

ANNUAL REPORT



step into
BLACKSBURG

THE **BLACKSBURG** PARTNERSHIP

506 South Main Street Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 443-2008 | info@blacksburgpartnership.org
www.stepintoblacksburg.org

NOTE FROM OUR CHAIR

Dear Investors,

It's been another busy year for The Blacksburg Partnership with the leadership of Diane Akers, her team, and our active Board and Investors. The Partnership continues to be involved with a number of initiatives that are not only good for Blacksburg but also, for our entire region.

Transportation has been a major theme during the past year. Efforts surrounding NRV Rail 2020 have continued with representatives from every locality in the NRV actively engaged. A station ownership and maintenance study was completed and recommendations were made to fund the initiative through a local rail authority. Students from Virginia Tech's School of Architecture presented design possibilities for the new station, a new website was launched, and new marketing materials have been developed. We will continue to keep our communities engaged as we advocate for NRV Rail 2020.

In addition to our efforts with passenger rail, several Partnership leaders were involved in advocacy efforts with the I-81 Federation and discussions with state legislators that eventually led to funding for I-81 improvements.

Our signature events, Fork & Cork, Brew Do, and the Virginia Cheese Fest Farm to Table Dinner continue to be successful. These events draw locals and visitors alike to Blacksburg for an entertaining experience. Fork & Cork and Brew Do, both in their 11th years, routinely draw up to 4,000 attendees each year and generate funds to help promote and market the community.

The Partnership's role to advocate, inform, convene, and collaborate takes shape in many different ways. The Step into Blacksburg website has been relaunched, with an updated look and more information. Investor meetings provide presentations with the latest information about important issues facing our community. Committee work and meetings transform this information into action. From leveraging funds for Access to Community College Education (ACCE) in Montgomery County, to supporting a successful outcome for the redevelopment of the Old Blacksburg Middle school site with Midtown, the Partnership is there to play an important role.

As my term comes to an end, I am inspired by the direction of our strategic planning committee. We are gaining insights from multiple perspectives as we take a deep dive into our priorities moving forward. I am excited to continue working with you as we strive to make Blacksburg a vibrant place to live, work, play and learn.

Kristi Snyder
Chair, The Blacksburg Partnership

CONTENT

OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION	4
> STEP INTO BLACKSBURG	5
> COMMUNICATING SOCIALLY	6
ARTS & COMMUNITY	8
> COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS	10
DEVELOPMENT	11
> PASSENGER RAIL	13
SIGNATURE EVENTS	14
INVESTORS	16
FINANCIALS	16



STEP INTO BLACKSBURG

The Blacksburg Partnership's stepintoblacksburg.org website underwent a revamp and relaunch this past spring. The website has expanded to include an interactive interface for site users, as well as updated resources. The purpose of the website is to showcase the amenities and resources that Blacksburg has to offer to appeal to residents, visitors, and those thinking of relocating to the area. In November, The Partnership applied and received funds from the Virginia Tourism Corporation Marketing Leverage Grant. These funds were used partly to fund the creation of the new website and to launch a comprehensive marketing campaign to attract outdoor enthusiasts, young professionals and artists to the Blacksburg Community.

CONNECTING

COMMUNITY

The Blacksburg Partnership boasts a robust outreach and communication program dedicated to promoting the assets of the Blacksburg Community to visitors, prospective business and existing residents. The organization builds connections with businesses, government entities, higher education and young professionals who are helping build a bright and exciting future for the Town of Blacksburg. The following are just a few examples of the resources used to execute the outreach and communications program.



COMMUNICATING SOCIALLY

IT'S HOW WE REACH PEOPLE

Social media is of the utmost importance for marketing in the digital age because it is a way to connect directly with key audiences. Digital marketing plays a major role in how the Partnership connects with the community. The use of social media allows the organization to advocate its goals, receive feedback and drive website traffic. The Partnership manages its nine brands on 21 social media pages across three platforms reaching over 25,000 people.

