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APRIL 2014



**WHERE  
TO GO NOW**  
OUR HOT LIST  
AROUND  
THE GLOBE

A WALK ON  
**SYDNEY'S**  
WILD SIDE

**BIZ TREND:**  
THE INTERNET  
OF THINGS

# LONDON

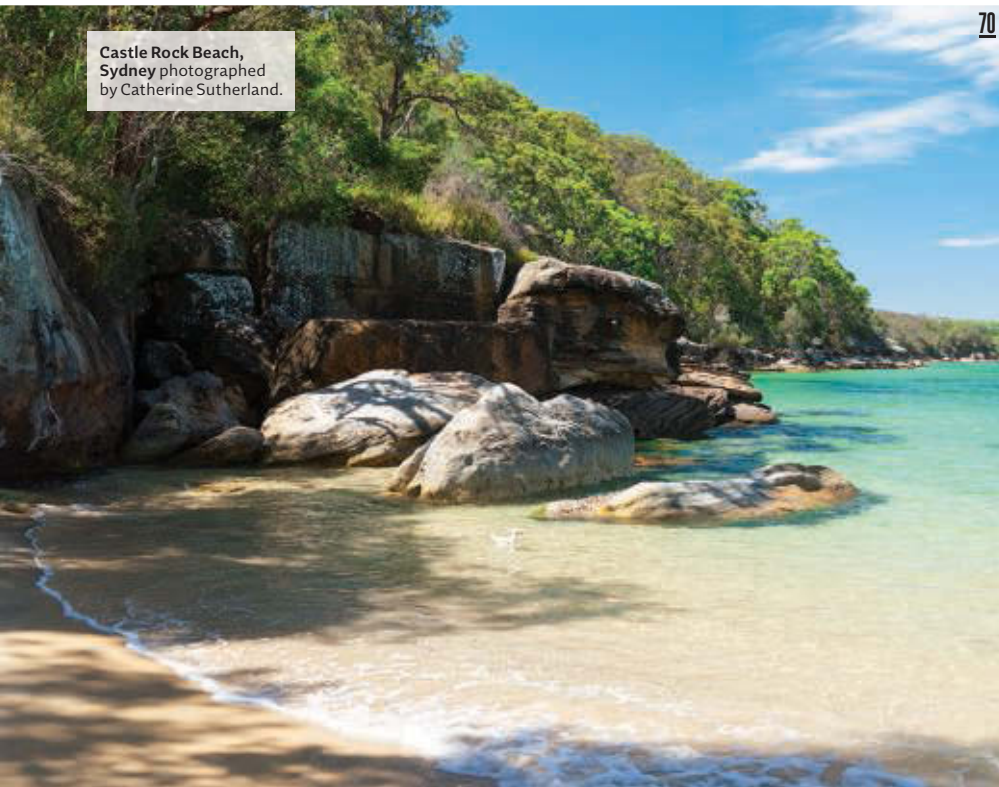
## CALLING

RICHARD BRANSON ON  
THE FUTURE OF SPACE TRAVEL,  
CURRENCY, THE ENVIRONMENT  
AND HIS PLAN TO TURN THE  
CARIBBEAN "GREEN"

# April

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For behind-the-scenes video of our cover shoot, visit us at [deltasky.com/april](http://deltasky.com/april).

## Contributors



### Mark Parren Taylor

The London-based photographer shoots for *National Geographic Traveler* and other publications. He shot all around London for the "Where to Go Now" feature, page 84.



### Jason Oliver Nixon

Sky's global lifestyle editor tapped London's top concierges for our "Where to Go Now" feature. Nixon is half of Madcap Cottage, a New York City-based interior design firm.



### Shana Ting Lipton

Writer-editor Shana Ting Lipton splits her time between Los Angeles and London. She penned this month's profile on Richard Branson, page 78.



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— Aaron Dykstra  
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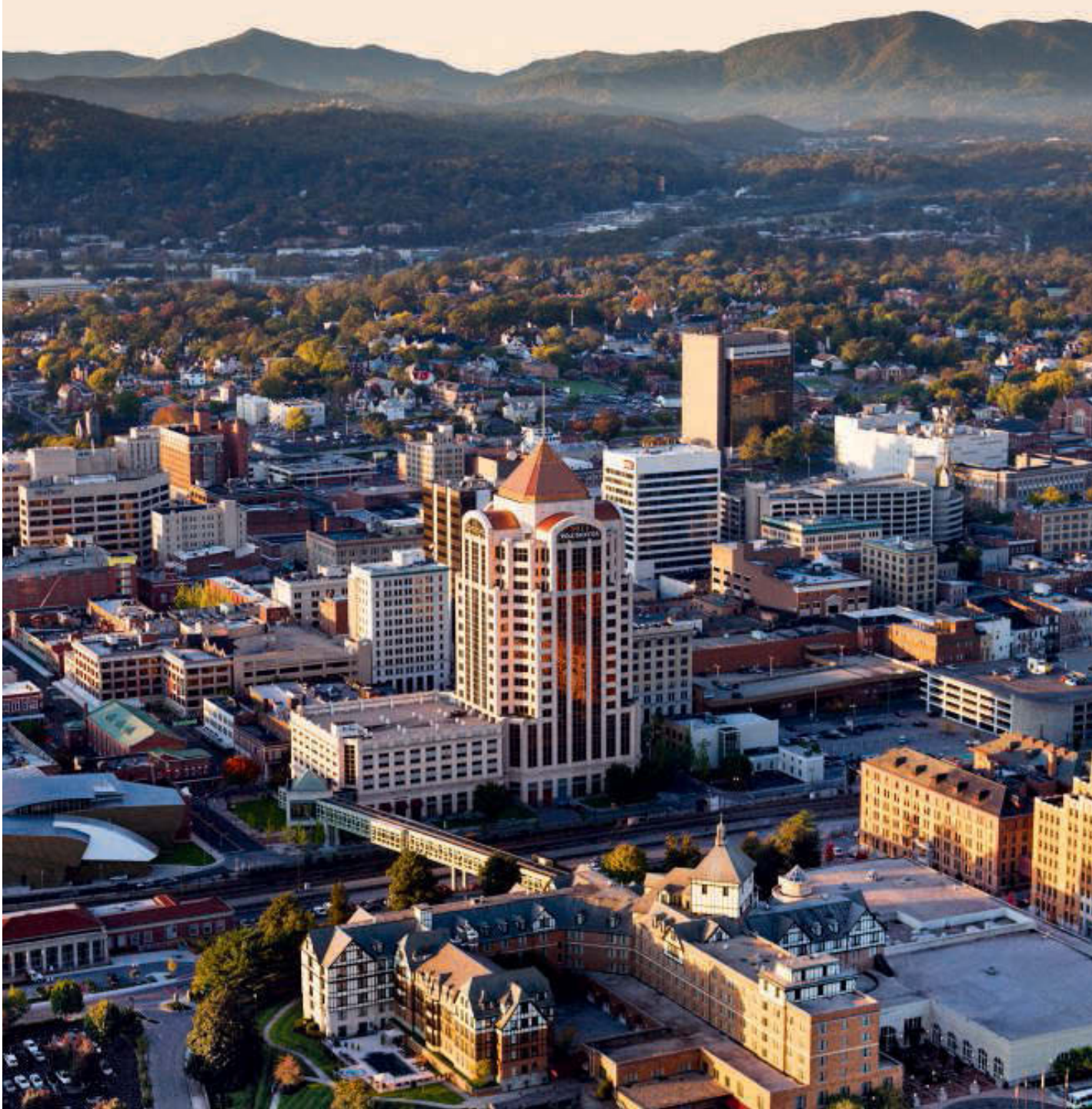
PROFILE  
ROA

