

>> Hello. This is Janet Michael.

In addition to hosting the Valley Today,
each week day at noon on the River 95.3,

I also produce podcasts,

and I'm excited to introduce you to

a new podcast series in partnership with Lord Fairfax Community College.

Having provided higher education and career training for the past half century,

LFCC is tightly interwoven into the fabric

of the Northern Shenandoah Valley in Piedmont regions.

Join me every week for conversations with current and former students to hear there

funny and inspiring stories as we learn about their journey to higher education,

the role that LFCC has played,

where they are now, and where they plan to go.

We'll also talk to current and former professors about

their experiences and best memories of LFCC over the past 50 years.

Get every single episode as they're released on

our website at the river95.3.com under the podcast tab,

or you can subscribe for free at Apple Podcast,

Google Podcast, on Spotify,

Amazon Music, wherever you listen to podcasts.

Just search for LFCC Stories.

Hello and welcome to the Valley Today.

I'm your host, Janet Michael.

Happy Thursday as you are listening to the show today, we have, however,

pre-recorded our conversation on

a Wednesday morning so that we could chat with our regular guy,

Guy Curtis from Lord Fairfax Community College's Workforce Solutions.

How you doing, Guy? It looks like you're back in your office today, you're not at home, you don't have your mullet wig on.

You seem like a much more professional person today?

>> Yes. I'm business casual today,

I'm not in my formal attire that I wear at home.

Yes. Thank you for having us back.

Glad to be here on the show again.

>> Well, I was joking before we started recording for the show that joining us on the Zoom screen today is Jenna French and she is the Director of Tourism and Economic Development for Shenandoah County, and I was having quite a Shenandoah County week because Carrie Han for tourism was on this past Tuesday.

>> We just some so much going on here that we have to take up more than one day of your show.

>> When we were talking on Tuesday, Jenna, John Henry General Store and Sycamore Banks Farm were the two guests that Carrie brought and I think those two stops are going to make up what I do this weekend.

She gave me something to get out of the house and go and do this weekend in Shenandoah county.

>> That's fabulous.

>> Guy, I understand today we're going to be talking about a scholarship that Workforce Solutions and Shenandoah County Economic Development are partnering on,

Shenandoah County Cares Scholarship.

Give me a quick overview of that and

then we'll talk Jenna about how the program came to be.

>> Sure. We've partnered with Shenandoah County and with our foundation at LFCC to bring a scholarship to Shenandoah County residents. It's a tremendous opportunity for anyone who's been impacted within their household or themselves by COVID-19, whether they've lost a job or maybe a reduction in work hours, this is an awesome scholarship for those looking to retool, train, get new skills for a career that's going to launch you long-term into to a great pathway.

A lot of these programs that are featured and identified for the scholarship really represent the demand locally in Shenandoah County and the surrounding areas. We're super excited that these programs are not only just high in demand, but they're certainly recession proof.

In other words, they're always are going to be needed.

For example, our CDL, our health care, our trades, IT computers, there's always demand for these careers.

Regardless of the recession that we're in, and hopefully, there's brighter better days ahead of us that this program's gong to launch folks into a new career pathway and help them find a meaningful career and wages that's going to support themselves and their families.

We're super excited about their scholarship and the partnership with the county.

>> I know that counties all across the Shenandoah Valley received Cares Act funding and a lot of them were distributing that in a lot of different ways. Some were doing grants to small businesses, some were helping with utility and rent assistance.

I had not heard of

this scholarship option until

Guy emailed me that that's what we were going to be talking about today.

How did you guys come up with this idea?

>> Yes. We, like other counties,

are also using Cares Act money for small business grants.

We certainly want to be helping those businesses that have been in place and continue to strive through the current pandemic.

But with the second allocation of Cares Act money that came to the county in such a short timeframe, quite honestly, of which we had to use them.

We were also trying to look at some creative ways where we can put that money back in the hands of our county residents and really help make an impact.

We've had hiring needs predating this pandemic to be quite honest.

A lot of our local manufacturers,

not just in Shenandoah County but really regionally,

have been looking for people and the pandemic didn't change that.

