

>> Hello, and welcome to the Valley Today. I am your host, Janet Michael. It is LFCC Day. This is the last time that you're going to hear me call it LFCC Day. Guy Curtis is on the screen with me, he is Director of Marketing for Lord Fairfax Community College. Guy, I have gotten in the habit of saying becoming Laurel Ridge, but now, it might be time to stop saying becoming and just say Laurel Ridge Community College.

>> That's right. We're very close, Janet. I catch myself sometimes. I think a lot of us catch ourselves, but it's such a great opportunity to enjoy this change, and a lot of what we hope that folks will do coming forward is growing with us and it couldn't just be more perfect with the spring weather we're having now, the sun, the flowers and everything else that comes with that. But yes, this new name change is a great reflection of all the past history of what the college has offered, what it does for our community, and we hope to re-strategize that, what the new change. We're excited about it for sure.

>> Well, it's one of those silver linings from the pandemic. One of the things that the pandemic has taught a lot of us is that nothing ever really stays the same. During this pandemic, we've all learned new skills, we've all learned how to communicate with each other differently, we've gone from being completely virtual to virtual, to some in-person. It makes sense that in that whole process, a lot of businesses that I've talked to have changed the way they're doing business. They've changed their names in a lot of cases. It's a new beginning for all of us and it's time to start looking at things a little differently.

>> Absolutely. I think the change of the name is a better reflection of what we're doing every day at the college, and that actually in itself doesn't change at all. We continue to serve the students, the employers, the individuals and our region to help them with their academic goals and pursuits. It's a new beginning for a name change, and too from the marketing side, it's a great opportunity to reintroduce the college to our region. We're very excited about what it's doing to hopefully better resonate with our audiences. I think that's the key piece, especially from the marketing, I'm going to put that on right now, that we want to try to find our audiences and where they are. I just had a conversation of the day with a close friend. "I didn't know the college is changing its name." I was like, "Yeah, it is." We have some work to do. Today, I'm excited to have Michelle Cribbs on the air with us to talk about our outreach activities, what we're doing in marketing as well to help connect with those audiences. It's the families, the community supporters, the folks coming in at a high school, the folks who we are trying to retrain and find themselves in a new career path. We're excited to have Michelle on board and talk a little about what she does and what we can hopefully connect the community with about this new name change.

>> I promise you probably another five, maybe 10 years, people are going to say, "I forgot it used to be called Lord Fairfax Community College." Everything comes and goes. It's like a wave.

>> Yes, we hope that, but we won't forget the name, for sure. It's definitely deeply rooted in our history and it will always be there. But hopefully, the new name change will reflect our opportunity to better connect with our future audiences, and that's where we're excited for.

>> Michelle, welcome to the show. I'm excited to have a conversation with you. Coordinator of outreach, sounds like a pretty broad title. That encompasses a lot of stuff. Talk to me about what you do.

>> Sure. Thank you so much for having me. My role at the college is really to just meet people where they are in their spaces and bring them onto our campus in one way or another. I had the privilege of talking to people throughout our service region and connecting the staff with our prospective students, families, community agencies, businesses, to make sure that they just have an awareness and an understanding at a high level of what opportunities that community college holds. Sometimes that looks like going to, again, a small group in a business or a community organization or Virginia Career Works, and helping their staff so they can be liaisons. A lot of my job is spent working in the high schools throughout our entire service region which spans seven counties, City of Winchester. I have been short staffed lately, so I've had an awesome opportunity to get into spaces and places that I had not had the opportunity before. I truly feel like that is a privilege. I get excited and share opportunities that people didn't know existed, they didn't realize how accessible it was to them. When you bring that information to them, it's really easy for them to be advocates for you. But I really feel very strongly about myself as an educational advocate, really sharing with other people so they can better their academic future or their professional goals or objectives. Then again, once they realize it, it's really easy for those community members to keep sharing the wealth of that. This year, like I said, with all the new name changed, coming out of the pandemic or getting students back into classrooms. That's really exciting for a lot of our community members to hear, and they are really considering a future here at the college, knowing that it has great transferability either into a four-year school later on or right into a career profession.

>> I think sometimes those of us that know about the college and are huge fans and advocates for the college forget that not everybody does. We assume we know about it, we know how great it is, so of course, everybody else does and maybe we're not as good as we should be about telling friends and family and even strangers on the street, "Hey, did you know about our great community college that we have right here?" That's probably a little bit of an obstacle that you have to overcome is getting those of us that do know about it to tell more people.