# ROANOKE

**BUSINESS:** VIRGINIA IN THE VANGUARD

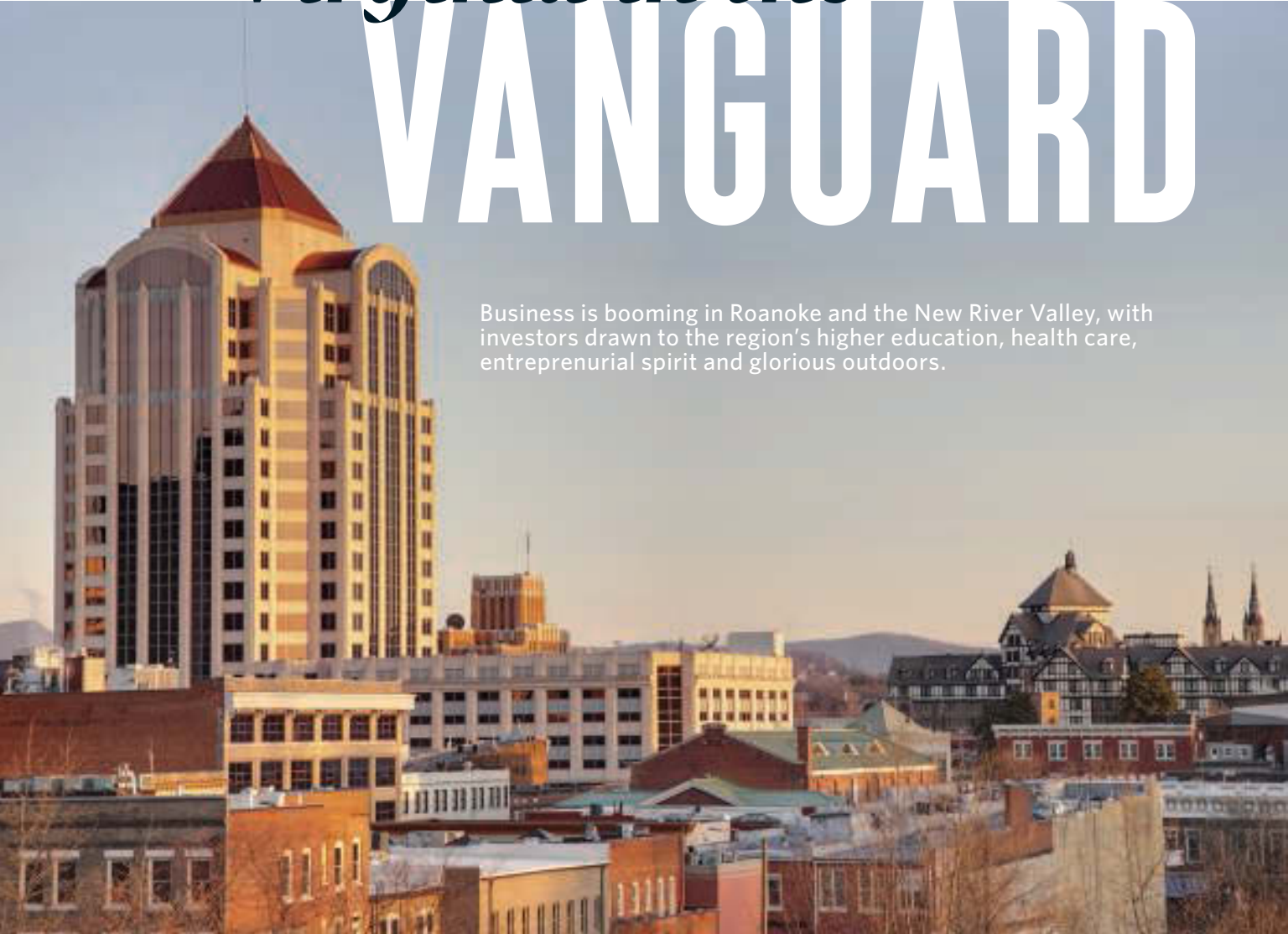
**TOURISM:** BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAIN HIGH

**LOCAL ROOTS:** DAVID BOWERS, NANCY  
AGEE, LARRY HINCKER, NICOLE YUN,  
ROBERT KULP & MIKE WHITESIDE



# Virginia in the VANGUARD

Business is booming in Roanoke and the New River Valley, with investors drawn to the region's higher education, health care, entrepreneurial spirit and glorious outdoors.



BY  
MASON ADAMS

**R**oanoke and the New River Valley were known during the 20th century as a gritty railroad city and home to a cow college, respectively. Over the past three decades, however, the two have emerged as economic up-and-comers, leveraging a growing number of entrepreneurs, a close relationship with higher education and an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities that have attracted a diverse range of employers.

Roanoke and the New River Valley are in separate metropolitan areas with a

combined population of just under half a million people. Both were established during colonial times, though their histories diverged in the late 1800s. Roanoke was chosen in the early 1880s for a major railroad junction that brought prosperity and rapid growth. Meanwhile, in the New River Valley, Blacksburg became home in 1872 to Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, later known as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University—or Virginia Tech for short.

*From left clockwise: Downtown Roanoke; bikers; grad students at Carilion Research Institute; Virginia Tech College campus; Lumenhaus Solar House*



Despite their differences, Roanoke, Blacksburg and their surrounding localities are closely linked by the geography of western Virginia and by Interstate 81, a major commercial and commuter corridor.

During the past few years, Roanoke and the New River Valley have shared an economic resurgence, as both have rebounded

from the Great Recession and have seen the return of manufacturing to the region—with many new investments boasting an international flavor.

