

Valley Business FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ISSUE 204
SEPTEMBER 2025

P1 Technologies

YM Jewelry

Roanoke's Railroad
Architecture

VT Helmets

Radio Melrose

RC-VWCC Biotech

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Drew Bratton
P1 Technologies



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There truly is
a market here. — Page 27

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P1 Technologies

A Local-Employee-Owned-Innovative-75-Year-
Manufacturer-with-Global-Reach Story

By Aila Boyd





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SEPTEMBER



Jade Richardson Bock



Aila Boyd



Carrie Cousins



Dan Dowdy



Gene Marrano



Shawn Nowlin

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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Mary Ann L. Miller
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Alicia Smith
F&S Building Innovations /
construction

“”
Treat every
job site, client
interaction,
email, phone
call, or detail
as your
masterpiece—
and you are
the artist.

— Page 29

“”
The company introduced
'cobots' into production.
— Page 11

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



PL16

75 years



P-200





P1 Technologies

A Local-Employee-Owned-Innovative-75-Year-
Manufacturer-with-Global-Reach Story

By Aila Boyd

P1 Technologies, a Roanoke County-based manufacturer with global reach, has come a long way from its beginnings in 1949 as a small shop making hearing aid cords. Today, the employee-owned company designs and manufactures custom injection-molded products, interconnect cables and advanced components for the medical, defense and audio industries.

Over the decades, the company's name has changed to reflect its evolution. It began as Plastic Products Company, later becoming Plastics One in 1987 to signal a growing injection molding presence. In 2001, it transitioned to employee ownership, giving workers a stake in the business. The most recent rebranding came in 2019, when it became P1 Technologies.

"We prompted this because we are becoming much more than an injection molder," CEO Drew Bratton said. "We help our clients design and develop the connections and devices incorporating state-of-the-art technologies into every connection that we make. This has helped us appeal to a broader audience and provide solutions for the medical, defense and audio markets."



P1 Technologies currently employs 340 in a variety of manufacturing, assembly, engineering, and other industrial and market distribution disciplines

Bratton knows the company from the inside out. Over the course of more than 20 years, he's held roles in engineering, sales and executive leadership, a path that shapes his approach as CEO.

"I have been fortunate to work for a company that values promotion from within, a value that I hope to carry forward for many years," he said. "First, it has given me firsthand knowledge of the day-to-day operations that help factor into the larger decisions made today. The second item is the trust and



relationships it has built with our employees and customers.”

The COVID-19 pandemic brought major challenges, from supply chain disruptions to worker shortages. Bratton said those pressures pushed P1 Technologies to rethink operations.

“It made problems such as supply chain shortages and lack of employees to fill open positions,” he explained. “This made our company really rethink how we operate and manufacture the items our customers rely on. We focused heavily on process improvements, automation, and employee training programs to become a well-oiled machine.”

While many of P1’s customers are long-standing OEM partners, the company is now placing more emphasis on expanding its reach.

“Recently we are working on a new approach to how we market to rely less on previous customer relationships and grow new long-lasting opportunities,” Bratton said. “One of the biggest new marketing strategies is refreshing our website that we hope to launch later in 2025. Stay tuned!”

A decade ago, P1 Technologies began using plastic additive manufacturing to speed up toolmaking and prototyping. The move significantly reduced lead times for parts and fixtures.

“Fast forward to today we received our first 3D metal printer just a few months ago,” Bratton said. “This machine can print many different items but will be focused on the fabrication of injection mold tools. The machine will improve price, lead times, and possibilities immediately for us and our customers.”

The company has also introduced collaborative robots, or “cobots,” into production. These machines assist workers by handling repetitive or ergonomically challenging tasks.

“We also see cobots not replacing people but aiding them in their work, allowing them

"IN BRIEF"



NAME: Drew Bratton

HOMETOWN: Salem, VA

EXPERIENCE: MBA and BS in Sales and Marketing Management from Liberty University; Engineering degree from Virginia Western Community College; 8 years of experience in engineering; 6 years in sales leadership; 5 years in executive leadership. With P1 Technologies since 2006; became CEO in 2024.

PERSONAL: Married and proud father of 3

FAVORITE PRINCIPLE: “Build lasting trust by keeping customer satisfaction at the heart of everything we do.”





“ ”

P1...
strengthens
the entire
innovation
ecosystem.

—Taylor Spellman,
RBTC

to produce parts quicker and with less fatigue,”
Bratton said.

Employee ownership, instituted in 2001, is central to the company’s culture. Every employee receives a retirement package at no cost, a benefit Bratton said fosters loyalty and accountability.

“Employee ownership also creates loyal employees who all think like owners, keeping our costs down and customers happy,” he said. “We like to hear the voices of our colleagues and the opinions they may have.”

The model has helped P1 Technologies retain skilled workers and reinforce its reputation for quality. That commitment to innovation and performance was recognized when the company received a TechNite award from the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council.

“This was a big honor with the name change we undertook in 2019 and the new focus on technology products,” Bratton said.


Taylor Spellman, director at the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, said having the company in the region provides a competitive advantage as groups like hers try to grow the local biotech cluster. “P1’s ability to deliver high-quality, custom manufacturing at scale not only accelerates the success of emerging biotech

companies but also strengthens the entire innovation ecosystem. The economic impact of P1's presence in our region is profound — they are helping to position us as a hub where cutting-edge ideas are transformed into market-ready solutions," she added.

P1 Technologies has been in southwest Roanoke County since 1987, operating under one roof with departments ranging from R&D and engineering to production, sales, and marketing. Over the years, the company has expanded its Merriman Road facility and maintained close ties with Roanoke County Economic Development.

"Roanoke County has been very good for P1 Technologies," Bratton said. "We work with the youth in the area as well through Roanoke County to grow their knowledge of the jobs in the area and future career opportunities."

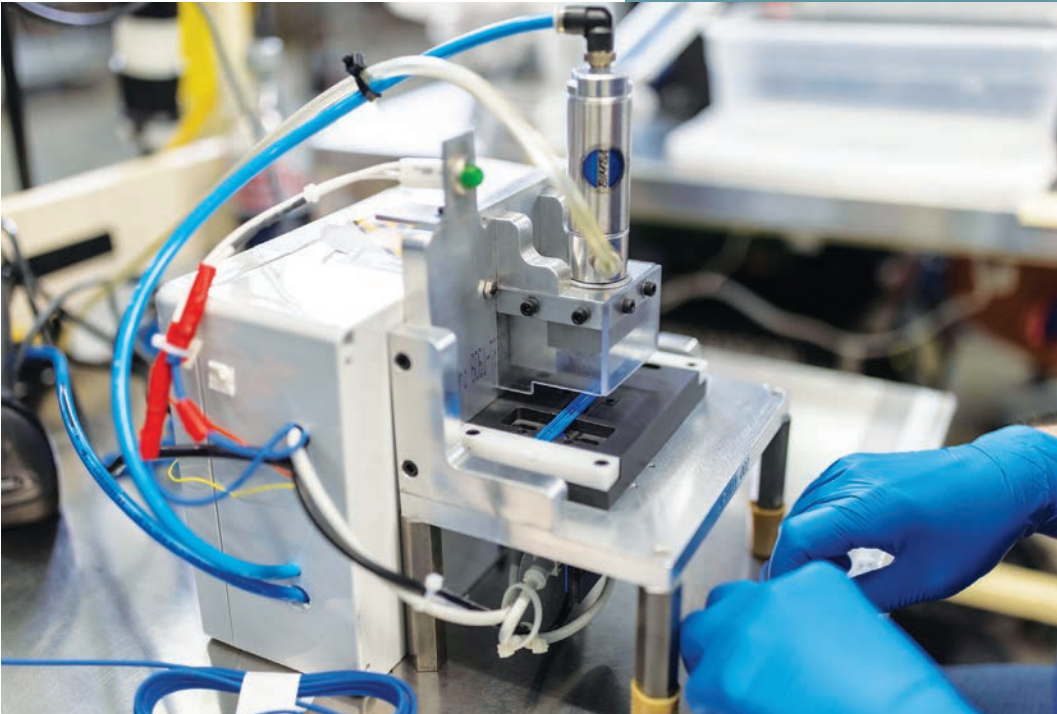
As it nears its 80th year, P1 Technologies is exploring new markets and capabilities. The defense sector, in particular, has shown promise.

"We started working on some audio products for defense applications and it has grown for us rapidly," Bratton said. "We see defense being a growing market alongside the medical market we currently serve. We are also working on bringing in more surgical tools versus simple cables and connectors. This requires things like advanced circuitry that we hope to grow our capabilities around." 

“ ”

Employee ownership... creates loyal employees who all think like owners, keeping our costs down and customers happy.

—Drew Bratton



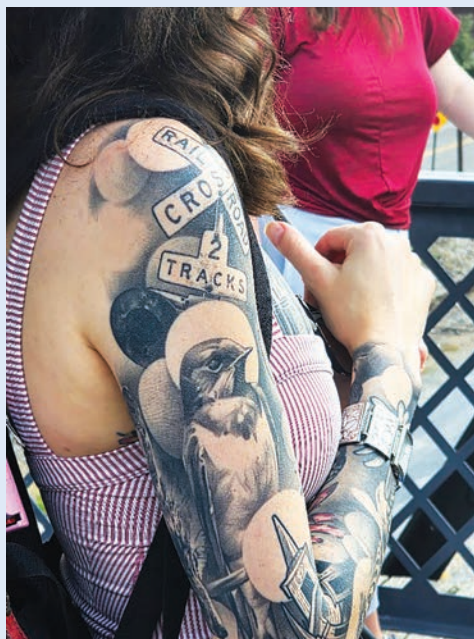


All photos: Tom Field

And, we're walking...

By Tom Field

Roanoke Historical Society and museum conducts “N&W Walking Tour” to show the railroad’s impact on local architecture.



Tour attendees included this serious railroad fan.

Kelly Robertson, museum visitor services manager for the Historical Society of Western Virginia and the Roanoke History and O. Winston Link Museum, put on her tour guide hat (okay, she just carried a notebook) to escort 16 of us on a brief walking tour in downtown Roanoke on a gorgeous Saturday morning in August.

It didn't take long for the main message to hit us like an oncoming freight train: The railroad—specifically, the Norfolk & Western Railroad—built much more than trains here in Roanoke City. In a smaller than a three-mile radius, one piece of evidence of that is in the architecture itself.



A "Grand Old Lady," the Hotel Roanoke featured Tudor style construction and is considered by many as Roanoke's preeminent landmark.

Our cityscape literally rose up from the tracks.

Robertson led our tight radius walk to only about a half-dozen structures to show a sampling of what the railroad built, how, and why—while pointing both eastward and westward to describe other significant points, like the—appropriately referenced—east-end shops (car-building) and west-end shops (turntable and Schaffer's Crossing) that we could almost-but-not-quite see. What we did see, though, was enough to determine a legacy so strong, it is undeniable to say anything other than Roanoke's existence was the result of being built as a railroad town.

1983 ... 2025 ... tomorrow




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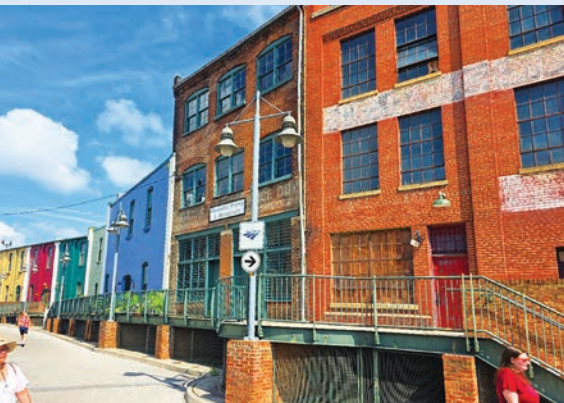
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"Warehouse Row" along the tracks in downtown Roanoke now include refurbished venues for various commercial and residential uses.