>> Exactly. My original position was in the Fauquier region. The position was designed because after doing some research, the college realized that there were a large number of people in the Fauquier community that had no idea about the building on the hill. We really spent the first basically two years of my position just getting as much accessibility, traction, consistent communication, and really building an intentional strategies of, again, being consistently available. Meeting

students maybe in the high school in a classroom and then meeting them at a larger school organization or an event. Meeting them again, the same person in their new student orientation. I present it for those, then added on teaching SDV. By the time a student really came onboard, they had a really comfortable familiarity with, wow, this is a really just approachable place. This is a college I can envision myself being at without some of the obstacles that they may be perceived were there before. That was a really intentional focus part of my original position and we've now just scaled that college-wide, and that's been an exciting opportunity for me to take what was once a small and really make it a much larger position and much larger activities, events, really building those relationships with our community.

>> You mentioned a minute ago about Virginia Career Works. I would imagine having partners like them, the local businesses. Guy, and I talked frequently about the local businesses and recruitment for them, for employees and people being able to get certifications and designations and things like that. Having great partners probably makes your job a little bit easier, I would guess.

>> Yes, because every student that you meet has multiple individual layers of what efficiency or what relevant opportunities means for that student. Not just with what maybe program they want to study, but their own personal, what needs they might have. A perfect example is not too long ago, I was working with a high-school student who really wanted to go into the dental field. We had a great program, but unfortunately, our program is fabulous as it is is one that does not qualify for some of the state aid and it is a little bit pricey for many students. I thought if there's anybody that could help me figure out some alternate funding opportunities, so I reached out and talk to a great colleague at Virginia Career Works and he was like, "Oh, we have money for an internship and we can connect her with an employer and that employer will be willing to pay for that." In a matter of just knowing creatively solve a perceived obstacle, we now took a student who felt very deflated that she was not going to be able to move forward with not only connecting her with a job, but then an employer that really believed that she could succeed and was willing to help pay for that. Those are the kinds of daily interactions that I get to be a part of. Really that is a result of just spending an enormous amount of time and focus energy getting to know our community. There's no way I could have all the answers or have all the knowledge, but having that trusted relationship partners, both internally in the college, as well as externally is just an essential part of being a community educational presence or having that presence.

>> You've got a couple of events that are coming up. You've got some virtual information sessions, you've got some open houses that are going to be in-person. Can we talk about those when we come back from the break?

>> Sure thing.

>> We're going to take a quick break. When we come back, we're going to continue our conversation. We are on the screen today with Guy Curtis. He is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Joining him is Michelle Cribbs, she is

Coordinator of Outreach. We're going to talk about open houses and virtual information sessions when we come back 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 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. We are on the screen pre-recording today with Guy Curtis. He is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Joining him is Michelle Cribbs. She is the coordinator of Outreach. Michelle, we were talking before we went to a break about the next step, which is the physical step, really it's parents, it's teachers, it's students, it's those of us even that may not be in the system learning more about what you have to offer at the college. We too can go out and be your speakers and tell people about it. You do a lot of this virtually and in-person these days.

>> Did we do? We have done a lot of research in terms of looking at what is accessible, what is meaningful, how are people getting their information now? Our study in higher education indicated that a lot of people really want to start virtually when they're doing their research. They're going to look for colleges that offer general information sessions. How can they gather that information? We are hosting a couple of, again, just general welcome to Laurel Ridge, take a look, come, here the information our new theme emerging from our name change and spring semesters, grow with us. Just want to make sure that people, community students, teachers, have access in that virtual format. Following up with a general session in mid-May is a session focused for parents and supporters. Again, we know that they have lots of specific questions. Maybe they have assumptions about what higher education is and we want to just give them the opportunity to engage with us in a really convenient way. We will focus on specifically on being a parent or a supporter for Laurel Ridge, but also go over some high level, just general higher education information like what is FASFA? While that definitely applies to students who are coming to our college, that is something that all college students will need to be aware of to take advantage of that financial aid opportunity. Then being very intentional knowing that the starting virtual making it really easy, so you can sit in your kitchen or your car, or wherever you could get great Internet service. We will then follow that up with some open houses this fall. Physically on campus we want to

invite people to our spaces. We want them to see the growth and the development, the energy around community college. Our Fauquier campus has one brand new building getting ready to open in a couple of months. Another one that's going to be breaking ground this fall. Just wanting to help people see that excitement and that energy to come onto our campuses. We will do an open house in-person at each of our three physical locations. Both in Luray, Middletown, and Fauquier. We'll have some mailings going out that will have all the dates for that.

>> Will people have to register in advance for those? Is there a fee to come to any of them?