In the past few years, food packaging company Ardagh Group (Luxembourg), Korona Candles (Poland), Phoenix Packaging Operations (Colombia), absorbent

## MY ROANOKE

### Mayor David Bowers

**ONLY HERE:** "When you fly into Roanoke, you know you're home when you can look out the window and see the Roanoke Star shining over the city. The neon star a metaphor for Roanoke: We're a six-time All-America City, and we are a people with a history of reaching for the stars in our lives."

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS:**

[People driving down I-581] "see a mountain with a star right in the middle of downtown, the Gothic style of St. Andrew's Catholic Church, the Tudor style of Hotel Roanoke and an eclectic art museum built beside the oldest continuous farmers market in Virginia."

**TIPS FOR VISITORS:** "Come downtown to the restaurants. There's a nice Cajun restaurant, the Quarter, and trendy Lucky restaurant—a neat place to eat with good food. We like a place called the Cedars, a Lebanese restaurant... There's Alejandro's. I always get huevos rancheros. You ought to try a famous hot dog at the [Roanoke] Weiner Stand."





From left: Radford University; Hollins University



paper maker McAirmaid's Vliesstoffe GmbH & Co. KG (Germany) and organic vegetable producer Red Sun Farms (Mexico) all have invested heavily in regional facilities.

Then there are the domestic manufacturers with international customers. Ohio-based Falls Stamping & Welding Company opened a plant to supply a nearby Volvo Trucks plant. Christiansburg's Inorganic Ventures recently doubled its facility, which makes a variety of chemical standards, serves a global customer base and maintains a European distribution center in Spain.

What's bringing these companies to the mountains of western Virginia? Plenty. There's convenient access to major railroads and interstates. A low cost of living and high quality of life. Virginia's "right to work" laws keep labor costs relatively low. And perhaps most significantly, a work force informed by the many institutions of higher learning found throughout the region.

The Roanoke and Blacksburg metropolitan statistical areas are home to Virginia Tech, Radford University, Hollins University, Ferrum College and Roanoke College. Community colleges provide not only a basic level of higher education, but also specialized work force training programs, with New River Community College's instrumentation and control automation program and Virginia Western Community College's mechatronics program as key examples.

Radford University, which has nearly 10,000 students, was named by the Princeton Review as one of the "Best 294 Business Schools" the past three years, and its crim-

inal justice master's program is one of only five in the nation certified by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. Since 2005, Radford has invested more than \$300 million in new construction and renovations.

Hollins University offers undergraduate education for women and graduate programs for both sexes. Its Batten Leadership Institute enables professional women in the area to access additional training through its year-long Certificate in Professional Leadership Program.

Although Roanoke and the New River Valley share in the manufacturing revival, other sectors of their economies have rebounded in divergent ways. Roanoke saw public and private investments made during the recession pay off with real estate developments that appear ready to change the face of the central city for years to come.



**"THE SHARPEST COMPUTER PROGRAMMERS ARE JOINING US ... RIGHT OUT OF SCHOOL AND RATES ARE CHEAPER BECAUSE THE COST OF LIVING HERE IS SMALL. IT'S A MAJOR ADVANTAGE."**

-NATHAN LATKA, HEYO

PHOTOS: PAGE 100-101 (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT): DENIS TANGNEY, JR. / GETTY IMAGES (DOWNTOWN ROANOKE); SCOTT K. BROWN / VIRGINIA TOURISM CORPORATION (BICYCLISTS); JIM STROUP / VIRGINIA TECH (LAB STUDENTS); MICHAEL T. KIERNAN / VIRGINIA TECH (VIRGINIA TECH CAMPUS); JIM STROUP / VIRGINIA TECH (SOLAR HOUSE). THIS PAGE (FROM LEFT): RICHARD BOYD / RADFORD UNIVERSITY (RADFORD UNIVERSITY); COURTESY HOLLINS UNIVERSITY (HOLLINS UNIVERSITY).

## MY NEW RIVER VALLEY

### Larry Hincker

Associate Vice President for University Relations at Virginia Tech

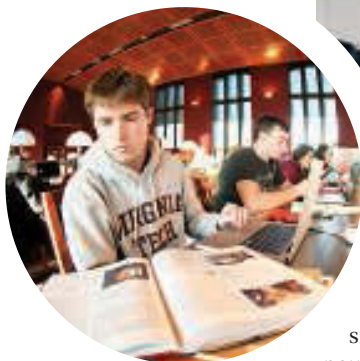
**LOCAL ROOTS:** "I was a Midwest transplant, but I graduated from Andrew Lewis High School and attended Virginia Tech. I left the area in 1970, living on both coasts, but loved the area so much I spent 18 years trying to come home."

**TIPS FOR VISITORS:**

"You must see the Pete Dye River course, even if you don't golf. The view from the deck overlooking the New River is memorable. The drive from Roanoke Valley to Blacksburg via the Catawba Road is a classic Virginia byway."

**WHAT LOCALS KNOW:**

"The Palisades Restaurant in Eggleston. Great food in a Lilliputian town along the New River. It can't get further from civilization, but the cuisine is world-class. I'm also a brew snob, and there's no better Hefeweizen than Farmhouse Hefeweizen at the River Company restaurant in Radford."



From left: Virginia Tech students; Teaching physics at Virginia Tech



The New River Valley, meanwhile, saw an explosion of entrepreneur-driven tech companies that have created a cascading effect that is spurring more innovation and economic diversity. It's all adding up to address a problem that's plagued western Virginia for decades: The so-called "brain drain" that results from a steady flow of homegrown talent from the region to other metropolitan areas.

#### THE VIRGINIA TECH EFFECT

Credit much of the region's growth to Virginia Tech, which has taken an aggressive approach in recent years to encourage students and faculty in business pursuits. That effort not only has provided support for endeavors hatched within the university, but it's also laid the groundwork for the next generation of entrepreneurs and start-ups.

"The university plays such a critical role," says Derick Maggard, executive director of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council. "It produces some of the most intelligent people this nation has. We have them in our backyard, and when we provide them with the tools necessary to create technologies and innovative solutions to big problems, and we do that here in the Roanoke-Blacksburg region, we're grooming them for success. That's the true nature of the best form of economic and community development."

Virginia Tech claims responsibility for an annual economic impact of \$1.5 billion. In Montgomery County, western Virginia's most populous county, the university accounts for a quarter of all jobs and a third of the payroll. Its graduates provide a

steady flow of talent for regional employers, too. "We are a monster economic engine for the region," says Larry Hincker, Virginia Tech's associate vice president for university relations.

Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center, a 230-acre park established in 1985, is home to 155 tenants and 2,700 workers. About half of the companies deal with information technology, another quarter involve biotech and the remainder are a hodgepodge, says Corporate Research Center president Joe Meredith.

One of the largest tenants, cloud computing company Rackspace Hosting, broke ground last summer on a new building that represents a \$5.5 million expansion. Another new building will serve as home to a \$3.5 million propulsion laboratory for Virginia Tech's engineering department.