They still continue to hire and, in fact,

in many cases we have companies that are still continuing to grow.

We recognize that there's a need with a lot of people because the pandemic has hit different industries in different ways.

We saw an opportunity to take people that may

have had careers at one point or worked in say,

the tourism industry for quite some time and

that industry sadly has been impacted by this in some ways

and maybe offer them an opportunity to retrain

and reskill and find a new career path if they so choose.

This just seem like a great opportunity.

I have to be honest, we stole the idea from our neighbors in Luray,
but we all work and collaborate really well together.

When there is a great idea out there,
then we're not ashamed to take
advantage of that and adapt it to our own community as well.

>> Well, it was interesting a month or so ago
I had a conversation with Dr. Mark Johnston,
who of course is the superintendent at Shenandoah County Public Schools.
We were talking about the impact that COVID was having in
Shenandoah County to a larger degree
in some cases than in the other surrounding counties.

It does seem like it's fitting that you guys would take
this perspective to help people switch jobs,
get into a new job or find a whole new career path.

>> Yeah, tourism has been traditionally
our number 2 industry in the county, just behind agriculture.
Certainly we saw a hit from that very early on.

Although it's also worth noting that while tourism has shifted and
we're seeing impacts certainly to our restaurants and our hotels,
we've also seen a surge as much of this region
has in tourism over the last several months.

Really since May when things started to open back up,
we found that people are itching to get out of
the city and they're looking to come to this area
because they can get outside and enjoy the great outdoors and wide open spaces.
A lot of our businesses that have had the ability to take advantage of the outdoor
space,

like our vineyards and our agritourism venues,
have not been impacted as dramatically as some of the other ones,
where hotels certainly people have a perception that staying in a hotel may not be safe,
even though our conversations with our hotels really prove otherwise that they,
with their parent corporations,
have very strict measures in place to ensure consumer safety.

But again, it's changing that perception that
people have and making sure that they feel comfortable.

Unfortunately, the employment that is supported through tourism has been impacted.

But it's not our only industry certainly and again,
that's where we're lucky to be a diverse county
that has a lot of different types of industry here.
Even within, say our manufacturing, it's diverse.

Several of those, U-Haul, Metal, TruckVault ,
IAC, Andros, they're all hiring right now and they're looking for people.

That's really why this program is such a great fit because the skills that
they're looking for are tied directly into the programs that LFCC offers.

This is an opportunity for somebody to come in at really minimal cost and
be able to take advantage of those opportunities and hopefully get themselves a
new job.

>> How does someone qualify?

How do they know if they're listening now whether they
fit to be able to fill out one of these applications?

>> It's pretty simple.

You have to reside in the county or within the town,
so of the county and be a resident. That's it.

You have to demonstrate your need through an application through our website here at the college and identify the course that you are interested in taking.

We've pre-selected quite a few courses that do align with some of those in-demand jobs that Janet mentioned, some of those businesses.

But if there is another course that the individual is seeking or looking to go after, those are also optional too.

If you happen to have our catalog,

I'm showing this but our radio viewers can't see it,

but if you happen to see one of our catalogs or see a course on our website that really aligns

with your long-term goals and it does

match potential job opportunities within the county,

we say go for it, just make the ask.

Filling out that application is pretty straightforward,

demonstrating your need or why you've been impacted by COVID-19,

and find a course that fits your need.

The scholarship is designed to cover 75 percent of

tuition that's due to the student up to \$2,000.

But for the math's sake of things,

that can mean a lot of things because many of

the Shenandoah County residents are obviously Virginia residents,

and we actually add additional grant funding on top a lot of our training programs.

We've talked before in the past about our FastForward grant,

which covers two-thirds of the costs of the course.

For example, our medical assistant course is normally \$3,195,

a little over 3,000.

With FastForward, it cuts it down to a third,
making a little bit over a 1,000 just for that student to take the course.

But with this scholarship,
it will cover 92 percent of the full tuition.

That basically, results to about \$266 for
the student to pay for medical assistant course.

We just heard recently from a local employer for that exact example,
they're hiring medical assistants right now.

