

The Business Journal

of Tri-Cities Tennessee / Virginia

bjournal.com

Leclerc expands Kingsport operations


Coming in 2020: more jobs,
more shifts, more cookies

Plus
The 25th KOSBE Awards
and
ActionVFX's business
is blowing up

The operations director and a line worker check the product against specifications at one of Leclerc's two Kingsport plants.

PRSR STD
US Postage
PAID
Johnson City, TN
Permit 3





From our award-winning golf course to
family dinners with a view, this is...

Real. Life. Virginia.

(Where days like this are the norm.)

*The
Virginian*

thevirginian.com



**Find what's new in building,
remodeling, landscaping
and most anything related
to your home.**



EXHIBITORS

**Participate in the
area's largest
show for building,
remodeling and
hardscape industries!**

**To sign up for the 51st Annual
Home and Outdoor Show
download an application
online at our website
jcahba.org**

Get expert advice from the professionals

**Every aspect of home design,
construction, contracting,
products will be on display**



Thirteen area high schools will compete in a build project that will be displayed, judged and awarded during this year's show. Come out and support local students as they try to win cash prizes for their schools.

Tickets are \$5; Children Under 12 Free.
Grand prize door prize \$500 shopping spree awarded Sunday. Do not have to be present to win.

423.282.2561 | 207 N Boone Street, Suite 12, Johnson City

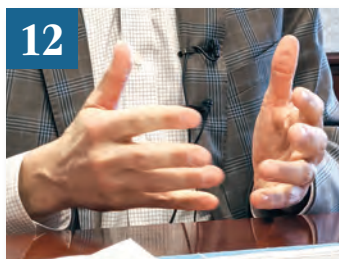
Table of Contents | January 2020



| ON THE COVER

Leclerc expands Kingsport operations

Canadian snack manufacturer plans to triple its production volume beginning this spring.



| FEATURES

12 Ballad to implement new charity/discount plan

Hospital system says it will also use A.I. to eliminate paperwork hassles.

14 Co-working comes to Big Stone Gap

What was once the basement of a pharmacy will soon be a broadband-enabled co-working space in Southwest Virginia coal country.

16 ActionVFX is blowing up

A young Northeast Tennessee entrepreneur is creating tech jobs in an unlikely field.

18 Elizabethton's TCAT will have an extra \$1 million in 2020

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee visited the site to talk workforce development and STEM

19 Foam Products adding jobs

Unicoi County manufacturer investing, hiring.

21 The 25th KOSBE Awards

Honorees were feted in categories from construction to food to retail and more.

27 Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center adding on

A new degree program coincides with groundbreaking for a physical expansion.

| DEPARTMENTS

7	From the Editor
8	Guest Column
9	Trends

28	Awards & Achievements
30	The Last Word



COVER PHOTO BY EARL NEIKIRK,
NEIKIRK PHOTOGRAPHY

Office

423.854.0140
news@bjournal.com

Publisher

William R. Derby
bderby@bjournal.com
423.979.1300

Co-Publisher

Jeff Derby
jderby@bjournal.com
423.306.0104

Managing Editor

Scott Robertson
srobertson@bjournal.com
423.767.4904

Marketing Coordinator

Robin Williams
rwilliams@bjournal.com
423.794.6938

Creative

Derby Publishing, LLC
Graphics Director / Judd Shaw
jshaw@bjournal.com
423.833.2726




Subscription per year \$25.



The Business Journal of
Tri-Cities Tennessee/Virginia

is published monthly by
Derby Publishing, LLC
PO Box 5006
Johnson City, TN 37602
Phone: 423.854.0140
©2020



**For courage that
doesn't need a cape,
there's a bank
that has your back.**

When it's time to rekindle your belief in what's possible, you want a bank that stands behind you. That's exactly where we're excited to be. Fueling your imagination with business banking that demonstrates a deeper understanding of you, your path and your potential.

Soar with us today at firsthorizon.com/soar.





At Lexus of Kingsport, we understand the complexities of buying a luxury automobile.

As part of your *Lexus of Kingsport* ownership experience, we offer many complimentary services: Lexus loaner vehicles, pick-up and delivery of your vehicle while in for service, and a well-appointed client lounge, just to name a few. And, while you are in for service, rest assured that your Lexus will be repaired by a Certified Lexus Technician, trained to work only on your vehicle.

Call or visit *Lexus of Kingsport* today to experience the finest luxury cars ever built.



2527 East Stone Drive | Kingsport, TN | 423-224-2270 | lexusofkingsport.com

Ballad Health announcement: can it lead to something more?



On Jan. 6 in Johnson City, Alan Levine, executive chairman, president and chief executive officer of Ballad Health, sat down with around a dozen reporters and introduced a plan to help Ballad patients who are least able to pay high healthcare costs.

Ballad, Levine said, will increase the discount for its services to uninsured patients from 77 percent to 85 percent. For those who are insured, but have

relatively low family incomes, Ballad will implement a sliding scale of discounts. For any insured patient making 225 percent of the federal poverty level or less, the hospital system will cover the entire deductible cost, so the patient will pay nothing. The scale slides so a patient making 450 percent of the federal poverty level will receive a 10 percent discount. Thus, the greatest benefit will be to those with the greatest difficulty in meeting healthcare costs. Ballad also announced it will implement a new artificial intelligence platform to streamline the process of determining eligibility so patients will be freed from bureaucratic paperwork.*

Many people in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia would have bet good money they'd never see Ballad do something like this. The discount initiative was the kind of thing good corporate citizens do in their communities, and it flew in the face of the increasingly popular narrative over the last 15 months that Ballad didn't fit the description of a good corporate citizen.

Since Nov. 2018, Ballad Health has borne the consequences of having mishandled a key trauma system announcement. When Levine announced the downgrade of the trauma center at Holston Valley Medical Center (and the planned downgrade of the trauma center at Bristol Regional Medical Center), what before the merger of Mountain States and Wellmont was a healthy level of skepticism about monopoly power boiled over into vitriol. Levine and other Ballad officials were subject to personal attacks generally reserved for unpopular national political figures.

The opportunity for a level-headed discussion of a nuanced problem and its handling quickly went out the window, discarded after a few weeks by both sides.

The notion that Levine, the former CEO of Mountain States, was picking on the communities formerly served by

Wellmont caught hold first in Kingsport, then to varying degrees in other communities. Suddenly, in thousands of minds, Ballad became "Allbad."

And, until the Jan. 6 announcement, Ballad had done little to effectively dispel the notion it was a corporate monolith run by elites who cared too little for their own communities. So, every time the company took an action, it was faced with the choice of publicizing it and being demonized for it, or taking the action without an announcement and being accused of acting in secret.

Until now.

The new discounts will benefit every Ballad community, but they'll benefit communities formerly served by Wellmont more. The rural communities in Virginia coal country and the towns west of the Tri-Cities in Tennessee where Wellmont had a greater presence have higher percentages of low-income patients.

I believe Ballad executives are hoping this action will not only benefit all the communities they serve, but will also take the edge off the hate. They've needed to do something to get people to realize that while there may still be plenty to disagree about, their company is not evil.

Does this mean Ballad should be pardoned for any and all sins, transgressions or missteps in the past or moving forward? Of course not. Giving the system credit for doing something good for its communities doesn't include the elimination of accountability.

Cynics have already wondered, for instance, whether the announcement of the discount/charity plan the day before Ballad's Tennessee Advisory Group's second annual public hearing was timed for maximum positive PR impact. Levine has denied it. But frankly, in the short term, at least, what's important to the communities isn't whether Ballad timed the announcement of a good thing for its own benefit. It's that Ballad is doing a good thing. What's really important though is the long-term question: Is this something the company and the disaffected community members will choose to build on as a first step in healing their fractured relationship?

