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VIRGINIA TECH TODAY



NO. 1



THE EMPLOYEE
EXPERIENCE MAGAZINE

VIRGINIA VOICES

THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE MAGAZINE

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Virginia is a place where people make the difference, and that truth is reflected every day in the work of our state employees. Whether you are serving the public directly, or supporting your agency behind the scenes, your contributions matter.

As we step into a new year of opportunity, I am reminded yet again that our greatest strength is our people. The diversity of experiences, backgrounds, and talents across our workforce creates a Commonwealth that is not only more capable, but more compassionate and resilient. Every employee brings something essential to the table, and together you shape the services

and support Virginians rely on.

This inaugural edition of Virginia Voices highlights that spirit. Inside, you'll find examples of creativity, dedication, and connection from across our agencies, stories that reflect who we are and what we value. My hope is that these stories encourage you, remind you of the impact you make, and help strengthen the sense of community that binds us across the state.

Thank you for the work you do each day and for the care you bring to the Commonwealth. I am grateful for your service, and I look forward to continuing our shared mission of making Virginia a place where every employee can thrive.

Virginia is for everyone – and that includes you.

Janet L. Lawson, Director

Virginia Department of Human Resource Management

EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to *Virginia Voices*

This publication is dedicated to celebrating the thousands of state employees who are shaping Virginia's future. I deeply believe in the power of storytelling - not just to inform, but to connect, uplift, and inspire.

And because of that, I have high hopes for what this magazine can become. My vision for *Virginia Voices* is a vibrant, inclusive space that reflects the diverse experiences of our public service community. I want our voices, our experiences, and our creativity to shine here.

Thank you for making Virginia a better place for everyone.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Levi Shane McDaniel".

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APPRECIATION SHINES AT LAUREL RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

I keep the thank you cards I receive from colleagues. Seeing the stack makes me smile and reminds me of two reasons I enjoy working at Laurel Ridge: our employees and our culture of appreciation and kindness.

A professional habit I have maintained over the years is sending thank you cards to colleagues every week. As an HR professional, it's heartening to see that the spirit of gratitude extends beyond the HR team, and it truly makes a difference in our workplace culture.

Kind words and recognition not only uplift those who receive them but also contribute to fostering a supportive and positive environment for everyone. Thank you to everyone who takes the time to acknowledge the efforts of others — such gestures are incredibly valuable and deeply appreciated.

Submitted By:

Kris Iden
HR Analyst II
Laurel Ridge Community College



Kris smiling and holding a display of numerous colorful thank you cards

Honoring Brandon Csady's Dedication



Brandon Csady

Brandon Csady, a Veteran Service Representative (VSR) with the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, is being recognized by Marlyn Cullen for his outstanding dedication to serving Virginia's veterans.

Brandon devotes countless hours to ensuring that every veteran who walks through the door or calls on the phone receives his full attention and thoughtful consideration. He consistently goes above and beyond, determined to find the answers veterans need to make a full claim.

Despite having a family and a young child at home, Brandon's commitment never wavers. He is often the first to arrive and the last to leave, setting an example of reliability and compassion.

Marlyn says working with him is a pleasure and applauds his constant support and encouragement. Even when outcomes don't go as planned, Brandon never gives up on finding a way to help each veteran. His dedication and persistence embody the best of public service.

Submitted by:

Marlyn Cullen

Veteran Services Administrator

Virginia Department of Veterans Services



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We'd love to feature their story in Virginia Voices!



Kari and her former service dog, Gidean

The Lucky Paw Foundation

Kari Magner, an Emergency Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Health, is one of the co-founders of The Lucky Paw Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit organization established in January 2024. Their mission is to provide supplies and financial assistance for animals with medical needs in shelters and rescues across Virginia. They've hosted several adoption events and supply drives in the community to help bring awareness to the needs of shelters and rescues.

The Lucky Paw Foundation has also assisted families throughout the Commonwealth with pet needs after a disaster has hit their area, including delivering a 26-foot box truck of pet supplies to southwest Virginia post-Helene. Please consider following "The Lucky Paw Foundation" on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to follow along with their future projects and community events!

Submitted By:
Kari Magner
Emergency Planner
VDH's Office of Emergency Medical Services

Blue Moon by Rosemary Gallick

This is a painting by NOVA Art/Art History professor, Rosemary Gallick, titled *Blue Moon*. It's an acrylic painting that was donated to a local fundraiser to help those in need. The painting is primarily various shades of blue in the background that accentuate the round circular moon.

Rosemary Gallick is a full-time Professor of Art and Art History at Northern Virginia Community College where she has taught for over 30 years. She holds a B.A. from the State University of New York in Art and an M.F.A. from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York. In addition, she holds a master's degree in communication from Cornell University. Her artwork has been exhibited throughout the U.S.



Within the full illuminated moon is a crescent moon with yellow, iridescent highlights. The painting was done in celebration after the solar eclipse and examines the night sky for dreams and inspiration.

This artist was selected as the featured artist for the Commonwealth of Virginia's Community College System at the annual New Horizons Conference in Roanoke, Virginia in 2017 and in 2020. Community outreach is a major part of her art donations to help raise funds for less fortunate residents in Virginia.



[Northern Virginia Community College: Higher Education Center](#)

Chesterfield Health District Providing Care to Those Most in Need

Chesterfield Health District partnered with Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center in 2024 to offer school physicals to their most vulnerable communities. For a parent without insurance, a child's school physical can cost \$200 (cost of appointment, transportation, childcare for siblings, etc.). Local community health workers saw a need and worked with a local organization to help ease the burden.

On August 9, 2024, staff and Medical Reserve Corp volunteers with the Chesterfield Health District helped 23 kids get school physicals at the Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center.

The Chesterfield Health District is one of 35 health districts made up of 119 local health departments in the Virginia Department of Health. It serves the counties of Chesterfield, Powhatan, and the city of Colonial Heights to include 434,000 people. Its mission is to protect the health and promote the well-being of everyone in the community.

