



ANNUAL REPORT

step into
BLACKSBURG

THE **BLACKSBURG** PARTNERSHIP

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NOTE FROM OUR CHAIR

Dear Investors,

What an uncommon, yet productive, year we have experienced. With the leadership of Diane Akers guiding a smooth transition of new staff, to the flexibility of a membership base that has seen “adjusting on the fly” as the new normal under the cloud of Covid-19, the Blacksburg Partnership has demonstrated an evolving focus on membership value.

Looking back makes going forward even more exciting. With a redefined mission statement, the inclusion of a Young Professional Board representative and the proposed realignment of our Board, the future shines bright with opportunities.

Zoom used to be a word mostly commonly associated with Scrabble contests, and now it is a daily devotion. Meeting and greeting fellow citizens with a handshake and a smile is now a peek into a home office, a brief 6-foot encounter behind a mask, or maybe an elbow bump.

Social distancing may have drawn people apart, but for the Blacksburg Partnership, it has reinforced an already incredible sense of community through membership and engagement. Partnership members have received banking guidance on PPP Loans, CPA tax guidance on the transformed economy, legal advice on human resource issues, risk management advice from the New River Valley Public Health Task Force and unrivaled leadership by the Blacksburg Police Department.

Our organization has also continued to see incredible leadership and governance by the Town government and Virginia Tech. Through open dialogue and collaboration during the COVID pandemic, we have set the bar for how a public-private partnership should operate. In keeping with the core of our mission, we continue to be a “catalyst for economic development by convening and collaborating with strategic partners; advocating for regional initiatives and enhanced business climate; and promoting the area to businesses, visitors, residents, and students.”

The flexibility and tenacity of the Partnership has allowed us to continue focusing on major issues for our region. Transportation initiatives including I-81 safety and NRV Passenger Rail remain key priorities. We have stepped up our legislative involvement and renewed our focus on downtown planning initiatives.

This past year, the Partnership also invested in the future of our youth by contributing \$28,100 to the New River Community College Access to Community College Education program (ACCE). ACCE is a development public/private partnership that makes college available debt-free to high school and home-schooled graduates by funding NRCC tuition for two years.

We remain committed to our annual signature events, Blacksburg Brew Do and Fork & Cork, and are moving forward in our planning under current pandemic guidelines. The safety of our staff, volunteers, and attendees is paramount.

We’re looking forward to another great year, working through challenges and making progress as a community and region.

Be Safe and Be Well,

Wally Nelson
Chair, The Blacksburg Partnership

CONTENT

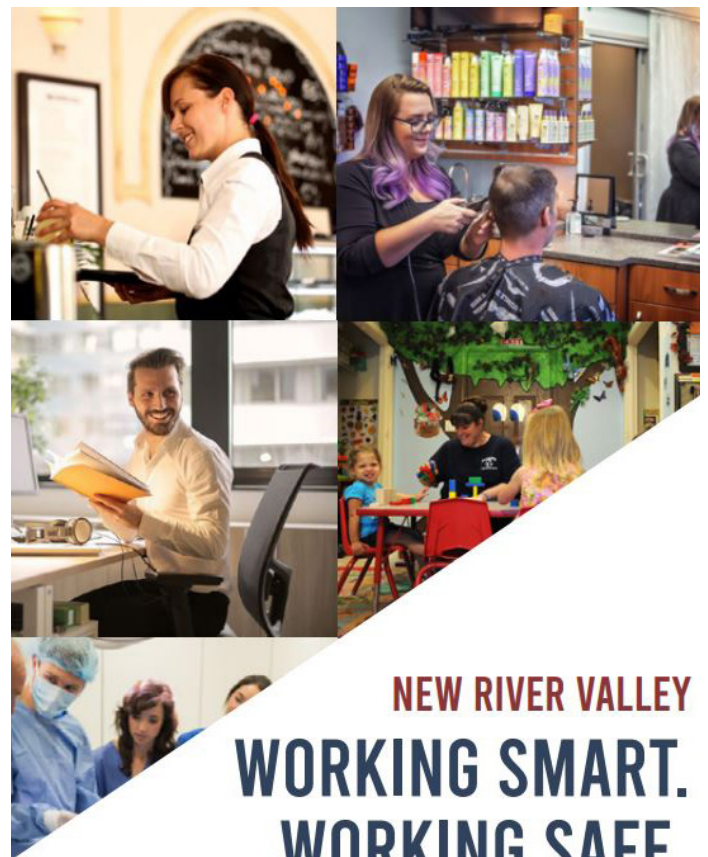
COVID-19: ADAPTING TO CHANGE	4
.....	
OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION	6
.....	
> STEP INTO BLACKSBURG	7
.....	
> COMMUNICATING SOCIALLY	8
.....	
ARTS & COMMUNITY	10
.....	
> COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS	12
.....	
DEVELOPMENT	14
.....	
> PASSENGER RAIL	15
.....	
SIGNATURE EVENTS	16
.....	
INVESTORS	18

