

>> 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. 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 and 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](http://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 this show today. It is LFCC Day, so we are on the Zoom screen pre-recording with Guy Curtis from LFCC Workforce Solutions. How are you doing, Guy? We were joking before we started, about your background and you put up this palm tree, because that's where I'd like to be right now, sitting under a palm tree with the fronds blowing in the breeze.

>> We all wish we were somewhere nice, warm weather and beaches for sure.

>> I'm excited because Sarah is on the show with us today. Sarah Pangle is an Academic Advisor and Career

Services Specialist with Lord Fairfax Community College.

Guy, we were chatting too before we started recording, about how you and I talk a lot about all of the really cool things that you offer through LFCC Workforce. You're actually housed at Lord Fairfax Community College, but we haven't talked recently about that relationship. How does that work with what LFCC Workforce does and what LFCC, the Community College does?

>> Workforce Solutions that continue educational, professional development as a unit, is a department of the college, and so a lot of our strategies, in just getting into the marketing world where we oversee and help support that we have very specific branding strategy. A lot of times we name and label ourselves as Workforce Solutions to appeal to, not only the individuals in our community, but the community employers that we work with. From corporate training activity to other professional development strategies and courses and programs that we offer and solutions, if you will. That's where our branding sometimes is perceived as a separate entity or unit from the college, but we support the mission of the college, it's for the greater region that we work within the college, and we're just one of the many units and services that are available through the college. I think some folks may see that as a different part of the college, but really we've been here since the college opened up and some way or form we've always had continued education. Certainly our unit over the last, I would say 16 years or so, there's been a very intentional presence of

Workforce Solutions because of the need to work with local business and help businesses grow within our region, and so our branding has reflected that, so that it would appeal more to business from a traditional aspect of non-credit to credit courses, our focus is fast-track course work and fast-track training that's credential based, that is non credit for those who don't need to necessarily apply to the college. They can come in for our four hour workshop, or you can come in for our 16 week-long boot camp training program, and so that's why our services are a little unique and different from a traditional college student or a non-traditional student who wants to get a degree or certificate. But then within our department, we're leveraging the credential based work, the skills that helped many employers find the qualified job candidates they need, and so that's really a lot of our focus and what we do, and that certainly supports the greater mission of the college we're serving our region, but not only just individuals, but the employers too.

>> Being part of the college, you have access to people like Sarah who are academic advisors, career coaches, because a lot of times it's not just new students out of high school or somebody

who's deciding to come back to college and isn't really

sure what their education paths should look like moving forward, it's somebody looking to upskill themselves but really still may not know what that's going to get them and what that's going to mean, and that's where you come in, isn't it, Sarah?

>> Oh, absolutely. I actually just worked with a student the other day who was currently taking classes, but she had applied for a job and she wanted some help with her resume and wanted some help with her cover letter, and I was able to help her tweak it some, bring it into what the employers are looking for now. I also set up a meeting with her to discuss interview tactics. How to answer those questions, what to have prepared, things to expect before you walk into an interview. We are working with all of our students that walk in the door for the first time, they don't know if they want to take classes on the credit side or if they would fit better on the Workforce Solutions side, they can come and set up an appointment to consult with me and meet with me and we can go over all different kinds of things from getting started, what are my interests? Maybe just trying to switch jobs, or a lot of times people have been out of work because they'd been at home with their kids and now their kids are a little bit older and they're trying to figure out what it's like to step back into the workforce, and so we go through that whole process with them from exploration to actually going into the interviews to get a job.

>> I will tell you from doing the podcast series with Lord Fairfax Community College, the LFCC Stories, so many of the people, the students that I've talked to have said, they didn't know where to start and they really didn't even know where they were going to end up, and that part of it was more fearful for them, than just walking in the front door, and so many of them have referenced their academic advisors, their career coaches that said, "They really helped me just figure it out, so I knew what the next step to take was."