Residents can access vital records, get restaurant, septic, and well permits, obtain maternal and child health care, access the Women, Infants and Children Program, get vaccinations, sexually transmitted infection testing/treatment, and contraceptives.

Submitted By:
Kristy Fowler
Public Relations Specialist
Virginia Department of Health



Krystal Oliver and Sherry Coleman
welcoming the families



Virginia Beach Convention Center

2025 DHRM HR Conference Recap

The 2025 DHRM HR Conference, *HR Navigating the Winds of Change: Building a Resilient Workplace*, welcomed more than 435 HR leaders and practitioners to the Virginia Beach Convention Center from October 28–30.

Attendees enjoyed three days of dynamic speakers, relevant HR-focused sessions, and collaborative opportunities with colleagues from across the Commonwealth. Topics included benefits administration, compensation, mental health and resilience strategies, VEC HR best practices, employment law, employee engagement, and innovative ways to integrate AI into HR workflows.

DHRM extends sincere thanks to all who participated and helped make this event a success.

Honoring Evergreen Cemetery

Ann Cooper, a former service member and veteran, now works part-time for the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. On November 11th, 2024, she and her two children, Aiden (14) and Lawson (9), spent the day volunteering at Evergreen Cemetery in Richmond, placing American flags on the graves of prior service members.

Evergreen Cemetery, established in 1891, is a historic burial ground located in the east end of Richmond. It serves as the final resting place for many individuals who have served their country, as well as members of the local community.

For Ann, the day was both meaningful and emotional. She watched her children walk the grounds, cleaning off headstones and honoring those who had been forgotten or abandoned. The experience, she said, filled her heart with warmth.

The photograph on the left shows her son Lawson, just 9 years old, crouched beside a soldier's grave, carefully placing a flag. The innocence of the moment speaks volumes - a quiet reminder that understanding the past is essential to building the future.

Submitted By:

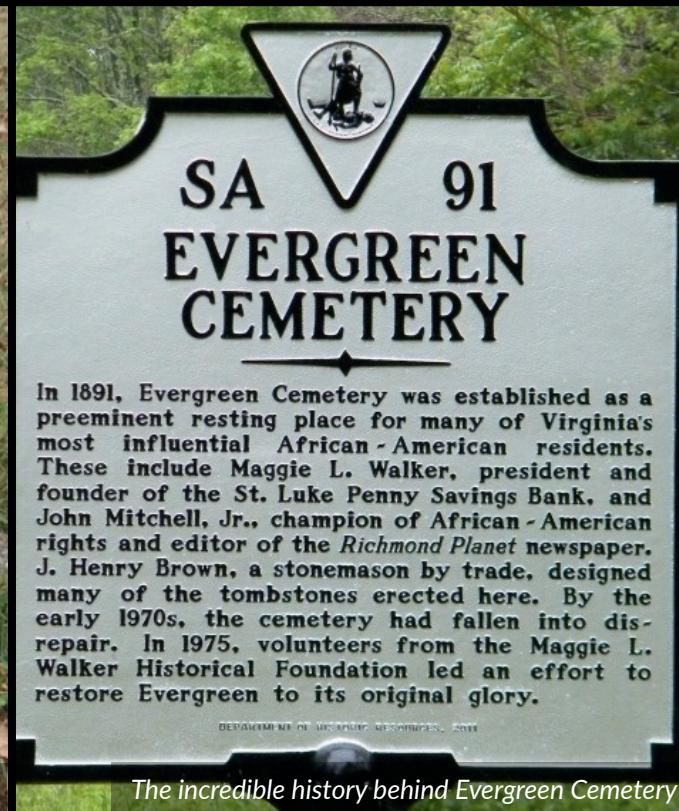
Ann Cooper

Veteran Services Administrator

Virginia Department of Veterans Services



Ann's son putting a flag by a headstone



The incredible history behind Evergreen Cemetery



VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

University Well-Being Symposium Held at VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) recently hosted the University Well-being Symposium, gathering 50 well-being professionals from across Virginia and beyond. The event, held at the Graduate Richmond hotel, provided a platform for sharing best practices in fostering a culture of care on college campuses. Organized by Cindi Phares, VCU's program manager for employee well-being and recognition, the symposium emphasized the vital role of employee well-being.

The event featured an impressive lineup of speakers who shared their expertise on a wide range of topics, from mental health strategies and innovative well-being programs to effective community engagement and the latest research in holistic well-being. Each session provided valuable insights and practical tools that attendees could apply in their respective roles.

Attendees exchanged ideas on innovative approaches to communication, connection, and care within the workplace. Suzanne Weaver, director of operations and wellness for VCU Employee Health Services, highlighted VCU's Employee Wellness Screening program, which offers personalized health assessments to staff. The initiative has been praised by employees, with some noting that it has potentially saved lives.

In addition to the educational presentations, the symposium fostered meaningful connections among participants through networking sessions and collaborative



A view of Richmond, the home of VCU, with the Federal Reserve Bank at its center



VCU Campus: Grace E. Harris Hall

discussions. Attendees had the opportunity to exchange ideas, share best practices, and discuss the challenges and opportunities within their organizations. This open dialogue created a supportive environment where well-being coordinators could learn from one another and explore potential partnerships for future initiatives.

To ensure the symposium continues as an annual event, a committee was formed to maintain its momentum and ongoing impact. Phares expressed hope that attendees would adapt the ideas shared at the symposium to benefit their own institutions, much as she has done at VCU. The gathering not only showcased successful programs but also reaffirmed the collective commitment to enhancing employee wellness across the region.

