyd** on its list of "7 Most Breathtaking Towns in Virginia." Interestingly enough, though the accompanying photo showed the iconic Floyd Country Store in town, the citation only described nature and adventure areas outside of town—mostly Blue Ridge and Buffalo Mountain, campgrounds, hiking, and ziplines.

Governor Youngkin board appointments

Board of Trustees of The Virginia Museum of Natural History: Sarah Bowman of Callaway,

Corporate Relations Officer, Taubman Museum of Art; Virginia Asian Advisory Board, Ashok Tiwari of Roanoke, Factory Focus Manager, Virginia Transformer Corporation.

Disaster funding for Southwest Virginia businesses, residents

The **Virginia Disaster Assistance Fund** is accepting applications from homeowners and businesses in Southwest Virginia. Governor Youngkin proposed the \$50 million initiative, which the General Assembly approved, to provide financial relief and long-term resilience to Virginians impacted by recent natural disasters. To apply, residents should contact their local government or regional Planning District Commission. Eligible counties in this region include Pulaski, Floyd, Montgomery and the City of Radford.

Hitachi coming to Southside

Hitachi Energy, a global manufacturer in electrification and based in Switzerland, will invest \$457 million to expand the company's power transformer production facility in South Boston, Virginia, creating 825 new jobs. The new facility will produce large power transformers, which support applications like high-voltage transmission, power generation, AI data centers, and large-scale industrial applications. Upon completion, the campus will be the largest manufacturing site

for large power transformers in the United States. VEDP worked with Halifax County, the Southern Virginia Regional Alliance, and the General Assembly's Major Employment and Investment (MEI) Project Approval Commission to secure the project for Virginia. Hitachi will be eligible to receive an MEI custom performance grant of \$29.4 million for site preparation and facility costs, subject to approval by the Virginia General Assembly.

Research grants for Virginia Tech

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has awarded **Virginia Tech** a \$150,803 research grant. The funding supports research into the behavior and neurology of young children involved in interactive video viewing platforms. The awarding office of this HHS grant is the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. HHS has also awarded Virginia Tech a \$428,578 research grant for research into focused ultrasound therapies for tendinopathies, which are chronic pains in the tendons.

Props for AccessU

Roanoke-based marketing agency **AccessU** has secured a coveted position on Inc. Magazine's prestigious Inc. 5000 list, ranking in the top 50% among America's fastest-growing private companies. AccessU

has experienced significant growth over the past five years, more than tripling in size while building momentum for even greater expansion ahead. The agency has cultivated a powerhouse team uniquely positioned to dominate higher education marketing through cutting-edge innovation and proven, results-driven strategies. "Growth happens when you put clients first and build a team that believes in that mission," said Tony Pearman, president and CEO of AccessU. "This honor presents a moment to celebrate them as our people, and our clients are the reason this is possible."

Downtown Roanoke parking

As concerns about **downtown Roanoke** parking continue to circulate across the Valley, one Market Building Foundation executive says it's not as big a problem as some claim. **Elliot Broyles**, Executive Director of the Market

Building Foundation, has been living in Roanoke for 25 years, and says that he has never considered parking in areas downtown to be an issue. With city garages, lots, and on-street parking available for people downtown, both residents and businesses alike have recently expressed challenges. Noting that private lots can be priced higher, Broyles adds that, "realistically if you come downtown, there is readily available parking, that is inexpensive or free, for the majority of the time [you are] down here." Broyles says the reason for business closures downtown entail other factors. He states the timing of the stories he has about business closures and parking issues have ultimately overlapped. The City Market building he oversees is "thriving ... there are new businesses popping up all the time." In response to concerns however, the City of Roanoke is conducting a year-long parking study. Broyles

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says he spies open parking spots daily - especially on-street parking.

A new twist on the golf experience

Located on Courtland Road Northeast in Roanoke, the **Star City Golf Club** is revving up to launch their brand-new indoor golf experience. Unlike venues such as Top Golf, players will swing towards one of six projectors that simulate ball flight. Owner Tim Horne says guests will be able to play all year round, no matter what the weather. "In the winter, at night, when it rains, when it's 100 degrees, in a climate controlled environment. We can download 1500 different golf courses;

you'll be able to play just about any golf course you want to." That includes the private Ballyhack course in Roanoke County. The Star City Golf Club will also feature a full bar and lounge. Horne says it will open sometime later this year.