The structures Robertson introduced on the walk included the N&W Corporate Headquarters; a second administration building (where my father worked as a structural engineer and draftsman on the third floor); the old Stone Printing building; the now-utilized Virginia Transportation Museum; the landmark Hotel Roanoke; and the now-utilized train station as Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge visitor center with O. Winston Link (vintage train photography) Museum. Of course, we saw the mainline tracks running through the city (where my grandfather was a brakeman) and bridges. Five freight trains passed during our 90-minute walk; as if to blow through their horns, "We're still here."

[You can catch a few notes in the photo captions.]

Our town (Roanoke City) would not exist



N&W wasn't just a railroad business; it was a holding company for many businesses. This building (now an apartment complex) **contained 22 massive, fireproof vaults** (seen in the windowless section).

as we see it without the railroad, Robertson reiterated.

What we walkers found most interesting was how the architectural details revealed a story. A story of power and progress, pride and well, yes... prejudice. Particularly from 1882 on to the 1970s and 80s (the last passenger train left the Roanoke station in 1971, though we have Amtrak today) Roanoke was a railroad town; and every resident knew someone (or was someone) who worked for N&W (and Norfolk Southern).

Robertson—who is not only a historian with history and political science degrees—but holds a graduate degree in Architectural History from the University of Edinburgh and is pursuing her PhD in History with a primary focus on Virginia architecture, was the perfect host for our audience, who was



Controversial or just pragmatic? The portico to the historic 1905 Roanoke Railroad Station was completely refashioned in 1949 (Raymond Loewy) to retain some **of the bold entrance; yet influenced by** a Swiss-French modern design that still draws mixed reactions. No other local railroad structure is quite like it.




The long shop (now the popular Virginia Transportation Museum) held 50 large bays, **"offloading as many as 100 cars a day,"** at one point; in a building designed primarily for pure function.

comprised of half locals, half visitors. She pointed out four distinct architectural periods demonstrated in our sample buildings: Queen Anne (like earlier train stations), Neoclassical (functional maintenance and office buildings), Art Deco (the “newer” company building that now houses the Roanoke Higher Education Center), with a surprising slice of Tudor (Hotel Roanoke).

The tour ended where it began—at the... wait for it: historic Norfolk & Western Roanoke Train Station / Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge / Roanoke Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau / Roanoke History Museum / O. Winston Link Museum / Historical Society of Western Virginia... building (yes, all are proper moniker designations); and Robertson concluded our tour and story with a twist, out in the parking lot. She held up a vintage black and white photograph, we looked at it, whereupon she proclaimed, “what you’re looking at was taken from the exact same spot where you’re standing.”

The message arrived forthrightly—like a train pulling into the station.

Train or no train—we’re in a railroad town. 



Kelly Robertson: “The impact of the railroad is still seen.”



The front of N&W corporate office featured art deco elements—lifting the visual skyward (“we’re progress... moving ahead”) in some-what contrast to the horizontal “we’re here to stay” permanence of the rather squatty, original headquarters building right beside it.





LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Carrie Cousins,
Lead Point Digital

Executive Summary:
*Attention Please:
The em dash is not a
"ChatGPT hyphen."*

There is No "ChatGPT Hyphen"

An em dash is not an automatic signal that your copy was written by artificial intelligence.

The em dash is a fantastic punctuation character that is designed to signal a change in thought, an aside, or a pause in the flow of reading. It's the text equivalent of a long pause in a monologue.

And when used in the context of human writing, you can almost feel the meaning in this simple long dash. You feel the change in the flow or storyline.

The drama currently surrounding the em dash as a signal that AI wrote something is almost comical. There are so many other ways to tell.

I am constantly looking for "AI infected" writing in copy that comes from clients because we know that AI hallucination is a real problem. Without the inside knowledge of a business or industry, this false information can hide and creep into unchecked AI writing with ease and make you look silly, or like a liar, to those who know better.

Telltale signs of AI writing often include distinct cadences or patterns that are monotone and lack rhythm when you read out loud. There's little passion in the writing even though it is easy to digest, and it can be predictable. (The formula often looks like this: Header, followed by a two sentence paragraph, followed by a bullet list, followed by a summary sentence.)

There are other more subtle tells as well:

- Citing sources without links (or even sources that don't exist).
- Use and reuse of phrasing, "on one hand," "plays a vital role," "it is important to note," and similar phrases that are grammatically correct, but unlikely to ever escape your lips in conversation.
- Inconsistent tone or style, especially when it comes to your brand.
- Uniform writing style without sentence structure and complexity, and lacking subtitles such as sarcasm, humor, and puns.

- Lack of directly quoted material or human sources.
- Factual errors for highly specific information.

Clients often ask: If it makes writing faster, why is it a problem?

Using AI tools can come with great benefits; use them to generate ideas, look up things quickly, or even help when you are stumped. But don't rely on the outputs.

Your brand voice carries high value with your audience, with common passions, needs, and fears. Flattening that to generic statements and writing will break that bond.

Here's an example:

A client recently relayed that customers were coming to their location to buy a product with an unrealistic expectation of price – \$100, far below actual retail of the item at \$749.


They could not figure out why people had this expectation. They finally asked a customer “Where did you see that price?”

It was in a search-generated AI overview.

The copy looked real. The product model number was correct. Usage and application of the product was correct, but the price was dead wrong.

The business had been hit by an AI hallucination.

And it was causing a real-life headache.

There's no AI engine that can truly replace human writing. That skill has value, is interesting to read, carries passion and brand value, and is at the root of an essential element of the human experience – storytelling. 

“

I am constantly looking for 'AI infected' writing...

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Helmet lab

"Safety Matters"

By Jennifer Poff Cooper

Steve Rowson has worked with the biomechanics of injury from the time he was a graduate student in 2006 until now, as the Director of the Virginia Tech Helmet Lab and Professor of Biomedical Engineering and Mechanics.

"Once you understand how injuries happen, you can work to prevent them," said Steve Rowson.

The lab is the "culmination of two decades of work," said Rowson. It didn't intend on rating helmets at first; it was initially funded by the auto industry. With its research on head impacts in sports, it evolved into

the Helmet Lab and now evaluates nine different areas of head protection.

The Helmet Lab has brought acclaim to the university since founder Stefan Duma launched the Virginia Tech Helmet Ratings in 2011, after he realized there was no independent, publicly available data to indicate which helmets provided the best protection against head injuries like concussions. Since then, Virginia Tech researchers have been conducting impact tests and then assigning helmets a corresponding number of stars, with five being the best. This STAR (Summation of Tests for the Analysis of Risk) rating system used to calculate a helmet's performance provides unbiased helmet ratings that allow consumers to make informed decisions when purchasing helmets.

Previously, Rowson said there was only a pass/fail standard, and it looked only at catastrophic head injuries. The Helmet Lab's ratings look at differences in helmets' ability to reduce concussion risk among the



ones that do pass. The STAR rating system, modeled after the auto industry's car safety ratings, provides a framework for sports. It's a summary designed to be easy for individuals and teams to interpret and use.

"It's a high-level overview of the complex process of testing," he said. "It makes the research useful."

The lab recently updated its helmet rating system to include new thresholds for bicycle, varsity football, and youth football helmets. This is the first time, according to Rowson, that the thresholds have been adjusted, a result of the helmet industry's growth toward performing better on the tests.

"We are raising the bar," he said.

Since the rating system's debut 15 years ago, the progress on helmets has been tremendous, said Rowson. The lab's research has "enabled



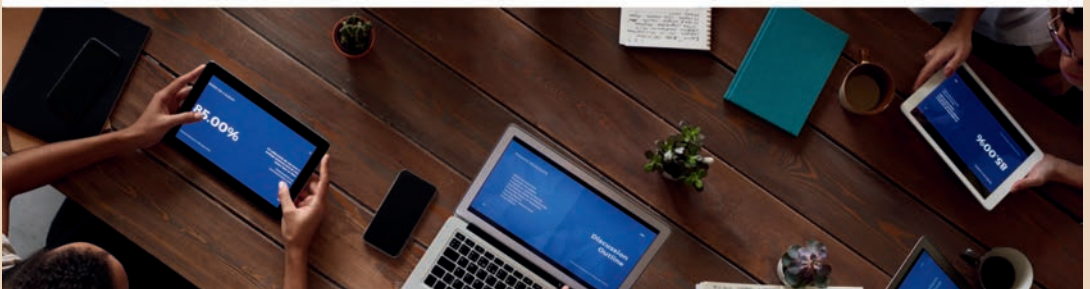
Steve Rowson



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Helmet lab

manufacturers to optimize design.” Helmets in some sports, like football, are farther along than in other sports, like hockey, where there is more room for improvement partly due to the sport’s culture. Overall, manufacturers have been “receptive” and have done a “great job” responding to the rising standards.

“The best helmet at the beginning would be the worst helmet today,” he said.

Rowson emphasized that the lab recommends

any of today’s four- or five-star helmets.

This work is done as part of Virginia Tech’s service mission with two goals, Rowson said. One is to inform consumers and other stakeholders which helmets reduce risk. The other is to provide methods for manufacturers to use in their research and development.

A new milestone in the public safety mission is a partnership with Dick’s Sporting Goods. The STAR helmet rating system is now available



Helmet display at Dicks Sporting Goods

in all the store's retail locations. Ratings can be found on store signage, which includes information about the Helmet Lab and tips on how to find a properly fitting helmet.

The lab is 100% independent of any funding or influence from helmet manufacturers. Some manufacturers replicate what the Helmet Lab does in their own labs, while others bring their helmets to Virginia Tech to test them. Manufacturers want to tout their high STAR ratings, so the school and manufacturers engage in "no cost licensing," said Rowson. Manufacturers sign "terms of use agreements" and, in return, have Virginia Tech-approved artwork available for their marketing.


The lab receives a "mix of funding," Rowson said. Most is application-specific, with the lab finding "independent stakeholders" as funding sources. Research and testing on bike helmets is backed by the Insurance Institute for Highway

Safety, on hard hats by contractor groups.

While Rowson expects improvements to "plateau" at some point, there are still innovations. He anticipates growth with breakthroughs in material science, methods for evaluating head injury, better sensors, and more data.

Researchers in the Helmet Lab continue their efforts to help people reduce risk in the real world. They actively do work to better understand the biomechanics of injury. They listen to community feedback. They learn from others' research studies. They stay current with what people experience. In short, they are always trying to learn more.

As the lab "continues to scale," Rowson said, it will be "looking beyond sports, looking at head protection in different areas."

"It's nice to be able to help people," Rowson said, "Plus it's fun to do." 



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BIZ OPS

By Zachary A. Collier

Executive Summary:
Regardless of what type of business you operate, you will inevitably face risks that, if not successfully managed, can throw your entire enterprise off track.

Smart strategies for responding to risks

Natural disasters like fires and floods, and human-caused threats such as cyberattacks, are just some of the risks that organizations face on a daily basis. The good news is that there are many ways that businesses can respond to risks – equipping them with a toolbox full of useful strategies. In general, these strategies fall into four general categories: avoidance, mitigation, transfer, and acceptance.

1. Avoidance: When a business decides to avoid a risk, they essentially make the decision not to engage in the risky activity in the first place. A school, for example, may decide that certain playground equipment poses too great of a risk, and therefore not to install that equipment. Of course, some lines of business are more inherently risky than others, so it isn't always possible to choose a risk avoidance strategy.