Submitted By:

Cindi Phares

Program Manager for Employee Recognition

Virginia Commonwealth University

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“Computers for Student Success Program” Expands Access and Opportunity at TCC

Tidewater Community College (TCC) is home to a program that's quietly transforming lives across the region. The Computers for Student Success Program, supported by student volunteers, staff, and generous donors like Sentara Healthcare, provides more than 1,100 refurbished computers each year to TCC students and area nonprofits. Since 2009, over 18,000 computers in total have been distributed.

What started as a small, student-led initiative has grown into a full-scale operation that blends community service with hands-on job training. The program is run by the TCC Computer Club and staffed by IT and Computer Science students, interns, and federal work-study participants. Together, they process donated machines, install software, and repair student and staff computers — often for as little as \$20.

“This is about more than technology access,” said a program volunteer. “It’s about giving students the tools they need to succeed — and empowering other students with the skills to help them.”

Each year, nearly 120 volunteers contribute their time and expertise, gaining valuable real-world experience in the process. It’s a win-win model: students receive support, while future tech professionals build a resume of community impact. You can read more about this program on Sentara Healthcare’s website (<http://bit.ly/4n1zzbQ>), or visit www.Computers4StudentSuccess.org to learn how to contribute.

Submitted By:

Gary Noah

*Professor, Coordinator, Computers for Student Success
Tidewater Community College*



Tidewater Community College, Norfolk, VA

Pay It 4 Ward: Lynchburg Probation Officers in Action

The District 13 Probation and Parole Office in Lynchburg, Virginia set a 2024 goal of spending more time giving back in the neighborhoods they serve. The idea came after staff had spent the fourth quarter of 2023 handing out Halloween candy and ringing the bell for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign. The Office's Healing Environment (a DOC initiative for employee health and wellness) set the stage for 2024 with the motto of "Pay It 4Ward in 2024."

The Probation Officers (POs) at District 13 had already created a community closet with personal hygiene items, clothing, and food for returning citizens served by the District. However, employees wanted to figure out a way to move that spirit of altruism out onto the streets. Success was had in finding worthy community events.

On May 13, 2024, POs volunteered at Dunkin' Donuts to collect donations for the Special Olympics. It was a great experience to meet the Olympians and help raise funds for an organization that is near and dear to the Department of Corrections' heart.



Lynchburg Probation and Parole Officers with a Special Olympian

The District continued to “Pay It 4Ward” on May 22, 2024, by participating in the United Way Day of Caring. This is an annual event that places volunteers with organizations that support health, education, income, and basic human needs in the Greater Lynchburg area. Staff volunteered at The Free Clinic, Lynchburg Daily Bread, and Camp Kumbaya. It was a day of meeting new community partners, and rolling up their sleeves and doing the dirty work. The District is looking forward to finding other opportunities to add to their time of charity and generosity.



Brittney Samuels and former Chief, Kelly Poe



PO Taryn Kelly and Kynadi Joyce painting Camp Kumbaya



Jami Hyler and Suzanne Erickson at the Free Clinic

Submitted By:
Suzanne K. Erickson
Probation and Parole Officer, CORIS LSS
DOC's District #13, Lynchburg Probation and Parole



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Empowering Administrative Excellence at JMU

On August 1, 2024, the Talent Development Department at James Madison University hosted its first Administrative Professionals Conference at Hartman Hall. With over 140 internal and external attendees, the Administrative Professionals Conference was created to celebrate, empower, and educate Administrative Professionals at James Madison University and the surrounding area. The program was aimed at administrative assistants, executive assistants, office managers, secretaries, receptionists, and support staff.

15 workshops were offered throughout the day. Topics included, but were not limited to, Team Emotional Intelligence, Inclusive Event Planning, Working with Gen Z, and Cultivating Joy at Work.

Perhaps the highlight of the day, however, was the keynote speaker, Melissa Peoples, CEO & founder of "Admin Gurus." Melissa educated and entertained the attendees with her tips for increasing their confidence and building their "administrative playbook." With a lengthy professional history in the administrative field, Melissa's guidance was practical, proven, and offered a way for attendees to recognize and maximize their value.

Administrative Assistants play a significant role in JMU's mission. Honoring them was itself an honor.

Submitted By:
Jojo Griffith
Program and Marketing Coordinator
James Madison University

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Volunteers from the Frontier Culture Museum serving meals to those in need



A volunteer cooking at the Valley Mission in Staunton, Virginia

Frontier Culture Museum's Brunch Outreach

In the Spring of 2024, a team of Frontier Culture Museum volunteers, Board of Trustees members, and staff volunteered to provide and serve brunch at the Valley Mission in Staunton. The Valley Mission is a community-supported non-profit which houses and serves meals to local families and individuals who need temporary housing or who live locally and are food insecure. Many local groups, organizations, and churches volunteer to prepare and serve meals at the Mission throughout the year.

The Museum team shopped, prepped, cooked, and served a hot breakfast of scrambled eggs, sausage, potatoes, and baked apples to about 100 people on a Saturday morning. Staff and volunteers who could not help that day provided homemade banana and apple breads and muffins to accompany the meal. The Museum team plans to make this a regular volunteer effort, as it provides a much-needed meal for those in need and offers a chance for the Museum to give back to our community.

Submitted By:
Lydia Volskis, SHRM-CP
HR Manager and Board Liaison
Frontier Culture Museum

WeightWatchers



Banana-Oat Power Muffins

- 1 cup oats
- 1 ripe banana, mashed
- 1 egg white
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp baking powder
- Optional: 1/4 cup blueberries

Mix all ingredients, divide into 6 muffin cups, bake at 350°F for 15 minutes, cool & enjoy!

Benefits-eligible Commonwealth of Virginia employees, spouses, and adult dependents (18+) get 50% off the retail price and can join WeightWatchers® for as low as \$9.75 per month.