The CRC's first tenant traces its history to 1985 and is the result of a Virginia Tech search for a new library computing system. Faculty member Dr. Vinod Chachra thought that products on the market weren't up to par and instead developed his own system. Word got out, and other libraries expressed

**"[VIRGINIA TECH] PLAYS SUCH A CRITICAL ROLE. IT PRODUCES SOME OF THE MOST INTELLIGENT PEOPLE THIS NATION HAS. WE HAVE THEM IN OUR BACKYARD."**

-DERICK MAGGARD, ROANOKE-BLACKSBURG TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL



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<p><b>Taubman Museum of Art</b> 540-342-5760   www.taubmanmuseum.org</p>	<p><b>Jack Brown's Beer &amp; Burger Joint</b> 540-342-0328   facebook.com/jbsroanoke</p>
<p><b>The Hotel Roanoke &amp; Conference Center</b> 540-985-5900   www.HotelRoanoke.com</p>	<p><b>O. Winston Link® Museum</b> 540-982-5465   www.linkmuseum.org</p>
<p><b>Virginia Transportation Museum</b> 540-342-5670   www.vmt.org</p>	



From left: Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center; CRC park



interest in adapting the system.

In 1987, Chachra's VTLS Inc.—named for Virginia Tech Library Systems—moved out of the university and into the CRC. Today, it employs 81 people, 53 of whom work from Blacksburg. It does business in 46 countries and maintains offices in Australia, India, Malaysia and Spain. Its clients include both the largest circulating library in the world and the largest in the U.S.

Chachra says he's kept the company in

Blacksburg because of his engagement with Virginia Tech, the presence of a laid-back, creative atmosphere and the steady stream of qualified workers who graduate from regional universities. "When we first moved into the park, there was basically green grass and cows," Chachra says. "Now we've got a critical mass here. We can support each other in the park, learn from each other, trade experiences."

TechLab Inc. marks another success

PHOTOS: MICHAEL KIERNAN/VIRGINIA TECH (CORPORATE RESEARCH CENTER)



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story for Virginia Tech and the research center. Dr. Tracy Wilkins grew the company out of his university research on *Clostridium difficile*, a pathogen that costs the

U.S. health care system more than \$1 billion dollars annually. Wilkins and his team began building diagnostic kits, then formed a company to sell them. TechLab grew in the Corporate Research Center until 2013, when its manufacturing facilities moved into a separate industrial park in nearby Radford.

Aeroprobe Corp., a one-time CRC tenant that makes instruments and software for cars, jets, wind turbines and other applications, similarly grew out of the research park into a new site in the Falling Branch Corporate Park.

The Corporate Research Center is partnering with the National Science Foundation Innovation Corps, the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council and others to support outside, smaller-scale entrepre-



TechLab Inc.

■

**“WE’VE GOT A CRITICAL MASS HERE. WE CAN SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN THE [CORPORATE RESEARCH CENTER] PARK, LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, TRADE EXPERIENCES.”**

-DR. VINOD CHACHRA, VTLS INC.

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Both images:  
NuSpark, a project  
providing entre-  
preneurs free  
space to workshop  
and collaborate.



neers, too. A project known as NuSpark launched in early February, providing entrepreneurs free space to workshop and collaborate on ideas. NuSpark's first tenants include teams working on online lawn care and ceramic razor blades.

Roanoke is home to a similar shared workspace called the Roanoke Business Lounge, which is preparing for a relaunch in a new, larger space known as the CoLab.

Virginia Tech's economic influence isn't limited to the Corporate Research Center, of course. Nathan Latka grew up in Loudon County, Virginia, and attended Virginia Tech as a double major in architecture and business finance. In 2010, having noticed the popularity of social media, Latka started searching Facebook for people with the word "executive" in their title. He cold-called them from his Barringer Hall dorm room to pitch the idea of building a fan page for \$700. On his fifth call, he made his first sale, and within six months, he had presold 100 fan pages.

"When I started, I didn't actually know how to build a fan page," Latka says. "My thinking was that if I couldn't sell enough, I wouldn't bother learning. But after raising \$70,000 in my dorm room, I watched 20 to 100 hours of YouTube videos on how to code Facebook fan pages. That was the start."

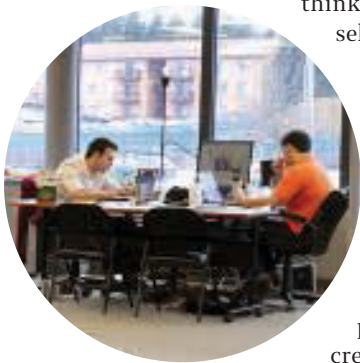
Latka partnered with two programmers to build a drag-and-drop platform that lets businesses create Facebook campaigns to generate more likes and email leads.

When the company, founded as Lujure Media Inc. but now known as Heyo, started earning five figures in revenue per month,

he decided to drop out of school to focus on the business.

Today, the company employs 10 full-time employees and six part-time employees. While investors from other parts of the country have tried to lure Heyo out of Blacksburg, Latka says there are better reasons to remain in the New River Valley, including a low operating cost, short travel distances to the Mid-Atlantic's larger metros and a steady stream of talented graduates. "The sharpest computer programmers are joining us as interns during college, then as full-time employees right out of school and rates are cheaper because the cost of living here is so small," Latka says. "It's a major advantage."

To the north, in downtown Roanoke, Meridium founder and CEO Bonz Hart has much the same perspective. He landed in the region after working for a Canadian software company and founded Meridium in 1993. Today the company works with clients in 75 countries and has offices in Houston, Madrid, Dubai, Bangalore and Singapore. It's headquartered in a highly



**"AFTER RAISING \$70,000 IN MY DORM ROOM, I WATCHED 20 TO 100 HOURS OF YOUTUBE VIDEOS ON HOW TO CODE FACEBOOK FAN PAGES. THAT WAS THE START."**

-NATHAN LATKA, HEYO



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From top: Roanoke Greenway; hikers in Explore Park

visible building that sits by Interstate 581 in downtown Roanoke.

“I loved the area,” Hart says of his decision to build Meridium from the Roanoke Valley. “I loved the flexibility as a place to live as well as the really nice people. That was one of the drivers for it. I was interested in having a different type of product to recruit to, versus another box office building in an office park near an airport near a big city. I thought we could find people who had a passion for simpler lives and being able to do outdoor activities.”

The company spent years in a 21-story office building near the railroad tracks, but when it came time to expand, Hart selected a historic building that had previously served as a hardware store, a sanitary chemical warehouse and a furniture store. The building sits next to a city park, is within walking distance of the restaurant-heavy City Market district and still is close enough to the Blue Ridge Parkway to provide daily recreational opportunities for Meridium employees.