2. Mitigation: When a business tries to mitigate a risk, they seek to find ways to lower the risk to an acceptable level. We can mitigate a risk by lowering the likelihood of it happening, reducing the consequences if it does happen, or both. In manufacturing, providing employees with safety training can lower the likelihood of an accident, while providing workers with personal protective equipment like hard hats and safety glasses can reduce the consequences of an accident. The level of risk that exists before mitigations are implemented is called the inherent risk, and the risk that is left over after mitigation is called the residual risk. The challenge is to achieve an acceptable residual risk in a cost-effective way.

3. Transfer: If a business passes some or all of their risk to a third party, they are engaging in risk transfer. Risk transfer might be achieved through contractual language or financial

Notable Transactions

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- Twenty/20 Management leased 7,489 square feet of office space in The Brownstone at 301 South Main Street in Blacksburg
- Buck Mtn LLC purchased the commercial building at 6402 Commonwealth Drive in Roanoke for \$675,000
- IvyRehab leased 3,000 square feet of retail space at 1215 W. Main Street in Salem
- Orion Solutions LLC leased 41,200 square feet of industrial space in the Virginia Plastics Building at 3453 Aerial Way in Roanoke
- American Systems Va LLC leased 1,320 square feet of office space at Oak Tree Professional Park at 130 Oak Tree Boulevard in Christiansburg
- Bison Head LLC leased 2,000 square feet of retail space at 20 Campbell Ave SE in Roanoke

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

instruments such as insurance policies. Depending on the nature of the business, a number of policies may be relevant such as property, general liability, workers compensation, errors and omissions, cyber insurance, and many others. As with risk mitigation, there are tradeoffs between risk reduction and the costs involved, such as those associated with premiums and deductibles.

4. Acceptance: Finally, a business may decide to accept a risk. After all, greater returns typically accompany greater risks. The type and magnitude of risks to accept is a judgement of management and should be based on the organization's strategy and risk appetite.

Companies just like yours face many risks in today's complex and turbulent business landscape. Luckily, risks can be avoided, mitigated, transferred, or accepted. With a little bit of creativity, businesses can withstand, and maybe even capitalize on, any risks that come their way. 

“

Risks can be avoided, mitigated, transferred, or accepted.



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David Points, Radio Melrose

Shawn Nowlin

New non-profit radio station focuses on community programming

By Shawn Nolin

There's a new station in Roanoke that targets an underserved community.

In July, Radio Melrose on 96.9 FM, had its official launch at the L.H. Hamlar Event Center on Melrose Avenue, where every attendee was given a ticket for an opportunity to appear live on the air. Overseeing the nonprofit station is owner Dr. David Points, a Michigan native who previously served as a state representative, college professor, court magistrate and Director of Joint Information Bureau Task Force for Guantanamo Bay.

"Since I was a young child, I have been a radio lover," said Points at the launch event.

"When I was ten, I built my first radio. It's not an exaggeration to say that radio got me through both graduate school and law school. Radio allowed me to expand myself. To ask questions such as, 'How can I get additional information?' Whether in the kitchen at home or the car, when people hear something that sparks their interest, they usually want to learn more about it. That's what radio has always done for me," he said.

If anyone understands the challenges that come with operating a radio station, it's

Points. A veteran of the industry, the Ohio Northern and Saginaw Valley State University alum has operated WFJX 910 AM and 104.3 FM in Roanoke for over a decade. "Like I've done my entire career, the mission of this station is to provide accurate information that encourages people's health, education and financial development," he said. "There truly is a market here. We were looking for a niche, and we found it with this new endeavor."

Being present in the local community and working with various organizations over the years has allowed Points to cultivate invaluable relationships. Vital to bringing this concept to fruition were the contributions of Dr. Eddie Amos, the Virginia Tech Foundation and WTVF FM General Manager Roger Duvall.

"I feel like we have done our job if people listen to the program and enjoy what they are hearing. We have various programs, ranging from how to eat healthy food to financial literacy," he said. "It is so important that we use this platform to be of service to as many people as possible. We take tremendous pride in encouraging conversations that occur at the dinner table."

From day one, Points saw Radio Melrose as an opportunity with limitless potential. "I want to provide the best product possible to listeners," Points said. "To do that, trust and credibility must be there." Community-oriented Radio Melrose is the latest example of northwest Roanoke on the comeback trail, following the official opening of

Melrose Plaza. (see related feature elsewhere in this issue.)

He added, "The launching event, in part, allowed other people to see what other listeners look like. There's no up and down, tall or short, brown and blue and green, this is for everybody. Our community services are free and available to improve the lives of the people right here in our community."

The first time that Michelle Smith listened to Radio Melrose, she did so with an open mind. "I became a fan that very day," she said. "Not only was the coverage informative, but it was engaging and clever too." WFJX's production studio on Clay Street in Southeast Roanoke is where Radio Melrose will broadcast from. Jazz music will be staple when community-related information is not being aired.

Airing on 89.1 HD4 (a WTVF public radio high definition digital signal) allows the station to reach beyond Roanoke into Lynchburg, Bedford and other surrounding areas. Support from the community said Points will largely determine the station's success.

As of press time, there were eight radio hosts - Ashley Patel, David Lee, Elia Cruz, Ethan Brooks, James Yang, Maria Gonzalez and Nigel Smith. According to its website, "Radio Melrose is committed to amplifying underrepresented voices and providing an engaging platform for cultural expression, ensuring everyone finds a place to be heard. For more information, visit www.radiomelrose.com. 

SEP 6



The
KINGS

SEP 12



BIG MATT &
THE TIME MACHINE

OCT 4



OUT OF
SPITE



Daleville
town center



BUSINESS CENTS

By Daniel Colston

Executive Summary:

Owning a business is not for the faint of heart. It is non-stop, organized chaos. It will test your limits in every way—from your personal finances to your emotional well-being, physical stamina, and mental acuity.

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

Business as self-expression: “the art of service”

This is why being a business owner isn't just for those who want to make good money. If your primary goal is wealth, you're often better off entering a high-paying field and building your financial future as an employee. Being a business owner starts with a desire and a passion for something you love, something that can evolve into a service or product offering. It requires a “fire in your belly” attitude, because without that drive, you simply won't have the stamina to weather the storms that inevitably come as you grow.

This is where business as self-expression becomes such a beautiful thing. We've all heard the phrase, “If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life.” The most important factor in avoiding burnout as a business owner is to keep the daily work enjoyable and fulfilling. As long as it's fun, you can keep thriving.

As your role evolves with your business, you'll find yourself learning to love new aspects of it. For example, I started my residential painting business because I loved painting. I was good at it, the profit margins were strong, and I had a waiting list of clients. These days, we're managing 3–4 different painting projects each week—and I rarely pick up a brush.

Still, I love everything about being a painting contractor. I love the feel of a brush in my hand, gliding it around trim to make a perfectly straight line. I love being invited into clients' homes and having real conversations while getting work done. I love the dramatic before-and-after of a great paint job. I love seeing our clients' smiles when a project is complete. I'm nostalgic about painting, because my dad was a painting contractor who taught me about life while we worked together on projects.

Now, my role looks different. I'm not on the job sites as much. My time goes into running payroll, doing accounting, renewing business licenses, keeping up with continuing education, hiring and firing, paying invoices, meeting with bankers, lawyers, and insurance agents, searching for fix-and-flip deals, chasing past-due payments, installing Microsoft Word, securing office space, meeting with clients, running sales appointments—the list is endless. It literally never ends. You just shift the priorities within the list.


The key to avoiding burnout is to love what you do. Even though I don't paint as often—which is why I started this business, I've chosen to love my new responsibilities. I love taking care of my employees, whom I consider the “most important clients” in the business. I love doing the right thing even when no one is watching. I enjoy building relationships with bankers, lawyers, and insurance agents to protect

the company's interests. I love trying to make every client interaction a great experience by going above and beyond—whether that's with communication or small thoughtful touches on the job site.

Owning a business isn't just about making money, it's about having a passion for what you do. Your role will change, your tasks will shift, but the key to success (and to avoiding burnout) is to keep that passion alive.

Viewing your service or product as a form of art and self-expression helps fuel that passion. Treat every job site, client interaction, email, phone call, or detail as your masterpiece—and you are the artist.

Picasso didn't paint expensive paintings because he wanted to make millions. He painted because he loved it.

Keep the passion alive in your business by making every day a masterpiece. 

“ ”

Now, my
role looks
different...
the list
is endless.



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Roanoke College photos

Articulation agreement

RC-VWCC alliance focused on what's hot locally: biotech

By Gene Marrano

Roanoke College and Virginia Western have launched a four-year biotechnology degree program pathway, which included a joint signing ceremony in late July, featuring Roanoke College President Frank Shushok Jr. and Dr. Laura Treanor, the recently installed new President at Virginia Western. Treanor succeeded the retiring Dr. Robert “Bobby” Sandel, who made workforce training and education related to business needs in the region a cornerstone of his mission.

The RC-VWCC pact provides a “seamless” transfer path for students that earn an associate’s degree at Virginia Western, then go on to pursue a Bachelor of Science in biotech at Roanoke College. This is really a two-way collaboration, with students at RC even taking some classes on the Virginia Western campus where hands-on laboratory training facilities are already in place; in short, no need to reinvent the wheel on the private college campus in Salem. Both colleges worked together in crafting the four year biotech academic path, which also includes opportunities for internships and research in the real world.

Virginia Western created the associates degree in biotech just two years ago, incorporating extensive lab experiences and specialized skills training. “Biotech is one of the most promising and transformative fields

of the 21st Century,” says Shushok. Treanor adds that, “our biotechnology students will be well prepared, whether they choose to join the region’s growing biotech workforce or pursue advanced studies with confidence in their strong academic foundation.”

Kathy Wolfe is Vice President for Academic Affairs at Roanoke College. It is an articulation agreement allowing for smoother transfers and more aligned courses of study making that happen, but she notes that, “we worked with [VWCC] to build a four year degree on our end at Roanoke College. Students at Virginia Western will have a real seamless 2+2 articulation agreement to come over to Roanoke if they want to finish the bachelor’s level.”

What’s unique about this agreement, says Wolfe, are the three classes Roanoke College will take on the Virginia Western campus –

a déjà vu moment perhaps for those that finished their biotech associates degree at Western before transferring. “They’ve got the qualified faculty, they’ve got the labs, the equipment. Its high quality experience.”


Instructors at VWCC will have support from Roanoke College’s learning management system and can advise Roanoke College if students in those three classes are struggling. “It’s a really unusual level of collaboration for two really different types of high ed institutions. We don’t think there’s anything else like it in Virginia. We’re really excited about it.”

Students who took those same courses already at VWCC won’t have to repeat. It’s really designed, says Wolfe, for matriculating RC students who lack those same hands-on lab experiential learning tracks. Those RC students won’t pay extra for those three courses; Virginia Western will bill Roanoke College. “We cover that [cost].” Roanoke College announced its four-year biotech degree this past spring. Wolfe says the new agreement, “builds on the Rapid Maroons transfer program that we’ve been working on with the community colleges in the area.” The process began in 2022 when Shushok and Sandel huddled about ways to work together more closely. The end result is building a more qualified workforce for the growing biotech sector in the region, fueled in part by work at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, Carilion Clinic, local biotech startups, etc. Not to mention the new wet/dry lab space that will be available for local researchers/businesses once it is actually up and running. Wolfe says she and



Kathy Wolfe, Roanoke College

a counterpart at Virginia Western began working on a path forward; the end result is this new agreement: “[We] started talking about the possibilities for programs we could develop together.” A GO Virginia state grant helped support the creation of Virginia Western’s two-year biotech degree, which led to the two schools now working together on a collaborative model.