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Building a Legacy:

How Professor Barksdale is Helping Her Community Thrive

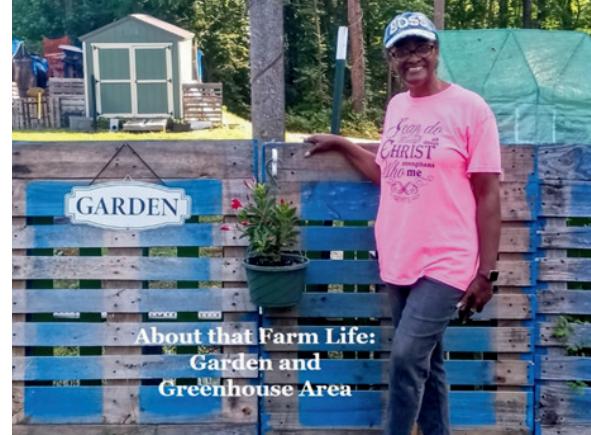
Dr. Gloria Barksdale is a 45-year veteran teacher, mother, grandmother, publisher, notary, and farmer. She currently teaches English 10 full-time at Mecklenburg High School and serves as an Associate Professor with Southside Virginia Community College's "Campus Within Walls" Program.

Raised in Lunenburg County, VA, Dr. Barksdale was the eldest of six and began her journey as a farmer before stepping into the classroom. After living in six states and working extensively in life skills coaching, she returned to Virginia in 2022 and purchased five untapped acres in Mecklenburg County — now known as "Legacy Acres I."

Through her business, "Build A LIFE, LLC," she inspires others to "begin again" by offering life skills training, motivational coaching, and "farm therapy." Her growing farm includes 20 chickens (17 hens, 3 roosters), six ducks, two dogs, and two $\frac{1}{4}$ -acre gardens. She sells brown chicken and duck eggs locally and volunteers monthly with the Central VA Food Bank.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Barksdale holds five degrees, more than ten IT certifications, and a Project Management Professional credential. She's currently pursuing a master's degree in information systems: technology management at Liberty University. Her future goal? Launching farm education programs for young girls, helping them grow in agriculture and IT. To learn more, please visit: barksdalelegacyacres1.com.

Submitted By:
Professor Gloria Barksdale
CEO of Build A LIFE, LLC





Faces of Public Service: Kevin M. Anzzolin

In September 2023, the Katherine Johnson Adult Education Center in Newport News, Virginia, began offering a GED in Spanish. In the halls of the center, you not only hear the staccato rhythm of English but also the melodious tones of Spanish. *Editor's Note: In December 2024, the Katherine Johnson Center celebrated its first Spanish-language GED graduates!*

It's a welcome addition to the Hampton Roads area. According to the latest census, nearly 12 percent of Newport News identifies as Hispanic. While cities like Roanoke, Richmond, and Washington, D.C. have previously offered this program, it was time Hampton Roads followed suit. The Spanish version of the exam dates back to the late 1960s, when it was created to meet the needs of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens seeking a high school equivalency.

Dr. Kevin M. Anzzolin, a Lecturer of Spanish at Christopher Newport University (CNU), has been instrumental in the course's success. Since 2021, he has taught a variety of language and literature classes at CNU. Outside of the classroom, he dedicates



CNU student Hannah Dennis teaching Cartesian line equations

Tuesday and Thursday evenings to teaching the GED in Spanish from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM.

This role has also allowed Anzzolin to create lasting intercultural connections with the Latinx community in Hampton Roads – often with the help of his CNU students. Together, they help participants prepare for the four subject areas of the GED: Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies.

His commitment extends to his scholarship, as well. His writing includes an article in Routed Magazine on Nicaraguan political refugees in Washington, D.C. and a feature in RVA Magazine exploring the Latinx community on Virginia's Eastern Shore. He is also a member of the Newport News Hispanic Advisory Committee, continuing his efforts to support and uplift the communities he serves.

Submitted By:
Kevin M. Anzzolin, Ph.D.
Lecturer of Spanish
Christopher Newport University

SVHEC Staff Give Back with Donation to Local Food Pantry



Comm. Dir. Hope Harris-Gayles, Local Business Owner Mary Bagwell, Dir. of Workforce Training Prog. Cassandra Satterfield, Exec. Dir. Betty Adams, Former Downtown South Boston Farmer's Market Mngr. Melissa Nelson, and Financial Support Spec. Susan Throckmorton

Staff at the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) held a food drive to benefit a local mini food pantry called "The Giving Tree." A food box constructed on a tree and located at the Downtown South Boston Farmer's Market, the "Giving Tree" provides food supplies to residents and hungry passersby. The mini food pantry is based on the concept of the "Free Libraries" that invite people to leave and take books throughout the community. A sign inside the box reads, "Take what you need. Leave what you can." SVHEC staff collected food for a week, and a small group of staff members presented the donation to the Farmer's Market former manager Melissa Nelson and food pantry volunteer Mary Bagwell.

Submitted By:
Hope Harris-Gayles
Director, Communications, Outreach, and Employee Relations
Southern Virginia Higher Education Center

VCU's "ACE-IT in College" Leads the Way: Virginia's First Inclusive Higher Education Program to Achieve Accreditation



Janai, a 2020 ACE-IT Alumni, and Ashley, a 2019 Alumni, met up in the VCU Cabell Library in between classes



ACE-IT students show off their VCU Cards during a summer Bridge-In event.

Virginia Commonwealth University's "ACE-IT in College" recently became the first accredited college program for students with intellectual disability (ID) in Virginia and the third program nationally.

ACE-IT in College is a two-year VCU School of Education certificate program for students with intellectual disability. Enrolled students take VCU classes and participate in campus activities and work experiences that align with career goals and interests. The accreditation was conducted by the Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation Council (IHEAC), which is an independent accrediting agency for college and university programs that serve students with ID. The IHEAC aims to promote standards-based quality programming for students with ID who attend colleges and universities.