STEP INTO BLACKSBURG

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| HUMANS OF BLACKSBURG | BLACKSBURG BREW DO |
| GOBBLE DE ART | BLACKSBURG FORK & CORK |
| NRV RAIL 2020 | BLACKSBURG RESTAURANT WEEK |
| VIRGINIA CHEESE FEST | BLACKSBURG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS |

SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE NUMBERS

6 
Accounts 6K followers

9 
Accounts 16K followers

6 
Accounts 3.8K followers

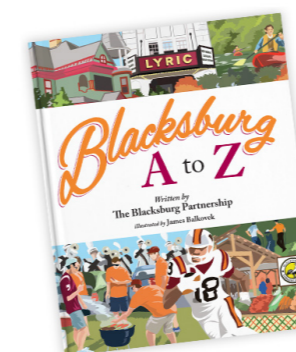
HUMANS OF BLACKSBURG what makes Blacksburg unique



Humans of Blacksburg is a social media campaign mirrored after the popular Humans of New York project. It was started in the summer of 2017 to promote Blacksburg and showcase the individuals who make the town a special and unique place. Since the start of the campaign, the project has grown with over 85 individuals who have shared their stories.


PROMOTION and advertising

The Blacksburg Partnership uses a variety of avenues to advertise and advocate Blacksburg. Through these platforms, the organization interacts and reaches its key audiences. The Partnership uses and distributes visitor guides to attract individuals to the town and highlight all that Blacksburg has to offer. Starting in May 2019, the Partnership has an ad panel through the end of the year at the Clear Brook Welcome Center to encourage people to visit the new Step Into Blacksburg website. Additionally, the organization has a Blacksburg A to Z Book that appeals to visitors, locals and newcomers. These are just a few ways in which the Partnership promotes its cause.



How we Reach the community

-  NRV Magazine
Posters + Save the Dates
The News Messenger
Valley Business Front Magazine
The Moss Arts Center

-  New River Radio Group
Positive Radio Group
The Mountain 102.5
WDBJ 7
WFXR

-  Next Three Days
NRV Macaroni Kid
Vimeo Community Arts Series

-  Facebook
Instagram
Twitter



PROMOTING ARTS



1,028

WEBSITE VISITORS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

25%

WEBSITE TRAFFIC INCREASE

657 Views

“SECRET LIFE OF THE HOKIE BIRD” MOST VIEWED BLOG

During the summer of 2006, the Gobble de Art program placed over 60 fabulously decorated Hokie Bird Statues all around Blacksburg. The purpose of the project was and remains to increase awareness and interest in the community, while bringing attention to the visual arts. The program lives on through its work with local artists to create new Hokie Bird designs, a line of small Hokie Birds and complementing merchandise.



Gobble de Art connects with its community through an integrated digital marketing plan that includes blogging, social media, monthly newsletters, as well as community outreach efforts. This year, seven new custom-designed Hokie Birds were added to the Gobble de Art flock.



BLACKSBURG — a creative village —

COLLABORATIVE FOR THE ARTS fostering a creative village

The Blacksburg Partnership Collaborative for the Arts (BPCA) fosters a vibrant and diverse arts environment in the Town of Blacksburg - a creative village - by providing leadership, capacity building services, advocacy, education and information that supports local artists, arts organizations, and arts initiatives in the Town and at Virginia Tech.

In communicating with artists, projects were identified which the BPCA has worked on. A community listserv and Facebook group were created to increase ways in which artists could more effectively communicate with each other. The group is also currently working on developing a database of available spaces within the Town of Blacksburg that artists can rent and use for studios, performances, and more.

The BPCA offered an Artist Training Workshop in collaboration with the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center and is currently working on developing a Public Art Plan to propose to Town Council this summer.



COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

The Blacksburg Partnership works closely with other organizations in the community to promote Blacksburg. In addition to the following initiatives, the Partnership has regular meetings with the Blacksburg Mayor, the Town Manager and the CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation. The Partnership also collaborates with the Regional Commission on both Partnership and transportation issues. Additionally, the organization partners with Virginia Tech and Radford University through internships and work study programs.



MARKET SQUARE JAM

Sponsored the weekly Market Square Jam in collaboration with the Town of Blacksburg. The Crooked Road affiliated Jam caters to traditional old-time music and encourages musicians and music lovers to attend the inviting atmosphere of the Blacksburg Farmers Market.



BLACKSBURG FOOD TOUR

Partnered with Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., and the Town of Blacksburg to create Blacksburg Food Tours that showcase Blacksburg history, art and culture while promoting Blacksburg cuisine.



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

The Committee focuses on creating an inviting and vibrant downtown with retail stores, restaurants and services for all ages. The recruitment subcommittee works to recruit businesses to fill vacant spaces and interacts with downtown property owners to better understand their leasing issues.