Both Virginia Western and Roanoke College spend time with the local business community on what their needs are, making sure the biotech curriculums are up to date. “We build our program accordingly,” adds Wolfe. The new Bachelor of Science and biotechnology is the end result, with students arriving in Salem with an associates degree in the same field, ready to complete the four year program before starting their biotech careers – hopefully, for many of them anyway, launching their professional journey locally. 



Laura Treanor, VWCC and Frank Shushok, RC



Scene in back of our sparkly shop

Yudel Martinez and Magda Salgado bring us their workspace at YM Jewelry in Roanoke (at 5220 B, Williamson Road). With their Cuban and Italian influence,

the family-owned business specializes in the design and fabrication of custom jewelry, like handmade engagement rings. YM also makes favorite pieces using diamonds, rubies, and "practically all other natural stones, in any style or material." Antique jewelry repair, gold recycling, and appraisal services are also available. [ymjewel.com]

Photo by Olivia Marone





SMALL BUSINESS TOOL KIT

By **Jade Richardson
Bock**

Executive Summary:
*Nonprofit service often
comes with added stress;
but there are ways to help.*

*Jade Richardson Bock
is a Senior Consultant
with Building Beloved
Communities, a Roanoke
based company that
supports nonprofit
organizations. [www.building
belovedcommunities.com](http://www.buildingbelovedcommunities.com)*

Beyond bubble baths and bon bons: preventing burnout in the non-profit sector

In the nonprofit sector, the deep commitment to serving others often comes with a hidden cost: burnout and vicarious trauma. These challenges are not signs of personal weakness—they are predictable outcomes of working in environments where mission, urgency, and limited resources converge.

Nonprofits play an essential role in our communities. In Virginia alone, more than 26,000 organizations employ 8–9% of the state's workforce, generate \$51 billion in revenue, and hold over \$108 billion in assets. Their work ranges from preparing youth for the global economy to amplifying the voices of underserved communities. While the rewards are immense, so too are the emotional demands on the people who make this work possible.

The Roots of Burnout

Many nonprofit cultures unwittingly carry on “Puritanical” ideals—those that prize tireless devotion, moral obligation, and self-sacrifice. Although noble in spirit, this unrealistic mindset can drive staff and volunteers toward unrelenting workloads, chronic stress, and emotional exhaustion. Over time, predictable symptoms emerge: declining health, waning job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates, which further strain those who remain.

Changing the Culture

Addressing employee burnout requires more than quick fixes. Bubble baths and bon-bons won't counteract an unsustainable workplace culture. Valuing staff well-being as highly as the organizational mission is a powerful first step. Strategies include:

- **Creating a culture of appreciation**—providing constructive feedback privately while recognizing successes publicly.
- **Encouraging healthy boundaries**—setting clear expectations about after-hours communication and honoring time off.
- **Shaping policy for balance**—ensuring workloads are sustainable, offering autonomy, meaningful PTO, regular “mini sabbaticals,” and a healthy mix of high- and low-stress projects.


Employee evaluation methods can also evolve—from judgment-based scales like “Meets Expectations” to growth-oriented descriptions such as “Proficient” or “Emerging,” fostering development rather than criticism.

Personal Replenishment

Organizational changes go hand in hand with personal

practices. Kelly Brogan, MD wrote, "The good news and the bad news is that you're in charge of your own health." Creating a life you don't need to escape from starts with intentionally spending time in practices that you enjoy, that fill your cup, that support your physical, emotional and mental health. These practices don't have to be elaborate or expensive to be fulfilling. Consider:

- **Daily:** Mindful showers, nourishing meals, short stretches, and limiting news intake.
- **Weekly:** Time in nature, meandering walks, and connecting meaningfully with others.
- **Monthly:** Joyful outings, hobbies, and creative pursuits.
- **Yearly:** Retreats for reflection, celebrating progress, and setting new intentions.

Sustaining the people who sustain our communities is not a luxury—it is essential. In a healthy social-profit workplace, mission and humanity can thrive side by side, ensuring that both the work and the people behind it have the resources to flourish. 

“ ”

The rewards
are immense,
so too are
the emotional
demands...






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THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

By Gene Marrano

Executive Summary:

A decade of efforts to establish a hub for training and higher education options led to the Roanoke Higher Education Center opening its doors to students in August 2000. 25 years later they celebrated last month with a bash at Hotel Roanoke.

25 years and counting for a “thriving” RHEC


The Roanoke Higher Education Center (RHEC) is located in what used to be the headquarters building for Norfolk & Western railroad. The silver jubilee celebration included a video welcome to attendees, from Senator Mark Warner - who was there in person as the Governor of Virginia when the Higher Ed Center opened its doors. Thomas McKeon was in charge then; Kay Dunkley now is the Center's executive director.

One of the special guest speakers was Dr. Ken Nicely, superintendent of Roanoke County Schools; he earned a doctorate through classes at the RHEC and in fact earned his teaching certification there as well when the center was opened, “a true example of access to educational opportunity,” says Dunkley, “and what that degree has done for him – he didn’t have to travel to Blacksburg [either].”

There are now more than 100 programs of study offered at the Roanoke Higher Education Center, including undergraduate and graduate degree programs, certificates, workforce training and more. What the 12 or so participating schools and organizations teach is in line with local workforce needs says Dunkley: “we are training a productive workforce, [which] adds to the economic vitality of our region.” James Madison, Radford, Roanoke College, Virginia Tech, Virginia Western and the Appalachian School of Pharmacy are current RHEC members.

Even with the explosion of remote on-line schooling - especially since the pandemic - Dunkley says many students still need physical space that the Roanoke Higher Education Center provides, like in the nursing field where practical in-person training is critical. “What we found is there is this experiential learning method that is very suitable to some learning styles for adults, that laboratory setting.”

Republican state delegate Terry Austin - a supporter of Higher Ed center funding in the General Assembly noted Dunkley, offered a resolution marking the occasion at the Silver Jubilee. 19 million dollars in state, local and private capital helped the RHEC journey from concept to reality 25 years ago, with champions like then-State Senator John Edwards (D-Roanoke) leading the charge.

The Roanoke Higher Education Center says it's an economic engine, generating over \$10 million for the region every year, “serving as a cornerstone for downtown development and the revitalization of the historic Gainsboro (Northwest Roanoke) neighborhood.” Says Dunkley, “we’re thriving right now, we are at 100% of leased long term space,” with several rooms rented on a short term basis for conferences, board meetings, corporate training sessions, etc. Here’s to another 25 years. 

Ask, don't tell

In some ways, I started Valley Business FRONT under duress. I already had a business—my agency—where I created and managed advertising and marketing for businesses all across the land (high-tech; manufacturing; engineering firms, primarily)—but I was also managing the original Blue Ridge Business Journal. The corporate world was shaking up for newspaper publishers (particularly in 2008, as the Journals' third owner, The Roanoke Times, was for sale); and out-of-the-blue, the core paper no longer wanted BRBJ to operate autonomously, as a venture property.

The timing was strange for me. Up until that fateful year, I was delighted that in less than three short years, my staff and I had managed to both streamline AND become profitable for the first time in a long time. But when—for the first time—a previously unaffiliated and unproven company appointee actually crossed the street (from RT proper to our building) to interfere with our progress (literally killing our productivity to engage unnecessary activities, like benchmarking studies); I knew something was amiss.

I did something unusual. I made a call.

Usually, I figure things out for myself. (Ask everyone who's worked for me about my stubbornness.) This surprising interference had me scratching my head. Out of character, I called someone who I knew was the most knowledgeable industry insider.

"Get out," he said, within a few minutes of my brief description of what was happening.

I think about that call—that advice—from time to time. What if I didn't call him that evening? What if I ignored my intuition? But here's the biggest lesson:

I asked for his advice.


He didn't offer it to me. Until I asked.

And I took his advice. He turned out to be 100% correct.

But there was no warning, no counsel, no intelligence—until I sought it.

To this day, I believe—and I tell people—the best advice comes from the best sources YOU seek out. If someone brings you unsolicited advice—in every instance I've observed my entire life—it's not valuable. Maybe you've noticed this too... the very people who give advice you didn't ask for—are the last people you should be getting advice from. (Hey Kids: parents and grandparents are the exception... sometimes.)

I was at a business event recently, involving startups and financing, where a random gentleman shared the following maxim: "If you want advice, ask for money; if you want money, ask for advice."

I should ask for advice more often. When I have, I may not be "shown the money," but I've always received tangible value. 



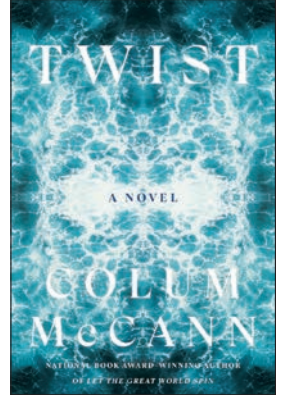
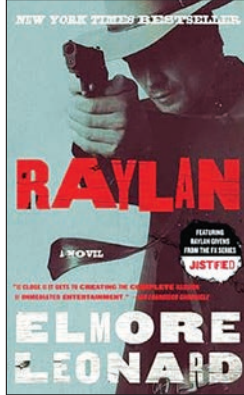
ON TAP FROM THE PUB

By Tom Field

Executive Summary:
*Advice is best when it's
sought—not brought.*

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.



The likability of Leonard

I was going to start this review with my befuddlement over the accolades of Elmore Leonard. He's lauded as one of the greats, such as NYT Book Review saying, "Leonard can write circles around almost anybody active in the crime novel today." I finally dove into his work, including this reading of *Raylan* (Mariner, 2012). Yeah. I'm going to stick with... I don't get it. But I do get why some readers like it. One clue is in Leonard's book, *10 Rules of Writing* (which, admittedly, are pretty solid), where his numbers 8 and 9 advise avoiding character descriptions and details of places and things. Indeed, he's utterly efficient. I think Leonard's greatness comes in foreseeing (predicting?) the evolution of content in the social/digital age. His *blurb-escent* style leaves a little too much out for me—but I know a ton of people who dig it. I don't know why they wouldn't just stick with pure dialogue podcasts.

—Tom Field

Reconnecting

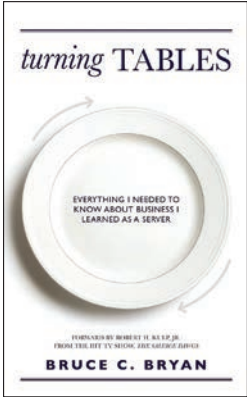
As someone who "pulled cable" and manufactured preforms on a chemical-glass lathe as well as dropped molten glass from draw towers for fiber optic cable back in the 1980s, there was no way I was going to let this book sit on the shelf when I discovered it. *Twist* (Penguin Random House, 2025) by Colum McCann is most interesting because a significant portion of it reads like non-fiction, though by the end, it's clearly a novel. It's about the all-so-critical fiber cable running across our ocean floors—and the men who run the ships to repair the breaks. Told by an "embedded writer-narrator" who is assigned to do a story, we meet our

nouveau-Captain Ahab (Conway) who captures attention, even as we know so little about him and the mystery of his personal life beyond the ship. Our narrator goes a bit "overboard" with the literary allusions (especially the *Apocalypse Now* movie); but that just adds colorful layers to our shipmen's work, like *Moby Dick* was more than a fish tale. The tone of this novel is rather morose (with a constant "strand" of failing fatherhood); and it slips super deep into dramatic action in uncharacteristic fashion at the end—but what an adventure into the psyche and the deep blue sea. (I actually looked up the sources credited in McCann's Acknowledgments... such as Orange Marine... fascinating!)

