

>> Hello, this is Janet Michael. In addition to hosting the Valley Today, each weekday 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 their 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 theriver953.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 am your host, Janet Michael. Happy Thursday as you are listening to the show today. It is LFCC Day so that means we are on the Zoom pre-recording with Guy Curtis from Lord Fairfax Community College's Workforce Solutions. Lord Fairfax Community College, becoming Laurel Ridge getting pretty excited about this new name, Guy. I got to tell you. It's growing on me. I wasn't overly thrilled in the beginning, but the more I hear it the more I really like it.

>> It's great. It's the whole brand that we actually will be rolling out in the near future. It really resonates well with our community and so we're excited about the change and certainly, all things have the best opportunity to change and better serve. That's what we're aiming to do with the new name and certainly, our strategic focus will continue and maintain supporting our region so we're very excited about it, but yes, glad to be back on the radio with you.

>> I know that supporting the region is one of the things you and I talk a lot about and today we're looking a little bit further into Fauquier County than we typically do in Middletown and in our backyard, so to speak. I'm excited to learn about the Career Cafe today. Tell me who you've got with us on the screen.

>> That's right. I got Donna Comer, she's with our Office of Workforce Solutions and Economic Development of Fauquier County, as well as Marty Baldwin too. He's with our Virginia Career Works partner agency that we send a student or two from time to time with them and they were talking about their Career Cafe that is serving the region of Fauquier County and beyond to help those employers look into fill all positions they have. They got a very crafty little event that's coming up in January so I'll let Donna roll with describing more about that program and how she fulfills it. But the Career Cafe, it's a great little piece and it sounds unique too if you're your coffee strategy so maybe there's some synergy there on somewhere formed with your show perhaps. But the Career Cafe is serving that immediate need of employers looking for opportunities, but also most importantly, the job seekers who are looking to find jobs within Fauquier County in the immediate region.

>> Donna before we pour our first cup at the Career Cafe, tell me a little bit about

what you do because you've got this unique position where you work for the school, but you work for the county and I would imagine it's the best of both worlds for those two organizations.

>> Yes, Janet. I do have a unique role. I have a dually funded position with Lord Fairfax Workforce Solutions and Fauquier County Economic Development Department. What I do, I spend half of my time programming different areas with Workforce Solutions, but then I spend half of my time really being in the streets and listening to the needs and desires of local Fauquier County businesses. Then what I do, I just listen for keywords and key things and try and figure out if there's something the school can do to help those employers with those needs and vice versa. As you said, it is the best of two worlds. In fact, just before I joined this show, I was introducing someone from a school to a local business partner because I think they have the opportunity to create a really cool internships. It truly is the best of two worlds. It's a fun job.

>> We've also got Marty Bywaters-Baldwin on this screen with us. You are another one that wears these multiple hats

because you have a position with goodwill,

but then you also are working through Virginia Career works. Explain how those two things work together for me.

>> Yeah that's great. Thanks, Janet. Thanks for having me here. Our goodwill started over 50 years ago with parents that had adult children with disabilities. They got the children together and realized that work was a really meaningful outlet. Goodwill always believing in the power of work to help people get ahead and find meaning and work and what we realized over the past decades is that those same strategies work for anybody looking for work. Those same strategies for empowerment and find [inaudible 00:05:05] wages. Goodwill partners with Virginia Career Works and the Piedmont region where we are and we've got some grants through Virginia Career Works that can help folks actually go back to school at Lord Fairfax. A lot of our interaction in partnership with Lord Fairfax is in that realm. But then when folks go to school, the next step is in trying to connect them with careers, with local businesses. I've been happy to partner with Donna and doing some creative things to connect those graduates and other job seekers with business opportunities.

>> Donna tell me about this Career Cafe. How did it come to be? I'm sure it's not something that operates in a vacuum.