BLACKSBURG RESTAURANT WEEK

Partnering with Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., local restaurants create weeklong specials to help boost revenue during the slower summer months.



BLACKSBURG GALLERY GUIDE

Partnering with Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., this is a comprehensive walking guide of Blacksburg's art galleries.



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Participated in Montgomery County Tourism Development Council meetings, which focuses on bringing visitors to Montgomery County.



RETAINING TALENT

BLACKSBURG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS



The Blacksburg Young Professionals (YP) group was formed to bring together individuals typically in their 20's and 30's who live, work, or play in Blacksburg and the surrounding area. Every month the group organizes networking events at local restaurants as well as other activities such as ski trips, pool parties, and cookouts.

In 2018, the Blacksburg Young Professionals received a grant for up to \$25,000 in consulting services from the Creative Give Back program. This grant was used to evaluate the Young Professionals program and recruitment efforts, make tangible recommendations for improvements that can be phased in over the next few years, and support brand development.

Based on the recommendations from the project, the Blacksburg YP group has created a formal Board of Directors, which takes effect in the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Attendance at YP events has grown over the past year, rising from an average of 25 people per event to 40 people per event.

DRIVING CHANGE

RETAIL

The Retail Committee has representatives from each merchant group, the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, and local developers. An updated, user-friendly property database has been incorporated into the new Step Into Blacksburg website. This database gives a digital view of the available commercial properties for rent in Blacksburg, while also allowing local commercial real estate groups to submit their own listings.

MERCHANT GROUPS

Created to facilitate communication and cross-marketing among businesses in different districts throughout town, the Merchant's Associations meet monthly and have collaborated as a group on several different projects. The South Main Merchants's Association has held multiple training opportunities for Blacksburg businesses in subjects such as marketing, communication and leadership. Multiple networking mingles were also held this year to encourage communication and collaboration between merchants and business owners throughout all of Blacksburg.

TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

This committee was formed to create a strategy for improving the entrepreneurial environment in Blacksburg to support new business as well as retaining existing ones and to determine efforts to recruit and retain talent to Blacksburg.

TRANSPORTATION

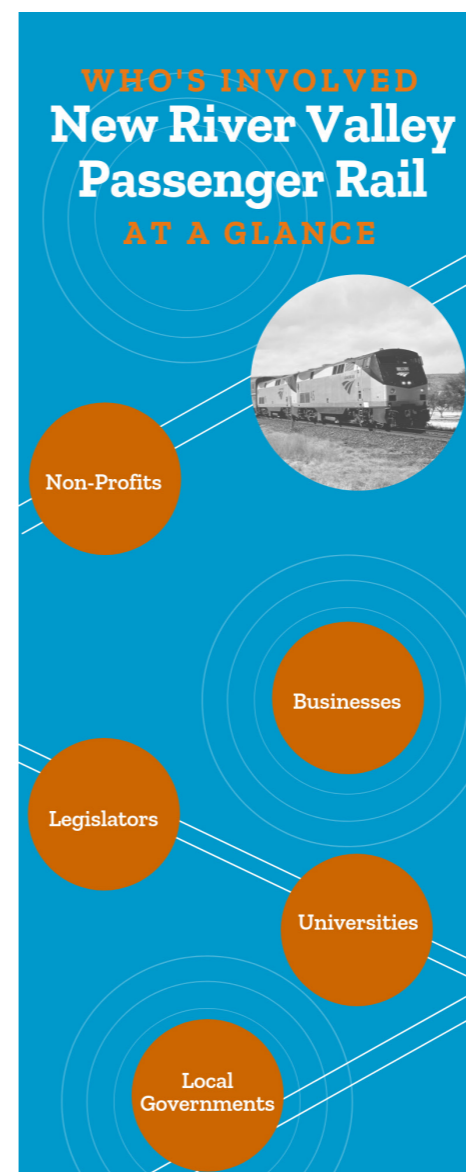
The Transportation Committee continued to educate investors on the many modes of transportation in the NRV. Presentations were held about multi-modal transportation, including bicycle and pedestrian modes, Interstate 81, Passenger Rail and Blacksburg Transit operations.