—Tom Field

Doing 'what's next'

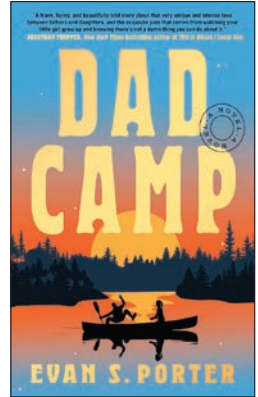
Turning Tables: Everything I Needed to Know About Business I Learned as a Server (Morgan James, 2025) by Bruce C. Bryan, the president and owner of local Roanoke ad agency 5 Points Creative, offers a descriptive study of the best practices of customer service modeled from the restaurant business. Bryan says the reason we hear mantras like "if you can wait on tables, you can conquer anything" and "the best employees (and people we hire) are those who have worked as wait staff and servers" is because they're true. I like the real-life examples provided (at real restaurants); the name-dropping of actual champions in the service sector (especially locals, from Jason Martin of Martin's and other restaurants; Brian Wells of Hotel Roanoke; DJ Ostrom, contractor; Mark Kary, advocate; to servers like Leia Thomas, Brittany Massey, Jessica, Sarah, Stephanie, Liz.) Specific tips (stories sell; the 10/5 hospitality rule; cold soup) are noteworthy; and the observation



Guys and Dolls



Taco Riendo



that superior servers are always cognizant of “doing what’s next” is a remarkable discovery that’s far more accurate than the standard notion of “multitasking.” I’d be delighted if all servers put these tenants into practice (many do) and their managers knew how to employ them. Business owners cherish such an environment.

—Tom Field

Bravo, guys; brava, gals

Attic Productions in Fincastle staged *Guys and Dolls*, the venerable Jo Swerling/Abe Burrow Broadway (and later a movie starring Frank Sinatra) smash with memorable music and lyrics by Frank Loesser in late July-early August. After 3 months or so of singing, dancing and acting/blocking rehearsals it all paid off beautifully in a show where you could appreciate all the hard work director James Honaker and his very large cast put into it.

Attic does a particularly good job with musicals, typically with plays that employ (for free of course, this is community theater) a large age range of actors, including youth-oriented shows. *Guys and Dolls* was one I am glad I didn’t miss. Bravo and Brava!

—Gene Marrano

Another taqueria worth the visit

Less than an hour before the close of business on a Sunday, Taco Riendo on Williamson Road was still buzzing with activity, people picking up orders to go, while others sat and tables

and were waited on by a courteous staff. There was lots of Spanish being spoken – but Tacos are a language everyone understand – witness the rise of the street taco, even locally. Tacos are the specialty of course at Taco Riendo, in a variety of choices; there are also quesadillas, burritos, etc. Williamson Road has long been a haven for a multitude of ethnic food choices, and Taco Riendo joins that list. Check it out.

—Gene Marrano

Daddy’s little girl goes to camp

Relatable. *Dad Camp* (Dutton; 2024) by Evan Porter is going to be my most relatable reading for this year. Daddy-daughter outings and coaching youth sports... right up my alley. Trying to preserve the tightest relationship—from when your little girl needed you the most, to when it appears on the surface she doesn’t need you at all—our narrator gets it. The story here is about taking your eleven-year-old daughter “hostage” off to a week-long camp in the hopes of reconnecting at a deeper level. My favorite thing about this novel: 1) it mirrors my experiences and thoughts as a dad; 2) it offers a balance of lightweight, humorous antics along with lump-in-the-throat moments, like real life; and 3) it reiterates the priority of a father’s responsibilities and the fortunate role that can play. I won’t forget this book or the poignant reminder that the smallest details—like silly dad jokes—matter.

—Tom Field

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

Your table is ready >

Turning Tables—a new business book by local ad agency proprietor **Bruce Bryan**—has released (see a review in this edition), describing how customer service at any organization can be modeled and improved when using the best practices found in the restaurant industry. Drawing on his experiences from his restaurant server jobs from high school and college years, Bryan praises the skills and attitudes that good servers acquire from the often hectic, multitasking environment of the busy dining establishment.

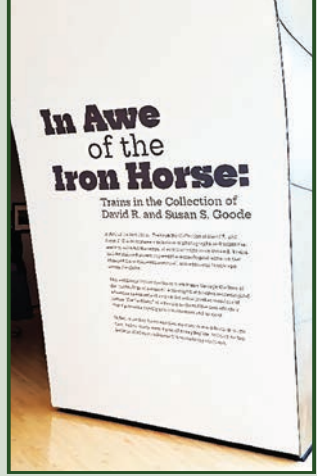
These characteristics can be applied to any business—particularly the majority of operators in any service sector. He is available for speaking engagements about his discoveries—compiled after an idea he had “for over a decade” but brought to market after watching the popular Hulu series, *The Bear*.



Emily Field

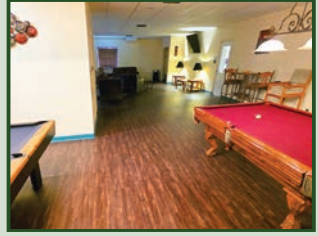
Favorite for fans >

In yet another jam-packed season, Roanoke’s **Dr Pepper Park at the Bridges** brought back its ever-popular Fleetwood Mac tribute band Rumours on July 25. Despite the triple-digit heat index (at the start), DPP was packed for the performance. Then, DPP managed a repeat of surprising turnout in the rain, when the weather hardly stopped folks from attending the Morgan Wallen tribute band 7 Summers. The 2025 season already included acts (such as Taylor Swift tribute; Tyler Parrish; Jared Stout Band; Diamond Rio; Yachtley Crew; Them Dirty Roses; Simon & Garfunkel tribute; The Ledbetters; Superunknown; Chayce Beckham; Jackson Dean; Eaglemania; Hairball; Easton Corbin; Pandora’s Box Aerosmith tribute); with still a dozen more after this one—from tribute acts of ABBA; Kenny Chesney & Luke Bryan; Sabrina Carpenter; Journey; AC/DC and touring performances by Hinder; Colt Ford; Sara Evans; Sammy Kershaw; Nitty Gritty Dirt Band; Chase Rice; and Texas Hippie Coalition. At most events you see a mix of regulars as well as folks selecting specific shows.



For the love of rail >

David Goode, former CEO of Norfolk Western, along with his wife, Susan, presented their private collection of railroad photography and art at the **Taubman Museum of Art** in Roanoke on Aug. 3; which is also on exhibit for viewing, as well as a printed catalogue entitled "In Awe of the Iron Horse." Goode shared his railroad life story, saying "all of [his experiences as a railroad executive] was just luck and happenstance. I didn't plan it." He also said, "my heart is here in Roanoke" and brought his collection back here because "I don't want us to forget our heritage." Although the Railroad "tugged us into Norfolk," as he puts it, "we can't forget that at one point in time, Roanoke built the best locomotives in the world." He also pointed out that "every great photographer took a train shot" because they are "part of the landscape" and are so captivating.



Designed for comfort >

7 Stars Lounge—a coffee-café-bar with separate cigar lounge—has opened on Church Ave on the western side of downtown Roanoke. Proprietors Larry and Mini McKee hope to attract “everyday people” who want to drop in to a place to relax. The large front area with tables and counter offers pub style food and beverages (including a signature Chicago hot dog); plus there is a humidor and separate spacious cigar lounge in the back. McKee calls the venture “my retirement” and the former electrician (who did al the reconstruction and buildout) says he intends to paint the exterior “something better... like black or gray” in the next stage. Unlike many cigar lounges, 7 Stars requires no fees or memberships... McKee says he enjoys just sitting back and relaxing and wanted to capture that same vibe here. In addition to walk-ins, the venue is also available for meetings and events.



Vinton's hotel project >

The **Town of Vinton** has announced the commencement of construction for the new **Extended Stay America Premier Suites** hotel, located at the intersection of West Virginia Avenue, South Pollard Street, and Cedar Avenue. Construction began in August and is expected to continue through September 2026. The project includes the permanent closure and vacation of 1St Street from Cedar Avenue to Virginia Avenue. Construction access will be limited to a designated entrance on Cedar Avenue. On-site activity will include demolition of the former Vinton Dry Cleaners building, site grading and construction of a four-story, 92-room hotel fronting Virginia Avenue The project is estimated to take up to 14 months to complete.



Gene Marrano



New Mediterranean eatery >

Taziki's Mediterranean Café held a ribbon cutting last month. Located next to First Watch on Franklin Road in Roanoke where Core Life Eatery used to be, it's the fourth Taziki's Café for owner Jona Ford, a Roanoker who also operates three locations in Richmond: "everything is cooked to order. My personal favorite is the grilled salmon mediterranean salad. Our food is handmade from scratch, made to order."

The ribbon-cutting event also featured a check presentation to Angels of Assisi. Ford describes Taziki's as a fast casual eatery. "It's all about the connection ... over food, and connection over people. Enjoying the food, enjoying the company."



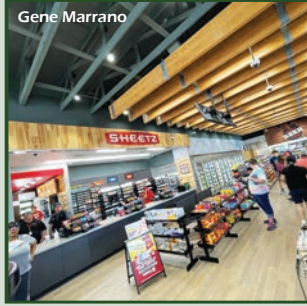
Gene Marrano

USA Biking brings visitors from 49 states >

When the **USA Cycling Endurance Mountain Biking National Championships** came to the Roanoke region in July it brought along thousands of visitors. Carvins Cove, Elmwood Park and Explore Park were the sites of the 2025 USA cycling endurance mountain bike national championships. "Just to see this park turned into a course that's one thing," said Roanoke Mayor Joe Cobb of the time trial short course racing at Elmwood Park, "thinking about all the partners that made this happen, and seeing the races of all ages. I'm hearing that they lie then variety of courses."

Explore Park hosted the cross-country mountain bike championships. Alex North, marketing and administrative coordinator for Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism, says visitors gave them a lot of positive feedback. "We're seeing folks from all over the country. Being able to highlight our region [like] Explore Park, has been great."

The region again hosts the USA Cycling Endurance Mountain Biking National Championships next year as well. North says people are already inquiring about booking stays at Explore Park and other area campgrounds for the event. If all goes well, the Roanoke region could see the championships stay here even longer.



Sheetz expands its footprint >

Sheetz cut the ribbon in July on its seventh fueling station, restaurant and convenience store in the greater Roanoke Valley. Director of Real Estate for Sheetz Jamie Gearhart, on this latest location, on Williamson Road in the Hollins area of Roanoke County: "these take a long time. We worked on this one on and off for fifteen years. It's just how they fall. Sure enough, we have a couple in a row as we build excitement and continue to invest in the greater [Roanoke] area." Gearhart says the new Sheetz in Hollins will draw customers from the busy Williamson Road corridor, and from I-81 travelers about one mile away. The Hollins location will employ almost 30 people in full or part-time jobs.

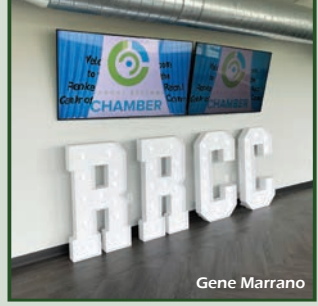
Another Sheetz then opened in mid-August on Franklin Road-US 220 near Lowes. The newest Sheetz in the Valley is on US 220/Franklin Road is on a smaller-than-usual parcel for the Pennsylvania-based chain. Tammy Shepherd is a Roanoke County supervisor: "the economic development is great; it brings a lot of tax dollars. They are a great business to bring in to our locality." The opening ceremony and ribbon cutting included \$2500 "big checks," donated to both Special Olympics and the Feeding Southwest Virginia food bank. Sheetz is about to open its 800th location.