*For more details, see page 12.

Tennessee legislators to consider several matters of interest to business community in 2020

by Timothy Hill

As we prepare for the 2020 legislative session, Tennessee continues to serve as a national economic leader. In fact, statewide unemployment remains near historic low levels, median household income levels are increasing at the second fastest rate in the entire southeast, and new businesses are moving to this state almost daily.

The House Commerce Committee has played an integral role in these achievements, and once again, our efforts will help this state reach new heights. This year, committee members will focus on and digest a wide array of legislation dealing with subject matters including utilities, banking, and business.

While the bill filing deadline isn't until February, we are already learning more about some of the bigger initiatives that will come before us in the months ahead.

There is no greater marker of economic growth than home-builders and realtor sales. A major bill that will impact this area will likely be the general contractor/subcontractor 'pay if paid' legislation, which was brought forward last year. The original intent of the bill was to remove the language from the code that allowed subcontractors to collect payment from general contractors if they were paid. Stakeholders representing all sides have met several times in recent months in order to craft the best legislation possible for all in this important industry. I am eager to discuss the final product and look forward to debate on this bill when it is scheduled on one of our future committee calendars.

Rural access to broadband also remains a constant concern. The Legislature has appropriated \$20 million for a grant fund for expansion in the most recent budget. This is a good start, but we need to be doing anything we can from a policy perspective to expand access for our communities so we have 21st century resources that will enable us to continue to attract and retain new jobs in communities across Northeast Tennessee and our state.

Before we can talk about broadband, there is another looming discussion that is not on folks' radar – rural water access.



The last statewide water study was conducted in the mid 2000's. Tennessee is in dire need of a new assessment of water access issues throughout the state and the anticipated cost to meet that need. We can and we will do more to guarantee all citizens have access to clean water so we can improve overall health outcomes in cities and towns across Tennessee.

In a case of technology outpacing the law, there is a new auto rental platform called Turo. The problem is that our current laws don't really have a definition for this exciting new technology. Stakeholders such as airports, the insurance industry, standard rental car companies, and the Department of Revenue have been working to find a reasonable solution. You will likely see a bill coming forward to address this situation later this year.

A thorough review of the practices and formularies for financial incentive and disbursement that take place within our Department of Economic & Community Development is also expected this year. One of the main questions we must ask is whether each region of the state is receiving its fair share of resources to promote community development and continued job growth? What can we do to encourage the department to spend incentive resources – especially in our rural areas? At the very least, the legislature needs to review recent spending habits to ensure fairness and proper return for taxpayers.

My main goal for the Commerce Committee is to continue to govern with consistent and conservative principles. We can be thoughtful and good for business with our policies. An effort is underway to identify and work toward removing red tape and compliance costs for business owners. It is different for every sector, so the challenge is to identify how we can eliminate additional barriers and allow the market to flourish.

I am proud of our overall work – both in the Commerce Committee and the Legislature – as we strive to remain a strong friend to our business communities. Tennessee is consistently ranked as one of the best places to conduct business in the U.S. We operate from the perspective that it isn't the State that creates jobs, but instead fosters an environment for risk and reward. It is in fact, the business owner and their employees that drive our economy, and I am proud to stand with them so this state continues its remarkable track record of recent success.

Timothy Hill serves in the Tennessee House of Representatives representing District 3. He is chair of the House Commerce Committee.

2020 residential real estate outlook:

More home sales, increasing affordability concerns

by Karen Randolph

Many of the conditions the housing market in the Tri-Cities experienced in 2019 will not change much in 2020, but there are new opportunities and some challenges. New and existing home sales should increase, but do not be surprised if growth rates take a breather from the current pace.

Buyers can expect an increase in the number of new homes coming on the market, and the inventory of existing homes will continue to be tighter than normal. Mortgage rates are expected to average out at 3.88 percent. That rate is a mitigating factor for affordability concerns in a market where home prices have increased faster than wages.

One factor that boosts the potential for 2020 is the region's Millennials being on the threshold of their prime home-buying years. The oldest are approaching 40, and the largest cohort of that generation will turn 30 next year. Locally, that accounts for about 60,000 people. Some are already homeowners; many are not. Will they become homeowners or continue as renters? So far, indicators point toward homeownership, but there are headwinds and some unknowns.

The big headwind – especially for first-time buyers – is affordability. In December, the National Association of Realtors held a real estate forecast summit to provide a year-end review and outlook on the real estate market and the economy. Continued slow housing growth and the lack of affordable housing stock were top concerns of 14 leading economists.

Housing Secretary Ben Carson calls housing affordability one of the real challenges of our time. This housing challenge is why the Trump administration changed financial rules to make townhomes and condominiums more attractive to buyers – especially first-time buyers. There has been increased local interest in those property types, but it has not become a

groundswell due to the lack of inventory.

Construction of new homes with price points in the \$200,000 range is planned. There is also building interest in modular homes on smaller lots with more affordable price points.

New homes in the \$250,000 and up price range also continue to be in demand. Some of that demand is being driven by new residents who have sold properties in other states and relocated here with increased purchasing power. Sales of existing homes in that price range have also increased. Currently, market conditions for homes in the \$200,000 to \$399,999 price are in the normal market conditions range of six months inventory.

Another potential headwind is uncertainty. An election year – especially this one – can dampen consumer enthusiasm and send some to the sidelines to “wait and see what happens.” Although a recession is not likely in 2020, the economy is expected to soften. That softening could also be an anchor on consumer spending and increase homeowner texture.

Housing is the largest single consumer expense making it a major economic contributor. Last year sales of new and existing homes and commercial properties pumped \$1.9 billion into the regional economy. That value does not account for economic multipliers that go with home sales.

Current conditions – including a labor market that continues adding jobs – point to a local 2020 real estate market that will be more competitive for both buyers and sellers and one that will hopefully face down economic doubts because the fundamentals for continued growth remain in place.

Karen Randolph served as president of the Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors in 2019.

APPALACHIAN HIGHLANDS COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE SERVICES



Jerry Petzoldt Agency, LLC

Each office independently owned and operated

**Search Over 750 Properties
www.tcigroup.com**

**Kingsport 423.230.0255
Johnson City 423.915.0911**



Jerry Petzoldt
Development
423.677.2486



Gary Sproles
Investment
423.612.0617



Jackie Hewitt
Buyer Representative
423.292.1000



Cassie Petzoldt
General Business
423.677.2344



Glenn Perkins
Net Leased Investment
423.956.5707



Kelsey Bartley
Leasing Specialist
423.948.1743



Lynn Shipley
Professional
423.612.4905



Shea Sproles
Corporate
423.612.2646



David Johnson
Financial
423.765.3636



Jessica DeBord
Tenant Representative
615.393.2198



Brenda Clarke
Site Selection
423.737.0911

FOR SALE - REDUCED TO \$250,000



229 South Main Street, Erwin



PHOTOS BY EARL NEIKIRK

Leclerc expanding Kingsport operations

Canadian snack food company adding additional shifts, new positions

by Scott Robertson

When Leclerc Foods US announced it would open granola bar, cookie and cracker manufacturing operations in Kingsport in 2008, the company made it clear the region's workforce was a big reason it was opening the new plant and moving its U.S. operations headquarters from Pennsylvania. Judging by the company's plans to invest \$2 million in its facilities and triple the volume of product produced in Kingsport, that sentiment hasn't changed.

Martin Caya, vice president of Operations for Groupe Leclerc in Quebec visited Kingsport in December. "We are well-established here in Kingsport. We have two plants here now. We started with just the one plant, but the second plant came because we had great success here. That's because of the team itself and how things were set up here. We have a great capacity installed, and now we're just adding up to this capacity."