The Blacksburg Partnership also joined the efforts of the I-81 Federation, a lobbying effort aimed at improving safety along the Interstate 81 corridor. Last summer, a group of business leaders created the Interstate 81 Federation, composed of more than thirty business and education leaders spanning the corridor from Winchester to Blacksburg. The group's efforts helped secure funding from the Virginia General Assembly for more than \$2.2 billion in improvements that VDOT identified as imperative for the entire I-81 corridor. This long-term project will improve the safety of travel by reducing vehicular crashes and lowering the number of fatalities. The investments will also create increased economic activity by improving transit times and generating future economic development opportunities.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Board of Directors launched a strategic planning process for the organization this spring that will define its direction for the next five years. The Partnership has engaged with Creative Economic Development Consulting to assist with the process.

A Strategic Planning Committee is in place to guide the work, with input from all investors. The process is expected to be completed by the fall of 2019.



The Partnership is continuing to lead efforts to see passenger rail service expanded to the New River Valley, through its NRV 2020 Passenger Rail Committee. The group has continued to promote the efforts of passenger rail and build awareness and support for the initiative through social media, an updated website, brochures, and various community outreach efforts, such as Speaker's Bureau presentations. Additionally, NRV Passenger Rail advertised in the Virginia Capital Connections Annual Handbook, the Quarterly Magazine and the annual calendar.

Over the past year, the group has made great strides in bringing passenger rail closer to home. The group completed a Station Ownership and Management Study, and as a result, began working to develop a regional rail authority.

Additionally, NRV Rail 2020 worked with Richmond based government relations strategist to further the initiative with state government officials and legislators. To increase legislative ties, NRV Rail has sponsored a Virginia General Assembly opening night. Also, the group met numerous times with the Secretary of Transportation and the Director of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

The group also worked with the Virginia Tech School of Architecture to review student renderings and concepts for potential Christiansburg station designs. The future for rail is bright, as the group plans to continue its efforts with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and the Commonwealth Transportation Board to build the case for passenger rail in the New River Valley.

EACH YEAR, THE BLACKSBURG PARTNERSHIP HOSTS THREE SIGNATURE EVENTS: BLACKSBURG FORK & CORK, BLACKSBURG BREW DO, AND VIRGINIA CHEESE FEST. THESE EVENTS HELP TO FURTHER THE ORGANIZATION'S MISSION OF AN ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE.



SIGNATURE EVENTS

OUR EVENTS

In facts and numbers



BLACKSBURG FORK & CORK

The 11th annual food, wine, and art festival was held on April 20th. 22 Virginia wineries, 15 regional artists, and 10 local restaurants were showcased at the event. Live entertainment was provided on the Main Stage and festival guests enjoyed cooking demonstrations and wine seminars. For the charity component, proceeds were raised for Micah's Backpack through a raffle, to provide food for children of low-income families.



BLACKSBURG BREW DO

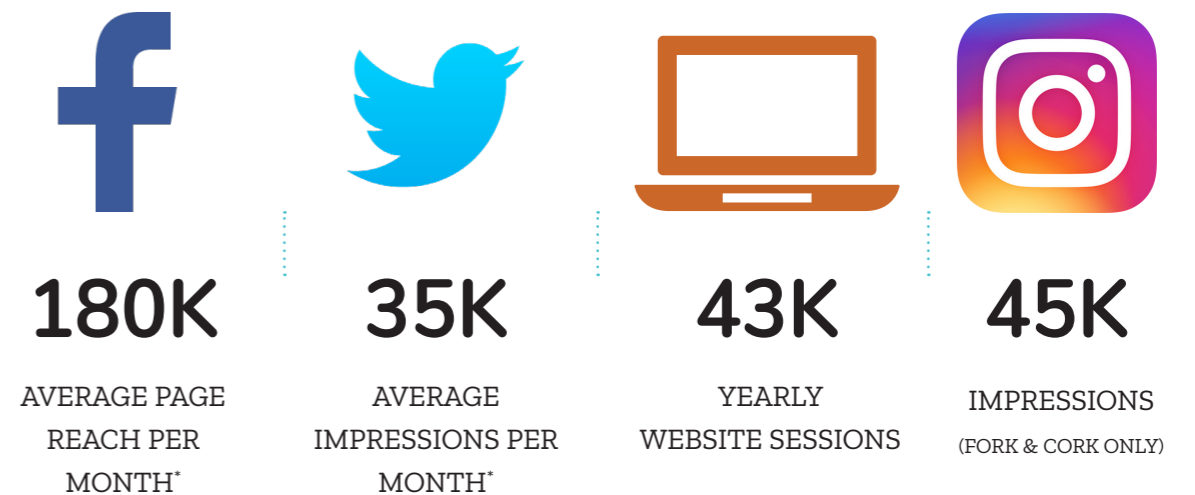
The 10th anniversary craft beer festival was held on September 22nd at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. The festival had approximately 60 craft breweries and 100 beer selections. The ever-popular Homebrew Contest returned with about 50 entries. The winner received the honor of brewing their winning beer at Ballast Point Brewing Company in Daleville, Virginia. A raffle was held once again to raise money for Micah's Backpack.