>> No. But Career Cafe, I think it's a fun little story. Marty and I often team up together and we host a big jobs fair once a year and this year we did so just like we have every year except for 2020, back in September, and the employers responded well, many of them found some employees. It was a well-attended event. Like I said, that was in September. Well then fast-forward, November coincidentally on literally the same day, Marty and I both received emails from the same employers just

asking for help. The labor shortage continues to rage on. These employers need help, they need employees. Marty reached out to me, he forwarded me this email and he says, "What can we do? Let's chat." So we did. We had a Zoom that day and we thought, well, we can't do another job fair. We just had one. Everyone will think, "Is this an old invitation? We were just there" so we thought, how can we reinvent the idea of a job fair? What can we do to spin it on its head and turn it upside down? Marty, wouldn't you say maybe 20 minutes of just brainstorming. We thought instead of the evening let's do it in the morning and everybody wants coffee in the morning, right Janet? We thought, let's trick them. Let's trick the job seekers into coming. We'll serve coffee and donuts and we'll make it a more intimate experience as well, so we limited the number of businesses to five, and we reached out with personal invitations, come join us. Then voila we had the Career Cafe. We were very pleased with the turnout and I've had three of the five employers report back as having luck and having hired someone from this event.

>> The word pivot in 2020 and 2021 is probably one of the most overused words ever and I feel like so is jobs. We've heard so much about jobs reports and we've heard about labor shortages, we've heard all of these things surrounding jobs so I love that you are using the word career because that's really what the focus for this should be because these aren't just jobs. To a lot of the people that you're talking to, this is their future and their careers. Cafe does just give it that sense of, I'm going to check this out without having to make such a huge major commitment as a job fair with applications and all of the misconceptions that they sometimes bring.

>> You definitely had the nail on the head. We were hoping using the word Cafe, making it in the morning and two hours, really smaller, I call it a pop-up style recruiting event. We hoped that would take the intimidation out of it for the job seekers and definitely the word career. We've only had one so far, but every single employer there, there is a clear pathway from point A to point B, C, D, or even W, depending on how far one would like to climb within those businesses. They're wonderful, we have wonderful employers in Fauquier County.

>> This Career Cafe concept just really taken the interaction from being transactional to conversational, which is really helpful. We've done big events in the past and had over a hundred job seekers come, but then when we ask the businesses how many of those hundred people they talk to, it can be 10 or 12. Because if you have a huge space, people don't know where to go, they're scared, they get mismatched. They think, "oh, that manufacturer, there's nothing for me there" and they don't know there's hidden jobs, there's administrative jobs, there's IT, there's marketing, there's all kinds of stuff, so this smaller environment, I think it's allowed everybody to sit down and to talk and everything's better with coffee anyway so it allows for those conversations to happen.

>> Will these be things that happen multiple times over the course of the year? How often do you think you'll put these on?

>> We're going to attempt to do these every other month. We have fallen into a

natural pattern, if you will, of the third Wednesday of the month, which means our next one would be on January 19th and just two hours at a time. As you referenced earlier, not a big commitment for either the employer or the job seeker. You can drop the kids off at school and shoot over to the Career Cafe, grab a cup of coffee, have five conversations and be more than likely be employed by the time you left, but definitely be on your way within a couple of hours. Likewise, for the employer, they're not working an extended day, they're not coming in the office at 8:00 and then coming over to a job fair until eight o'clock at night. We find that it really is a win-win situation.

>> I feel like too, it's much more qualified. It's much more focused than just going to something where there are 30 or 40 employers and you're stampeded in and out this way, you've got a focus. There's only going to be five places. It's going to be a whole lot easier to know what you want to talk about to get the answers that you're looking for and that a lot of these people are probably already more qualified on the employer end when they're coming in to sit down and talk with them.

>> Absolutely.