The \$2 million capital investment will be in new equipment

for the company's second plant, the 110,000-square-foot former Magneti Marelli building across Airport Parkway from the first plant in the Northeast Tennessee Industrial Park. Caya says he anticipates the new equipment will be in place by May.

"It's a natural fit with this area, where in a lot of areas you don't get that same culture."

The need for capacity, Caya says, is driven by orders from major American brands. While Leclerc is one of the best-recognized brand names in Canada, the company mainly manufactures products that go out under other labels in the U.S. "We're dealing with large private label brands and we have a lot of success with these brands. We cannot keep up with the demand. The business is very good for the clients right now."

The challenge for Leclerc now is hiring the right people in a marketplace that's at or near full employment. "I would say that hiring people is tough, but it's possible to grow here," Caya says. "There are some other regions where we are where it's almost impossible these days, so Tennessee is better from that aspect."



Leclerc line workers conduct quality tests.


Jarrold Christensen, senior director of Operations for Leclerc Foods US, explains, “We have four pillars within this company: safety, quality, people and then production. Leclerc really values the people as being the No. 1 asset above the production. And, with the culture around here, people care. So, it’s a natural fit with this area, where in a lot of areas you don’t get that same culture.”

The last company-wide employee engagement survey conducted by Leclerc three years ago showed Kingsport trailing only the company’s head office in Quebec.

“In getting floor employees, it’s tough but it’s doable,” Caya says. “To bring in managers or technical employees, from our recent experience, it is tougher.”

There is a sense of urgency in the search. While Christensen oversees operations of both Kingsport plants, he is currently searching for a plant manager for the facility in which the new expansion will take place.

Part of the difficulty in this regard is the fact that the company’s standards are beyond industry norms, says Caya, pointing out the need for management personnel who are familiar with industry 4.0 operating practices. Leclerc, like most manufacturers, is increasingly automated, with human interaction in the process coming more and more through apps and iPads.

The warehousing for the Kingsport operations, for instance, is automated. “I don’t know where we are on the Industry 4.0 spectrum,” Caya says, “but we are certainly on the leadership side.” 



Jarrold Christensen, above and on the previous page

Ballad Health announces discounts, changes to charity structure

by Scott Robertson

Ballad Health announced Monday a sweeping set of discounts aimed at improving the ability of lower to middle income patients' to afford healthcare costs, even if they are uninsured or have high insurance deductibles.

Ballad issued a press release saying it will increase the discount for its services to uninsured patients from 77 percent to 85 percent. For those patients who are insured, but have relatively low family incomes, Ballad will implement a sliding scale of discounts. For any insured patient making 225 percent of the federal poverty level or less, the hospital system will cover the entire deductible cost, so the patient will pay nothing. The scale slides so a patient making 450 percent of the federal poverty level will receive a 10 percent discount.

Ballad also announced it will implement a new artificial intelligence platform to streamline the process of determining eligibility so patients will be freed from bureaucratic paperwork.

At a news conference an hour after the release was issued, Alan Levine, executive chairman, president and chief executive officer of Ballad Health, explained the details of the plan and why the system had chosen to implement it.

Levine said the discounts given to insured patients are an attempt to respond to the dramatic rise in the number of patients with high-deductible plans. "What we don't want is for people to not seek care when they need it because they're afraid of the out-of-pocket cost," Levine said. So, under the new plan, "if you are a family of four and you make \$57,800 a year, you're eligible to have all your healthcare costs written off."

When asked whether the new policies would affect cases of individuals who Ballad is currently suing to recoup unpaid bills, Levine said it would. He placed blame for the majority of the increase in unpaid bills over the last several years on the insurance industry.

"Our approach to how we collect has never changed," Levine said. "What has changed is over the last six or seven years these deductibles have skyrocketed and the shift of liability to patients has gone way up. And so that's why you're seeing (hospitals suing patients over unpaid bills) all over the country. I think this crept up on hospitals in a way they didn't quite understand. I know I didn't

realize this until a couple years ago, but the fastest growing part of our uncollectible revenue is not patients who are uninsured. It's patients who have insurance but who can't pay the deductible."

The insurance conundrum

In the press release announcing the discounts, Ballad said, "According to a Kaiser Family Foundation survey, four in 10 U.S. workers had difficulty paying a medical bill or insurance premium in the previous 12 months, and nearly half of those workers (are) in a plan with at least a \$3,000 individual deductible or a \$5,000 family deductible reported problems affording healthcare."

"The steps being announced by Ballad Health today are intended to be helpful to the people in our region, but they are in no way a long-term solution to the affordability crisis in healthcare," Levine said in the release. "The ongoing shifting of costs by insurers to patients is unfair, and it is certainly not reasonable to expect patients and rural and non-urban hospitals to shoulder the burden of the cost."

"So, the insurance company premiums have gone up," Levine said at the news conference. "The deductibles have gone way up. But the patients, the benefit they're receiving has actually gone down. And a long-term solution to this isn't just to shift those costs to the hospitals. Rural hospitals won't survive."

Most rural hospitals simply won't be able to afford to increase their discounts the way Ballad is. "It's estimated that 450 hospitals

in the country are at financial risk," Levine said. "If every hospital in the country is going to now take responsibility for the deductibles. You're going to have a lot of those hospitals that are going to accelerate their demise."

"I don't know what the long term solution is for the country and Ballad isn't really in a position to tell everybody what they should do. What we're doing here is trying to incrementally make it better for the people that live here in the hopes that we can work with our colleagues in the insurance industry and in government to try to come up with a longer term solution."

"We've had to sort of step back and say, how do we help those people while at the same time advocate for a different approach to this? We're going to do what we can to help, but we're implor-



Alan Levine PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

ing the insurance industry and our federal lawmakers to sort of step in and realize that this is not what the purpose of insurance was. Insurance is intended that when you pay a premium you have a reasonable out of pocket participation, but when you walk into an ER with a heart attack or you are brought to an ER with a heart attack, you expect that you're not going to be stuck with a \$5,000 bill. And I don't think that's an unreasonable expectation for patients to have."

Presumptive eligibility

In addition to the discounts, the press release said Ballad would implement an artificial intelligence platform designed to drastically cut the bureaucratic red tape patients are currently forced to cut through in order to receive discounted care. "After April 1 you will no longer have to apply to receive the benefit of charity," Levine said.


Beginning April 1, Ballad Health will be implementing "presumptive eligibility" for patients who could be eligible for free care or discounts under Ballad Health's expanded charity policy. Using publicly available data and newly acquired analytic tools, Ballad Health will be capable of determining if a patient is likely to be eligible for free care or for discounts. This, the system said in its news release, will reduce barriers to receiving charity care (such as producing hard-to-find paperwork), therefore reducing the number of patient bills labeled as bad debt or referred for collections.

In many cases, the release said, the discount will be applied to patients who aren't even aware they are eligible.

Not COPA-driven

"The changes announced by Ballad Health today to expand discounts and access to charity care are not required by the COPA, nor have they been imposed by either state," Levine said. "These changes are a result of Ballad Health's board of directors and leadership listening to the concerns of our patients, recognizing the hardship that has been imposed by insurers shifting higher costs to patients through unaffordable premiums and deductibles, and they are intended to be responsive to those concerns."