>> There is no fee. We will have the opportunity to register. We always like to just know how an idea of how many people will be in attendance. If there's going to be several dozen or hundreds, it would really be beneficial for me to have more than just myself available for question-and-answer, engagement, that thing. We would want to staff accordingly for those virtual sessions and we will have a registration form on our website as well as a link on those mailings that we'll be sharing with the community and our service region. The open houses as well are free, we will have preregistration as an option. But if you decide last minute, we really would just rather you come, show up and we'll meet you where you're at and we can just go from there. There's a follow-up that you would need if you find something really specific that he would like to maybe come back and schedule more of a personal one-on-one visit. We can certainly connect you with the staff and faculty that might be really able to answer those specific questions.

>> When you talk about the numbers of people that would show up for a virtual information session, you mentioned if there is a lot, then you want to have extra people on for Q&A. One of my questions was going to be, is this a canned thing where it's already recorded and I'm logging in and I'm going to sit and watch or is it something where at the end I can say, "I have a question about how do I find where I fill out my FASFA or any of these other things?" You're actually going to be able to interact with people during these virtual sessions.

>> Absolutely. While we know that people like to be in-person, we have really learned the value of being live and still available to our community. As of now, we have continued to do a lot of our regular higher education enrollment processes live just on Zoom throughout the pandemic. We're going to continue to do that because we know that it's timely to drive to a campus location, take time off whereas if you can do that a little more efficiently for your family dynamics and it makes people more easily able to attend and then when they have time, they can schedule a visit that works more for their personal schedule. We do have some pre-recorded information on certain programs that's helpful. But most of the time anything we do that would be a general information session. Parents and supporters were hoping to do a bilingual information session this fall. That is all live. One of us from our outreach team really accessible, able to engage with questions, with parents, teachers, our community members because that's really the opportunity they have to dialogue.

>> The other upside to doing some of these virtual, I would guess, is very similar to what I've run into with the radio show is people are less nervous. They're more likely to actually listen and even to participate to a certain degree if they think they're still anonymous. If they can show up virtually and get a sense of what's going on they're much more likely, I would guess, to then come in in person because like you said, that's the beginning of that relationship.

>> Exactly. When we did some of the general information sessions and the parents and supporters and the session was designed to last about 30 minutes and I think we stayed around for about an extra hour answering questions because the chat questions, you're right. Once one person starts asking questions, it really creates that comfort level. The people ask questions. Sometimes they're really excited to unmute their mic and just ask out loud. Other people again prefer the anonymity, just typing those questions in the chat.

>> Do you find that a lot of those questions are misconceptions. What people think they knew about community college, that it's nice, I would guess on your end to be able to say, oh, no. Let me explain to you how this really works.

>> Correct. Oftentimes we have adult students that feel like maybe they missed the opportunity to go to college when they were younger or they're going back for a second degree but it's really different 20 or 30 years later so they assume that maybe they've expired or aged out and they're going to have to go through a lot of challenging logistics and so when you share with them it's actually quite simple. The application is free. We are going to have staff that will answer your questions and be available to you. So if you're having trouble with the application, if you need help with filling out any of the paperwork for any reason, we have a live person that will call you or you can come into our campus, stop by. We have staff right at the welcome desk and then our students services officers at all of our campus locations. I think that's the big misconception from adult students. I think from traditional age college students, the high school students, they don't know what questions to ask so when you give it to him in a step-by-step, this is what you do first. Then we'll get to the next part. The wonderful thing that I've really appreciated about Laurel Ridge Community College is the commitment to academic advising. Every student will be assigned an academic advisor who's going to help them have that one-on-one personal dialogue conversation. What do they want to do? Where do they want to go? What about tomorrow versus two years from now? I'll really helps them build that plan and also reassure them that can change, it's not set in stone. I will say that's the other misconception. They're afraid if I pick business that we're going to hold them to that. Just letting them know that there's a value and exploration.

>> I was having a conversation with an old friend the other day and we were talking about the college and she had referenced that she had always thought about going back to school, but she wasn't really sure what she would study and she didn't think there were any financial aid programs out there for her because she assumed that all of the scholarships and all of the grants and a lot of the funding were for the kids and she said, I don't know that I could afford to do it on my own and there isn't any

of that stuff out there for me and I did one of those. Let me tell you, there are all of these programs and there is this and it doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter all of these things. All of us probably have somebody in our lives that thinks that college is something that it isn't that we could correct for them very quickly.

