

Valley Business FRONT

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Columnists Share
Leadership Insights

Virginia Tech Corporate
Research Center's
Brett Malone

Virginia Western
Community College's
Amy White

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Leadership
in a year
when we
desperately
needed it

The 2020
Business Leaders
FRONTList

Nancy Howell Agee
Carilion Clinic



2020 FRONTLeaders in Business

By Tom Field and Gene Marrano

Valley Business FRONT presents leaders in business
for 2020—a year of unprecedented challenges.

Pivot.

A word repeated often in Virginia's Blue Ridge and across the globe this year—thanks to COVID-19 and the pandemic. Before "March Madness" could even begin this year, "pivoting" was most often used as a sports term in basketball. An offensive player who is not actively dribbling the ball, must keep one foot planted as he or she spins and moves to keep away from the defense before passing or shooting.

Keep planted while still moving to stay in the game.

That's exactly what nearly every business has had to do this year. Some businesses pivoted more than others. Some completely changed the pace of the game. And some couldn't survive the pressure and lost.

To be fair, some of our businesses that closed couldn't have pivoted enough, unless they:

1) completely changed the kind of game

they had always played (business model);

- 2) faced a different opponent or fans (customers, suppliers, stakeholders); or
- 3) played on a different court (markets forced to shut down, scale back, or remain open—depending where you are or what your state mandated).

Our FRONTList of Business Leaders in 2020 include examples of individuals who had to pivot a little or a lot. And though pivoting turned out to be a rather necessary skill for most leaders; this FRONTList shows resiliency in operations above everything else... no matter how it was accomplished. Most of the leaders on our list will tell you they just happened to be holding the coach's clipboard when the terrible economic crisis stormed the court.

The team prevails and any win comes from the players.

With that, let's get ready to rumble. Here's our 2020 FRONTList of Business Leaders:

(alphabetical order; see sidebar for FRONTLeaders by industry)

Individual

Nancy Agee: The Carilion Clinic President and CEO guided the region's largest employer through the height of the coronavirus pandemic – the first wave – when revenues from elective surgeries put on hold and fewer people coming to the emergency department dried up. Agee took a temporary pay cut like everyone else at the height of the pandemic this summer. (see separate story on Nancy Agee).

Hal and Kris Cone: While the real estate business actually bumped upwards during our challenging year of pandemic (facilitated by plummeting interest rates, record home sales, fast inventory turnover), real estate agents still had to adapt to new ways and demands for showing properties and working with both buyers and sellers. The Cones—already ahead in the game with their creative marketing tactics—juiced up their outreach even more with a newly branded Cone Realty Group, virtual tours, walk-thru scripted out like mini-movies, digital and physical mailings, and a YouTube channel that's all about showing off the best of Roanoke. It's an aggressive audience-building system to generate more referrals.

Beth Doughty: About to retire as executive director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, Doughty helped reshape the greater valley by promoting outdoor amenities and quality of life, as a way to lure businesses and people here. From Eldor Corporation in Botetourt County to tenants like StikPak Solutions in Franklin County's still developing Summit View Business Park and the joint property near I-81 owned by Roanoke City/Roanoke County/Salem – being marketed to potential major tenants - Beth Doughty leaves her mark, adding that she has “a vast storage of knowledge about economic development that I can certainly share with other people.”

Greg Feldmann: CEO of the recently announced alliance featuring the Valleys Innovation Council, the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council and the RAMP business accelerator is designed to take RAMP to the next level in fostering potential high growth tech businesses. A substantial grant will help as well. Feldmann, a financial advisor, is now at the wheel: “we have an on-ramp component to it now [and] this funding will also allow us to do what we are labeling exit-ramp programming for [RAMP] graduates and alumni that need continuing support and counseling.”