Aligning with some of those in-demand jobs
we've identified with some of the training programs,
but that's going to find someone a job very quickly in
a few weeks versus waiting a long-term program that they may have to go through.

The scholarship itself, it's like getting extra discounts.

Everybody likes discounts, I think we've heard that somewhere before.

But it's an awesome opportunity to really start your career path in a whole new area
that's in-demand aligned with a great pathway opportunity with local employers
hiring.

But also the other thought too,
it's up to \$2,000.

If I only spent a couple hundred dollars in my first course,
I can stack it with another credential that makes me more employable,
so that's even more valuable.

Your \$2,000 scholarship in theory,
goes along way with building your skill set and
making it more employable for those who are looking for individuals like yourself.

>> That's important to note because you're not limited because of

the low cost once you factor in all of these discounts,
so to speak, to just taking one course.

You literally can take two or three and get even further along in your hiring process,
because you've got so much more certifications and credentials under your belt.

>> Exactly. We were talking off there about CDL being variable no matter
where you go and another training program that also offers our heavy equipment
operator,
so many cases, and if you're taking out a piece of machinery to a job site,
you need to also add your CDL as well too.

That's a great example of stacking your CDL with
your heavy equipment operator training program.

That's how individuals can really set themselves apart
from all the other applications that employers are looking through.

If you have that credential it demonstrates your skillset and also
your drive initiative towards that industry as well too.

It's a great thing to do to better be stackable.

This scholarship opportunity is a tremendous way to get in to some of
these high-demand careers that are paying very well with minimal training and
effort,

and the great part about it too is if you are still
working on a part-time basis or something of that nature,
or you're trying to figure out ways to help accommodate
your family during this challenging time,

that many of the courses are available weekends,
weeknights, or some of them are full-time or part-time based on your availability.

We haven't a lot of flexible training options for those when you get into a new
career.

>> Let's take a quick break.

When we come back, can we get into the weeds a little bit more,
Guy on what some of these classes are,
and Jenna, you mentioned before we started recording that
local companies are hiring right now.

Maybe we can marry some of
those courses with some of the companies so people can really get
a serious idea of what kind of
new career paths they could choose using these scholarships.

Can we do that in the next segment?

>> Absolutely.

>> Sounds great.

>> Okay, we're going to take a quick break when we come back,

we're going to continue our conversation with Guy Curtis from LFCC's Workforce
Solutions.

He is on the Zoom screen with us along with Jenna French.

She is the Director of Tourism and Economic Development for Shenandoah County.

We're going to talk more with them in just a couple of minutes.

>> Do you know anyone who is struggling with financial hardships because of
coronavirus?

Our new webinar called Coping with a Money Crunch can help.

We'll talk about immediate options to consider,

revising or creating a spending plan,

and lots of community resources.

Then we'll cover how to narrow your priorities,

contact creditors, and avoid scams and risky loans.

The webinar is free and you can either join by phone

or through Zoom on a smartphone, tablet, or computer.

You can find out more by visiting

the Northern Shenandoah Valley Financial Education Program on Facebook or calling Karen Poff at 540-635-4549.

Let me show you how to make your own plan or help someone you care about get through the crisis, call 635-4549, or visit @NSV Financial Education on Facebook today.

>> Welcome back to The Valley Today,

I am your host, Janet Michael.

We are on the Zoom screen today with Guy Curtis.

He is with LFCC Workforce Solutions.

Also on the Zoom screen is Jenna French,

she is the Director of Tourism and Economic Development for Shenandoah County.

We've been talking about the Shenandoah County CARES Scholarship.

Guy, when we went to break we were talking about the number of classes that people can take.

I was looking at the list during the break.

A lot of these aren't even \$200,

some are less than a 150 bucks for people to be able to take,

that could potentially put them into a new job or a career,

that is a well-paying job and career.

>> Right, and so not everything's free,

but that's why we offer a little bit of money there so

that the student has a little bit of skin in the game,

of course, but yeah,

these are tremendous opportunities to get a job quickly after a short training period,

and so commercial driver's license, medical assisting, phlebotomy,

farm tech, getting over into construction trades like heavy equipment, HVAC, electrical.