>> Yeah, and we have this really awesome site that we have been working with Workforce Solutions and through the college, and it is our career coach website, and students can go in there and they can put their resume information and they can upload resumes that they have currently, they can take assessments, they can look at jobs that are posted. It's a free site for employers to post as well, and so our students are really using this website. They have incorporated it into the curriculum for the Student Development course and so the site sees a lot of traffic. They get 400 to over 600 hits a week, and a lot of those are brand new touches on the website. A lot of people will reach out to me, a lot of employers will reach out to me and ask how they can market their jobs to students, and so that is the best place that I send them because we don't have as much traffic as we used to have on campus right now, a lot of our classes are still online, students are choosing to stay online because they found the flexibility through the pandemic. When somebody contacts me and wants to post jobs, things like that, I tell them to go to [lfcc.edu/portal](http://lfcc.edu/portal) and they can set up an account, and from there they can post jobs. Every single morning I go in, I check to see if there are new employers in there and I approve them, and then I also approve the job postings that are put in there. It's a really great resource for students to use and for employers in the community.

>> I am sure you get put into a tricky situation a lot of times. I know that when I talk to somebody and they're like, "We're looking for help," and I say, "Where have you posted that you have this job available?" I always suggest have you checked out Lord Fairfax, they've got students there that are learning everything and the ultimate goal obviously is to get a job but you have just as many businesses that come to you to train their existing employees so you can't be mixing and matching a lot of the time either.

>> It is a challenge because we do want to help our local employers find the individuals with the right skill sets and a lot of the courses and programs we offer at the college have those individuals coming out with the skill sets they want. But obviously, some employers too have different development opportunities within themselves. They'll send employees directly to us so we like to honor that and make sure we don't have employers lose their employees they've developed and grown so we do offer ways through the portal that Sarah mentioned for other employers trying to find ways to connect with our students through this platform so they'll assist the online curriculum which is a great place to do that and it's free place to post. But the very unique part of it too is that as job postings come up real-time through a featured employer who's submitted the request to do so, a job will show next to a program that's related to that job skill set that they're trying to fill so it aligns with students who might be looking there not only just current students, but the big part of it too is community members can look at it as well too. There's no cost to get into it so if you're looking for jobs yourself and you're not a current student of the college in any form, any community member can come use this site as a resource for many of the features Sarah mentioned the assessment tool, career exploration, looking at job postings. Another nice part too as well as students are looking at our programs as a whole, if they're looking at any program. They can see some of the outcomes that align with the program they may consider so if I look at,

for example, commercial truck driving, what job opportunities are within our region with say, like in the next 25 miles of Middletown Campus or if I go out to the Fauquier Campus 15 miles from there. They can get very specific for the job openings related to the programs you offer so I think that's even a key aspect too not only for the employers to find the right folks to fill their pipeline, but also for students and their outcomes. If I get into this program, how much I'm going to make per hour? What am I expected to make? Who is hiring right now? Where can I find a job in this area and within the market and region, then I can expand my searches based where I want to live with the LFCC region or even beyond. So I think for everybody in the community to come to one place, this is a great resource and of course, the college has aligned all of its programs so that they can see those outcomes, see those opportunities but obviously make it fair for those employers who are eagerly after some of our students so we make it equitable that way. If you have more questions, certainly reach out employers about how to get in front of our student audiences we can help you do that, but the Career Coach site is a great place to start fundamentally. Now we do have some other programs that are out there, such as our guaranteed interview programs with our IT credential programs our commercial truck driving program as a nice way to get in front of employers there too and also our heavy equipment operator program as well. There are some other programs that have some alignment with job prospects, if you will, and local employers looking for our students but otherwise, the Career Coach site is a great place to start for employers and individuals in our community.

>> Let's take a break. When we come back, Sarah, can you maybe walk me through what that looks like when they come to your office or call you on the phone or get in touch with you over Zoom?

>> Lets do it.

>> We're going to take a quick break when we come back, we're going to continue our conversation. We are pre-recording today with Guy Curtis from LFCC Workforce Solutions. Sarah Pengo is joining us as well. She's an academic advisor in Career Services Specialist with LFCC, we'll be back and talk more with him in just a couple of minutes.

>> Got 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](https://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 and 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 and 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](http://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 pre-recording on the screen with Guy Curtis from LFCC Workforce Solutions. Sarah Pengo is with us as well. She's an academic advisor and career services specialist and Sarah, we were talking a little bit during the break and you were saying that probably the bulk of your job is asking questions because you can't help somebody find their way if you don't know where they are in the process and where they want that way to end up being.