“We have a group of people and families who on a nice day will go on a bike ride from our offices up to Mill Mountain and then out to Roanoke Mountain,” Hart says. “We have showers on our first floor so they can go on walks, bike rides and hikes, then take showers and go back to work. On a bad day, they can go down to our exercise room and clear their heads.”

“We find that people who are self-motivated like that do well in business and do a great job of serving customers. They have the ‘I’m just going to do it’ attitude, and people tell us they can tell the difference.”

## BRANDING THE OUTDOORS

The Roanoke Regional Partnership, an economic development group funded by 240 private businesses and eight western Virginia localities, picked up on that concept.

“You stop people on the street and ask what makes this place special—nine out of 10 talk in some form or fashion about the rivers, lake, mountains, the natural beauty,” says Pete Eshelman, director of outdoor branding for the Roanoke Regional Partnership. “That’s an asset we weren’t really using. There’s real potential to sell quality of life.”

Eshelman was hired in 2009 to find ways of leveraging those outdoor assets and use them to attract talent and investment. His targets fall into four categories: 1) Outdoor-oriented companies such as Backcountry.

**“I WAS INTERESTED IN HAVING A DIFFERENT TYPE OF PRODUCT TO RECRUIT TO . . . I THOUGHT WE COULD FIND PEOPLE WHO HAD A PASSION FOR SIMPLER LIVES AND BEING ABLE TO DO OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES.”**

**-BONZ HART, MERIDIUM**





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Foot Levelers  
Blue Ridge  
Marathon

com, a Web-based retailer from Utah that built its East Coast warehouse and distribution center in Christiansburg; 2) Companies that use the outdoors as part of their brand; 3) Businesses such as Meridium, which incorporate outdoor recreation into their employee culture; and 4) Individuals attracted to the outdoor lifestyle, which works on two levels—those who choose where they live based on quality of life and local companies that use the outdoor story to recruit talent.

The RRP’s “Roanoke Outside” initiative has added new attractions to build on the region’s existing assets. In 2010, it launched the Foot Levelers Blue Ridge Marathon, which starts and ends in downtown Roanoke, climbing three mountains in

between. A year later, it added the Roanoke Go Outside Festival, which attracts outdoor enthusiasts of all stripes to the River’s Edge Sports Complex. “We invite national companies to come here for the Go Outside Festival,” Eshelman says. “Now these companies know about Roanoke. We’re on their radar, and if they’re looking at expansion or opening a new retail store, they know about us.”

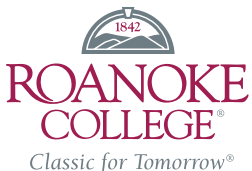
The River’s Edge Sports Complex is a particularly appropriate site for the festival. It sits along the Roanoke River Greenway, a winding asphalt path that extends seven miles and serves as a gateway to get people walking, running and biking. In 2012, the city council officially made the sports complex and surrounding parcels part of downtown Roanoke. At first blush that designation seems like a stretch, since the land sits along a river and at the base of Mill Mountain, which is adorned by the city’s famous, 89-foot neon star.

PHOTOS: ROANOKE VALLEY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU (MARATHON RUNNER); JIM STROUP/VIRGINIA TECH (CARILLION CLINIC, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR).

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### HEALTH CARE HUB

Despite its pastoral appearance, the River's Edge Sports Complex sits just a mile from the City Market Building—long considered the heart of downtown Roanoke. The districts are connected by a street lined with medical practices and commercial businesses that receive free trolley service. And the expanded “downtown” designation links the region’s largest employer, Carilion Clinic, with a revitalized city core. Carilion operates eight regional hospitals, including the flagship Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, which sits between Mill Mountain and River’s Edge Sports Complex.

Carilion provides the bulk of the region’s health care and drives a growing economic sector, particularly in terms of employment and investment. With 12,000 employees, Carilion Clinic is the largest private employer west of Richmond. Roughly 750 physicians and midlevel practitioners work there, along with 250 residents and fellows.



In 2006, this economic giant began a major transition away from merely running hospitals toward a more comprehensive clinic system.

“We are evolving from a system of hospitals to an integrated system where our physician group, our provider group, is on top of the organization and leads the organization,” says Carilion CEO Nancy Agee. “It includes hospitals, but other services, too—physician practices, home health, hospices. It’s a whole constellation of services for patients.”



Carilion School of Medicine; Carilion Research Institute



## These Virginia destinations aren't on everyone's bucket list, but they should be!

### Cascades Giles County



### Mtn Lake Conservancy Giles County



### Mabry Mill & Blue Ridge Parkway Floyd County



Pandapas Pond  
Montgomery County



Bissett Park  
Radford City



New River Trail & Claytor Lake  
Pulaski County



Huckleberry Trail  
Montgomery County



## MY ROANOKE

### Nancy Agee

President and CEO  
of Carilion Clinic

**LOCAL ROOTS:** "I was born here at Roanoke Memorial Hospital and grew up in the Grandin Road area. That's one thing that's wonderful about this valley—we have so many little neighborhoods."

**ONLY HERE:** "You'll only find the Roanoke Star here, overlooking the Roanoke Valley. You'll only find the Texas Tavern and some really fabulous food. We are so blessed with wonderful small restaurants. There's a real vibrancy downtown. We have the Taubman Museum of Art, which is an amazing arts center. The building itself is a piece of art. There's Center in the Square, which others are trying to emulate. We have a really vibrant downtown where people are working and living."

**TIPS FOR VISITORS:** "Go to the market area. Go to the O. Winston Link Museum, Center in the Square and the Taubman Museum of Art. Take a walk along the Appalachian Trail. Go up to the Roanoke Star."



From left: Roanoke City Market; Neuroimaging Lab and Computational Psychiatry Unit at Carilion



The shift includes an enhanced approach to education. As part of its development, however, Carilion partnered with Virginia Tech to establish the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute. The medical school accepted its first class in 2010 and reached full capacity during the 2013-14 academic year. In four years, the facility generated nearly \$50 million of funded research, Agee says.

#### DOWNTOWN BOOM

The medical school has sparked development unrelated to health care, as well. Across the street, an investment group, WVS Companies, optioned a 22-acre site for a mixed-use project called The Bridges that carries an estimated \$150 million build-out value. The \$13 million first phase includes renovation of a historic warehouse for restaurants and construction of a 157-unit apartment building. Future phases include a kayak launch, a river walk and additional retail and housing.

Linking the medical school and new development along the river may help drive even more momentum for a city center that's been on a roll in recent years. Once the thriving heart of business in Roanoke, during the early 2000s, the downtown district was hit hard by development in the surrounding suburbs.