"When people buy insurance, they deserve peace of mind knowing they can access the coverage when they need it. It is terribly unfair to families who find out, at their most vulnerable time, that they cannot access the coverage they thought they had," Levine continued. "Hospital charity programs cannot be expected to solve this problem alone. Working with health care providers, insurance companies and federal policymakers, we have to come up with a more sustainable solution. A rural health system with only 25 percent commercial payer mix cannot survive if the expectation is that insurance, pharmaceutical and other medical companies can shift cost to patients, and then hospitals are forced to pay for these costs by writing off necessary care that patients can't be expected to afford."

Asked whether the timing of the announcement had anything to do with Tuesday's scheduled public hearing regarding the Tennessee COPA, Levine denied any connection. "You make a move like this for the right reason and hopefully something good results from it...that's what's happening." 

Kingsport's social event of the year...

73rd Annual Dinner

FEBRUARY 7, 2020

RECEPTION: 6PM
DINNER & PROGRAM: 7PM

BLACK TIE OPTIONAL

Tickets are \$140 and
will go on sale in January

**PARTY
on the
MOON**

**KINGSPORT
CHAMBER**

**MEADOWVIEW
Marriott
CONFERENCE RESORT &
CONVENTION CENTER**

this is **kingsport**

KingsportChamber.org
(423) 392-8800

Tobacco Commission announces \$250k grant to town of Big Stone Gap for co-working space

The Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission Thursday highlighted a Southwest Economic Development program grant award of \$250,263 to assist the town of Big Stone Gap in adding entrepreneurial co-working space to the renovated Mutual Pharmacy property. The grant was originally awarded in October. The town is modeling this co-working space after successful spaces in other localities and is presently designing its co-working operations program to fit within this unique downtown space. The location also ties in with a successful recent downtown revitalization effort as part of a strategy to attract new businesses and grow existing ones.

Tobacco Commission Chair, Delegate Terry Kilgore said, “Attracting new businesses to our rural towns and communities has been a challenge but it is one the Commission, along with our local and regional partners, is having success in meeting. Projects like this new co-working space in Big Stone Gap serve as an anchor for new businesses giving them a place to launch and grow. I look forward to participating in additional events like the forum held today that allow us to get together with our regional stakeholders and discuss the best strategies for invigorating our economy.”

“We are focused on making Big Stone Gap attractive to working professionals as a great place to both live and work,” said Steve Lawson, Town Manager for Big Stone Gap. “This grant will help us continue to revitalize our downtown district and recruit new business opportunities.”

Along with the grant announcement the Tobacco Commission, Invest SWVA and Lonesome Pine RIFA sponsored a Forum on Smart Communities that was attended by community leaders from across Southwest Virginia. The Forum served as a discussion of ways communities in Southwest Virginia can become better connected and utilize technology to attract new businesses to grow their local economies and that of the region as a whole. The Forum featured presentations by David Ihrie, Chief Technology Officer for the Center for Innovative Technology and Charles Neal, Managing Director of Operations Transformation for Deloitte Consulting LLP.

“Co-working spaces like this one in Big Stone Gap are a critical business recruitment tool for us as we continue to market the region to Northern Virginia-based high-tech companies looking to grow their operations in Southwest Virginia,” said Will Payne,



Delegate Terry Kilgore, Big Stone Gap Town Manager Steve Lawson, InvestSWVA Project Lead Will Payne and Duane Miller, Executive Director of the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission show the plans for a co-working space in the basement of the former Mutual Pharmacy building. PHOTOS BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

who serves as project lead for InvestSWVA, a newly-formed regional marketing initiative backed by the Tobacco Commission and corporate partners around the region, including Point Broadband and Appalachian Power.

Payne’s firm, Coalfield Strategies, is leading the Invest SWVA initiative, funded by the Tobacco Commission, Point Broadband, LENOWISCO, and Appalachian Power. This public-private initiative covers the 13 counties and 3 cities in the GO Virginia Region One footprint. Payne tapped Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP’s Global Economic Development practice, led by former Secretary of Commerce and Trade Todd Haymore, as its strategic advisor. At InvestSWVA’s launch in September, co-chairs Senator Ben Chafin, Delegate Terry Kilgore, Delegate Israel O’Quinn, and Senator-elect Todd Pillion announced a first-of-its-kind strategic partnership with the Northern Virginia Technology Council to offer growth opportunities in the region to its member companies.

“Developing co-working spaces in small towns like Big Stone Gap creates the potential for both downtown redevelopment and job creation in one fell swoop — a win-win proposition for Southwest Virginia,” said Duane Miller, Executive Director of the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission.

LENOWISCO’s localities (Lee, Wise and Scott counties and the city of Norton) in addition to Dickenson County comprise the Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Facility Authority. This



David Ihrle, CTO for the Center for Innovative Technology

Authority, the first of its kind in Southwest Virginia, supports revenue sharing and serves as a mechanism for sharing resources.

“The CIT Smart Communities team is honored to support Big Stone Gap in their mission to improve and modernize community resources and services through smart technology,” said David Ihrle, Chief Technology Officer for the Center for Innovative Technology. “Communities like Big Stone Gap can be an ideal environment for smart initiatives to make a big difference in the quality of life for the people who live there. We are thrilled to be a part of the plan to deploy their vision for the future.”

Ihrle is co-leading the Virginia Smart Communities Working Group and, along with CIT Broadband, is helping bring this new generation of capability to all Virginians.

“Improving connectivity can impact almost every corner of a community from education and mobility to public safety and overall prosperity,” said Charles Neal, principal, Deloitte Consulting LLP. “What will make improved connectivity possible is collaboration across the public, private and nonprofit sectors, which is now happening in Big Stone Gap thanks to the many community partners involved. By working together, identifying clear goals and developing a clear understanding of the obstacles and available options, towns such as Big Stone Gap can reap the benefits of being a smart, connected community.”

Deloitte Consulting LLP’s Smart Rural Communities Practice explores the economic transformation of underserved rural areas in the United States through enhanced connectivity. Their work convenes community and government stakeholders, private industry providers, and experts to serve as a catalyst for designing innovative strategies and solutions to the challenges rural communities face. These strategies help federal, state, and local agencies realize the cascading impacts of connectivity for their industries and communities in pursuit of rural prosperity. 

ARE YOU WORKING WITH THE RIGHT LENDER?

TENNESSEE'S #1 RESIDENTIAL MORTGAGE LENDER

We provide mortgage programs specific to your needs with closings on your schedule.

- Conventional
- FHA (Federal Housing Administration)
- VA (Veterans Administration)
- THDA (Tennessee Housing Development Agency)
- Rural Development
- Additional Loan Programs Available

M MORTGAGE INVESTORS GROUP

* According to Courthouse Retrieval Systems (CRS), NMLS #34391, TN #109111



BOB HEFTY
BRANCH MANAGER
423-943-0410 CELL
bob.hefty@migononline.com
NMLS #186694, TN #102525



DAVID BROWN
MORTGAGE CONSULTANT
423-202-5911 CELL
seth.belcher@migononline.com
NMLS #922393, TN #198827



MICHAEL WORLEY
MORTGAGE CONSULTANT
423-383-2728 CELL
michael.worley@migononline.com
NMLS #1495938, TN #12729587



MATT STICKLEY
LOAN OFFICER
423-306-9995 CELL
matt.stickley@migononline.com
NMLS #1805581, TN #173916



BRANDON BURLESON
LOAN OFFICER
423-943-6055 CELL
brandon.burleson@migononline.com
NMLS #1815845, TN #178121



SETH BELCHER
MORTGAGE CONSULTANT
423-300-0571 CELL
seth.belcher@migononline.com
NMLS #1828388, TN #188884

JOHNSON CITY
423-283-4702

508 Princeton Rd, Ste 201

KINGSPORT
423-765-2211

1825 N Eastman Rd, Ste 3

WWW.MIGONLINE.COM



ActionVFX is BLOWING UP

Johnson City-based visual effects firm markets explosions, fire, windy snow and muzzle-flash to filmmakers and video game companies

by Scott Robertson

Rodolphe Pierre-Louis is a young entrepreneur growing a seven-figure tech-based firm by doing a lot of things conventional wisdom says it would be hard to do. He's outside Silicon Valley and Northern Virginia. He's in a region without a significant tech-specific entrepreneurial funding infrastructure. In fact, he's operating his tech firm from a building significantly older than he is. Yet he is providing the answer to the biggest question the region's economic developers have been trying to address for years: how do we keep young professionals from leaving the region? Pierre-Louis' answer is simple. Provide them jobs they want to do in an area where they already want to live.