>> Absolutely. Like I said, we have an incredibly generous community that donates to our college with the sole purpose of supporting these people. Sometimes our challenge is matching them up, so again, that's a privilege of my position is that when I'm talking to students, I'm hearing their story, I'm hearing what they say, I can read between the lines and if I see here a hesitancy or I can really just help them understand without having to ask them directly what opportunities or resources that we can offer at the college. I know sometimes specifically finances and uncomfortable subject to many people don't feel like they are needy enough. That's an interesting dialogue sometimes and once you start talking to people, you realize the nuances of that. Without them having to even say I can offer just genuinely helpful resources or scholarships. Again, our foundation is incredibly creative and savvy. Whenever there's a need, we really do try to meet the students where they are and see what we can do to just help create that positive engagement, just getting them back and started. Sometimes that's the hardest part, so we can keep it positive, help them out a little bit, encourage them along the way and usually they tend to figure it out one way or the other. They're just tenacious and if there are bumps again, we have some great community partners, resources, and inter college access for students for different needs.

>> Where can people go to get more information about the college in general, but specifically about the dates and the times for these different information sessions?

>> That's a great question, Janet. We have a view book that's going to highlight a lot of these sessions that's currently mailed out to our service region of certain household contexts that we were able to acquire. But the best place is our website, laurelridge.edu/info and that's going to give you a quick redirect to all of our information sessions that Michelle has described in the open houses that we have for this fall. We do strongly encourage pre-registration, if it's possible and if you can't make that date and time too will also send out an on-demand replay so you're able to watch those sessions after the fact in case you couldn't make it for those two dates coming up in May. But the website is a great place to pre-register and certainly reaching out to Michelle, she can help direct you to the right one as well. We're excited about being able to reach audiences virtually and again, back in person, we had the trades information session a few weeks ago and it was great to see more folks coming out, feel more comfortable to talk with the faculty and the staff about what we offer in programs and so we're very excited about the fall events so we know a lot of folks will come out, but we still have those virtual first options because we know that a lot of folks are very busy and if you can't make that day and time, you can always watch the on-demand replay because we will shoot out a reply link to those who pre-registered and are sure after the facts. So we're excited about those events.

>> I love that you do that on-demand reply because a lot of times I know ahead of time that I'm not going to be able to make a particular information session that you're doing but I register for it anyway because I know that you're then going to email me when that's available and I'm not going to have to remember to go back to your website at some point and then be trying to find it. When I get to your website, you're just going to send me that link and I'm going to be able to watch it. This is great too for someone who may watch it and then realize when it's over, my mom needs to see this or my aunt needs to see this. You're going to be able to send that to them and let them watch it when they may not have even known anything about it to begin with. So it takes a lot of boxes. I'm really glad that you guys do it that way.

>> Actually byproducts of COVID and what we learned through a lot of online, on-demand, webinars, and different things we've experienced as professionals but also as individuals students in the community so, we're excited to be able to offer those just to be more accessible like what Michelle is referring to, describing all the ins and outs and I think if you can attend in person, it's a great way to ask those live questions. We do have staff always available and we do have live chat, for example, if you can't make to our information sessions or you're not able to meet us on campus. Live chat connecting with us during our operating hours or off hours. We're glad to answer any questions you have about the process, how to get started, figuring out those problems that Michelle was describing and trying to connect the dots for those individuals trying to make the next step for themselves or a family member. So we're excited about where we're able to offer now at Laurel Ridge.

>> Even if they're not available to come to one of the group sessions, the open houses, there's still the ability for them to call the college and schedule a one-on-one and actually come in and sit down individually with somebody and talk as well, if that's more of their comfort level, right?

>> Absolutely. Prospective students, community members can go to our website and the top-left corner you'll see a tab that says future students. When you click on that, you'll have the opportunity to click a button that says meet us, and you can select whether you want to meet us virtually first on Zoom, phone if that works better or of course, come to the campus will schedule a tour. We've got outreach staff that can host those tours, as well as a couple of student ambassadors who are fabulous. They're current students themselves. They also bring a really terrific opportunity and perspective to share with students.

>> Laurelridge.edu. I like the ring of it, Guy.

>> Doing that one for sure.

>> Yeah. We all just have to now just keep saying that over and over in our heads so that it sticks in our brain. Thank you both for taking some time to chat with me today and giving me all these details.

>> Thank you, Janet.

>> Thank you.

>> I will be back tomorrow. I will have a brand new episode of The Valley Today, having a conversation with Julian Royalty from the Virginia Cooperative Extension office about the spotted lanternfly. She has some very practical tips for how you can keep them from being an annoyance to you this summer so, meet me back here for that tomorrow, just a few minutes afternoon.