Record numbers says VVBR

In 2024, spending by visitors in **Virginia's Blue Ridge** hit another record and a 4.6% increase over 2023. Direct visitor spending also supported a record 7,418 jobs in 2024. The direct spending by visitors helps to reduce annual taxes paid by residents. In 2024, direct visitor spending generated \$44.6 million in local tax

Notable Transactions

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- **Nash & Smashed** leased 1,600-sq-ft of retail space at University Crossroads in Blacksburg
- **Solar Energy Solutions** leased 26,850-sq-ft of industrial space at 901 11th Street NE in Roanoke
- **TCV Trust & Wealth Management** leased 3,330-sq-ft of office space at Colonnade One Corporate Center, 2840 Electric Road, Roanoke
- **Three Notch'd Brewing Co** renewed its lease of 5,250-sq-ft at 24 Campbell Ave, Roanoke
- **Noble Furniture** renewed its lease of 7,000-sq-ft of industrial space at 2816 Mary Linda Avenue in Roanoke
- **Build Smart Institute** renewed its lease of 12,219-sq-ft of industrial space at KKP3 Bldg 701 Gainsboro Road NE, in Roanoke

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

revenue for the Cities of Roanoke and Salem and the Counties of Botetourt, Franklin, and Roanoke. This resulted in an average tax savings of \$347.38 per household in Virginia's Blue Ridge according to Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge. Beyond direct visitor spending, the impact of tourism in Virginia's Blue Ridge is even larger. When indirect and induced spending* are factored in, tourism generated \$1.417 billion in local economic impact, a 4.6% increase over 2023. Landon Howard, President of Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge, said, "we are encouraged by recent figures that show our region is pacing well ahead of state and national hotel data in 2025, despite economic uncertainty in the national and overall travel industry."

NRV airport receives grant for upgrade

The U.S. Department of Transportation

(DOT) Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has awarded the **New River Valley Airport Commission**, based in Pulaski County, Virginia, a \$474,406 grant. NRVAC is comprised of Pulaski, Montgomery and Giles Counties, the Towns of Dublin, Pulaski and Christiansburg and the City of Radford. The New River Valley Airport is located just outside of Dublin. This grant money was made available through the FAA Fiscal Year 2025 Airport Infrastructure Grant program and supports the construction of new 152,000 square foot hangars, and the rehabilitation of 40,000 square yards of existing main Apron pavement.

Badge(s) of healthy honor

The **Community Health Center of the New River Valley** (CHCNRV) has been recognized by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) with five national awards

for excellence in quality, technology, and value-based care. These distinctions place CHCNRV among the top-performing health centers in the nation. CHCNRV received the Health Center Quality Leader – Gold Badge Award for ranking among the top 10 percent of health centers nationwide (one of only three recipients in Virginia); two National Quality Leader Badges: one in Heart Health and one in Cancer Screening (the only health center in Virginia to receive the Cancer Screening Badge); the Advancing Health IT for Quality Badge; and the High-Value Care Badge.

56 for 2010

Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTC SOM) is expanding its impact on the health care workforce, welcoming 56 new students this summer to the Class of 2029. It's the largest incoming class since the Roanoke-based medical school

opened in 2010.

Combining ingredients

US Foods—which has a large plant in Salem, employing over 300—is being courted by Virginia Performance Food Group for a possible merger. US Foods operates more than 70 locations; PFG has over 150 location, employing more than 25,000.

Henry, the tin man

Nathan Trotter—a Pennsylvania manufacturer of tin (material used in circuit boards and other products) that was founded way back in 1789—has broken ground on a \$65 million plant at the Patriot Centre industrial park in Henry County. The facility (the first company plant located outside of Pennsylvania) should employ around 120 and is expected to open by the end of next year.

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They saw the Mill Mountain Star aglow and were charmed. — Page 23



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