"The Council is delighted to award accreditation to the ACE-IT program," said Stephanie Smith Lee, IHEAC Board President. "The employment outcomes of this outstanding program are commendable. Graduates are obtaining jobs in local businesses and federal agencies."

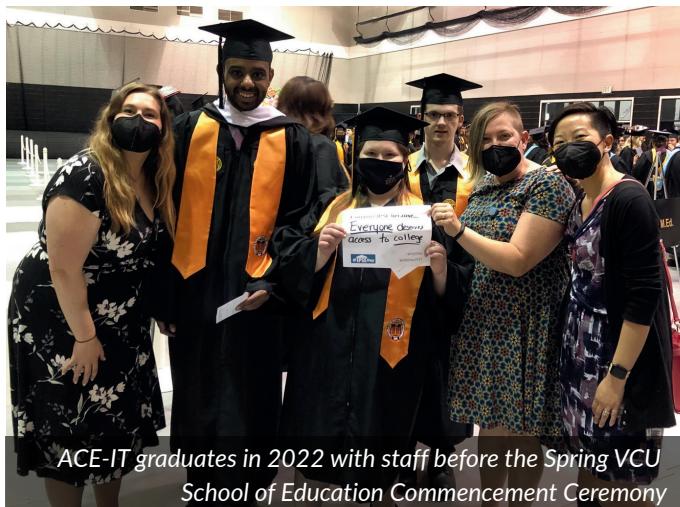
Accreditation involves a comprehensive evaluation process, including a self-study and a two-day site visit. The self-study requires programs to meet ten rigorous standards, such as student achievement, curriculum quality, and program development. These standards ensure that programs provide high-quality, inclusive education for students with intellectual disability.

With the historic accreditation now official, the Director of ACE-IT, Jaclyn Camden, looks towards the future of the program. "We are thrilled about the future of ACE-IT in College. This achievement not only recognizes our commitment to inclusivity, excellence, and employment

outcomes but also sets a strong foundation for continued growth and success. We are excited to continue delivering a high-quality program while further enhancing students' experiences and amplifying their contributions at VCU," says Director Camden.

To read the full article, visit: <https://vcurrtc.org/about/features/feature.cfm?id=13>.

For more information on ACE-IT in College, visit aceitincollege.org.



ACE-IT graduates in 2022 with staff before the Spring VCU School of Education Commencement Ceremony



An ACE-IT student working on an academic project, building skills for the future

ACE-IT students show off their unstoppable VCU spirit

Submitted By:

Lucian Friel

Educational Technologies & Communication Specialist
VCU Rehabilitation Research and Training Center

Supporting and Celebrating Hybrid and Remote Employees at George Mason University

Gallup reports that employees who feel a strong sense of belonging, connection, and genuine value within their teams are more engaged, productive, experience greater well-being, and are more easily retained. At George Mason University, our goal is to ensure all employees feel valued and supported, even if they work from a location other than on campus. This commitment is reflected in the university's recognition of outstanding, remote employees who have received the university's Employee of the Month award, and the launch of new initiatives such as Mason Throughout the Nation (MTN), an Employee Resource Group dedicated to remote and hybrid staff.



Mason Throughout the Nation (MTN) aims to bridge geographical distances, fostering well-being, connection, and a sense of belonging for employees who may not be physically present on campus. MTN meets via Zoom monthly and focuses on social networking, along with professional development such as maintaining a healthy work-life balance and connecting with colleagues in a virtual space.

Through various initiatives, George Mason is striving to improve the overall experience for all faculty and staff. To connect on these topics and learn more, reach out to engagehr@gmu.edu.

Celebrating Employee Success



Brianna Alford

The Assistant Director for Student Belonging in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD), who works fully remote from Michigan, was recognized as the 2024 August Employee of the Month via a Zoom ceremony and celebration led by President Washington and Interim CHRO, Michelle Lim. Daniel Minot, CEHD Assistant Dean for Student Success, praised her as "a trusted, reliable, and invaluable resource for so many colleagues."

Joy Sobieralski

Joy is the financial Reporting Manager with Fiscal Services who works remotely from South Carolina. She was recognized via a virtual ceremony as the 2025 June Employee of the Month, led by President Washington and CHRO, Chris Ackerman. Nusrat Sultana, Director of Financial Reporting in Fiscal Services, stated, "Joy is renowned for her ability to adapt seamlessly to change, maintaining focus, and delivering exceptional results under pressure." Following the official celebration program, many peers stayed on Zoom to share stories of and words of appreciation for Joy.

Submitted By:

Stacey Ellis

HR Faculty and Staff Engagement Program Manager
George Mason University

The Power of Friendship: Brian and Jennifer's Journey to Wellness

IF IT DOESN'T CHALLENGE YOU,
IT WON'T CHANGE YOU.



Brian and Jennifer flexing their muscles at burn boot camp

Brian

Dealing with the everyday stresses of life and work can take a toll on the body and mind. As for me, those stresses were directly impacting my health and overall general wellness. The stress impact became more realized when a routine visit to my primary care physician helped me understand the negative influence that the stress, weight gain, and a relatively sedentary daily routine was having on my health.

Understanding that it was time to make a big change in my life to improve my health and knowing that many changes have taken place over the years as to proper diet and exercise, I was at a loss as to where to start. Quickly, I remembered that I have a friend and fellow coworker, Jennifer, that is on her own personal journey to renewed health that I could turn to for guidance.

Jennifer

Helping those in need is a cornerstone in the building blocks of my personality, so when Brian came to me requesting information as to how I accomplished my personal health improvement goals, I shared these "not-so-secret" secrets to my successes and milestones in my ongoing health journey:

Have a Goal:

When I started my wellness journey, I just wanted to get active and feel better. I chose to prepare for and run a 10K, which gave me a clear goal to stay motivated and track my progress.

Find a Buddy:

Find someone who will celebrate your successes, pick you up when you fall, and be that solid rock. For me, it was my sister, then Brian joined our group, and we all became 5am burn workout buddies.