The young entrepreneur

Pierre-Louis was around 10 years old and living in Haiti when his father visited the United States and brought the family back a video camera. "It was the coolest thing ever," he remembers. "I could make the things that I was seeing on TV. My friends and I made short films."

About the same time, Pierre-Louis was developing a strong entrepreneurial streak. He started selling magazines when he was 11. When he moved to the United States, he sold bracelets and chewing gum to his classmates. By the time he was 14, he was learning how to create visual effects, teaching himself by watching online tutorials. His first online work came at a site of his own making, rodypolis.com. "That's what got me started in this specific world of selling visual effects stock footage to people on the Internet."

In summer 2015, Pierre-Louis had saved around \$10,000 from [rodypolis](http://rodypolis.com). He hired a power technician and headed for Chicago for

Rodolphe Pierre-Louis



Before and after images showing samples of ActionVFX's work
PHOTOS COURTESY ACTIONVFX



his first big shoot. "In my mind, this was going to go to the next level," he says. "Instead it was a classic case of you don't know what you don't know."

Pierre-Louis thought he had everything planned out in advance, but says, "we really hadn't because there were so many unknown variables we could not have foreseen. We weren't really on the same page as the power technician. It went horribly."

The one positive outcome of the Chicago trip was the introduction of Pierre-Louis to Luke Thompson, who would eventually become ActionVFX's COO. But when Pierre-Louis and Thompson returned to Johnson City to review the Chicago footage, they agreed it wasn't extraordinary. "It was mediocre," Pierre-Louis says. "The whole point of this was to take us to the next level, so mediocre wasn't what we needed."

Pierre-Louis knew what had gone wrong in Chicago, but no longer had the funds for a reshoot. He eschewed traditional funding routes and went back to the Internet, to Kickstarter. The idea was to market his start-up to the same artists who he planned to sell to once ActionVFX got up and running. "They would invest at the start," he says, "and in return, they would get the products at a very cheap price."

The stated goal of the company was to create the biggest library of visual effects stock footage. The stated goal of the

Kickstarter campaign was \$10,000. It raised \$59,000.


Fast forward to June 2016 and ActionVFX launched to the world. Marketing to filmmakers and videogame developers worldwide, the company reached \$1,000,000 in sales in 2019, with around 60 percent of that coming from clients outside the U.S.

“Blowing things up in Tennessee’s a lot easier than other places.”

It blew up real good

"Blowing things up in Tennessee's a lot easier than other places," Pierre-Louis says about keeping ActionVFX based in Johnson City instead of northern Virginia or southern California. "It's not like we don't have to get permits for everything, but it costs a lot less and it's a lot less complicated. We generally shoot in Erwin or Gray, so honestly, our work would suffer if we went to California."

Another positive aspect of basing his business in Johnson City is the flow of students from ETSU's Niswonger Digital Media Center. "We have 10 employees now," he says. "Half of them are from ETSU."

"I fully believe we have people who could work in any market but they love the work they do for us here and the area is a great match for them," Pierre-Louis says. "I would never say never as far as maybe one day opening an office in Atlanta or L.A., but as far as ActionVFX and Johnson City, honestly, the two go together and I don't have any plans to move the company from here." 

Lee announces \$1 million workforce development grant for TCAT Elizabethton

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee made his first visit to the Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Elizabethton Jan. 3 to announce a \$1 million Governor's Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE) grant to fund "Northeast STEM to Work" training.

The Northeast Tennessee STEM to Work initiative is designed to bring STEM-based education to more than 300 high school students from nine school systems within the TCAT Elizabethton service area, including Carter, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington counties. The initiative is meant to address industry existing and future demands for trained workers with advanced manufacturing skills and impending retirements.

In 2019, the Tennessee General Assembly approved \$25 million in the state budget to collaborate with local partners for GIVE. The awards went to programs throughout the state, with the highest award to any program being \$1 million. TCAT President Dean Blevins expressed appreciation to Gov. Lee for the GIVE grant which will be used, he said, to enhance learning opportunities in high demand fields for students in the region.

During the TCAT visit, Gov. Lee met Charles Phillips, the recently-hired instructor for Advanced Manufacturing Technology who has 21-plus years' experience in the field.

TCAT Elizabethton Vice President Danny O'Quinn, project coordinator, said the TCAT-Elizabethton grant for the Advanced Manufacturing Program will be used to purchase machinery and technology used by the most modern manufacturers. These include smart machinery and robotics.

"We started this a year ago and we are half complete. This grant will allow us to complete it," O'Quinn said. The Advanced Manufacturing Program will allow students to be familiar with the latest equipment used in manufacturing. He said much of the lab is designed according to the Factory 4.0 model designed by the German company FESTO."

The rest of the \$1 million grant is going to STEM (Science, Technology, Education and Math) labs built by TCAT Elizabethton in area high schools. The first labs being built will be located at Elizabethton and Unicoi County High Schools. A decision has not yet been made on the next high schools to be added.

O'Quinn said the labs will enable high school students to take TCAT Elizabethton courses in their own school. Students taking courses in the lab would receive dual credit and would be able to complete as many as six of the 15 modules for completion of a TCAT course. Students coming from a school with such a lab would

only have to take nine more modules before they graduate and move on to a job.

Lee announced projects receiving funding through the GIVE program which prioritizes learning opportunities in rural counties and enhances career and technical education statewide. The program prioritized economically distressed and at-risk counties in the RFP process. The 28 funded projects will serve all economically distressed counties and 18 of the 24 at-risk counties, Lee said.

The Appalachian Regional Commission index of economic status categorizes counties as at-risk or distressed based upon their three-year average unemployment rate, per capita market income, and poverty rates. Distressed counties rank among the 10 percent most economically distressed in the nation while at-risk counties rank between the bottom 10 percent and 25 percent of the nation's counties, Lee said.

Some 20 elected and appointed government officials from five Northeast Tennessee counties, as well as members of the TCAT Elizabethton General Advisory Committee and faculty, were invited to hear Gov. Lee's announcement. TCAT students were on break between trimesters.

"We are proud to work with the General Assembly to pass the GIVE initiative and expand career and technical education for Tennessee students. These funds directly support our workforce development efforts in distressed and at-risk counties and are a key component of our strategy to prioritize rural Tennessee," Lee said.

TCAT Elizabethton serves approximately 1,500 students who commute to class each day from their residence in Carter, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, and Washington counties. For the past several years, TCAT Elizabethton program completion, job placement and licensure pass rates have been in the 90-percentile range, according to Blevins.

In addition to Advanced Manufacturing Technology, TCAT Elizabethton offers training on campus leading to a diploma or certificate in most cases in the following areas: Administrative Office Technology, Automotive Technology, Computer Information Technology, Cosmetology, Criminal Justice (for jailers), Diesel Powered Equipment Technology, Industrial Electricity, Machine Tool Technology, Millwright Skills, Phlebotomy, Pipefitting, Practical Nursing (diploma only) and Welding.