Hurray for Valleydale >

The **Valleydale Apartments** are open in the City of Salem after eight years of planning and construction. The first Valleydale Apartment building renovation, where the former meat packing plant used to be, represents a \$25 million investment. Developer Ed Walker thanked partners at the ribbon cutting for sticking with the project through three city managers and three Salem City Councils. "One of the things we love about Salem, Virginia – when Salem decides to do something, they think about it real hard, they evaluate it, they analyze it, and then they go all out."

The project offers one-, two- and three- bedroom apartments with rents ranging from \$1,700 to \$2,800 a month. Most of the apartments already built (more are coming) have already been leased. [It's] a culmination of a multi-year process to envision and implement a transformation in the East Bottom neighborhood of Salem. The building looks amazing," says Walker, "it is the first luxury apartment building in the region with resort amenities like a golf simulator, co-working space, card room, roof deck, event spaces, resort swimming pool etc."



Regional Chamber is on the move >

Several months ago, the **Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce** sold the building that was its home on South Jefferson Street for three decades (developer Ed Walker was the buyer); now the doors have opened on its new headquarters. After working remotely and borrowing office space since April, the Chamber cut a ribbon in July on its new headquarters, at the Varsity Park center on Franklin Road. Regional Chamber executive director Eric Sichau: "we desire this location to be accessible, bright, different and a hub for the future."

At least 150 Chamber members and guests showed up for the ribbon cutting. The Franklin Road corridor between the Riverside Virginia Tech campus and the Tanglewood area in Roanoke County has been envisioned for redevelopment, mixed-use and walkability by a number of local officials. There's more room to grow, a large meeting space - and plenty of free parking. John Lugar owns Varsity Park, and the Varsity moving and storage company: "this property is known throughout the region as the Grace Humphries building, an iconic part of Roanoke's River's Edge corridor. When the opportunity came to reimagine this Roanoke landmark we were committed to honoring its past while investing in its future."



LG mental health milestone >

A milestone was celebrated in mid-July at **LewisGale Medical Center** in Salem - the 50th anniversary of the behavioral health program. Over 100 people including local business and political leaders were on hand, including Dr. John Hurt, who admitted the first patient to what was then the Roanoke Valley Psychiatric Center in late June 1975. Today it is known as LewisGale Behavioral Health. Vice president Leigh Gathings says there's less of a stigma these days about asking someone - how are you doing?: "we're starting to see that wrapped around primary care visits, OBGYN visits, where doctors are saying 'how are you feeling?'; it's even getting more common when you visits a doctor, they [may] ask if you're suicidal or for a reason that may be mental health related."

LewisGale Behavioral Health also serves as a training center for students studying in the field, from schools like Virginia Western, Galen College of Nursing and Radford University. Over the past half-century LewisGale Behavioral health has treated around 75,000 people.



Advance Auto founder honored >

There are now more than 20 historical roadside signs in Roanoke, honoring those who have made their mark - and made a difference - in the Star City. The latest was dedicated recently to honor the late **Arthur Taubman**, who moved to Roanoke in 1932 and purchased three auto parts stores that eventually became Advance Auto Parts. Advance was based in Roanoke for decades and was a major employer.

Former Mayor Nelson Harris applied for the Taubman Historical marker and did the research. Nelson spent more than a year applying for the historical marker and researching Arthur Taubman's legacy. "he was also heavily involved in moving civil rights forward in our community, a lot of people do not know that. He was part of a group of businessmen, black and white, clergy, lawyers, that got together and championed the integration and desegregation of our lunch counters, movie houses, recreational facilities, health care., here in the city."

Taubman family members traveled from as far away as Colorado to attend the ceremony; the Arthur Taubman historical marker is located on McClanahan Street near the Sweet Donkey coffee shop. Taubman helped found the predecessor to the local United Way and was an early supporter of the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra. During World War Two Arthur Nicholas Taubman signed hundreds of visa affidavits as part of an effort to help Jews flee Europe as Hitler and the Nazis looked to purge them from the continent.

His son Nicholas Taubman, who also served as Advance CEO and was an Ambassador during the George W. Bush administration, told the story of how his father, who was Jewish, tried to save as many as 500 European Jews attempting to flee Nazi Germany, by vouching for them as "first cousins." When the FBI came calling and asked, "with all the visas of support you've signed ... how many first cousins do to you have? His response was 'any Jew that was in trouble was my first cousin.'" After which the FBI agents withdrew and did not pursue the issue. Nicholas and Jenny Taubman have become major philanthropists in their own right, making large donations to the Taubman Museum of Art and the new Carilion Taubman Cancer Center.

Roanoke celebrates ADA anniversary >

The **City of Roanoke** celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act - or ADA - a bill signed into law in 1990 by President George H.W. Bush that prohibits discrimination based on disability. The city honored the anniversary in July by announcing the near completion of an ADA accessible ramp at the Church Avenue entrance of the Municipal building, as well as recently launching a city-wide ordinance that allows up to 10 hours of on-street parking for people with handicap placards or license plates. Roanoke City Mayor Joe Cobb says accessibility improvements are not always physical. "We're also looking ahead. The city is working to redesign our website, to better serve individuals with visual, auditory and cognitive challenges. Accessibility in a digital age is just as vital as access to the built environment."



Gene Marrano

Cobb said the anniversary should be a call to action: "equity, dignity, full access, and participation, must always guide how we build our city and serve our neighbors in love." Cobb's remarks were signed by an interpreter for the deaf. The 35th anniversary of the ADA is a reminder that every accessible building, bus, and sidewalk brings us closer to the welcoming and inclusive city we strive to be." The event concluded with a proclamation marking July 26 as Americans with Disabilities Act Awareness Day.



Gene Marrano

Traditional Medicinals breaks ground >

It was around 5 years ago that California-based **Traditional Medicinals** - the second bestselling brand of tea bags in the U.S. - announced it would build its east coast production and distribution facility at Franklin County's Summit View Business Park. The groundbreaking - pushed back in part by the pandemic - finally took place in late July.

CEO Joe Stanziano joined local elected officials, State Senator Bill Stanley and others for the ceremony - despite the yearslong delay Stanziano says Summit View Business Park was the right place to plant their east coast flag: "We knew we wanted east coast; the logistic opportunities were great. As we started to look closer the cultural similarities with our company [based in Sonoma, California] - family values, hardworking people, community, commitment to the land and the environment, really just felt like it came together very nicely."

Traditional Medicinals will make a 47-million-dollar investment, building a 125,000 square foot facility set to open in 2026, while hiring 57 people over the next few years. Company officials pegged the average employee compensation at \$70,000. Promoting "Botanical Wellness," Traditional Medicinals sold 782 million tea bags last year. By mid-2026 the Sonoma, California-based company will produce much of that tea for the east coast in Franklin County.

One picture says it all >

From trains to brains, biotech and healthcare. This photo provides a snapshot into Roanoke's history, from its early name Big Lick and a railroad hub that was later the home for **Norfolk & Western/Norfolk Southern**, to the healthcare and research regional heavyweight Roanoke has become. This was taken from the new paved loop trail on the perimeter of the playing fields at River's Edge. Norfolk Southern has been exploring merger talks with Union Pacific.



FloydFest 2025's second festival at new site >

In its second year at a new location just off U.S. 221-Bent Mountain Road in Floyd County, **FloydFest 2025-Aurora** staff and patrons had to deal with a heat wave and two days of thunderstorms that delayed and even cancelled performances, and saw campers advised to avoid sheltering in their tents during nearby lightning strikes.

That didn't stop 24-year-old Nashville-based singer-songwriter Clover County, who opened up the Main Stage schedule last Friday, from having a good time at her first FloydFest; she's appeared at several outdoor music festivals before: "it's beautiful, so sunny, everybody's walking around with a smile on their face. I would love to come back again – I better be back. I've done a handful [of festivals]. This might be one of my new favorites."

There were several notable changes at Festival Park, the new home for FloydFest that debuted in 2024, including a relocated Oasis stage to reduce sound bleed from that venue to others close by, new paved pedestrian pathways and improved campsites.

The "heat dome" and several delays due to lightning strikes in the area didn't stop Lua Flora, front man Eric Button from enjoying the Asheville band's gig on stage at FloydFest 2025 over the weekend - and the whole outdoor festival vibe: "my first time playing FloydFest. Been here plenty of times as a fan. I remember being 13 and coming to my first FloydFest, [thinking] we're going to get up there one day. It's a cool full-circle moment to be here. Somewhere like this where people are hungry for live music just makes a world of difference." Lua Flora was part of the annual FloydFest "On the Rise" series that showcases emerging bands.



Healthier hearts mean healthier residents >

Several northwest Roanoke City census tracts are among those with the highest rates of hypertension in Virginia. That's where the **Healthy Hearts Initiative** in Roanoke strives to make a difference. Reverend Carroll Carter is with a group called One Valley, which operates several community gardens - then distributes the produce grown there to local churches and pantries in northwest Roanoke City.

Carter lost more than 60 pounds himself and says he eats much healthier now. "It's a problem all over the state but our numbers are higher here in Roanoke than in other parts of the state. We want people to join us in that mission – that is, to create an environment where people are healthy. It's not about how long you live but the quality of life we want for our citizens, and our children and grandchildren as well."

The Healthy Hearts Initiative advocates for more health education, increased blood pressure monitoring for northwest residents 45-plus and providing better access to nutritious food - including produce grown at the EnVision Center Garden on Salem Turnpike, where the Celebrating for Healthy Hearts took place in late July. One Valley volunteers also grow fresh produce at community gardens on 6th and 8th streets northwest, then distribute it to those most in need. The Virginia Department of Health was on hand for the celebration of the efforts to live healthier in the City of Roanoke.

Carilion Clinic expands its footprint >

A new home for **Carilion Children's Pediatric in Rocky Mount**, officially opens its doors on Monday in July after being relocated to a building on the Carilion Franklin Memorial Hospital campus from a smaller space nearby. Carl Cline is the President for Franklin Memorial Hospital, and a Carilion Clinic Vice President: "It is a newly renovated space. The previous children's clinic was ... a very small space, four exam rooms, not much space to work from, the waiting room very small. We felt the need to expand."



Besides general pediatric care, pediatric specialties now rotate through the new clinic location, which offers more access to care for children in Franklin County. Cline says it will also mean that fewer families will have to travel to Carilion Children's-Tanglewood - also relieving pressure on that facility in Roanoke County. Still coming said Cline: Carilion; first two standalone emergency departments in Botetourt County at Daleville and at Westlake on Smith Mountain Lake. Construction begins soon with a 2027 expected completion date. Carilion's new Crystal Spring Tower recently opened in Roanoke, it also includes expanded emergency services.



Kelsey Monahan

Hi! Bye! Mugsy >

As the **Salem Red Sox** 2025 seasons winds down, fans await the team's new identity (which can't be revealed until after the last game). Much speculation has circulated around the new brand, with hints of local/regional attachment (Hellbender native salamander? Blue Ridge mountains and Parkway? Star?). New merchandise is already on the way for the next season—a move that the minor league ball team stakeholders believe will generate additional revenue (based on other teams that don't use their major league franchise monikers). Some of the more creative names now include: Richmond Flying Squirrels; Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp; Montgomery Biscuits; Rocket City Trash Pandas; Amarillo Sod Poodles; Lansing Lugnuts; Sugar Land Space Cowboys; Wisconsin Udder Tuggers; and of course, the exhibition team Savannah Bananas.



Pulaski County Sportsplex construction >

Pulaski County officials call it, "one of the largest and most versatile indoor sports and event complexes in Virginia and the future hub for recreation, athletics, and entertainment in Pulaski County." The new 165,000-square-foot Sportsplex will offer multisport indoor courts, indoor turf fields, cardio and strength rooms, a golf institute, a 6,300-square-foot indoor playground, a full-service restaurant with catering, a one-fifth mile walking track, etc.