>> One of the things that was, I think really interesting as the day that we did this first Career Cafe, that day we got multiple messages from other businesses. They said how do I sign up? When can I be next? From as far away as Charlottesville? They said, "We're willing to drive. Whatever we need to do. We're going to keep this Fauquier focused." But I think businesses are being really creative and any new idea to connect with folks, especially unexpected communities and populations they hadn't looked at before, they're game, so it's a real good time to be looking forward.

>> How do you get these businesses? Marty just mentioned that people are reaching out saying "I want to get on the list" I would imagine you probably already have a waiting list of ones going into 2022.

>> Getting the businesses is not a problem at all. The way we came up with the first five, I think I referenced earlier in November to the same businesses contacted Marty and myself. We had a jumpstart at two, and then Marty is in constant contact with multiple employers as am I. Between Marty and myself and recent interactions with employers, we just reached out to really probably the last one who had spoken with us. It really was that simple. Then as he said, it happened in the next day, we had employers reaching out asking, how can we do this? We do already have some employers lined up for January, and we're just awaiting responses from some others who have been invited. It's easy enough to get on the list just by contacting one of the two of us.

>> When we come back, I want to talk about the flip side of that. How do you job seekers get involved and get registered and participate? Can we talk about that in the next segment? Maybe dive a little bit into just the job market in Fauquier County alone because I know there's a lot of really good jobs in Fauquier County that don't necessarily require commuting either, which is a bonus these days.

>> Sure.

>> We're going to take a quick break, we come back, we're going to continue our conversation. It is LFCC Day. We are on the screen pre-recording with Guy Curtis, he is the Director of Marketing for Lord Fairfax Community College, becoming Laurel Ridge. Joining us is Donna Comer and Marty Bywaters-Baldwin. We're talking about the career cafe. Next one happens in January we're going to get more details for that in the next segment, we'll be back in just a couple of minutes.

>> Thought a financial decision to make or a goal to reach, but you don't know where to start? You've come to the right place. Introducing quick money chats with the Northern Shenandoah Valley Financial Education Program. Visit TinyURL.com/quickmoneychat to schedule a virtual chat with a staff member or trained volunteer. We won't tell you what to do, but we will give you the tools you need to choose wisely. Because Virginia Cooperative Extension is part of Virginia Tech and Virginia State, your land-grant universities. You can be sure that our information is credible and trustworthy. You'll know that we aren't trying to sell you something. Maybe you want to improve your credit score or reduce your banking overdraft fees, or even figure out if you can afford to buy that car. Sorting through tons of information on the Internet can be overwhelming, and sometimes it can be hard to know who to trust. Schedule a quick money chat and get the information you need to take action. Go to TinyURL.com/quickmoneychat and get financial education personalized for you.

>> Welcome back to The Valley Today, I am your host, Janet Michael. Happy Thursday as you are listening to the show today it is LFCC Day. We are talking about career cafe. Guy Curtis is on the Zoom with us for Lord Fairfax Community College Workforce Solutions. We're also chatting with Donna Comer and Marty Bywaters-Baldwin, I'm not going to get into all of the different hats that both of you wear, but I think it is phenomenal how so many different organizations and businesses have come together to help you guys create this Career Cafe. We talked in the first segment about the number of employers in the region that reached out literally before the first one was over saying, how can we participate in the second one? Marty, how does somebody from the job seeker perspective get on that list or know that they can come to the next one that's going to be on January 19th?

>> There's no wrong front door. At the Lord Fairfax and in the campuses can be an easy access point. Also, Virginia Career Works has three centers in the region here. We've partnered with the workplace in Fauquier and we have the Virginia Career Work Center in Culpeper and Orange, that people can access and they are the centers, what we do is we work one-on-one with folks to figure out what kind of jobs they're looking for, give them information about who's hiring and what kind of training skills and credentials they might need to get those good paying jobs. Then at the centers, we do one-to-one resume writing. We do practice interviews. We'll help people if they're feeling nervous about answering a tough question. Then we've also got some grants they can sponsor to send people back to school if that's something that they need in order to get those good-paying jobs. I think the career

work centers are a great place along with the Lord Fairfax campuses to get information. Then if people are still uncomfortable in-person services, we offer all those things virtually as well through Virginia Career Works. We can set up a phone call, Zoom, and we've got some online workshops to do those resume writing interview prep to get people ready for the next Career Cafe.