Michael Fleming: The TORC Robotics CEO keeps bringing some of the best economic announcements to Blacksburg, the New River Valley, and our region. This summer, the technology/manufacturing leader in autonomous vehicles reported another win, \$8.5 million in expansion and development at its facilities at Virginia Tech's Corporate



Courtesy of Carilion Clinic

Nancy Agee



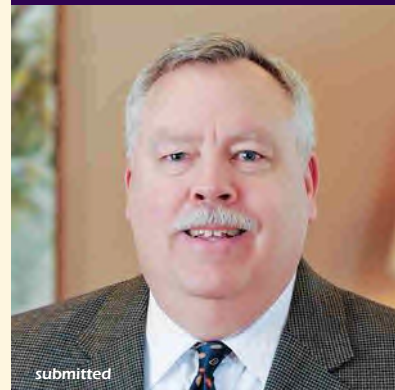
submitted

Hal and Kris Cone



submitted

Beth Doughty



submitted

Greg Feldmann



submitted
Abby Hamilton



submitted
Brian Hemphill



VBR photo
Landon Howard



RoCo courtesy
Jill Loope

Research Center and Blacksburg Industrial Park. Coupled with the still somewhat recent Daimler Trucks deal and other advancements that continue to populate tech and investor headlines, Fleming is a business “celebrity” sought after often, and by other movers and shakers.

Michael Friedlander: The executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (just one of his titles) pivoted the FBRI into becoming a COVID-19 testing center for the region, while also overseeing the expansion of the Institute, which opened a new wing this Fall. That expansion will further enable another goal for the FBRI – turning more of the medical breakthroughs developed in the labs into commercial spinoffs that can save lives and enhance therapies. “The caliber of people working on this campus is absolutely extraordinary. They are doing groundbreaking biomedical and health sciences research in areas of tremendous need,” Friedlander has said of the FBRI.

Abby Hamilton: Now the president and CEO at United Way of Roanoke Valley after many years at the non-profit, Hamilton connected with stakeholders and partners via regular teleconferences as the pandemic gained steam – with as many as 100 on a call at one time – investigating what shortages there was and who could help fill them, when it came to PPE, food, and other supplies. Also issues like, “rent and mortgage assistance, utilities that we know are going to be spiking when utility cutoff orders are lifted... some areas around mental health,” said Hamilton earlier this year.

Lyn Hayth: Bank of Botetourt has certainly secured its role as a leader in community banking. As CEO, Hayth led the financial institution as it assisted almost 500 businesses with PPP through COVID, while growing deposits and lending, and opening another branch in Vinton.

Brian Hemphill: The Radford University president, like all college administrations, oversaw major adjustments in how the school could operate, but Hemphill did it in a space that was nationally headlined as a super concentrated area with COVID cases. Not only that, but RU allowed campus activities and even public rallies (with safety ordinances), when many other colleges sequestered or moved to mostly virtual.

Landon Howard: The president of Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge celebrated 10 straight years of tourism revenue growth – a streak that will end in this year of the pandemic, but VVBR is already charting a path back he says, with a focus on luring visitors back to the region’s outdoor amenities and more socially-distanced lifestyles. “I think the potential for us getting back to normal by 2022 and seeing record numbers again is certainly on the way.”

Jill Loope: The economic development director for Roanoke County, on her watch, Mack Trucks has moved into Valley

Eight Previews to 2020



After we compiled our **FRONTlist of 2020 Business Leaders**, we noticed eight of our candidates happened to be FRONTcover models in back issues. We've reported on all of the businesses and organizations over the years, but it looks like we were once again, out FRONT in our predictions on the individuals that continue to succeed and exhibit leadership qualities.



Leadership means knowing your strengths and translating that knowledge into inspiring others.

— Lisa Clause, *Richfield Living*



Tech Park after extensive upgrades and is now building its mid-size truck series. "It's a 13-million-dollar investment and 250 new jobs. It's very exciting for the community [and] for the region. This is the type of project that will bring new people into the community," said Loope when the Mack Trucks announcement was made almost a year ago. Roanoke County has also seen several vacant properties upgraded and new tenants moved in – like the former Allstate building on Electric Road. There's the Reimagine 419 project including a Tanglewood Mall makeover as well.



Today's best leaders listen intently, serve those around them, and enable people to achieve great things without consideration for who gets the credit.

— Mike Dame,
Carilion Clinic



submitted

Sonu Singh



submitted

Lucas Thornton

Annette Patterson: Through the Vinton-based Advancement Foundation and its Gauntlet competition, The Hive small business incubator and the Innovation Mill – where startups with high-growth potential are nurtured – Patterson has become a force to reckon with when it comes to small business development. No home runs yet perhaps, but a number of singles and doubles. With COVID-19 figuring to still be a factor come late winter, Patterson is turning the virtual model used this past spring for the Gauntlet into a hybrid model for the 2021 competition, which now awards more than \$250,000 in cash and in-kind services to participants in the Shark Tank-like event. Several hundred mentors have also volunteered their time to work on business plans with the startups. “We’re trying to prepare them to move on to that next level, where they can begin to get out into the market, maybe get some investment.”