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

TAKING COVID-19 TO TASK

The Blacksburg Partnership participated with the New River Valley Chamber of Commerce Directors, Tourism Directors, Merchant Groups, and Downtown organizations to help create messaging and best practices for safely reopening retail and small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The NRV Public Health Task Force published a reopening guidebook for small/local businesses, titled Working Smart Working Safe, in May of 2020.

[Click here to access the Guidebook](#)



NEW RIVER VALLEY
WORKING SMART.
WORKING SAFE.

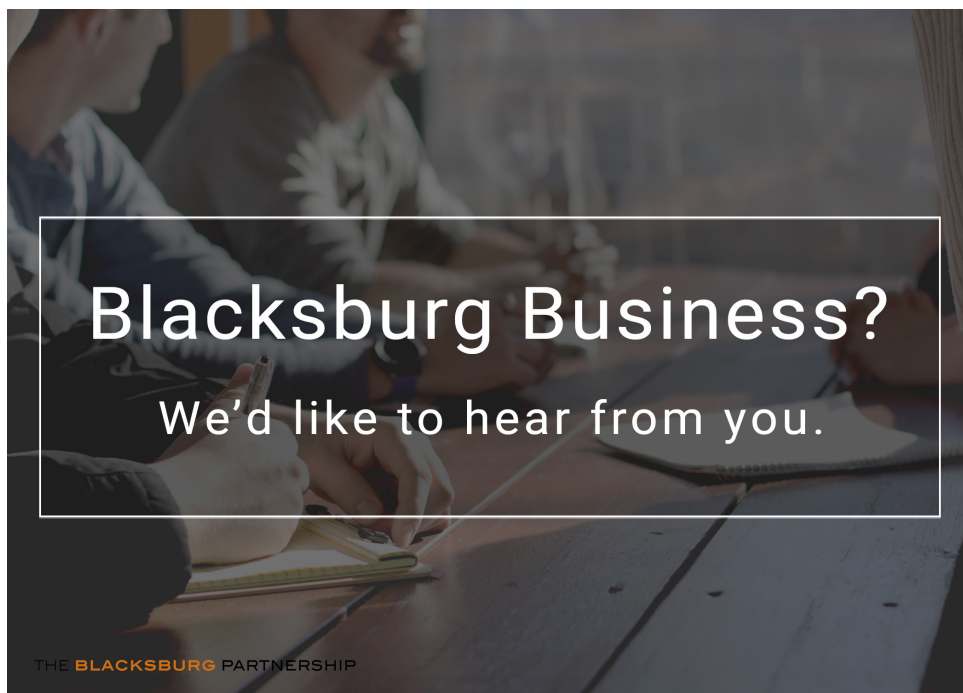
A GUIDEBOOK FOR REOPENING
YOUR BUSINESS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

#NRVSTRONGERTOGETHER

COVID-19 RESOURCES



In March of 2020, the Blacksburg Partnership created a COVID-19 Resources page on the Step Into Blacksburg website with daily news updates as well as information for businesses. The partnership worked to distribute useful information to investors through monthly Zoom meetings and newsletters.



Blacksburg businesses that wish to have their updates shared via The Partnership's social media accounts can do so by sending all relevant information to info@blacksburgpartnership.org.



BRIDGING

BLACKSBURG

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.

STEP INTO BLACKSBURG

The Blacksburg Partnership's stepintoblacksburg.org website showcases many assets that appeal to residents, visitors, and those thinking of relocating to the area. The website includes an interactive interface for site users, as well as updated resources. The events calendar tells a story about our community. It provides information to residents and creates a social hub on the web. The events calendar also serves as an extra source of advertisement to local businesses.

35.6K

annual
users

75%

out of town
visitors

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 that reach over 25,000 people.