Tennessee Promise scholarships for high school students and Tennessee Reconnect for adults provide two years of free tuition to attend TCAT Elizabethton after all other financial assistance has been applied to students who qualify. [BJ](#)



Tennessee Governor Bill Lee at the Elizabethton TCAT
PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

Foam Products Corporation invests in, expands Erwin operations


by Scott Robertson

Georgia-based Foam Products Corp., cut the ribbon on an expansion to its Erwin, Tenn., manufacturing facility Dec. 6. The company purchased the building which it had been leasing at a price of \$5 million, according to Perry Muse, vice president of Manufacturing and general manager. In addition, the company has invested more than \$5 million in equipment for the facility in the last decade, and another \$1 million in the current expansion.

“It’s going to bring in approximately 15 new jobs,” said Erik Arnold, president. “In a day when so many companies are moving to lower cost areas that might allow different advantages for them, we’re proud to invest in Unicoi County and continue our growth here.”

The plant manufactures foam underlayments for hardwood and other hard surface flooring, Muse said. “We make the top of the line. We were the first manufacturers of these products in America as a private label for another firm. Since that time, we developed our own product lines.”

“This facility is responsible for making the majority of our underlayments,” Arnold said. “We make some of the industry’s best acoustic underlayments for floor covering. We actually incorporate several hundred tons of used tires annually into our product. These are post-consumer, recycled tires. So, it’s one thing to be doing business and have lots of jobs here, which is great and we’re very proud of that, but to be able to say we’re doing something good for the environment by using recycled tires in our product, that is important too.”

In addition to the underlayments, the plant manufactures women’s undergarments on a contract basis for a well-known company which Muse declined to identify. “They’re a major company,” he said. 



Perry Muse, Foam Products Corp., vice president of Manufacturing and general manager

GIMME SHELTER

WASH. CO. JOHNSON CITY ANIMAL CENTER | JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE

The Washington County Johnson City Animal Center provides a state-of-the-art refuge for a variety of animals with spaces for Adoptions, Surrenders, Humane Education, and Animal Control Services. Clerestory gable windows bring sunlight, warmth, and natural ventilation to kennel areas, and large glazed walls of Cat Condos and Meet + Greet rooms encourage uniting furry friends with their future families.



 THOMAS
WEEMS
ARCHITECT

3203 HANOVER ROAD, JOHNSON CITY, TN | (423) 952-2700 | THOMASWEEMSARCHITECT.COM

YOU'RE MORE THAN A TAX RETURN.

Since 1961, the partners and staff of BCS have been committed to treating our clients like family. Named to *Forbes* Top Recommended Tax & Accounting Firms Lists and *Accounting Today's* Largest Firms in the South List, we have the size and expertise you need while providing you with timely, personalized service.



THE BCS PARTNERS

JOHNSON CITY
KINGSPORT
GREENEVILLE
BOONE

423.282.4511
423.246.1725
423.638.8516
828.264.3595

BCSCPA.COM

BCS Blackburn,
Childers &
Steagall, PLC
Certified Public Accountants & Consultants



Hal Carmack and Don Royston received the Hidden Gem and IMPACT Awards, respectively.



Jane Hillhouse and Jenny Kontos of Hillhouse Creative spoke on succession planning for entrepreneurs and small business owners.

25th KOSBE Awards feature Carmack, Royston, Hillhouse and Kontos

The Kingsport Office of Small Business Development & Entrepreneurship (KOSBE) held the 25th Annual KOSBE Awards Dec. 5 at the MeadowView Conference Resort & Convention Center. More than 300 business leaders and entrepreneurs showed up for the awards gala, including all of Pal's Sudden Service operators. The Pal's organization was on hand to witness as honored guest Hal Carmack was presented a special Hidden Gem Award, for his significant but quiet contributions including designing and building 26 of Pal's distinctive restaurants.

Don Royston received the 2019 IMPACT Award. Royston is well-known for his role as Santa Claus aboard the Santa Train. Royston was one of the original founding fathers who helped create KOSBE.

Taylor's Martial Arts Academy received a \$1,000 cash prize for their efforts and results while participating in KOSBE's new Propel Mentor/Protégé Program. The Propel program is a one-of-a-kind opportunity designed for woman-, veteran-, and

minority-owned small businesses and disadvantaged businesses including rural, economic, or social disadvantage. The program provides business owners with one-on-one assistance to help them grow their business, and teams them up with a mentor (an established community business leader) and exclusive mastermind group.

"The award winners represent the best of the best small businesses in the region," said Dustin Mohr, KOSBE Chair-Elect and Chief Operating Officer at Martin Dentistry. "In an environment that is increasingly competitive, we have recognized the leading businesses and individuals that have impacted the small business community, the city of Kingsport, and beyond."

The nominations, representing 46 businesses and eight individuals, were judged by an independent jury of industry experts.

In addition to the awards presentations, the KOSBEs also featured a fireside chat with Hillhouse Creative's Jane Hillhouse and Jenny Kontos regarding succession planning.



Construction Business Excellence Award



Travis Patterson, Austin Willis, Katie Willis

Patterson Homes specializes in custom home building in Johnson City, Kingsport, Bristol, Church Hill, Gray and Jonesborough, Tenn. The company generally has around 50 homes under construction.

Food Business Excellence Award



Jamie Dove, Nacho Nunez

The Main Street Pizza Company entered the crowded pizza market and quickly established a reputation for quality and value. Main Street has won the Tri-Cities "Pie Wars" competition three years running and four times overall.

Gazelle Business Excellence Award



Chris Thomas, Rebecca Thomas, Cody Wood

The owners of **Mycroft Signs** have grown this business from a window lettering business to a local business that does work for NASCAR tracks across the country, professional sports teams, college sports facilities, schools, and more.

Innovation Business Excellence Award



Rodolphe Pierre-Louis, Zac VanHoy, Jamie Dalusio, Luke Thompson, Tori Humphreys

Based in downtown Johnson City, **ActionVFX** is well on the way to becoming a leading supplier of action-oriented stock visual effects to filmmakers and videogame developers. The company has ten employees and continues to grow. For more on ActionVFX, see page 12 of this issue of *The Business Journal*.

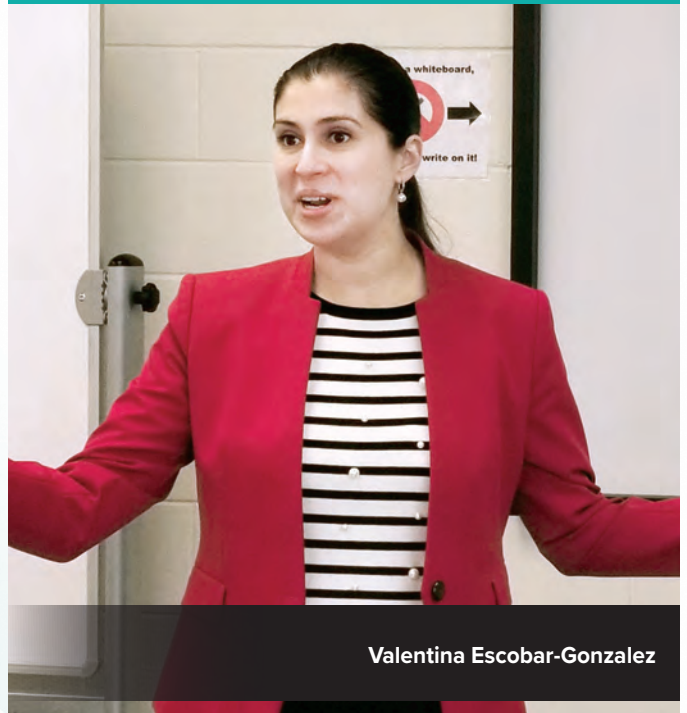
Manufacturing Business Excellence Award



Scott Cooper, Tim Siglin

GSM Filtration, based in Fall Branch, Tenn., manufactures a range of filter fabrics for liquid/solid separation, forming, filtering and conveying, from plastic woven to spiral link. In addition to filter fabrics, the company also markets belt filter press replacement parts including rollers and roller repairs.