"The dual-purpose approach that the county is taking with this building is a win-win for everyone," said Tim Miller, executive director of Pulaski County Sports and Entertainment. "The local community gets a world-class facility that might otherwise not be possible, and the region gets a state-of-the-art facility."



That Melrose place >

Melrose Plaza celebrated its official grand opening last month. The community hub in northwest Roanoke created by **Goodwill Industries of the Valleys** and numerous partners features a full-service supermarket, a bank, a cafe and an adult high school, with a wellness center and a re-imagined Harrison Museum of African American Culture coming soon. Richmond Vincent, President & CEO for Goodwill, on how unique Melrose Plaza is: "there's other examples of projects that have one or two elements of the social determinants of health. But there's not one that takes all five and fits in under one roof, and then inter-connects them. That's what this project does."

The grand opening included the unveiling of a "History Wall," and Living Legends gallery, plaques honoring the accomplishments of those past and present, that made a difference in northwest Roanoke. The first cohort of living legends included former Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea Sr, Apple Ridge Farm founder Peter Lewis, and Roanoke Tribune publisher Claudia Whitworth. A recurring theme at the grand opening celebration was moving on from past hurts in northwest Roanoke - such as the memories of urban renewal - and moving forward. "We wanted to be able to illustrate the history of northwest Roanoke and really Roanoke as a whole. We took it all the way through time to our current living legends," says Vincent.

Among the guests was State Senate majority leader Louise Lucas; the General Assembly allocated \$750,000 towards the Melrose Plaza project, the City of Roanoke chipped in ten million towards the 40-million-dollar project that included donated land worth ten million from Goodwill, at what used to be its home campus.

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



Zimmerman

Grant Zimmerman has been named the head coach for the men's lacrosse team at Roanoke College. He was formerly the head coach at Centre College in Kentucky, with a 69-31 record over seven seasons. His team won the Southern Athletic Association regular season and tournament championship in 2023. Zimmerman has a bachelor's degree from UNC and played internationally as a member of the Netherlands men's national team. He played in two European Lacrosse Championships (2008, 2012) and was the team captain of the Netherlands at the World Lacrosse Championships in 2010.

Corretta Patterson has been appointed director of alumni and family relations at Ferrum College. She is a graduate of Franklin County High School and Ferrum College and holds an MBA from Averett University. Patterson has over 20 years of experience in operations and leadership in corporate, nonprofit, and entrepreneurial sectors.



King

Ryan King has been appointed executive director for administration and chief of staff in the President's Office at Roanoke College. He previously served as innovation manager at Carilion Clinic and assistant professor of medicine at Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and has more than 10 years of experience in innovation

and research and development, including positions at Ohio State University, Franklin Biomedical Research Institute in Roanoke, UNC Hospitals, and has authored more than 20 peer-reviewed manuscripts in various professional medical journals. He is a named inventor on one issued and five pending US patents. King has a Ph.D. in translational biology, medicine and health at Virginia Tech and a B.S. in biology from UNC at Chapel Hill.



McClanahan

Jackie McClanahan has been named to the role of human resources division director for the Division of Facilities at Virginia Tech. She has served in the interim position since 2024. McClanahan joined Virginia Tech in 2017 and has served

in various leadership roles in the Pamplin College of Business, the Division of Human Resources, and the Division of Facilities.



van de Gevel

Saskia van de Gevel is the new dean of the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech. Van de Gevel joined Tech this summer after serving as the department chair and professor in Appalachian State University's Department of Geography and Planning.

FINANCIAL FRONT

Laurie Hart has been promoted to senior vice president, chief revenue officer at Bank of Botetourt. She joined Bank of Botetourt in 2019 and has more

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Hart

than 40 years of experience in the financial industry, including commercial banking, treasury services, and capital markets. Hart double majored at Roanoke College with a Bachelor of Business Administration and Economics. She serves on the Virginia Bankers Association Government Relations Committee and the St. Andrews Catholic Church Parish Finance Council. She has previously served on the boards of the Roanoke Symphony and the Jefferson Center.

Duane Burks has been promoted to senior vice president, chief retail officer at Bank of Botetourt. He has been with the Bank for more than 20 years and in

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.



Burks

the financial industry since 1994. He holds an associate degree in accounting from Virginia Western Community College and a bachelor's degree in business management from Emory & Henry University. He is also a graduate of the Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management. Burks is a member of Bonsack Baptist church, where he served as a deacon and member of multiple committees.

Marty Francis has



Francis

been promoted to senior vice president, chief lending officer at Bank of Botetourt. He joined Bank of Botetourt in 1995 and most recently served as first vice president, head of business banking. He began his career at the Bank as an intern and became a full-time employee after graduating from Ferrum College with a degree in finance. He also completed studies at the Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management at the University of Virginia

and the Graduate School of Banking at Louisiana State University. Francis serves on the board of directors for Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare.



Francis

Mary Ann L. Miller has been promoted to senior vice president, chief marketing officer and head of business development at Bank of Botetourt. Since joining the Bank in 2016, Miller has drawn on more than 20 years of experience in the financial industry to enhance its marketing, brand presence, and

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growth strategies. Miller earned a bachelor's degree in communication studies from Bridgewater College and is a graduate of the Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. She continues to serve on the Bridgewater College President's Advisory Council. She serves as chair of the Botetourt Family YMCA Board of Directors and sits on the boards of the YMCA of Virginia's Blue Ridge, Total Action for Progress (TAP), the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Daleville Institute, Inc. She is also a member of the Carilion Clinic's Reaching Far, Caring Close Cancer Campaign Cabinet, the Valley Business FRONT Advisory Board, and the Virginia Bankers Association's Marketing Committee.



Murphy

Paul Murphy has been promoted to senior vice president, chief credit officer at Bank of Botetourt. He has been with the Bank for over two decades and most recently served as first vice president, head of credit and loan services. Murphy earned a bachelor's degree in business and economics from Virginia Military Institute and an MBA from the University of

Tennessee. He is active in the community through his involvement with St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Fincastle and coaches recreational sports throughout Botetourt County.



Rhodes

Paula Rhodes has been promoted to senior vice president, chief bank operations officer at Bank of Botetourt. She has been with Bank of Botetourt for over 25 years and previously served as first vice president, head of operations. Rhodes is a graduate of the Virginia Bankers School of Bank Management at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. A native of Southwest Virginia, Rhodes has lived in Buchanan for more than 30 years.



Griffin

L. Nicole "Nikki" Griffin has been promoted to senior vice president, chief mortgage lending officer at Virginia Mountain Mortgage. She joined the Bank of Botetourt's mortgage division in 2016 and most recently served

as first vice president, head of mortgage lending. Griffin earned a bachelor's degree in international relations from Roanoke College. She is active in the community through her involvement in the Roanoke Valley Junior Women's Club and serves as secretary/treasurer of the Blue Ridge Mortgage Lenders Association.



Journiette

Devin Journiette joined City of Roanoke Department of Economic Development as an economic development specialist who will manage leases, commercial properties, real estate programs, and help guide redevelopment through sales and leasing of city-owned properties. He has a strong background in community development, small business support, grant writing, and focusing on rural and underserved communities.

WELLNESS FRONT

Michelle Franklin, R.N., has been promoted to Chief Nursing Officer at Carilion Clinic. Most recently, Michelle was the Vice President responsible for Women's, Children's, Nursing Support and Interpreter Services. She began her career



Franklin

as a nursing assistant in 1990 at what later became Carilion Roanoke Community Hospital, and she has served in progressive clinical and operational leadership roles for over 30 years in both hospital and ambulatory areas. Michelle also previously served as co-interim Chief Nursing Officer overseeing the Nursing Center of Excellence and nursing at Carilion Medical Center and ambulatory practices.



Herman

Andrew Herman, M.D., has been appointed Chair of the Department of Pediatrics at Carilion Clinic. Dr. Herman comes from Atrium Health in Charlotte, N.C. where he worked as vice president and chief medical officer for Levine Children's Hospital and Jeff Gordon Children's Center. He attended Indiana University, earned a medical degree from Saint Louis University, and completed his Pediatrics residency and Neonatology fellowship at the University of Virginia.

Dr. Herman has also held academic appointments at Carolinas Medical Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine Charlotte Campus and Wake Forest University School of Medicine.



Herman

Tristi Metcalf, M.D., has been appointed Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Carilion Clinic. Dr. Metcalf comes from Cleveland Clinic where she worked as OB/GYN and Women's Institute Chief since 2021. She previously served as OB/GYN Department Chair at Houston Methodist Hospital. She attended Lewis and Clark College, earned a medical degree from Mayo Clinic Medical School, completed residency at Texas

A&M Health Sciences Center, Scott and White Hospital and fellowship at Cleveland Clinic Foundation. For more than a decade, Dr. Metcalf served in the U.S. Air Force, obtaining the rank of lieutenant colonel. She is board certified in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery and a nationally recognized speaker on pelvic health and gynecology.

COMMUNITY SERVICE FRONT



Lewis

Stephanie Lewis has been named Director of the Developmental Disabilities Ministry at HopeTree Family Services. She will oversee strategic planning, program implementation, and daily operations across all DDM programs

statewide. She brings more than 12 years of behavioral healthcare and operations leadership experience; most recently as Director of Operations for Dream Builders ABA, where she led service delivery across multiple regions. Prior to that, she held leadership roles at the Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD), including Region Manager and Operations Manager. In 2022, Lewis was honored with the Founders Award at CARD for outstanding leadership. DDM is a residential care program designed to support adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities and includes 17 group homes while also providing sponsored residential and community engagement services throughout Virginia.

BUSINESS SERVICES FRONT

5Points Creative welcomes back **Beth Kolnok** to lead the account services team.



Kolnok

As director of account services, Kolnok will oversee the account services team while solving brand challenges, looking to grow and transform accounts.

MUNICIPAL FRONT

Greg Craddock, CEO of Patriot Group International, a government intelligence services contractor, was named 2025 Mid-Atlantic Region Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst & Young LLP. Craddock is a graduate of Ferrum College; and as one of eleven regional recipients, he will advance to the national competition in November.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

SEP 5
OCT 3





BANANAS AT LARGE
BOTTOM OF THE BARREL
SEASON FINALE



FIRST FRIDAYS



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]

Jade Richardson Bock is a Senior Consultant with Building Beloved Communities, a Roanoke based company that supports nonprofit organizations. www.buildingbelovedcommunities.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.

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“The architectural details revealed a story. — Page 16

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Prim is prime

Primland resort at Meadows of Dan in Patrick County was ranked the number one resort in the Continental US in 2025 by Travel + Leisure magazine.

RVPF's blacklist

The **Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation** released its 2025 Endangered Sites list: Williamson Roanoke Mid-Century Buildings (former Kenny's Burgers; Carlin's Amoco; Sears City); Belle Aire house; Melrose Baptist Church; Route 221 (Back Creek) rural character; Historic Neighborhoods. The Breckenridge Law Office in Fincastle was named "eminently endangered" and ABoone Real Estate / Boxley Family got the dubious "Bulldozer Award" for its demolition of four historic buildings on Richelieu Ave.

Women: speak out

Mic Drop Club Roanoke has launched with host Katie Beach (and host Kate Steiner in Lynchburg). It's a women's public speaking group and local chapter of the global organization, Mic Drop Workshop—founded by entrepreneurs to help women develop confidence and become thought leaders through public speaking.

Kicking back with stogies

7 Stars Lounge has opened on Church Ave in downtown Roanoke. It's a bar and café offering a separate lounge for cigar smoking, Chicago-style hot dogs,

sandwiches, baked goods, coffee, beer and wine, in a setting with big screen tvs, recliners, pool tables. (See FRONT'n About post, this issue.)