Protein & Water:

Protein is my “best friend.” It helps build muscle and aids recovery. I aim for 100g of protein a day. And remember: water, water and more water! I divide my weight in half to get the ounces of water I need to drink.

Get Active:

My favorite workout is Circuit or High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), especially at Burn Boot Camp. Find ways to get active that you enjoy and look forward to. Many places also have trainers and nutritionists to help you stay on track.

Lastly, just have fun! Through this journey I have lost 20 pounds, ran 13 miles, and feel great. And as for Brian: “I have lost over 33 pounds and was able to run over a mile this year in support of the Virginia Special Olympics. So, in short, make that lifestyle change, set a personal goal to accomplish and find that friend that will support you throughout your journey.”

Submitted By:

Brian Kessler Lacks, MPA, CLSSYB, Business Systems Analyst

Jennifer F. Glass, CLSSGB, Process Improvement Coordinator

Virginia Department of State Police



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What's Buzzing at Central Virginia Community College?



Paul demonstrating a honeybee frame to his students



Paul sharing photos of different hive types

After spending just a few minutes with Paul Tabor, a beekeeper and Central Virginia Community College's (CVCC) Facilities Department Trade Technician, students and staff learn quickly that bees are amazing, and so is Paul. In May 2024, Paul volunteered to teach his first CVCC Workforce Solutions workshop, "To Bee or Not to Bee?" The class was filled with diverse students of all ages and backgrounds interested in learning about honeybees.

Paul discussed beekeeping practices, bee biology, hive maintenance, swarms, hive styles, and bee products. Students were able to observe a live beehive, custom-designed by Paul, known as the #TravelinHive. The youngest student went on a scavenger hunt to find the queen amongst hundreds of worker bees.

Paul made the class fun with bee activities, demonstrations, and fun facts. He also shared information about the dedicated life of beekeepers. There is no "down" season during a year in a Virginia apiary (an area where beehives of honeybees are kept).

Beekeepers are working throughout the year to keep their bees healthy, collecting honey and wax, doing maintenance, and producing products like candles, body care products, and more. That is commitment!

Beekeeping is for everyone. Paul transferred his excitement to his students. Within 24 hours of the workshop, a 6th grader had a honeybee colony in her yard with the help of Paul and supervision of her mother. She is learning and well on her way to becoming a beekeeper.



On July 9, 2019, the Lynchburg City Council voted unanimously to become a [Bee City USA affiliate](#). At places like the [Cloverlea House](#) and [Claytor Nature Center](#), you'll even find special "bug hotels" that support just a few of the 400 bee species native to Virginia.

Paul Tabor is the epitome of someone who is making a difference at CVCC and in the community. Paul is spreading happiness, increasing awareness, and uplifting the lives of our students, staff, and many honeybees who reside in the Greater Lynchburg Region. Kudos to Paul BEE-cause he is an amazing human-BEE-ing!

Paul Tabor, also known as "***The BeeKeeper***," works as a Trade Technician at the main campus of CVCC in Lynchburg. He is thrilled to have joined the Facilities team. During the weekdays, he is busy on campus, repairing and problem-solving in the mechanical realm. On any day that ends in "Y," you will catch him tending to his *bee*-loved bees. He loves to share bees with everyone, especially young people. Since his first encounter with a swarm in 1995, his passion for honeybees has only grown stronger. He keeps bees at three main yards (apiaries) where he manages about sixty queens or more in five types of hive boxes.

Submitted By:
Francie Dye
Workforce Training Coordinator
Central Virginia Community College

Get Outside

Give Back



Growing Together: 104 Ministries & Community Agriculture



Neil Zahradka (center) and volunteers at 104 Ministries in Prince George County

In 2020, Neil Zahradka's professional role as manager of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) Office of Land Application Programs intersected with a personal spiritual calling to establish a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, 104 Ministries. Psalm 104 describes the psalmist's thankfulness for an earth capable of feeding all humankind, and 104 Ministries celebrates that gift of creation with the community.

Located on the farm Neil now shares with his siblings in Prince George County, the organization grows produce using techniques that support soil health and maximize use of natural fertilizers, pest, and weed control. Volunteers are invited to help plant, tend, and harvest. The non-profit is currently partnered with the Food Bank of Prince George County to supplement their supply of fresh produce.

The farm has hosted Scout troops, church youth groups, friends, and neighbors to raise their primary crop of sweet potatoes (the perfect food!), along with sweet corn, white potatoes, and melons.

104 Ministries invites participation without theological, gender, or racial boundaries to join in its mission to foster stewardship of the earth, partner with social programs to make food available to hungry people, and involve the local community in agriculture.

Submitted By:

Neil Zahradka

Manager

DEQ's Office of Land Application Programs and Water Division



Douthat
State Park



Commitment to the Commonwealth

With 41 years of experience with the Commonwealth, including nearly 18 years at the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), Linda Balderson has grown progressively in her career.

After serving the Commonwealth in an administrative role with the Supreme Court of Virginia, Linda started with DRPT in 2007 as an executive assistant. In 2011, she began working with both rail and transit teams. Linda managed our DRPT civil rights compliance efforts for Disadvantaged Business Enterprise, Title VI, Environmental Justice, for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and was integral in bringing DRPT and our grantees into compliance with federal regulations. She made the shift with the Rail Team in 2015 and worked her way up to Rail Capital Programs Manager by 2021. This experience, and her well-deserved DRPT Colleague of the Year Award in 2023, make hers an inspiring story.

Linda excelled at administering our Rail Presentation and Rail Industrial Access (RIA) programs by building strong relationships with stakeholders and bringing new business to Virginia.

Linda has established herself as the point person for the programs, works closely with localities and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), and is part of the Economic Development team which has earned the title of "America's Top State for Business" six times.