Sonu Singh: To say this leader is so high up he’s in the cloud—is no overstatement. As founder and CEO of “the cloud company” 1901 Group, Singh announces one of the fastest expansions from any technology company in our region. He’s established an Enterprise Operations Center in Blacksburg and positioned the business as a leader in public sector managed services, cloud migration, software development, and cyber engineering. In common speak, he’s taken a small group of geeks around Virginia Tech all the way to a major IT contractor in the US, employing hundreds.

Jeanne Stosser: The New River Valley developer (see the November feature story) and her SAS family-owned company has broken ground on its latest project – the Vue apartment complex near Virginia Tech’s burgeoning Corporate Research Center, which will feature more than 200 units, and aims to target the young professionals working at the CRC.

Isabel and Lucas Thornton: She rebuilds and renovates blighted homes in Roanoke, taking advantage of grants and historic tax credits, turning older homes into multi-family affordable rental properties. “It’s something that I think adds so much value to a city, so maybe it’s borne of just a passion for Roanoke and wanting Roanoke to do well as a city,” says Isabel Thornton. The other half of this young power couple focuses on downtown Roanoke apartment spaces like Gramercy Park and the proposed Campbell Court mix-used development that Lucas Thornton is working with the city on – providing they can find another home for a new Valley Metro bus depot.

Ed Walker: As the early redeveloper of older properties into downtown Roanoke living spaces – you can say Walker got the ball rolling. He’s now turning a multistory building in Southeast Roanoke City (in the 9th Street industrial park once home to American Viscose) into living spaces.

Two-Time FRONTcover Model



Carilion Clinic's Nancy Howell Agee has the distinction of being the only business leader who has been on the Valley Business FRONT cover—twice. (And both times it was for our annual FRONTList of business leaders.) Check out the FRONT November 2011 edition, and of course... this edition.



Collective

Local governments step up: Kudos to the localities that stepped up to use federal CARES Act money, dispersing it (often in several waves) to help local small businesses weather the worst of the coronavirus shutdown. Each locality had their own parameters and shifted them at times to make those grants work more effectively. Aside from pandemic response, some government leaders kept going full steam ahead on other priorities, from transportation and infrastructure upgrades to specific projects, like Delegate **Terry Austin**, who was inspired to launch a uniform health care curriculum for high school students in Roanoke and Botetourt County.

Arts & Cultural Organization and Performance Venue leaders: Mill Mountain Theatre, Jefferson Center, Roanoke Children's Theatre, Southwest Virginia Ballet, Taubman Museum of Art, Center in the Square, Moss Arts Center, 5 Points Music Sanctuary, Dr Pepper Park and others all did their share of pivoting this year to stay relevant in the face of a shutdown that kept the public locked out. That often meant performances (or museum gallery tours) produced digitally, shared for free or for a fee with patrons. Jefferson Center filmed a series of concerts on its stages and then used them in part as a fundraiser late in the year. Notes executive director Cyrus Pace: "we've got great venues, a really good production staff, let's see what we can put together – and then present that as a package."

Chamber leaders: Beth Bell with the Salem Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce and Chris Finley with the



Terry Austin



Cyrus Pace



FB photo

**Jimmy Delgado and
Kat Pascal**



Leadership involves thinking creatively about the next step, supporting and mentoring the people that work with and for you, the ability and confidence to make changes as necessary on the fly. People who are true leaders seem to have that "It" quality about them and never seem to run short of the energy needed to make things better.

— Gene Marrano, Valley Business FRONT

Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce both assumed those roles within the past year or so and went to work with networking events (often online, like Bell's Monday morning check-ins) and a spate of ribbon cuttings. Finley and the SMLRCC have also launched a business leadership academy for members.