Developer Ed Walker sparked a trend, however, when he used historic tax credits to renovate and convert stores and old hotels into rental apartments and condos. The resulting demand from young professionals and retirees sparked a series of similar projects by Walker and others, and a new

city center emerged, seemingly overnight. Fewer than 50 people lived downtown before 2000; more than 600 lived there by 2010; by 2013, the population had more than doubled to about 1,300.

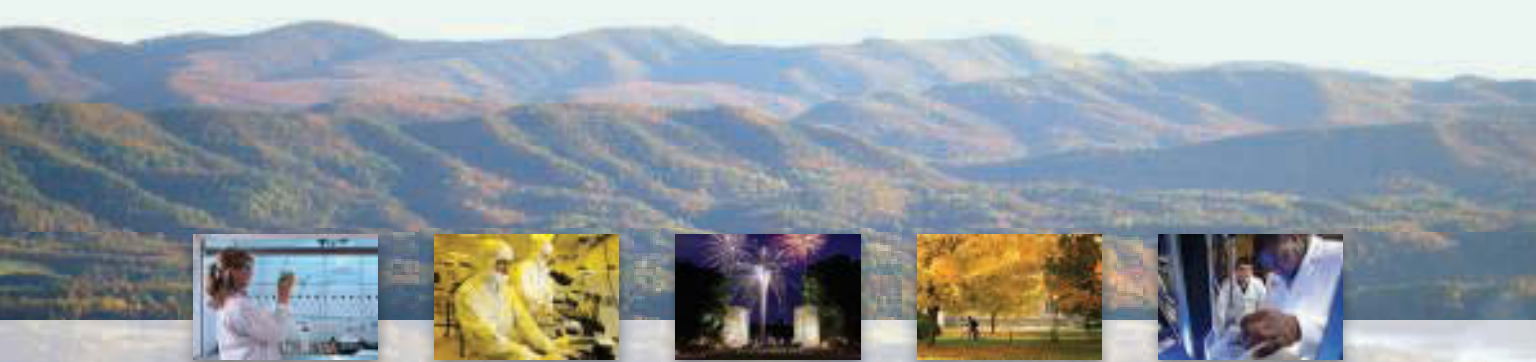
Those new residents have embraced the work/play/live ethic of downtown Roanoke, but they've also been attracted there for a wide variety of business reasons. That's emblematic of the region's wider appeal. Maggard, director of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, admits that it's difficult to define the region's appeal with a single label. Both Roanoke and the New River Valley are playing to their strengths, and that's a good thing.

"The region has a really cool opportunity," Maggard says. "It is the outdoor mecca. It is a great place to start a company. It is the arts hub. It is the best place to raise a family. It is all of those things." ▼



**"THE REGION . . . IS THE OUTDOOR MECCA. IT IS A GREAT PLACE TO START A COMPANY. IT IS THE ARTS HUB. IT IS THE BEST PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY. IT IS ALL OF THOSE THINGS."**

-DERICK MAGGARD, ROANOKE-BLACKSBURG TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL



# You can say a lot of things about the New River Valley of Virginia. We like to let others do the talking...

Named the "Best Place in the U.S. to Raise Kids" - Bloomberg/Businessweek.com

Named a "Perfect Place" and one of the "Top 10 Dream Towns" - Outside Magazine

2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of PH.D.'s per capita in the U.S. - Expansion Management

Ranked 7<sup>th</sup> most secure town to live in the U.S. - Annual Farmers Insurance Group of Companies Study

Named one of the "Best Places to Live and Launch" - CNNMoney.com

Named the 14<sup>th</sup> Smartest City in the U.S. - Lumosity



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## *Inventing the future around the world.*

Founded as part of the 19th century land-grant college movement, Virginia Tech has evolved into one of the nation's top research universities, an academic leader with a tradition of service and innovation that stretches across five continents.

With a research portfolio of nearly \$500 million, Virginia Tech ranks 40th among U.S. research universities. That research has led Tech students to protect biodiversity in Appalachia and water quality in Botswana. They've designed and built vehicles that drive themselves; robots that play soccer; and a house that creates its own power, captures and purifies its own water, and adapts itself to the weather. That building, Lumenhaus, won the 2010 International Solar Decathlon, besting entries from 15 other international research universities. In December 2013, the Federal Aviation Administration chose Virginia Tech and its partner institutions in Maryland and New Jersey as one of six teams to test and develop systems to integrate unmanned aerial vehicles into U.S. airspace.



Moss Arts Center

### **Leading and learning**

Virginia Tech is more than a great science and engineering school. It offers 225 undergraduate and graduate degree programs and ranks among the United States' top 25 public universities. The 2013 opening of the \$100 million Moss Arts Center highlighted the university's commitment to the arts. Tech students learn to work across disciplines and to succeed within an academic community that comprises students from across the United

States and more than 100 other countries. The university, which is consistently included in lists of best educational values, is in Blacksburg, Va. That town and the county around it have been on some superlative lists of their own, including best college town, and best place to raise children, find a job, start a business, and retire. Virginia Tech has a lot to do with those accolades. The university not only enhances the local quality of life through cultural experiences and sporting events, it is also a \$1.5 billion force in the local economy. Since 2010, companies created or led by Virginia Tech alumni have created almost 500 jobs and \$13 million in economic growth in the county.

### **Expanding reach**

The university's economic and educational benefits extend far beyond its 2,600-acre Blacksburg campus. In Roanoke, the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute is a public-private partnership that benefits the region's health and economy while educating the doctors and searching for the medical miracles of the future. The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center has transformed a historic hotel into a magnet for national and international conferences. Virginia Tech has education and research centers in Southwest Virginia, Southside Virginia, Hampton Roads, Richmond, and the Washington, D.C., metro area. They include the Commonwealth Center for Advanced Manufacturing (CCAM), where Tech has teamed with three other Virginia universities, NASA, and 18 companies, ranging from Rolls-Royce to Canon to Siemens to Newport News Shipbuilding, in part to bridge the gap between basic university research and the commercial application of that research.



Main Campus, Blacksburg, Va.



Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center



Hotel Roanoke &amp; Conference Center

The university's reach isn't limited by the commonwealth's boundaries. Through its Office of International Research, Education, and Development, Virginia Tech partners with 80 universities and institutions in 44 countries, managing a research grant portfolio of more \$100 million. The university's most developed international outposts are its Caribbean Center for Education and Research in Punta Cana, in the Dominican Republic, and the Center for European Studies and Architecture in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland. Tech's newest international campus is in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. A public-private partnership with MARG Swarnabhoomi, the campus is researching alternative energy sources, working to harness wind and solar power to serve the 400 million Indians who live off the grid.