>>The career cafe itself, do people have to pre-register for it? Is there are a limited number of people because you only have two hours and a finite number of employers that are participating each time. How do people get registered for that?

>> We'd like to know how many people are coming so I have enough donuts for everybody because that's very important. But walk-ins are always welcome and we'll supply a pre-registration link. Registration is not required, but it helps us make sure we got enough coffee and donuts and make sure that folks if they need some help and practice before the Career Cafe, we can meet with them to do that.

>> Then how do they work that morning? Is it a traditional job interview kind of scenario? Is it a panel where there are sitting there answering questions from a bunch of different people at the same time? How does it look that morning at the Career Cafe?

>> The morning of the cafe and we have five businesses. Each business has a table, and really what it looks like is standing together over a cup of coffee and talking. It's real unimimidating. People walk in, Donna and I and our colleagues are there to welcome folks and give them the lay of the land, we'll give your cup of coffee and then we say, please go around and talk to everybody. Folks can talk about what jobs are available, what kind of path for growth in that company? What kind of pay? What kind of benefits? It's not an interview. Most of the businesses use this to pre-screen folks to set up one-on-one interviews later. This is a meet-and-greet kind of scenario. Then sometimes the connection is, this isn't right for me, but I have a child or I have a cousin that would be perfect for that. The businesses are very open to those connections as well.

>> We hear so much in our job searches over the years, not even just because of the pandemic and how it's changed to sometimes just getting your foot in the door is the biggest first step and that sometimes is the hardest first step, so this is providing that for a lot of people.

>> Absolutely. Yeah, that's the question that we instruct the job seekers to ask when they're coming in. The question is, ask what's the next step? Because you're right, some businesses you got to get onto their applicant tracking system for them to make a call and to line up an interview. But the businesses, they're so happy because they're not just sorting through applications online that are faceless and nameless and vague. They're actually meeting folks and a lot of the businesses are changing their recruiting strategies because of the shortage of workers right now, like one of the businesses, it was at a Career Cafe, the last one we did. They said they have a staff person that all they do is they monitor applications coming in and they call within five minutes of any application hitting their website because they're

finding that the quicker you respond the better chance you get interviews and employees, it's tidbits like that that that we find out through these conversations.

>> I like the in-person aspect of it because we hear stories about kids that are brilliant, but they are terrible at taking tests. This is that on an adult level because sometimes your resume might not look that great. But if I can explain to you and talk to you about what my history is and my experience and you can see my personality and hear how I speak and all of the things that don't really come across in a resume, it really does give you that added boost that you wouldn't know if I just build something out online and send it to a particular company.

>> That's right. The last year and a half has been so difficult and different for so many folks. I think a lot of people feel like, well, I got this gap in my resume because I had to stay home with the kids. I had to do this or my business close. This reduces any anxiety about that. The businesses that were at the last Career Cafe, they were so happy to talk to every single person that came through. They were very open to whatever the explanation was for your current situation.

>> Donna, what does the job market in Fauquier County look like right now? I'm sure it's busting open like it is all across the country.