Linda took the lead facilitating with the railroads to update the VEDP's inventory of rail-served sites. Linda also works closely with businesses to utilize the RIA program. The relationships that Linda built with railroad partners and VEDP resulted in record numbers of RIA applications that deliver unprecedented benefits to the Commonwealth. Linda is known as one of the "go to" people in the office for any institutional knowledge questions. Over the years, she has served on many hiring teams and many of DRPT's social committees, as well as volunteering for charitable and other events.

Thank you, Linda, for over 18 years of impactful contributions to DRPT!

Submitted by:

Debbie Barnett, MPA, MBTI

Human Resources Manager

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation



Linda Balderson

Faces of Public Service: Dr. Ebony D. Lynch



Dr. Ebony D. Lynch

When I see the words 'Faces of Public Service,' I like to believe I strive to be one of those individuals who make a difference by being a part of the public service in my community. I wear many hats throughout the community. First, I am the career coach for CHAMPS (Career Help and Mentoring for Parenting Students) at Rappahannock Community College (RCC). We work together to ensure parenting students are fully supported in their academic endeavors. I am also an associate professor for psychology and student development, and an adult education instructor there, as well. Outside of RCC, I serve on the Lancaster Community Library Board and Literacy Committee. Our mission through the Literacy Connect Program is "Linking literacy communities for promising futures."

One of my most passionate ways of working with my community is serving as a foster parent. Since 2017, I have been licensed as a foster parent for the Department of Social Services. It has been a most challenging yet rewarding role. I am in the process of adopting my current foster children. We have just gotten our dream forever home and can't wait for the adoption to be finalized. It is my goal to help change the lives of the children I foster. I want to be their mentor, role model, comforter, and safe place, all rolled into one. The reward of helping these children who need a home far outweighs any challenges. I would like to one day be a promoter or advocate for foster care, especially fostering teens.

Lastly, I am hoping to finish my classes at Old Dominion University to extend my knowledge of the community college world by participating in the community college leadership certificate program. After earning my certificate, I am hoping more career opportunities will be made available to me to explore. I thoroughly enjoy being a part of the community college and workforce atmosphere.

Submitted by:

Dr. Ebony D. Lynch

*Virginia Certified Career Coach and Associate Professor
Rappahannock Community College*

Laurel Ridge's NEIGHBOR WEEK



Inspired by the kindness of Mr. Rogers and the welcoming spirit of Laurel Ridge Community College, Neighbor Week is a celebration of community, generosity, and connection. This special week was an opportunity to come together, share kindness, and support our neighbors during the week in March 2025 that would have been Fred Rogers' 97th birthday!

As part of Neighbor Week, we raised funds and collected donations for the TRIO Neighbor Donation Drive! Laurel Ridge neighbors are ensuring that every member of our community has access to essential resources. The Laurel Ridge Community College TRIO program provides essential support for those who are either first-generation college students, low-income students, or students with a documented disability.

Our Laurel Ridge neighbors raised \$313.06 in donations for TRIO, along with a wonderful collection of pantry items, which will have a significant impact for students in need. Whether through a donation of money (employees donated to wear jeans and cardigans for the week!), a small act of kindness, a donated sweater for the career closet, or simply showing up to celebrate in our neighborhood, Laurel Ridge neighbors are heroes of their community.

Submitted By:

Kris Iden

HR Analyst II

Laurel Ridge Community College



Viviane Meder, Director, TRIO & Disability Services
and Whitney Miller, Chief Facilities Officer



Fauquier Campus



Middletown Campus

"We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes." – Fred Rogers

Coffeewood's Walk for Wellness

In celebration of 2025 National Employee Health and Fitness Day, Coffeewood Correctional Center (CWCC), with the support of Warden Melvin Davis and CWCC's Employee Health and Wellness Facility Advocate Executive Secretary, Kerry McClure, hosted a "Walk For Your Health" Event in May.

The group walked approximately 1.63 miles covering the round-trip distance of the facility access road in less than 40 minutes. Seventeen participants from multiple departments, including Records, Medical, Treatment, Business Office, Warden's Office, and HR, enjoyed the opportunity to get some fresh air and exercise by doing a healthy event with their colleagues.



Kerry McClure

There was a name drawing at the end for fun health and wellness gifts provided by CommonHealth and VADOC's Employee Health and Wellness Team.

Warden Davis approved jeans for the day for a \$5 donation to the Healing Environment Ambassador's current chosen charity, "Mom 2 Mom," a local non-profit organization based out of Culpeper that assists mothers and families with resources, diapers, wipes, formula, and personal hygiene products at no cost. The event raised \$20.

Submitted By:

Kerry McClure

Executive Secretary

Virginia Department of Corrections

Community Spotlight: 2025 United Way Day of Caring



PO Kynadi Joyce



Senior PO Taryn Kelly and PO Brittney Samuels

A special thank you goes out to Suzanne K. Erikson for letting us know that DOC's District #13, Lynchburg Probation and Parole, participated in the 2025 United Way Day of Caring. They provided two local daycares with an abundance of art supplies and hard work!

DOAV Employee Helps Students Reach New Heights at the ACE Academy



NASA Langley tour



Students with Gov. Youngkin



JetBlue ramp visit



VSP Aviation Unit

Alton Jordan, Chief of Facilities/Technology for the Virginia Department of Aviation (DOAV), recently served as the Director for the **2025 Richmond Aerospace Career Education (ACE) Academy**. Throughout this transformative week, hosted by the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals in June, he introduced 14 eager students to a world of possibilities within the aerospace industry, enhancing their understanding through visits to several airports and interactions with aviation professionals.