### Innovation ecosystem

While its reach stretches around the world, some of Virginia Tech's most powerful work is done close to the university's main campus, at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (VTCRC). Named the Association of University Research Parks' outstanding research park of 2010, the VTCRC has developed from an empty field into a 230-acre park that is home to 150 companies with 2,700 employees – with plenty of space for more. The VTCRC is part of the university's innovation ecosystem, an environment that nurtures ideas and grows them into businesses. It gives those businesses the advantage of access to Virginia Tech faculty, students, and facilities, as well as a supportive incubator system through VT KnowledgeWorks that helps create business-based technology.



Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute

The Virginia Tech Foundation invests in local economic development, in venture funds committed to the area, and in enterprises such as NuSPARK, a start-up work space to facilitate the creation of companies.

Virginia Tech's tagline is "Invent the Future," and the future is indeed being invented every day at the university's facilities and by Virginia Tech faculty, students, alumni, and partners. But the university also follows its motto, *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), by serving an innovative, high-tech business community that advances the university's research and educational missions while creating jobs, strengthening economies, and improving lives.

*At Virginia Tech, collaboration and innovation are at our core. Join us now.*

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# Blue Ridge

# MOUNTAIN HIGH

Roanoke and the New River Valley lure with plenty of outdoor adventures set against stunning mountain backdrops. Add in farm-to-table dining, local microbrews and a buzzy cultural scene, and these Southwest Virginia destinations are thriving.



BY  
JENNY KINCAID  
BOONE

**T**he late April day begins just after sunrise. More than 1,000 runners stand at the starting line. The gun fires, and they take off, headed for the Roanoke Valley's highest point—Mill Mountain—and the backdrop of this Southwest Virginia region, bordered by the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Appalachian Trail.

This is the **Foot Levelers Blue Ridge Marathon**, a course that not only takes runners up one mountain—it also climbs a second, for a 7,430-foot elevation change.

Intense? Organizers set out to make this marathon America's toughest on the road. It captures the can-do spirit of this region,

where a jagged blue mountain outline frames most every view. Here, strangers greet one another when passing and drivers rarely honk car horns.

The Roanoke and New River valleys, once a crossroads for the Norfolk and Western Railway, combine a strong rail heritage and rich Southern charm with thriving arts and culture, unique dining, budding breweries and a mountainous mecca for seasoned outdoor adventurers or casual explorers.

## ON FOOT

Lace up your running shoes, grab a water bottle or hop on your bicycle. The region's

*From left clockwise: McAfee knob on the Appalachian Trail; Blacksburg Brew Do festival; Virginia Tech football; Alexander's Restaurant; Explore Park*



**MY ROANOKE**

**Nicole Yun**

Lead singer/guitarist with the indie-rock band Eternal Summers, which released its newest album last month.

**LOCAL ROOTS:** Yun, a Washington, D.C., native, settled in Roanoke in 2006 after getting married. Before that she lived in Blacksburg, Virginia.

**ONLY HERE:** The Bazaar, a record/consignment shop; Taaza Indian Cuisine; Roanoke Natural Foods Co-op; Pop's Ice Cream & Soda Bar, where "you walk in and you're in a time warp."

**WHY HERE?** "A lot of bands that flock to Brooklyn or LA don't realize that there are a lot of trends, knitting of ideas, influencing of each other here. We feel like we can focus here. We are big fans of just being close to nature and natural things."

**HANGOUT:** Wasena Park: "Sometimes I'll go there with a friend to catch up. We'll go and walk the greenway. I've done a few cookouts there in the summer."

**THE VIBE:** "I really don't get stressed out in Roanoke. I enjoy having a city that has beautiful mountains, skyline, trees and parks."



Adventurous types can bike two miles up Roanoke's Mill Mountain and stop at the **Roanoke Star overlook** for a stunning view of the valley. Travel another few miles to the National Park Service's **Blue Ridge Parkway**, meandering 469 miles through Virginia and North Carolina. Head south on the parkway to check out **Explore Park**, the site of numerous mountain bike and running competitions. It offers nine miles of mountain biking trails and access to the Roanoke River.

For a strenuous climb and a 270-degree panorama of the Roanoke and Catawba

outdoor gems are best seen on foot or bike. Locals love Roanoke's **greenways**, paths that connect various spots around the city. Bikers, joggers and walkers traverse greenways alongside the Roanoke River or through parks. For bikers, rent a bike at **UnderDog Bikes**, at the base of Mill Mountain.

PHOTO CREDITS, PAGE 122.





From left: Explore Park historical area; Mountains of Misery ride in Blacksburg; Explore Park environmental education



valleys, head outside of the city to **McAfee Knob**.

This 8.3-mile loop is the most photographed spot on the Appalachian Trail. In the New River Valley, don't miss **Cascade Falls**, a

breathtaking 69-foot waterfall in Pembroke. It's

part of a four-mile loop trail for beginner to intermediate hikers. And not too far away is **Mountain Lake Conservancy**, where there are 22 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails. Remember 1987's *Dirty Dancing*? It was filmed here.

Bikers hungry for a serious challenge flock to the annual **Mountains of Misery** ride in Blacksburg. It features century and double metric century mileage options and more than 10,000 feet of climbing.

The region's relaxing lakes and rivers also offer a chance to unwind. Sail, water-ski, golf or simply take in the view at **Smith Mountain Lake**, the second-largest freshwater lake in the state. Choose a sunny day for tubing, kayaking or canoeing on New River

in Blacksburg or on the James River in Buchanan or Botetourt County. **Twin River Outfitters** on the James River offers tube, kayak and canoe rentals and canoe camping trips. With all of these outdoor options, it's no surprise that Roanoke was voted best trail town by *Blue Ridge Outdoors* magazine in 2013.

#### ON THE TABLE

Come hungry—and thirsty—to Southwest Virginia. Dining options are diverse, but many restaurants serve a common Southern treat: sweet tea.



**"I REALLY DON'T GET STRESSED OUT IN ROANOKE. I ENJOY HAVING A CITY THAT HAS BEAUTIFUL MOUNTAINS, SKYLINE, TREES AND PARKS."**

-NICOLE YUN OF THE BAND ETERNAL SUMMERS



PHOTOS: PAGE 120-121 (FROM LEFT, CLOCKWISE): ROANOKE VALLEY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU (MCAFFEE KNOB); ROANOKE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION AND TOURISM (KIDS AT EXPLORE PARK); P. 122: HISTORICAL AREA, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION).

Find some regional flavor within the area's growing farm-to-table restaurant scene. At **Local Roots Restaurant** in Roanoke's Grandin Village, the menu changes based on produce and meats available from local farms. Salem's **Blue Apron Restaurant & Red Rooster Bar** features local farm tastes with a modern twist. Downtown Roanoke's **Alexander's Restaurant** fills its menu with vegetables, herbs, meats and cheeses from 7Hills farm in Floyd County. **Blacksburg Taphouse** serves grass-fed beef from Grayson Natural Farms in Virginia.