Not this day

Our Daily Bread / Salem location—a brunch, bakery, bistro—closed at the beginning of August; no reason was given.

Get your smash on

OutRAGEous Smash & Splatter has opened in Christiansburg. The "experiential" entertainment business offers people a controlled environment to "break stuff, throw paint, and blow off steam" and can be booked for events. It's called "a safe, fun space to smash stress and make messy, meaningful memories together." Owner Terri Welch has operated similar experiential businesses, like wine and paint affairs.

Get your swing on

Salem Golf Simulator has opened on 4th Street in Salem, with tech-assisted training and 18-indoor holes.

Mac & Bob's [dot] 2

Popular Salem eatery **Mac & Bob's** has been sold; the restaurant/pub tied to downtown Salem and Roanoke College just celebrated its 45th anniversary, with co-owner and founder Bob Rotanz announcing his retirement. Pennsylvania-based

Dave Magrogan Group is the new owner, whose portfolio includes various pubs, oyster house, cantina, grill, wine bar.

Educated choice

Virginia ranked number one in education in CNBC's Top States 2025 ranking. Criteria included test scores, class sizes, spending, workforce training, and the presence of institutions of higher education.

You say tomato, we say TONS

Oasthouse Ventures is building a 65-acre, low-carbon greenhouse for tomato production in Carroll County at the Wildwood Commerce Park. The initial phase of the project is expected to create 118 jobs (eventually over 250) with over 45 million pounds of annual tomato production for distribution in the eastern and midwestern US.

NRV NPOs get funds

Community Foundation of the New River Valley announced a \$796,053 donation from 3,465 donors from the 12th Annual GiveLocalNRV giving Day in late June. The fundraising was for around 120 area nonprofit and community service organizations.

Somebody moved my beer

Salem-based **Blue Ridge Beverage Company** is relocating its Lynchburg division to Campbell County.

Plans are to construct an 80,000-square-foot facility on 14 acres at Seneca Commerce Park in Rustburg. The company—a full-service distributor of beer, wine, cider, seltzers, and related cocktail and non-alcoholic beverages—says the employees at the new facility will be transferred from the Lynchburg operations.

Legal tender response to hunger

Gentry Locke law firm raised over \$31,000 to fight hunger in the 2025 Legal Food Frenzy campaign. The firm was recognized with a Regional Winner for Toral Giving award (Roanoke/Lynchburg) and Regional Winner for Per Capita Giving (Norfolk) for its support and contribution to local food banks.

Beam me outta here

Beamer's 25 restaurant at west end of downtown Roanoke closed in mid-August. The sports-themed pub named for Virginia Tech football former coach Frank Beamer operated for 15 years.

Virginia tourism sets records in 2024

Virginia's tourism industry generated a record high \$35.1 billion in visitor spending in 2024, marking a 5.4% increase from \$33.3 billion in 2023. Overnight visitation to Virginia increased by over one million people to 44.7 million visitors in 2024, up from 43.6 million in 2023, surpassing

pre-pandemic levels for the first time and setting a new record.

Creative selling hub in Southside

MerryGoRound—an NC-based digital e-commerce fulfillment company—is planning to move into a 400,000-square-foot facility in Pittsylvania County that should represent a \$10 million investment with around 200 new jobs. The business will include “live commerce and online sales” for major social media platforms like eBay, TikTok, Walmart, and Fanatics Live; and the jobs include videographers, graphic designers, live commerce hosts, and logistics.

VALET program grads

Thirteen companies across the Commonwealth have graduated from the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's Virginia Leaders in Export Trade (VALET) program, which assists

Virginia exporters that have firmly established domestic operations and are committed to international exporting as a growth strategy. Uttermost in Franklin County is one of those graduates.

VT grants for research on several fronts

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has awarded Virginia Tech multiple research grants: \$567,977 for brain imaging related to parent-infant interaction; \$832,818 for expanded safe water access in Appalachia; \$442,750 for pharmacology, physiology, and biological chemistry related to enzymes and molecular biology; \$419,080 for cancer research into treatments for osteosarcoma; \$395,248 for research of the causes of cancer and ways to prevent cancer related to episodic future thinking and smoking; and \$452,769 for allergy, immunology and transplantation related to treatment for a

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mosquito-borne alphavirus capable of nervous system damage.

Walker Foundry redevelopment project gets a boost from Commonwealth

The **Walker Foundry** property in the Norwich neighborhood of Roanoke (home for Walker Machine and Foundry for almost 100 years; employing thousands from 1920 until 2019) was allocated \$1.1 million via the City of Roanoke Economic Development to support construction of the site on behalf of developer Greg Kapnes and The Foundry Realty, LLC. The project is a mixed-use development that will include renovating over 16,000 sq ft of existing industrial space

for community-focused uses and reclaiming over 30,000 sq ft of concrete slab into usable greenspace, as well as 10,000 sq ft for a fresh food and beverage venue (Foundry Bar & Grill), 4,000 sq ft for an outdoor active fitness and wellness provider, and 2,000 sq ft of commercial office space for community-oriented services. At some point future plans include 200 multi-family residential units to provide affordable housing. Developers estimate it will cost between \$45-50 million.

Williamson Rd façade grants round 2

The **Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association** is accepting applications for phase two of the facade grant.

Notable Transactions

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- **1701 Kraft Drive LLC** purchased 32,000-sq-ft office building (same address) at VT-CRC in Blacksburg for \$4 million
- **Kura Holding / Milken Veterinary Group** purchased 16,472-sq-ft office building at 4461 Starkey Rd in Roanoke for \$2.5 million
- **Living Health & Wellness** leased 1,025-sq-ft of office space at 4119 Franklin Rd in Roanoke
- **34-unit Stonegate Manor Apts** in Salem and **32-unit Hounds Chase Apts** in Roanoke purchased by D&J Associates for \$6,269,000
- **Whiting-Turner Contracting Co** leased 4,264-sq-ft of office space at 111 Franklin Rd Plaza in Roanoke
- **THC Enterprises** leased 9,200-sq-ft of industrial space at 3716 & 3717 Garmin Rd in Salem

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

This multi-phase grant will provide one-time funding for business property owners to improve the profile of Williamson Road (visible entrances, doors, lighting, exteriors, etc.). Businesses located within a block of Williamson Road, within the city or county, are eligible to apply. For details: Valerie Brown at 540-362-3293, valerie@WilliamsonRoad.org.

More Tellys for 5Points

5Points Creative was recognized for outstanding video production on behalf of three clients during the 46th Annual Telly Awards. The agency earned two Silver Awards—one for the FedUp with Gun Violence fundraiser video and another for the Friendship “Live Better” commercial—as well as a Bronze Award for the Ridge View Bank “Game Day” commercial.

DRI by the numbers

Downtown Roanoke Incorporated says there is a lot of activity in the 122 blocks it serves. Joya Garriss DRI, Director of Marketing & Communications, says there is more than \$200 million in investments in eight ongoing and projected projects. DRI’s annual report said it hosted 49 events that drew 130,000 people in 2024. It also offered more than 370 hours of programming (holiday markets, Dickens of a Christmas), Restaurant week and special happy hours, and the Ambassador program (keeping downtown

streets cleaner). Garriss says in September DRI will start a program to fill upper-level office space that is vacant.

More shovel-ready sites in the NRV

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development has approved a GO Virginia Region 2 project for the Site Advancement Strategy by the New River Valley Regional Commission. This project will update and expand upon the 2019 Virginia Business Ready Sites Program assessment by evaluating industrial sites across Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski counties, and the city of Radford. Each locality will collaborate with Onward NRV and the New River Valley Regional Commission staff to select one priority site in their locality for evaluation. The GO Virginia board approved a total of \$94,400 in state funds for the project, which is leveraging \$108,479 in non-state sources.

RSO 2025-26 season kicks off in September

The **Roanoke Symphony Orchestra** is promising “A new season exploding with passion and power.” It’s the RSO’s 73rd, 29 under the direction of Maestro David Stewart Wiley. “Nashville meets the Symphony” which includes a Dolly Parton tribute and the Boogie Wonder Band, promises disco with full symphonic force. Wiley says the season also includes outstanding classical Masterworks concerts,

Shostakovich symphony, Holiday Pops Spectacular, Holiday Brass and Handel’s Messiah, Music Under the Stars at Elmwood Park (free, on September 13).

Excel adult high school now open for classes

A new adult education center opens in August at **Melrose Plaza** in northwest Roanoke that offers adults a second chance to get a high school diploma, and students can earn a trade certificate as well. When it opens it will be the 50th Excel Center in the nation. Bruce Major is director of the school. Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, which operates the Excel adult high schools elsewhere, successfully lobbied the Virginia General Assembly in 2023 to create the first Excel Center in the Commonwealth. The inaugural class will have 50 students and expand in the future to be able to handle several hundred adult learners. Registration is now open; classes are free for students.

The arts as an economic engine

Roanoke City released a new 2025 Arts Connect Neighbors: Volume 2 catalog, which includes an eclectic variety of artistic workshops. It features 60 activities, all in a push to connect neighborhoods with one another through the power of art and creativity. Douglas Jackson, Arts and Culture Coordinator for Roanoke City, says they were really happy with how last year’s catalog supported 100 activities

that spanned over 12 neighborhoods. Free activities in 2025’s catalog include everything from painting mini murals to conducting improv acting classes.

Gas boost

Developers of the **Mountain Valley Pipeline** are considering a plan to increase the amount of natural gas the existing pipeline can carry by further compressing its gas, an idea (dubbed “MVP Boost”) that could include building a compressor station near the border of Montgomery and Roanoke counties.

ERs out-n-about

Carilion Clinic announced plans to open its first two freestanding emergency departments—one in Botetourt County (Daleville Town Center area), one in Franklin County (Smith Mountain Lake’s Westlake community). The ERs will offer 24/7 care, exam rooms, advanced imaging, telemedicine options and laboratories, along with quick-transport to Roanoke Memorial and Franklin Memorial hospitals.

Hydroponics business is growing

Blue Ridge Hydroponics and Garden Supply is opening a second location. Brennen Beyerle purchased Blue Ridge Hydroponics just shy of three years ago. The Roanoke Valley location then moved from downtown Roanoke to Salem. “We really

started expanding outside the cannabis community [that business grew, pun intended, when it was made legal in Virginia to grow your own]; we love the cannabis community and will always have cannabis related events, but all of the products we carry

for gardening are for gardening anything. We spent the last few years really trying to target growers of other things and target schools and local businesses.” When Beyerle heard of a hydroponic store closing in Christiansburg, she again saw an opportunity.

The new location will offer the same products.

Biggest railroad yet

Although there are few details, and tons of speculation, one of the biggest breaking news stories for industry

reports possible merger talks between **Norfolk Southern** and **Union Pacific** railroads. If such a merger were to occur, it would create the largest railroad in the US.

Compiled by Gene Marrano and Tom Field.

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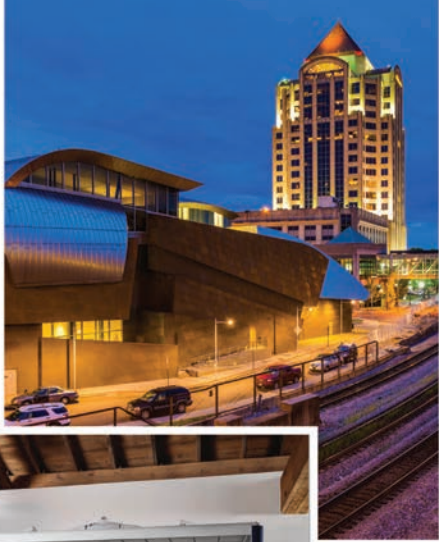
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