Those are all high in demand in the Shenandoah County and surrounding areas.

Those are great courses to consider with this scholarship.

We also have a pocket of courses that are slated in our open enrollment catalog, but they're not necessarily maybe

convenient for those who could make the dates and times.

We have some other courses we were suggesting that we would create in the area, such as our project management professional,

PMP program, and ServSafe certification,

as well as some leadership courses to help folks round out

skills and maybe help make themselves a little bit more employable,

marketable for the job they are trying to apply for.

I guess the biggest thing is that if an individual has found

an open job opportunity and can see themselves in that opportunity locally,

and I think Jenna is going to share a few examples that are out there,

they can choose that course through our service scholarship and

potentially register now for a course that's taking place early in the new year.

For example, amenities are starting in October, November, December,

and the new year of 2021,

but they can use a scholarship now,

they have a deadline of December 10th,

but they can go and get enrolled,

and take advantage of the scholarship and pay really minimal amounts of dollars,

in most cases less than \$200.

It's an awesome investment to get yourself into a wonderful career,

and especially employers who are hiring right now.

>> Jenna, you were mentioning during the break,

several of those companies,

we were joking with you because you were talking about TruckVault,
and Guy and I were like, what exactly is TruckVault?

We had no idea.

We've heard of it, but we have no idea what they do,
so tell us a little bit about them.

>> Yeah. It's funny,

we all drive past these companies on a fairly regular basis.

Most people in the region have probably been to
Route 11 Potato Chips and TruckVault is right next door,
and probably either never paid attention
or have no idea what it is that they're driving past.

TruckVault is great. It's actually one of
our newest industries here in Shenandoah County.

They opened up here just a couple of years ago.

They are Washington state-based industry and what they actually do is manufacture
gun safes that are custom-fit to

vehicles and so they work with a lot of our law enforcement throughout the county,
and quite honestly throughout the entire East Coast to outfit

your local sheriff's office and law enforcement with the cases that they need,
they fit in their trunk,

that enable people to transport them safely and know that they're locked-in secure.

Actually even individuals, you don't have to be a part
of law enforcement to be able to come in and purchase their product.

They have a small showroom there at their facility in Mount Jackson.

They also have catalogs and of course a website to be able to browse everything.

But what's really neat is most people
assume that these safes are made out of metal and in fact,

they're actually carpentry and almost exclusively made by hand.

There's a little bit of CNC automation for somebody that has that type of skill set.

But it's a really awesome opportunity for anybody that loves to work with their hands,

enjoys woodworking and craftsmanship.

They have several different specialized positions open,

some that are not as specialized though as well and information

about the employment opportunities that they have can be found on their website.

They're just one of

the many companies that we have here in Shenandoah County that are hiring.

>> Like you say, it's important to note that some of these don't necessarily

initially require any type of specialized education,

but almost all of them probably at some point will,

if you want to move up and that's the key for this is,

you may be able to get in entry-level with not anything more than say,

a high school diploma,

but if you want to go any further,

you're going to need to get some of these extra classes,

like Guy says, to stack on top of each other to move further up the ladder.

>> Yeah. We're finding with a lot of our companies,

many are willing to take somebody without the skills and then

work with them as they get the training.

It gives everybody a nice trial period to see if it's a good fit

with the company and they like the culture while being patient and

working with that potential applicant or an employee to go through

the programming at LFCC in conjunction with their onboarding processes,

for positions that may be more specialized or again,

if they want to grow at some point in their career.

>> You were telling us also during the break about Howell Metal and they had an interesting position because one of their positions doesn't require a CDL.

But boy, I bet that would look good on a resume if you are applying because you had one anyway.

>> Exactly. I think it's certainly worth noting that while many of these companies will often take somebody that maybe doesn't have this specialized training right off the bat, if you're really looking and you're eager to find a new position, a lot of these trainings that LFCC and Workforce Solutions provide are just that extra boost on your resume to really help you stand out from the rest of the crowd and getting in.

When they're going through hundreds sometimes of applications, how do you stand out above everybody else?

Sometimes showing that initiative that you are willing to take some of these things on your own to get the training, really just gets your foot in the door and helps open it for potential opportunities.