For a vibe that's true to the region, treat yourself to lunch, dinner or brunch at the grand **Regency Room** at the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, an 1882 restored Tudor hotel in downtown Roanoke. Try the peanut soup.

If you're in a comfort food mood, have breakfast at the 73-year-old **Roanoker Restaurant**. Its heavenly butter-



milk biscuit recipe is featured in the cookbook *Southern Living Off the Eaten Path*.

For dinner, tuck into mashed potatoes and green beans at the family-style **Homeplace Restaurant** in Catawba, where diners sit on the farmhouse's porch while waiting for a table.

**Mill Mountain Coffee & Tea** is a household name for fresh roasted coffee in Roanoke; its beans are hand-roasted at three of the company's five locations. Organic beans are roasted at **Red Rooster Coffee Roaster** in Floyd (about half an hour from Roanoke), named for its bright red electric roaster.

You can't visit downtown Roanoke without stopping by **Texas Tavern**, a 1930s mainstay that never closes, has 10 seats and



From top left: Local Roots Restaurant; Blue Apron Restaurant; Blacksburg Taphouse

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## MY ROANOKE

### Robert Kulp & Mike Whiteside

Stars of the DIY Network reality show *Salvage Dawgs*, Kulp and Whiteside own Black Dog Salvage, an architectural salvage and custom design business in Roanoke.

**MUST VISIT?** "I always tell people that they need to go up to the top of Mill Mountain and see the valley from there," Kulp says. Also, he suggests a stop at the downtown Roanoke Farmers Market. "It's a great place to get the flavor of what our town is like."

**ONLY HERE:** "The outdoor life is the best of almost anywhere I've been," Whiteside says. "I've lived a lot of places around the country, and this is one of the prettiest areas."

**WHERE YOU'LL FIND THEM (IN NICE WEATHER):** Kulp says he'll be driving Black Dog's vintage cabin cruiser at Smith Mountain Lake. As for Whiteside? Riding his motorcycle. "There's great motorcycle riding around here," he says. "I usually use the [Blue Ridge] Parkway to get to another area to ride."



From left: Blacksburg Brew Do festival; Mill Mountain Theatre



its own lingo. Order a "bowl with" and you'll get "chile" with onions. For more tastes and history, take a walking tour of downtown Roanoke's notable eateries with Roanoke Food Tours.

#### ON TAP

Local microbrews are on tap at many eateries. The region's growing craft breweries produce some of the tastiest lagers, stouts and porters in the country.

One of the first in the region was **Roanoke Railhouse Brewery**, which offers a robust session beer as its signature lager. Others include Salem's **Parkway Brewing Co.**, **Flying Mouse Brewery** in Troutville and **Sunken City Brewing Co.** in Hardy. The New River Valley has a great selection of brewpubs as well, including **Bull & Bones Brewhaus & Grill** in Blacksburg and **The River Company Restaurant & Brewery** in Radford.

For even more suds, plan your visit

"I'VE LIVED A LOT OF PLACES AROUND THE COUNTRY, AND THIS IS ONE OF THE PRETTIEST AREAS. WE HEAR IT A LOT, TOO, FROM PEOPLE [WHO] SAY, 'I DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS THIS BEAUTIFUL.'" -MIKE WHITESIDE, *SALVAGE DAWGS*

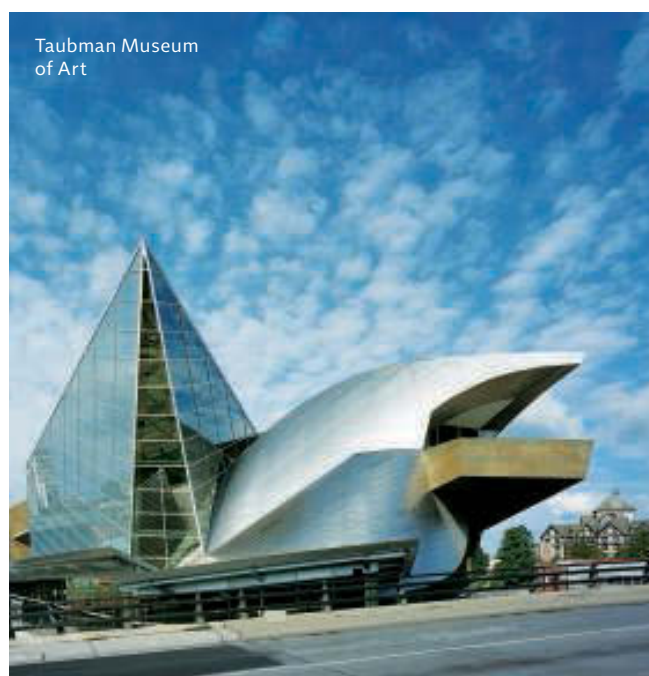
during popular craft beer festivals such as the **Blacksburg Brew Do** and **Microfestivus** in Roanoke.

#### ON THE TOWN

From art and zoo animals to museums and college football, you'll be busy in Southwest Virginia.

The modern **Taubman Museum of Art** in downtown Roanoke is a must-see, with its steel and glass exterior and American and international art collections and exhibitions. Downtown galleries showcase work by the region's artists as well.

Center in the Square, also in downtown, is a one-stop shop for culture. It houses



Taubman Museum of Art

PHOTOS: COURTESY DIY NETWORK (KULP & WHITESIDE); MILL MOUNTAIN THEATRE (ANNABELLA OPERA BOX).



From left:  
Virginia Tech  
football; Mill  
Mountain Zoo



museums, including the **Science Museum of Western Virginia** and **History Museum of Western Virginia**, as well as music and theater, such as **Mill Mountain Theatre** and **Opera Roanoke**. Check out the science museum's fourth-floor butterfly garden, an indoor habitat with live butterflies and plants.

Rail history buffs will enjoy perusing photographs of steam locomotive history at the **O. Winston Link Museum** in Roanoke.

What about the kids? Take them to visit more than 175 animals and ride the Zoo Choo Train at Roanoke's **Mill Mountain Zoo**.

Sports are also a major draw. Blacksburg's Lane Stadium/Worsham Field lights up each fall for Atlantic Coast Conference football powerhouse, **Virginia Tech**. In summer, cheer on Salem's minor league baseball team, the **Salem Red Sox**. Catch a foul ball and a beautiful mountain sunset from the bleachers at Salem Memorial Ballpark. ▽

PHOTOS: JOHN MCCORMICK (VIRGINIA TECH FOOTBALL); ROANOKE VALLEY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU (MILL MOUNTAIN ZOO).

# There's so much to Love in Salem, Virginia this Summer!



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