>> I just took a training where we talked a lot about active listening and how to ask questions and how to dig and how to help people self realize different things about themselves. Because if you have a student that comes to you and says, "I want to do something with art." It's so vague and sometimes starting with an assessment is where you want to start. We have six-question assessments, 30 question assessments, or 60 question assessments that pull out those things. I'm an SCA, which is Social Enterprising and Artistic and the first two are really where do you want your position to land. I'm very social person. I wouldn't want to be locked in a room by myself all the time. I want to be around people. Those things are really important and the assessment can pull that out of you. You don't want to be in a position that doesn't allow you to explore that and to really thrive in something that you are just innately built to do and to be and of course as a younger job seeker you may start out in a certain place on the assessment, but then once you've been doing 10 years of work, things may come a little clearer. Things may change a little bit for you so if you've taken an assessment in the past and you haven't taken one in a while, those things may have changed based on what your experiences have been and how you've evolved in your personality. So I do spend a lot of time asking questions and then I help the student facilitate their own plan as to how they're going to navigate doing some job exploration. Is it reaching out to professionals on LinkedIn and saying, "Hey, I'm interested in your career," and asking those people questions about their career, "How did you get here?" I am actually an adjunct instructor for public speaking and the way I got into my position was I asked people how they got to where they got to. I wanted to be an instructor of communication and so I went to somebody who I see as a mentor and I said, how did you get there? She said, "Well, I went to this school and I did this program," and so that is the exact path that I went on in order to be able to do that and so now I teach that on a part-time basis and that's how a lot of career exploration goes. It's your own path but I help facilitate that for students.

>> I know again from doing the podcasts that what we used to consider a traditional student, someone who has just graduated high school and they're doing their two years at community college or maybe four depending on what it is they actually want to do. Isn't necessarily the traditional student anymore? You've got people in their 30s and 40s in their 60s, who are deciding they retired from one career and now they don't want to sit at home or they can't sit at home. It's got to be a scary

process for them because it's a whole lot different now looking for a job and going back to school than it was 30, 40, 50 years ago.

>> I love our non-traditional students. I love our students who come back. They bring such a different energy to the classroom. They have different perspectives to share. It is such a rich experience for those students to be in the classroom, especially with our traditional students and to interact with them and my non-traditional students talk about how terrifying it is. It's terrifying to change your life, to go back, to feel like you're starting again but they are the most focused students. They really are motivated, they know what they want and I guess that's for anybody who's been in the workforce for a while, you know more about yourself and you know that you don't want to waste time and so you hit the ground running, you're a really hard worker in classes and not to say that I don't have traditional students that way because I absolutely do, but my non-traditional students across the board are some of the hardest workers I've ever seen and usually they are balancing so many other things in their lives.

>> The process is so different now so the beauty of what you offer them is a starting point because they may know, "Look, I'm going to take on this career so I'm assuming I need XYZ classes." But you can actually guide them and say this is what you're going to need and then you're going to want to do this and then here are other options that maybe they wouldn't have thought up because it's not a career they have been in before.

>> Absolutely. You don't even have to be interested in a program. You don't even have to know what program you want to do. You can just have an interest to say, you know what, I'm out of work or I'm fed up with my job, I want to change my life and do something different. You can e-mail me and I can come by or we can meet on Zoom. I've been doing that quite a bit, and we can talk about things and we can figure out if the college is the place that you need to start. Do you need to go over to Workforce Solutions and work through their fast-track programs? Are you better suited to something on our end and the credit side? It's more of a one-door auction for people. You just come in and we can just talk about some things. You could just sit down and I'll ask you lots of questions and I will learn all about you. I'm nothing but a big cheerleader for people. I really want to encourage people because I have seen the change and the growth and how much the community college does for people's lives firsthand.

>> She's a great cheerleader Guy, I got to tell you. You couldn't have done a better job at choosing somebody to put in that spot because Sarah is amazing.

>> Yes, for sure. She serves with her heart and the student in mind and the community mind, so that's wonderful.

>> Fear is a big factor. It's not even always about money or about the time that would go into going back to school. It is the fear of, can I do it? What's involved? Is it overwhelming or too much? I love that through Workforce Solutions, you guys have those programs that are fast-track programs that are virtual in some ways. Also you

really can fit a program to whatever it is somebody wants.