Howell Metal, people may recall that they actually announced an expansion just this past,

well, it's been a year, a year in September.

They're still in the process of continuing to grow and expand which is pretty remarkable for a company that's been around in Shenandoah County for over 50 years.

They used to do metal precision tubing, think of them as the tubes that go inside the air conditioner coils,

but that's transitioned and they're under the parent company Mueller out of Pennsylvania.

They've brought a whole new operation down into the plant.

A lot of times when people think of metalwork, they think of the dirty, smelly.

It is not like that at all.

I think that's also worth noting across the board.

Sometimes we find that people don't get into manufacturing, because they often have very antiquated perceptions of what the manufacturing industry looks like, and today's manufacturing is completely different than what you saw in movies of the kid potentially growing up and work conditions say of the 1920s and things like that.

I mean, these are clean, modern facilities.

These are brightly lit and tall ceilings and really great places to work.

I'm amazed going into a lot of these facilities of the company cultures and you walk the floors and you see the people and the smiles from ear to ear.

I mean, they truly love what they do and how it has just been a great company.

They have several different positions that they're opening right now.

Again, just because of that expansion, they're looking for folks for warehouse and distribution.

The yard jockey is the position where again, the CVL is not required but certainly would be preferred.

Production machine operators, some of these positions are even 07:00 AM-03:00 PM.

So it's great if you have kids in school, you can get them off to school and still be out of your job by the time they get off the bus and or need to be picked up from school.

The production machine operators,
they do have all shifts available for somebody who wants to work in evening shift.
There's opportunities there as well,
but you don't necessarily have to come in and I think that it's great.
Sometimes you start at these companies,
and they often start you sometimes at
the night shift and you work your way up to the day shifts.
It's great to see those entry level positions with the 07:00 AM-03:00 PM,
Monday through Friday work schedule.

People interested in Howell Metal can either go
on-site between Monday through Friday from 8:00-5:00,
and pick up an application and apply in person or they
can apply through their website at howellmetal.com.

>> Guy, Jenna brings up a point.

I had a conversation a few weeks ago,
Sally Michaels was on the show with me for their regular show.
National Manufacturing Day was on October 2nd,
and we were talking exactly what Jenna said that,
what manufacturing looks like now is nothing at all like what it looked like when
my dad worked in one of the industries in Frederick County 50, 60 years ago.
I think it makes a lot of people nervous especially an older generation,
while I can't get a job at these places because I don't understand any of this.

This is what these classes are built for,
for these people to learn and understand and not make it so scary.

>> Right. I think over the years we've been
scared that automation is going to remove jobs,
but it's actually done the opposite of that.

It's actually created new job opportunities for folks.

Where traditionally they were doing a lot of labor work but nowadays with more sophisticated systems that are in the manufacturing environment, they've become very advanced.

There's things that we've done,

especially now over the past year or so looking aggressively out what manufacturers are doing within

their environments and how to help those individuals who are currently working, get the skills they need as they transition to more sophisticated systems.

We actually provide quite a few programs in that area to

help folks if that is an area they want to go into long term.

It's certainly shows their commitment if they're able to add

in some programming around mechatronics,

which is another huge area that we're investing in

time and effort and with our training programs.

So PLCs, power fluid systems,

industrial instrumentation and control,

there's so many different pieces and aspects of

advanced manufacturing that are highly involved.

I think in some cases,

if you'd like computers or just dealing with things hands-on and troubleshooting,

fixing, maintaining, that's all part of the manufacturing environment now.

So there's some awesome opportunity to get some training,

show your commitment to that area,

and as you grow and add on credentials and training,

it just shows the employer that you're more willing to

be invested in them and build and grow with them as well too.

I think I'll have some announcements coming in the future that we're advancing our programs or even further, because there's a new level of manufacturing that's out there, Manufacturing 4.0. I'm not sure if Sally mentioned that, but it's a whole other level of they're using WiFi systems to help gauge and manage their equipment. It's just crazy.

It's unbelievable how things are advancing.