STEP INTO BLACKSBURG

HUMANS OF BLACKSBURG

BLACKSBURG BREW DO

GOBBLE DE ART

BLACKSBURG FORK & CORK

NRV PASSENGER RAIL

BLACKSBURG RESTAURANT WEEK

VIRGINIA CHEESE FEST

BLACKSBURG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE NUMBERS



Accounts 6K followers



Accounts 17.8K followers



Accounts 5.3K followers

HUMANS OF BLACKSBURG

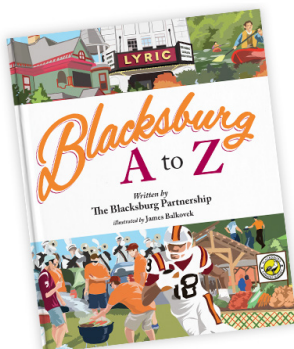
what makes Blacksburg unique



The Humans of Blacksburg social media campaign showcases the individuals who make our town such a unique place. In just three years, the campaign has developed a large following and has over 100 stories in its collection. Interested in sharing your story? Contact us at info@blacksburgpartnership.org for an interview.

PROMOTION and advertising

The Blacksburg Partnership uses a variety of avenues to promote our community. 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. The Partnership had an ad panel 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.



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
Community Arts YouTube Series



Facebook
Instagram
Twitter



gobbledeart
Authentic. Creative. Hokie.

During the summer of 2006, the Gobble de Art program placed over 60 fabulously decorated HokieBird Statues all around Blacksburg. The purpose of the project is 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 HokieBird designs, a line of small HokieBirds, 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, six custom-designed HokieBirds were added to the Gobble de Art flock.

The Blacksburg Partnership will launch a website revamp in July 2020 to promote HokieBird retail sales.





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. The Collaborative provides leadership, capacity building services, advocacy, education and information to support local artists, arts organizations, and arts initiatives in the Town and at Virginia Tech.

The Collaborative has worked closely with local artists on a number of projects to increase visibility and create ways in which the artists can interact with one another. A community listserv and Facebook group actively increase ways in which artists effectively communicate with each other. The group is also currently working to develop 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 developed a Public Art Plan that is under review by Blacksburg Town Council. This iteration is intended to provide updated structure to a proposed arts program designed to further the Town's commitment to the arts and provide guidelines for and outlines roles associated with the administration of a town-sponsored public art program.



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.

MONTGOMERY CO BROADBAND MANAGEMENT TEAM

Participated in reviewing current broadband availability and selecting a broadband provider for Montgomery County. A comprehensive needs assessment identified 41 communities across Montgomery County and the City of Radford that need assistance. Montgomery County has issued an RFP for a Broadband Implementation Partner.

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

The Partnership continued to promote local restaurants through the shutdown on social media with restaurant spotlights and a list on the Step Into Blacksburg website.

BLACKSBURG GALLERY GUIDE

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

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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



BLACKSBURG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS



The Blacksburg Young Professionals (YP) group continues to connect individuals in their 20's and 30's who live, work, or play in Blacksburg and the surrounding area. The group organizes events for networking, professional development, and community service.

The Blacksburg Young Professionals Board of Directors completed their first term with four executive officers, three members at large, and a representative from The Blacksburg Partnership staff. All members of the Board served as co-chairs on the four committees: Community Service, Marketing and Outreach, Professional Development, and Social Networking. The group just completed elections for the 2020-21 Board of Directors and will have a full Board for this term.

The group hosted a total of 20 in-person and virtual events in the 2019-20 fiscal year. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the group has held 5 virtual events consisting of social gatherings and professional development segments.

The group continues to follow the consulting recommendations from the Creative Give Back program awarded in 2018.

DRIVING CHANGE



RETAIL

The Retail Committee is comprised of retail representatives from Main Street Connect, the Town of Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, and local developers. The Partnership maintains an available commercial property database that offers a digital view of what Blacksburg has to offer.. This database offers a digital view of the available commercial properties in Blacksburg. Local commercial real estate groups can also submit their own listings.



MERCHANT GROUPS

The Merchant's Associations elected to merge for the next fiscal year and chose Main Street Connect as the new group name. The combined group will meet monthly and will hold training opportunities for Blacksburg businesses in subjects such as marketing, communication, and leadership. Networking mingles were also held this year to encourage communication and collaboration between merchants and business owners throughout all of Blacksburg.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Board of Directors Strategic Planning Committee collaborated with Creative Economic Development to complete a strategic plan for the Partnership in February 2020. The Partnership is working to implement this plan for Fiscal Year 2020-21. This strategic plan will define the Partnership's direction for the next five years.



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 I-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.



TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

This committee is focused on improving the entrepreneurial environment in Blacksburg by supporting new business as well as retaining existing ones. The committee also determines efforts to recruit and retain talent in Blacksburg.

PASSENGER RAIL



WHO'S INVOLVED New River Valley Passenger Rail AT A GLANCE



Non-Profits

Businesses

Legislators

Universities

Local
Governments

New River Valley Passenger Rail

The Partnership leads efforts to see passenger rail service expanded to the New River Valley (NRV) through its NRV Passenger Rail Committee. The group works to promote passenger rail awareness and local support through social media, an updated website, brochures, and various community outreach efforts such as Speaker's Bureau presentations. Additionally, NRV Passenger Rail is 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 regional rail authority includes every locality in the New River Valley. NRV Passenger Rail works with Richmond-based government relations strategists to further the initiative with state government officials and legislators. To increase legislative ties, NRV Passenger Rail sponsored a Virginia General Assembly opening night reception. The group maintains communication with the Secretary of Transportation and the Director of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT).

THE BLACKSBURG PARTNERSHIP HOSTS THREE SIGNATURE EVENTS: BLACKSBURG FORK AND CORK, BLACKSBURG BREW DO, AND THE VIRGINIA CHEESE FEST FARM TO TABLE DINNER. THESE EVENTS HELP TO PROMOTE THE PARTNERSHIP'S QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE.



SIGNATURE EVENTS



BLACKSBURG FORK & CORK

The 12th annual food, wine, and art festival, originally scheduled for Saturday, May 2, 2020, was postponed until the spring of 2021. We are already excited to host this community event and are looking forward to being able to celebrate Virginia wine, delicious food, and beautiful artwork again. The Partnership continues to support participating wineries through social media.



BLACKSBURG BREW DO

The 11th annual craft beer festival was held on October 26, 2019, 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 Three Notch'd Craft Kitchen and Brewery in Roanoke, Virginia. A raffle was held once again to raise money for Micah's Backpack.



VIRGINIA CHEESE FEST

The fourth annual Virginia Cheese Fest Farm to Table Dinner originally scheduled for Friday, June 5, 2020, was postponed until the spring of 2021. The Blacksburg Partnership continues to promote farm to table initiatives across its various social media platforms.



DIGITAL MARKETING



180K

AVERAGE PAGE
REACH PER
MONTH*



35K

AVERAGE
IMPRESSIONS PER
MONTH*



43K

YEARLY
WEBSITE SESSIONS



45K

IMPRESSIONS
(FORK & CORK ONLY)

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

INVESTORS

A Cleaner World
Alacran
Atlantic Union Bank*
BCR Property Management*
Blacksburg APF Partners
Blacksburg Young Professionals*
Block.One
Brown Insurance
Carilion NRV Medical Center*
Carter Bank & Trust
Champs Sportsbar/Wikiteria/Avellinos*
Community Foundation of the NRV*
Cooke, Lavender, Massey & Co.
CowanPerry, PC
Downtown Blacksburg, Inc.*
Draper Aden Associates*
Duncan Automotive Network
Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM)*
First Bank & Trust*
First Citizens Bank
Foresight, LLC
Green Valley Builders
HHHunt
Hurt & Proffitt*
Hyatt Place/Graystone Companies
Imaginations/Annie Kay's
Lewis Gale Hospital - Montgomery*
Linkous Auctioneers
The Mitchell Law Firm
Mike Eggleston, Realtor*
Modea*
Moog Components Group*
National Bank of Blacksburg*
New River Computing
New River Office Supply, Inc.
NRV Regional Commission
Olio Financial Planning
Ozmo
Park Commercial Real Estate
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 Search/Link
Skyline National Bank
Stateson Homes
Steve Jacobs, Optometrist
Top of the Stairs/PK's Restaurant
TORC Robotics
Town of Blacksburg*
TR Collection/Sugar Magnolia
Truist*
VA Eagle Distributing
Virginia Tech*
Virginia Tech - Moss Arts Center*
Virginia Tech CRC
Virginia Tech Foundation
VPT, Inc.
Warm Hearth Village
YMCA at Virginia Tech

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.

Vision Statement

The Blacksburg Partnership is the catalyst to make Blacksburg a vibrant place to live, work, learn, and play by convening businesses, Virginia Tech, and the Town of Blacksburg.

Mission Statement

The Blacksburg Partnership is a catalyst for economic development by convening and collaborating with strategic partners; advocating for regional initiatives and enhanced business climate; and promoting the area to businesses, visitors, residents, and students.