>> Absolutely. I tell people if you need a job, you can get a job. Just take three steps and look to your left, look to your right, and Fauquier is really no different. Everybody is hiring. Just to give you an idea for Fauquier County Economic Development, the director of this department, he goes out and he visited businesses in Fauquier to see what their needs are. Since October 1st until today, he's sat one-on-one with 15 companies in Fauquier county, and one company out of 15 has told us they do not have any workforce needs. That just gives you an idea. Of these 15 companies, we have talked to those who need tradesmen, we have talked to those who need health care, we have talked to those who need sales. The job market is diverse, it's plentiful, and it's very welcoming. I'll sit down and talk with an employer in our county, and I'll leave that employer and think, "Oh, that is my favorite employer." and then the next day I'll meet with a different Fauquier County employer and I'm like, "Wow. That is my favorite employer." Now I have 15 favorite employers because we've been on 15 visits. For a county our size, and to have such a large outward commuting percent, I think it's something close to 76 percent of those in the job market in Fauquier county commute out. As I've said, when I've sat down with 15 employers and thought, "Gosh. Why is someone driving to DC or to Fairfax even when they could drive just across their own county and keep it all local, keep all the money in the county, do all that good stuff you're supposed to do in economic development. " It's crazy. There's no need.

>> A lot of these jobs aren't the jobs that we typically think of either. We're looking at jobs that are career-based, which again goes back to the Career Cafe, but they're not what a lot of people might think they are, so they really need to investigate them a little bit more.

>> Absolutely, they do. Certainly, there is a fair share of entry-level positions. But

definitely, some mid-level and upper-level positions are all vacant in Fauquier County and they all have clear pathways. I haven't met with one employer yet that this is where you begin and end in this entry-level position. All of them have options.

>> I think that those career pathways, that's the essential message that we're trying to get to job seekers too. One of the challenges in the market right now is how can folks make family-sustaining wages? That might be part of the out-commute that we're seeing. Our message to job seekers is there is a pathway to get to a better paying job and it's the same in career, and Lord Fairfax in getting further education and credentials might be part of that path for you. A few numbers for you. There's a great online calculator, the living wage calculator, that MIT puts out. You can look up any county in the country and it can tell you what the baseline is you need for any family size to just make ends meet in that county. It's like a basis of housing, food, transportation, and a little bit of entertainment, but it's not retirement savings or anything huge, it's just the basics. For Fauquier county, for one single adult living by themselves, that could be a high-school kid that just graduated or it could be a 30-year-old, is \$19 an hour. That's what that one adult needs to make ends meet. Means there are lots of companies in Fauquier County that are pushing that. That's close, that's competitive. That's good news even at the entry-level. If you got a family of four, so you got two adults and two kids, and both adults are working full time, both of those adults need to make \$24 an hour each in order to make ends meet. Again, that's challenging. But five companies we had last month at Career Cafe, like Donna said, especially in that middle level, once you get a promotion up, that's attainable. The challenge is if you got a single parent with one kid, it's a family too, but just one adult, the living wage for that one adult is \$36 an hour in Fauquier county. I think that's the challenge and that takes into account a lot of things, child care cost and housing, that's two of the primary ones. But that's our message to job seekers, is there are living-wage jobs in the county. You might need to go back to school, but you can go to school and work at the same time, and there's lots of grants and funding out there to make this stuff happen.

>> I think so many times people disqualify themselves or think, "That's not going to work for me" or "That's not going to pay enough" or "I'm not qualified enough for that",

and they don't even make even the initial effort and lose out on something that could

have been the best thing that ever happened to them or they didn't ask the questions to find out, "Well, I can work from home three days a week. That's going to eliminate some of my daycare costs. That helps me in my budgeting. Maybe I don't need a car, maybe I can rideshare." All of the things, but they just immediately look initially at something, make that snap decision and they really shouldn't. These Career Cafes are great ways to find all of the details out for what some of these positions are in and around the area.