Marketing Business Excellence Award



Valentina Escobar-Gonzalez

Beyond Engagement teaches clients the importance of implementing engagement marketing as a tool to increase their company's visibility and profits through social media. Beyond Engagement also received a Tennessee Small Business Development Center Award in 2019, one of only 11 given in the state. Mrs. Escobar-Gonzalez was unable to attend the KOSBEs this year.

New Business Excellence Award



Anita Henley, Savanna McDavid, Dana Glenn

Now in its second year of operation, the **Salt Oasis** has established a focus on customer service and relationship-building. The company markets itself as the Tri-Cities' only holistic spa.

The Pillar of Excellence Award



Steve Darden, Pat Shull

With more than a century of service to the region, **Hunter, Smith and Davis** has gone from writing the Kingsport city charter to consistently garnering national and state recognition for excellence in business and corporate, labor and employment, litigation, family law, estate planning, mediation and immigration law.

Retail Business Excellence Award



Duke & Fox owner Candace Lacey has built an online following selling handmade personalized dog collars and leashes. The company also sells bandanas and other accessories, both on its website and on ETSY.

Service Business Excellence Award



Owner Jenna Tamayo (right)
and the AMS team

Appalachian Maid Services is a veteran- and female-owned business which started with a dream of a family-focused life. Their mission is to make sure their clients enjoy their free time spending quality time with their loved ones.

Woman-Owned Business Excellence Award



Victoria Cunningham, Caroline Jones

Flight Athletic Academy is a woman-owned gymnastics, dance and cheer training facility in Kingsport. The company is a previous KOSBE winner in another category.

Young Entrepreneur Business Excellence Award



Samantha Culbertson, Tara Burns,
Ashley Shutt

ARO Creative is woman-owned, full-service creative agency headquartered in Kingsport. Through comprehensive strategies, ARO is focused on cultivating partnerships, promoting community initiatives, and creating impactful work for its brands and clients.

Veteran-Owned Business Excellence Award



Ed Sheffey, Ernie Rumsby

Rowan Tree Care brings the values Ed Sheffey learned as a captain in the U.S. Army to the private sector. "In the military," Sheffey says, "you are taught to focus on service. It's not about yourself. It's about the service you are providing."

Hidden Gem Award



Cassie Honaker, Hal Carmack

If you've seen one of the unforgettably eye-catching Pal's Sudden Service buildings in the region, you've seen the work of **Hal Carmack**. He built them, and is responsible for the unique styling of the buildings. At the 25th KOSBEs, not only did Pal Barger and Thom Crosby pay their respects to Carmack, so too did every store manager in the Pal's chain.

IMPACT Award



Lori Arnold, Don Royston, Phil Ketron

Don Royston is best known to many in the community for his annual portrayal of Santa Claus during the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce's running of the Santa Train. His impact on the business community, however, has been felt both through his work as a certified public accountant and as one of the founding fathers of the Kingsport Office of Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

Propel Mentor/Protégé Prize



Twana Taylor, Chaiba Bloomer

Taylor Martial Arts Academy won the 2018 New Business Excellence Award. After entering the Propel programs, the company has doubled its square footage and increased enrollment by 30-plus percent.

Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center breaks ground on expansion

Announces new Radford University master's program

December was a busy month at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon. Not only did the center break ground on a \$2.6 million expansion of its facility, it also announced it would host a new master's degree program for Radford University.

The expansion, funded by the Virginia General Assembly, will include expansion of the existing testing center, as well as new classrooms and meeting space, and a freight elevator. The new space will be welcome as the center has grown to host more than 65,000 visitors to various events throughout the year, including more than 2,500 students taking classes offered by colleges and universities throughout Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee.

The latest program to be announced is a master's degree school counselor program offered by Radford University. It will begin with the spring 2020 semester. A \$325,000 Tobacco Region

Revitalization Commission grant enabled the program to come to the Higher Education Center.

The Radford school counselor program in Abingdon was developed to meet the growing need of school counselors and a school counselor training program in Southwest Virginia, said Carrie Sanders, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Counselor Education.

Prime candidates to enroll in the master's program are "teachers who desire to make a change," Sanders said, from the classroom setting to a role as a counselor.

"There are many teachers in Southwest Virginia who would be interested in furthering their education to include a master's degree in school counseling. However, they may not be able to quit their job or drive a long distance to attend classes," Sanders said. "That's the reason we are offering the program in Abingdon, to take the program to them." BJ

Your Local Staffing & Recruiting Resource

Industrial & Office/Administrative Support

LUTTRELL
STAFFING GROUP



Experience the
Difference,
Contact Your Local
Office Today!

LuttrellStaffing.com

Meet Our Founders:
Marty Luttrell and David Luttrell

FAST SIGNS
More than fast. More than signs.®



- Electric Signs
- Architectural Signs
- Interior Graphics/Wall Wraps
- Exhibits & Displays
- Interactive/ Digital Signs

423.282.4229 | 2708 N. Roan Street | Johnson City

Blackburn, Childers & Steagall and Brown Edwards make Forbes' Best lists

Forbes magazine in December published its list of top recommended tax and accounting CPA firms, with two Tri-Cities area firms making at least one list. Blackburn, Childers & Steagall was one of only three firms listed in Tennessee for both tax and accounting and one of only five in total in Tennessee. Brown Edwards was included on the list of America's Best Tax Firms for 2020. Brown Edwards was one of five recommended firms in Virginia. Forbes collaborated with a market research company, Statista, to create the list of more than 200 firms nationwide.

Food City's Jones named Tennessee Retailer of the Year

John Jones, executive vice president/director of Store Operations for Food City's retail grocery chain was recently named 2020 Retailer of the Year by Tennessee Grocers & Convenience Store Association. TGCSA is a Nashville based trade organization representing the interests of the Tennessee food market. Jones will receive his award in May of 2020 at TGCSA's annual convention in Nashville.

"I am honored to have been chosen as TGCSA Retailer of the Year. It is a very humbling experience to be counted among the ranks of such a great assembly of industry leaders. I would like

to thank Tennessee Grocers & Convenience Store Association for the great work they do and the tremendous impact they have upon our industry," said Jones. Jones joined the Food City team in 1980, accepting a position as a courtesy clerk in Johnson City while attending Hampton High School. Jones has served in a number of key positions, including store manager of the company's Newport, Tenn., and Euclid Avenue (Bristol, Va.)



John Jones

locations; district manager, overseeing store operations for locations throughout Sullivan County, Tenn., and Scott, Lee and Wise counties in Va. In 2003, he was promoted to executive vice president of store operations for Food City's Knoxville based division; and in 2014, he was again promoted to his current position as executive vice president/director of store operations. Jones is responsible for guiding store operations for the company's entire chain of 132 supermarkets, including 105 fuel centers and 108 pharmacies. **BJ**



| bjournal.com 

Information you can use to make
better decisions for your business
and improve your bottom line.

Breaking News | Digital Editions | Mobile Friendly



MAIL Works, inc.