We're keeping up with our training programs here at the college, and what an awesome opportunity for folks to take advantage of that with the scholarship that's available at Shenandoah County that allows them to build their skills and continue to work with a company that's advancing themselves.

>> If a Shenandoah County resident is listening now, where can they go to access the application and at least a list of classes that are potentially available to them?

>> Sure. A quick website to go to is our workforce website.

It's lfccworkforce.com/SC.

That's short for Shenandoah County, so /SC.

From there you'll find a listing of the details of the scholarship as well as the application to download and review.

But also we want to mention that if folks are interested in looking to learn more and where to ask questions, we have a live information session next week on October 15th, from 5:30-6:30. You can register for that session there on that website.

But if you can't make that time, certainly go ahead and register and you can watch their recording afterwards.

Just let us know you're interested.

I think that's the other part of it too.

The biggest barrier is not finding out what you don't know and able to make a decision from there.

The thought is, reach out to us.

If there's a course you're not seeing in the catalog and you really would like to go after, let us know and we'll get you set up with the right information and direction on where to go next.

That website is a good place to start and joining us at the information session next week on the 15th would be a great time to do that and ask questions.

If not, you can watch the replay later.

>> Well, this scholarship covers up to \$2,000 per resident if they're taking these classes.

The cheapest class on here is \$61 and the most expensive one is 375, out of pocket after all of that is covered.

That's pretty huge when you figure you can take multiple classes.

>> Oh absolutely. We mentioned earlier being able to stack those credentials to make yourself more employable, and that's just a quick shot of breadth of what we see as far as right now.

Real-time information, what jobs are needed, what skills are needed,

and so that's why we have this represented on the application.

But there's some other opportunity too, if we can get enough interests.

For example, for an H Technician Bootcamp.

We just completed one. I had one this last fall.

But some of the fellowship courses,

you may see for H FAQ aren't necessarily within a four month period.

They have a six month period.

If we get enough interests in H FAQ,

we'll create our own custom course for

individuals trying to meet the needs that they have.

So such a tremendous opportunity for sure.

The only obligation with this application is that you are a resident of the county.

There is a requirement of completing a thank you letter to the county,

and we'll accept that on our behalf as you complete the application.

From there, it's just a matter of completing the course.

There is a course you're responsible for the funds if you don't complete,

but in most cases folks do complete,

they'll find a job right away.

So there's no real need or fear for that,

but it's a great opportunity and why not to go and demonstrate your need?

The other thought too is, we were talking offline about the employers in the area.

They may have had to let employees go or maybe they've reduced hours,

they can extend this application,

really share this with those employers that have been impacted as an employer.

If you run a corporation business in the area and you know you have

a Shenandoah County resident that had worked for you or maybe reduced hours,

that's an opportunity to share with them that they can get reskilled to get

back on with them as they ramp up operations.

Of course, the financial piece of it comes down to the individual,

not the employer themselves,

but it's the individual who has to apply and before.

But a great opportunity for employers who are looking to ramp up their workforce again.

>> All of the information lfccworkforce.com/SC for Shenandoah County, that's where they can get all of the classes, the application, register for the online information session on October 15th. Everything is there?

>> Exactly.

>> Awesome. Well, we're going to wrap up our conversation today.

We have been chatting on the Zoom screen with Guy Curtis from LFCC Workforce Solutions, along with Jenna French.

She is the Director of Tourism and Economic Development for Shenandoah County.

Thank you both for taking some time out of your Wednesday morning to have this conversation with me. I appreciate it.

>> Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity.

>> Thanks Jennah.

>> I would be remiss if I didn't wrap up and remind people that there is a new podcast series that I am hosting in partnership with the college, with Lord Fairfax Community College, called LFCC stories.

If you haven't heard about it, you haven't heard or listened to any of the podcast episodes, head over to the river953.com/lfccstories, and you'll be able to hear.

I think we've got four episodes up.

Actually, a new one will have been released by the time Today show air.

You'll be able to go and hear that tomorrow.

I'm back with Tony Baker from Frederick County Parks and Rec talking about their programs going into the last quarter of the year.

So I will have that show ready to go for you a few minutes after noon tomorrow,
meet me back here then.