>> Yeah, that is a big barrier. It's the mindset of, can I do this? Can I balance the family and a life and other obligations? It comes down to supporting maybe a child that's at home and trying to get them to practice, as well as the job you're currently working through and maybe another job you might be also working. There's a lot of those factors and certainly financial and other barriers that should have come into play. A lot of our fast-track credential programs at the college meet those needs where they're low cost investment, meaning there's a lot of financial support through Virginia grants and in some cases, federal support too. But also they're short-term in nature, and so there's not a lot of, I guess, risk, if you will, there's no as much time invested into them. But I think what Sarah hit on exactly was just how to overcome some of those fears, ask the questions. We have so many resources and a great reason why we have Sarah here today. She's connected as a community partner and some of the resources within the college. We also have a Workforce coach who does the same thing on the Workforce Solutions side, where we're trying to help them connect the dots so that all of these barriers that individuals face. We're well-connected in the community with other partners within our region that can help connect those dots. If you're running into barriers, transportation, housing, food, you name it, there's a lot of ways for us to connect you with folks. If you have some of those initial barriers, that's one, but to help get through and understand what might be possible, asking those questions, asking Sarah exactly what might be troubling you is a great way to get started. I do want to mention if there's a good time to do it, we have a lot of information sessions that are upcoming, as well as free opportunities to learn more about our programs and certainly our job coach, our LFCC Workforce Online Career Coach site has a great place to start exploring, looking at some of those assessments, looking at the job openings that are in the region, understanding the expectations of the job duties of those jobs that are open. Saying, hey, can I do this? Is this a job that would be a good fit for me? But sometimes it just takes a person to talk to and Sarah is a great resource to leverage. Many times, so many stories we've seen where folks who have gotten a credential from the college and have gotten out of poverty, for example. There's been so many success stories that we can't begin to number that the college has impacted within the region. But it just takes that one step, talk to somebody at the college or leverage some of the free resources

and get started, that's all it takes.

>> What was the web address for that free online career coach website?

>> For the individuals to look at jobs, explore careers and look at assessments, resume builder, it's [lfcc.edu/jobs](http://lfcc.edu/jobs). For the employers, it's the same address but [/portal](http://lfcc.edu/portal). That's where they can go in [lfcc.edu/portal](http://lfcc.edu/portal), post their jobs and get in front of our student audiences, as well as community audiences that are looking.

>> You were telling me right before we came back for this last segment about something new that has been added to the CDL program?

>> Yeah, just a quick announcement and this is a great example of a free resource to take advantage of. If you have ever considered taking our CDL program, one of the top credentials in-demand jobs within our region. It's still at the top of our credentials and most in need of our region, truck driving. You can take a free CDL exam prep course that we're offering at Lord Fairfax. You can visit our website, [lfccworkforce.com](http://lfccworkforce.com), but the first upcoming date is October 16th from 8:00-12:00 and October 19th from 6:00-10:00. We'll also have some sessions, free courses in November and December and the New Year as well too. But it's a great resource to leverage prepping and getting ready for the exam, which you need a learner's permit before you start the course or if you enroll into the course, you can get it in that first week. Those are great options as well as other information sessions that we offer, not only just speaking to staff, but we do have an IT certification information session on December 2nd, as well as a healthcare professionals online information session in December. Some of those options might help you out decide whether or not these programs are a great place to start. Otherwise, Sarah would be a great resource to leverage, to just ask questions and sit down and coffee talk through some of the things they're trying to get through as far as barriers or opportunities and learn more about the services we have available at the college.

>> We are all seeing in the news about supply chain issues and the fact that stores aren't going to get Christmas presents on shelves because truck drivers aren't around to get them shipped from point A to point B. Now, is the time, CDL is having a moment.

>> That's right. You can drive locally, weekday, or weekend trips, just locally in our region or if you want to go long haul, you can. But I just looked today within our region over the last six months, heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, over 800 jobs have been posted for that position and they're looking for the CDL-A or CDL-B license. Yes, that license in itself with many other occupations in construction and manufacturing, having multiple stackable credentials helps you more employable and obviously you get a little extra more change as well too with that.

>> Guy, Sarah, thank you both so much for taking some time to chat with me about this today. I think it's a great program and I love the fact that people can start on either side of the college, whether it's Workforce Solutions or the college itself and get themselves wherever they need to go. I will be back tomorrow. I will have a brand new episode of The Valley Today ready to go for you. It is Extension Office Friday, Corey Childs is going to join me for the conversation, so meet me back here for that just a few minutes after noon.