VIRGINIA CHEESE FEST

In collaboration with the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, the third annual Virginia Cheese Fest Farm to Table Dinner was held on Friday, June 7th. The Palisades Restaurant created a wonderful four-course meal highlighting farm to table ingredients, local wine, and cheese sourced from Meadow Creek Dairy.

DIGITAL MARKETING



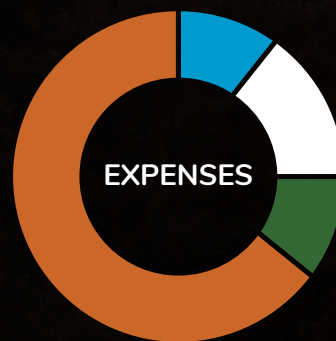
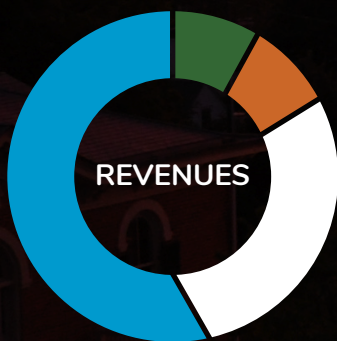
*All event data has been combined. Data collected is from two months leading up to each event.

INVESTORS

A Cleaner World
 Alacran
 BCR Property Management*
 Blacksburg APF Partners
 Blacksburg Community*
 Brown Insurance
 Carilion NRV Medical Center*
 Carter Bank & Trust
 Champ Sportsbar/Wikiteria/Avellinos*
 Community Foundation of the NRV*
 CowanPerry, PC
 Dominos NRV
 Downtown Blacksburg, Inc.*
 Draper Aden Associates*
 Duncan Automotive Network
 First Bank & Trust*
 First Citizens Bank
 Foresight, LLC
 Green Valley Builders
 HHHunt
 Hurt & Proffitt*
 Hyatt Place/Graystone Companies
 Imaginations/Annie Kay's
 The Lester Group/Lester
 Development
 Lewis Gale Hospital - Montgomery*
 Linkous Auctioneers
 Michael Cooke, CPA
 The Mitchell Law Firm
 Mike Eggleston, Realtor*
 Modea*
 Moog Components Group*

National Bank of Blacksburg*
 New River Office Supply, Inc.
 NRV Regional Commission
 Olio Financial Planning
 Ozmo
 Park Commercial Real Estate
 Rackspace*
 Rainbow Riders Childcare Center*
 Reynolds Architects, Inc.*
 Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport
 Sands Anderson*
 SAS Builders
 Security Self Storage*
 The Shaheen Firm, PC
 SIA Group*
 Siegel Link
 Skyline National Bank
 Steve Jacobs, Optometrist
 Suntrust*
 Top of the Stairs/PK's Restaurant
 TORC Robotics
 Town of Blacksburg*
 TR Collection/Sugar Magnolia
 Union Bank & Trust*
 VA College of Osteopathic Medicine*
 VA Eagle Distributing
 Virginia Tech*
 VPT, Inc.
 Warm Hearth Village
 YMCA at Virginia Tech
 *Board of Directors

FINANCIALS



■ Social Entrepreneurship (54%)
 ■ Virginia Tech (7%)
 ■ Outreach & Communication (65%)
 ■ Project Support (10%)

■ Business Community (32%)
 ■ Town of Blacksburg (7%)
 ■ Social Entrepreneurship (15%)
 ■ Administration (10%)

The Blacksburg Partnership is a non-profit, independent economic development organization focused on projects that attract visitors and retail prospects. Partnership projects include the development of property, revitalization of retail districts, special events, and community arts endeavors such as Gobble de Art and the Collaborative for the Arts. The Partnership is also known for three signature events that take place every year: Blacksburg Fork and Cork, a food, wine, and art extravaganza; Blacksburg Brew Do, a craft beer festival; and the Virginia Cheese Fest, an homage to fromage.