>> Janet, that is an excellent point. For the Career Cafe, Marty and I keep using the

word intimate, conversational, relaxed. At the last Career Cafe, a job seeker did come in and she talked to two employers and she went to leave. But because it was just a casual atmosphere, and as Marty said, we're there drinking our coffee and eating our donuts and greeting everyone as they walk in, and because we've chatted with all of these employers, one of us stopped her at the door and we said, "Well, how was it? Did you talk to all of the employers?" and she said, "No, I talked to this one and this one." She says, "I don't even know what that one does." I said to her, "Well, go ask them what they do. They are hiring for multiple positions requiring different skill sets. I happened to know that they were a family-owned business and very flexible." Ultimately, that person did get hired by that job. That employer emailed me two or three days afterwards and she said, "That young lady that you stopped at the door, we've hired her. We're very excited to be welcoming her into our place of employment.", so, yes to your point, people can't be shy, ask. The worst thing that can happen is the employer can say, "Well, we're not set up for at home teleworking" or "We're not set up to do this, but you know what, maybe we can help you with your hours in this way" or "Johnny, he comes from that area, maybe they can make those connections." Job seekers, you just need to ask the right questions, and the Career Cafe provides that platform for job seekers to do just that.

>> Where can people get more information about Career Cafe, either employer side or job seeker side? Is social media the best place to kind of keep an eye on those kinds of things?

>> Absolutely. You can certainly follow Workforce Solutions, our social media pages. But also you can follow the Fauquier County Economic Development Department social media. I believe there's Instagram and Facebook. She posts when the next ones will be. Employers and job seekers alike are more than welcome to reach out to Marty and myself for details. But keeping an eye on the social media pages will certainly help. It will also certainly help keep people informed about what jobs are open in-between. You don't have to wait for the Career Cafe. People are hiring.

>> I will put links to all of that in the show notes page. How about you guys? Curtis, January's going to be here before we know it, what kind of cool fun stuff do you guys have going on in January?

>> In addition to the Career Cafe, we have a number of information sessions. When Marty and Donna talk about job seekers looking for career pathways and long-term job opportunities, we have a number of sessions that we offer at most of our campuses that prospective students or employers looking to upskill their workforce can come out and learn more from our program. Very similar to the Career Cafe, we also have a coffee talk, table-talk. A lot of our information sessions are in person. We have a trades information session coming up on January 22nd at our Vint Hill site in Warrington right in Fauquier county from 9:00 AM-12:00 PM. Opportunity just to come out anytime you'd like, open-house style, just to have informal conversations about careers, job outlook, training programs that are available. We have a number of funding options for a lot of our programs including G3, fast-forward, and Marty

and other folks across our service region have other supportive grants that can help folks who are in need to get into some of these fast-track programs quickly. They talked a little bit about some of those wages and some of the programs that we offer are aligned with a lot of in-demand programs, I'd say jobs actually, within the Fauquier market and beyond, and so there's a lot of hot jobs out there that pay really well. Some of the training programs we offer are very short-term, fast-tracked to get someone the skill set and the credentials that these in-demand employers are looking at. Since the pandemic, I'm going to say that buzzword, pivot, I'm sorry, Janet. But when we think about the pandemic and a lot of the employers are realizing, and also job seekers, there's a lot of jobs out there that you can work from home too, like IT, for example, project management. There's a lot of programs out there and job opportunities where you can get into a career that allows you to continue that flexibility you had during the pandemic. Definitely come out to our trades information sessions. If you're not able to attend, we have a workforce team and coach that could help support any of the questions you do have, as well as replays of the information sessions, we've be recorded. a lot of resources at LFCC Workforce.com.

>> Thank you guys for taking some time out of your day to meet up and tell me about the Career Cafe. This has been fun. I appreciate it.

>> You are welcome. Thank you for having us.

>> Thanks, Janet. I just want to give a big shout-out to Marty and Donna. A great example of community partners that we have with the college and other different partners in our region. A big shout-out to them and thank you for your support on the radio show today.

>> Again, I will put links to everything that we talked about today, including Marty and Donna's contact info. In the show notes page, you can find that at theriver953.com under the Podcast tab just look for The Valley Today. I will be back tomorrow. I will have a brand new episode of The Valley Today ready to go for you. It is one of my shop local shows, but I can't tell you where I'm shopping local yet. You got to wait till tomorrow, a few minutes after noon, to find out. Meet me back here then.