320 Wesley Street
Johnson City, TN 37601
423.283.9875

facebook.com/mailworks.tn
www.mailworksinc.com

MARKETPLACE

For advertising information call 423.854.0140

The Johnson City News & Neighbor



**That's not a threat.
It's a fact.**

The most recent Circulation Verification Council audit of the News & Neighbor shows:

96% of area households regularly receive our publication

95% regularly read our publication

81% frequently purchase products/services advertised

It's Verified: We Deliver
jcnewsandneighbor.com
423.979.1300

*Source: Dec. 2018 CVC Publication Audit Report.



TFL #675

**GREENE COUNTY
LAND & AUCTION CO.**
COMPLETE REAL ESTATE & AUCTION SERVICE

BUY • SELL • TRADE

Farmland • Residential • Estate
Commercial • Acreage

*"All we ask is the you talk with us
before contracting your property"*

Col. Larry H. Jones
Owner / Broker / Auctioneer

Vicki W. Jones
Owner / Affiliate Broker

*"We don't want all the
business... Just Yours!"*

(423) 639-5231
400 North Irish Street
Greeneville, TN

Painting, Sandblasting
Floor Coatings
Polished Concrete
ICE CLEAN
Dry Ice (CO2) Blast Cleaning

GARDNER
PAINT SERVICES, INC.
POLISHED CONCRETE

423-928-8351
estimating@gardnerpaint.com

The Genuine. The Original.



Ken Shaw
General Manager
423-282-9191

garagedoorjohnsoncity.com

We furnish and install the following:
Commercial and Residential Sectional Doors
Loading Dock Equipment | Rolling Steel Doors

**Budget Office
Furniture**
of the Tri-Cities, Inc.

*The Best In New & Used
Since 1982!*

1-800-729-6522

**20 COMMONWEALTH AVE
BRISTOL, VA 24201**

www.budgetofficefurniture.com

SOPAK CO
Distribution

Public & Contract Warehousing
Locations in Greeneville & Kingsport
Rail Service NS/CSX • Local Fleet of Trucks
Reworking & Light Assembly
Crossdock Service • Food Grade/Cooler

102 Coile Street, Greeneville, TN 37745
Phone: (423) 639-1163 • Fax: (423) 639-7270

www.sopakcotn.com
wkeller@sopakcotn.com

E-Journal
The Business Journal of Tri-Cities TN/VA

Get important local,
regional and state
business news first!

Sign up by
sending "Yes" to
marketing@bjournal.com
to receive our newsletter.



Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent East Tennessee

by Phil Roe

Serving East Tennesseans these past 11 years has been the honor of my life, and I will be forever grateful for the trust my friends and neighbors put in me to represent them. As someone who practiced medicine for over 30 years, I said I would serve five or six terms because I never intended this job to be a second career. After prayerful consideration, I have decided to retire at the end of the 116th Congress.

First and foremost, I want to thank my family. No one could do this job without a loving and supportive family, and I look forward to spending more time at home with my wife Clarinda, my adult children and my grandchildren.

As a veteran, I was honored to be selected to chair the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs in 2017. I had one, three and six-year legislative goals for the committee: to increase access to care, improve the electronic health records system, review VA assets to ensure an effective use of resources, and bring true accountability to the department. I never could have imagined that we would accomplish all that in my first term leading the committee – in large part because of the leadership of President Trump. In particular, I was proud to author the MISSION Act – a transformative piece of legislation to ensure veterans have the ability to receive the best possible care now, and in the future – and the Forever GI Bill – to ensure veterans never lose access to the education benefits they have earned. I'll leave Congress at the end of the year knowing that our nation's heroes are better served today because of our work. I am still hopeful that, before the 116th Congress adjourns, we will pass important reforms that improve outreach to veterans in crisis to address the suicide epidemic.

When I first ran for Congress, my hope was that someone with experience as a practicing physician could positively influence health care policy. The Affordable Care Act was signed into law during my first term, and much of my time was spent trying to undo some of the harm that was done to the patient-centered health care model as a result. We have made great progress in reversing some of the most damaging effects of this law such as passing my bill to repeal a government payment setting board



that likely would have rationed care. We took the teeth out of the individual mandate and just last month repealed three harmful taxes that discouraged medical innovation and drove up costs for patients. I am also very proud of legislation I introduced while chairing the Republican Study Committee's Health Care Task Force that would replace the ACA with reforms to actually lower costs for patients and improve the quality of health care. Perhaps most significantly, as co-chair of the GOP Doctors Caucus, I led my colleagues in the fight to repeal the Medicare formula which threatened patients' access to their physicians and to improve Medicare for seniors. I am still hopeful that before this Congress ends, we will address surprise medical bills in a way that protects patients and is fair to doctors and payers.

As a senior member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, I was proud to be on the forefront of some very consequential accomplishments. The work we did to help workers' retirement security through multiemployer pension reforms in 2014 is significant. I was also pleased to be a part of passing the Every Student Succeeds Act to repeal and replace the burdensome federal mandates associated with No Child Left Behind Act. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions, we were able to provide careful oversight of labor reforms being pursued by the Obama administration that were holding back job growth. There's no question in my mind this oversight played a part in helping the Trump administration identify those burdensome rules and regulations.

Finally, I'm proud of the bipartisan successes. They don't always make the headlines, but they are critical to our nation's future. Legislation I authored has dramatically increased the availability of lifesaving epinephrine in schools for those who suffer from deadly food allergies; and the Desert Storm and Desert Shield War Memorial will be built on the National Mall in the coming years as a result of four years of effort to get my bill across the finish line.

The challenges we are facing now are as complex as ever, and I still have a lot of fire in my belly. I look forward to finishing my term strongly for the East Tennesseans that I love representing and working with President Trump in favor of the free-market, conservative policies so many of us hold dear. I am equally confident East Tennessee is full of capable public servants who will step up to fill my void, and I am ready to give them the opportunity to do so.

I will always cherish the friends I've made and people I've met. I could not be more grateful to my family, my staff, the volunteers, the veterans, and the numerous East Tennesseans who have made this job so rewarding.

Thank you for giving me the great honor to represent you in Congress.

Why Local Matters!

The Business Bankers at Citizens Bank are accessible, available and ready to bring their expertise and attitude of personal service to you!

What sets Citizens Bank apart from most other banks?

Being LOCAL is at the top of the list!

Ford Davis

423-610-3006

ford.davis@citizensbank24.com

David Mowell

423-547-2059

david.mowell@citizensbank24.com

Brad Hoover

423-230-4304

brad.hoover@citizensbank24.com

Brooke Tittle

423-989-4428

brooke.tittle@citizensbank24.com

Mark Feuchtenberger

423-547-2093

mark.feuchtenberger@citizensbank24.com

Larry Estepp

423-230-4308

larry.estepp@citizensbank24.com



**Citizens
BANK**

citizensbank24.com



Bank your own way.



Member FDIC

I need care, but where?

We've
got you
covered.

Emergency and urgent care services at Ballad Health are close by and ready to serve you for the unexpected times in your life.

For non-emergent medical problems, call your primary care provider first.

Visit balladhealth.org for a list of emergency room, urgent care and primary care locations.



Urgent care clinic

Quickly

No appointment needed. Open extended hours and weekends.

- Fevers that respond to fever-reducing medications
- Flu
- Migraines
- Minor broken bones
- Minor cuts and burns
- Sinus infection
- Sore throat, cough, congestion
- Sprains and strains
- Rashes
- Urinary symptoms



Hospital emergency room

Now

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for serious or life-threatening problems.

- **Any condition that you believe is life, limb or vision threatening**
- Chest pain
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Deep cuts or bleeding that won't stop
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe burns
- Seizures
- Sudden dizziness, weakness or loss of coordination or balance
- Sudden loss of vision
- Sudden, new numbness in the face, arm or leg

If you are experiencing life or limb threatening symptoms, don't wait, call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest hospital emergency room.