Local eateries pivot: From aggressively marketing curbside pickup and home delivery to setting up outdoor dining areas – sometimes in parking lots, like **Kat Pascal** and **Jimmy Delgado** did at FarmBurguesa in Roanoke's Grandin Village (joined by Local Roots and several other eateries on same block), **Hunter Johnson** and **JP Powell** at Lucky and Fortunato, **Cody Thompson** and **Chris Mullens** at Zeppoli's in Blacksburg, **Bob Rotanz** of Salem's Mac & Bob's – restaurant owners did what they could to keep the doors open and people working. Including **Roland Macher** of Macado's, who used CARES Act money and adopted a takeout/delivery model very early on to keep as many people working during Phase 1 of the COVID-19 restrictions. "The very first day we were told that we would have to shut down we launched our in-house delivery. That meant that our staff could continue [working]," said Kat Pascal. In some cases for local restaurants, it meant preparing meals that non-profits delivered to school children and families stranded at home during the pandemic, many of those families scraping by with the breadwinners often out of work. There have been casualties, eateries that didn't make it, but others held on until Phase 3 made their business model more practical in many (but not all) cases. 🍷

2020 FRONTLeaders (by industry)

Financial FRONT

- Lyn Hayth, Bank of Botetourt

Healthcare/Wellness FRONT

- Nancy Agee, Carilion Clinic CEO

Legal FRONT

- Gentry Locke (COVID team, services, workshops for business response)

Service (Restaurant) FRONT

- Jimmy Delgado, FarmBurguesa



Chris Mullens and Cody Thompson, Zeppoli's

- **Hunter Johnson**, Lucky and Fortunato restaurants
- **Roland Macher**, Macado's
- **Chris Mullens**, Zeppoli's
- **Kat Pascal**, FarmBurguesa
- **JP Powell**, Lucky and Fortunato restaurants
- **Bob Rotanz**, Mac and Bob's
- **Cody Thompson**, Zeppoli's

Development FRONT (real estate, construction, architecture)

- **Hal Cone**, Cone Realty Group
- **Kris Cone**, Cone Realty Group
- **Jeanne Stosser**, SAS Builders
- **Lucas Thornton**, developer
- **Isabel Thornton**, developer
- **Ed Walker**, developer

Education FRONT

- **Brian Hemphill**, Radford University

““”

Take advantage of lots of different opportunities. Create lasting relationships.

— *Nance Agee, Carilion Clinic*

““”

I've had good leaders and terrible leaders throughout my life. To me, it comes down to the golden rule: treat others as you would have them treat you. People will believe in you because they know that you respect them and they will take on any challenge with you.

— *Tim Bradshaw, Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport*

submitted



Waynette Anderson



submitted

Tyler Godsey



submitted

Cindy Petersen



Bella Muse

Ginger Poole



submitted

Brett Roden



submitted

James Sears



submitted

Pedro Szalay



submitted

Ruth Waalkes



submitted

Christopher Finley

Culture FRONT**(arts, museums, performance venues)**

- **Waynette Anderson**, Dr Pepper Park
- **Tyler Godsey**, 5 Points Music Sanctuary
- **Cyrus Pace**, Jefferson Center
- **Cindy Petersen**, Taubman Museum of Art
- **Ginger Poole**, Mill Mountain Theater
- **Brett Roden**, Virginia Children's Theatre
- **James Sears**, Center in the Square
- **Pedro Szalay**, Southwest Virginia Ballet
- **Ruth Waalkes**, Moss Arts Center

Technology & Manufacturing FRONT

- **Michael Fleming**, TORC Robotics
- **Sonu Singh**, 1901 Group

Government FRONT

- **Terry Austin**, Virginia House of Delegates
- **Jill Loope**, Roanoke County Economic Development

Organizational FRONT

- **Beth Bell**, Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce
- **Beth Doughty**, Regional Partnership (retired)
- **Chris Finley**, Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce
- **Abby Hamilton**, United Way of Roanoke Valley
- **Landon Howard**, Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge

Entrepreneurial FRONT

- **Greg Feldmann**, Valleys Innovation Council
- **Annette Patterson**, The Advancement Foundation



Leadership should be boldly subtle. Bold enough to inspire transformational thinking and followship, while subtle enough to welcome innovation, conversation and action.

— *Amy White*,
Virginia Western
Community College



Indeed, the definition of leadership is about having followers; but it's interesting to discover our best leaders are those who push others ahead.

— *Tom Field*,
Valley Business FRONT