David lending a hand to one of his ACE Academy students

The students toured the Richmond Executive-Chesterfield County Airport, visited the Virginia Department of Aviation hangar, and explored Richmond International Airport, including JetBlue Airways and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Traffic Control tower. At the DOAV hangar, they engaged in hands-on learning experiences such as

sitting in the cockpit of an ICON A5 aircraft, flying a virtual flight simulator, and mastering aircraft maintenance techniques like riveting. A surprise visit from Governor Glenn Youngkin added to the excitement of their journey.

Additionally, Jordan guided the students to NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton and other inspiring stops, including the 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment of the

Virginia Army National Guard. In partnership with Heart of Virginia Flight School (HOVA) at Hanover County Municipal Airport, students embraced the thrill of discovery flights in Cessna 172 aircraft on the final day. As a passionate pilot himself, he dedicated himself to uplifting these inquisitive youth, helping them reach new heights throughout the week.

Submitted By:

David Halstead

Public Relations and Education Coordinator

Virginia Department of Aviation

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Spring 2025 Commonwealth Leadership Academy Graduates

Congratulations to the Cohort 3 graduates of the Spring 2025 Commonwealth Leadership Academy (CLA). CLA is led by DHRM in partnership with The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute within the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at VCU. This program supports the development of expertise in organizational culture, innovation, strategic decision making, and change leadership for senior level leaders in state government.

Submitted By:

Deanna Goldstein

Workforce Development and Programs Director

Department of Human Resource Management

dhrm.virginia.gov/VSEAF



Faces of Public Service: Myra Bass

The Office of Compliance, Collection Unit at Virginia Tax would like to celebrate and recognize Myra Bass. She is currently the Program Administration Specialist and has worked for the Commonwealth of Virginia for over 32 years.

Myra contributes to her community through volunteering at her church's mobile food pantry. Her church has collected canned goods and distributed them during the holidays for years. After the pandemic, they partnered with the Food Bank. Currently, the church has a drive thru/walk up to distribute monthly boxes of food every 3rd Thursday of the month. So far, they have served more than 800 households and over 3,000 people. Myra stated that it's a lot of work to accomplish under 2 hours, but it's extremely rewarding. Myra is truly an asset to her community and Virginia Tax!

Submitted By:
Adrienne Bridgeforth
Office of Collections
Virginia Tax



Myra Bass (right) contributing to her community

Government and AI: A New Era of Public Service

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way public services are delivered, offering new tools and mechanisms to enhance productivity, efficiency, and accessibility. Whether it's identifying trends in health data, helping students succeed, or improving communication with citizens, AI provides new ways to make government services more effective and accessible. At the Department of Human Resource Management, we are encouraging the ethical use of AI under our acceptable use policy, while actively monitoring advancements in the field to ensure alignment with our strategic mission. AI is here to stay and our goal is to adapt and utilize this revolutionary technology to better serve our communities across the Commonwealth.

Submitted By:
Zobair Wali
I.T. Coordinator, Virginia Voices
InfoTECH Analyst
Department of Human Resource Management

Gut Check

Metabolism • Immunity • Mental Health



In recent years, gut health has emerged as an important part of overall well-being. The gut, often referred to as the "second brain," is home to trillions of microorganisms that play vital roles in managing blood sugar, preventing diseases, regulating mood, and more.

CommonHealth is excited to help employees distinguish facts from myths and discover best practices for optimizing gut health with their latest health education campaign, Gut Check:

Metabolism • Immunity • Mental Health

Invite CommonHealth's Wellness Consultants to share Gut Check with your team onsite, virtually, or in a hybrid format to help support their overall well-being, engagement, and performance — at work and at home.

Contact your CommonHealth Agency Coordinator (or HR Benefits Administrator) to schedule today. If you aren't sure who that person is, please email CommonHealth at wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov to find out.

Submitted By:
Jami Zanetta
Wellness & Communications Consultant
DHRM - Office of Health Benefits



Commonwealth Mentoring Program: Cultivating Virginia's Future Leaders

The Commonwealth Mentoring Program (CMP), a dynamic year-long initiative, is driving the next generation of leadership within Virginia's state government. Led by **Jonathan Singleton** of the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM), the CMP is engineered to accelerate the professional growth of state employees through intensive, dedicated career development. At its core, the CMP strategically pairs state employees—or mentees—with seasoned mentors, offering invaluable one-on-one guidance. This structured relationship helps mentees acquire new skills, align with their career aspirations, and build a critical statewide professional network. For the mentors, it's a chance to actively hone their own mentorship and leadership abilities, contributing directly to the growth of their colleagues.

The CMP Pilot, representing employees from 11 different state agencies, successfully completed the program, graduating on August 27, 2025. The program facilitated strong connections by strategically matching participants using an advanced algorithm provided by Qooper. Mentor-mentee pairs adopted a hybrid communication model, blending traditional in-person meetings with convenient virtual sessions facilitated by the Qooper app. Formal meetings were scheduled for 3–4 hours per month during the initial six months, then scaled back to 1–2 hours per month for the program's latter half. Participants also engaged in quarterly meetings as a larger group.

A Focus on Development and Accountability

Throughout the year, participants concentrated on fundamental development areas designed for long-term impact:

- Building strong mentorship relationships
- Setting clear goals and action plans
- Developing productive habits
- Increasing responsibility and productivity
- Fostering a culture of inclusivity

Promising Outcomes and Future Momentum

The 2024–2025 program concluded on a high note, achieving a 65% retention rate. The final phase saw participants actively networking, reviewing their established goals, providing essential feedback, and formally wrapping up their mentorship relationships. Building on this success, the 2025–2026 CMP cohort kicked off on September 3, 2025, welcoming 102 employees (51 pairs) ready to begin their journey of accelerated career growth.



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From benefits to work/life balance and employee engagement, we have information to assist you as a state employee.

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Workforce Engagement

[Workforce Engagement \(OWE\) Resources](#)
[Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign \(CVC\)](#)
[Commonwealth Mentorship Program](#)

Training and Career Development

[Learning Center \(COVLC\)](#)
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