

>> Hello and welcome to The Valley. Today, I am your host, Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College day, so I am on the screen with Guy Curtis. He of course is their Director of Marketing. Jelise Ballon is with us. She is their corporate training product developer. We're going to be talking about some webinars and some COVID assessment, some looking back at COVID and where we are today versus where we may have thought we were going to be a webinar that they've got coming up at the end of August. Guy Curtis, how are you doing back in the office?

>> Doing great. We're enjoying the summer months here and some vacation time, but otherwise a lot of us are so suddenly working for the fall recruitment that we're doing at Laurel Ridge Community College, and all the workforce development strategies employing with our employers and trying to help them through these challenging times with labor shortages and everything else. Excited to be here and thank you again for having us on the radio show.

>> Jelise, I'm excited to hear about this new report. I believe you came and did the show with me shortly after you guys did the first one in August of 2020, giving a sense of the local landscape. We keep seeing all these national reports, and on a national level, this is what's going on. This is great because you guys undertook this for our local area in 2020 and now I've done it again in 2022. We're going to get to see our own backyard and what's improved, what's changed, where we're headed. How cool was that for you to be on the inside of that, putting it all together?

>> Yeah, it's actually been really great because what's interesting is there's certainly some trends that we see nationally that carry through to our region. But there's some things that are really unique to our region as well. Particularly when you start breaking it up by the different industries and seeing where the differences are. It's been really enlightening, of course, Workforce Solutions want to be a voice for the local workforce, and so being able to see really what our local businesses are still struggling with, what new challenges they have, where they've had successes is really important for us.

>> When you did the first report in August of 2020, did you do this second one differently? Did you collect data differently? Did you go about it with a different approach than you did back then?

>> We tried to use a lot of the same questions because we want it to have that benchmarking data. Obviously, we're in a different place two years later. Back in August 2020 at that time, if you can remember, I think we had this sense that we were starting to come out of the pandemic. Cases we're lowering, and so we thought, this is a great time to see how our businesses have fared the last eight months or so. Of course little did we know, what was still ahead of us. We definitely had some different questions last time that were very specific to how have you adjusted to safety requirements and keeping up with government changes. Obviously those weren't relevant anymore. But what we've seen now two years later as some of the knock on effect from the pandemic and this great resignation in the workforce shortages that are being experienced all over the country. We asked

some questions that were more specific to that. But we also tried to keep some of the same questions just to understand what are their biggest challenges? What are their goals for the next 6-18 months? What do they need to do to make those goals a reality and how can we support them with training. Those were all questions we asked in 2020 that we asked again this year.

>> It's probably really great for a business owner on their end. Obviously it's great for you when they answer these questions and you have this data and can put together this report. But as a business owner, making me think about what those answers are probably was very beneficial for my business too, because sometimes we're so in the weeds, running our business and trying to get through day-to-day, we're not even looking at what those answers are. It's probably a good perspective on both sides.

>> Yeah, I would think so, especially since a little more than 60 percent of our respondents were small businesses. It's one of those things that if you are a small business owner, maybe you haven't thought about it because you don't have that larger corporate umbrella driving those decisions. I found also that even the larger organizations, they appreciate the data because they want to know they're not alone. It's helpful to hear, we're not the only one struggling with this, so we're not the only ones needing this, and especially when we start to do the breakdown in the report by industry, you can see not only what other local businesses are struggling with, but what are other local businesses in your industry struggling with? Where are they succeeding and how are we comparing to one another?

>> One of the downsides to the pandemic is that we all really get comfortable in our bubbles. It really hasn't helped realize that we're all in this together, which is interesting, that's what the name of this webinar is looking ahead together, 2022, we all need a reminder more so now than maybe we would have in 2020.

>> Yeah. I agree. I think a lot of those organic conversations that would happen through networking local business development groups where some of that information will be shared because everybody's had to scale back on those events. I think there is a little bit of that siloed bubble feeling that you don't really know what the folks down the road are doing and going through and it's comforting, like you said to remind ourselves, we're all in this together.

>> You've got this webinar scheduled for 11:00 AM on August 31st. Tell me what people can expect if they register for it.

>> Yeah, that's a great question. So we're going to go over the highlights of the report, the key findings that we had. We'll talk about some of the main trends that we saw where some things have differed from two years ago versus today, we're going to look at the top five industries that responded to the report and what the trends are in those specific industries. Then the best part is if you registered for the webinar, you're going to get a complimentary copy of the report sent to you. You will have that data front and center to refer to.

>> Is there a fee or a registration cost to attend the webinar?

>> Nope. It's absolutely free is one of the services we provide to our community.

>> Those are my favorite webinars.

Guy Curtis, How do people register for the webinar? I assume registration is open now.

>> Yes. They can reach out surge a lease or myself, but our website, laurelridgeworkforce.com/webinar, is the best place to go and you can search the landing page for it and to review some of the introductory information about the report and register there. Pre-registration is great, but if you miss it after the actual live showing, you can watch it on demand, which is always a nice benefit of our busy work schedules that we have today. If you can't see it at the day and time, you can always watch the replay.

>> Jelise, will there be any interaction during the original webinar? I'm one of those people that loves to sign up for these webinars. Not because I'm actually going to watch them live, but so I get that replay and can watch them at 9,10,11 o'clock at night when everything settles down. But sometimes when I do that, I realize that I'm missing out on any interaction that may be happening during the actual webinar itself. Is that going to be an option for this one?

>> Yeah, we always try and save some time at the end for Q&A, sometimes those are where the best organic conversations happen. So we do try and save some time. You never know how much of that will take place. Hopefully those watching it on playback won't feel like they miss too much, but that's definitely going to be an opportunity for those who attend live.

>> Well, let's take a break when we come back, can we dive into maybe who should be signing up for this webinar, an overview of some of the things that you're going to talk about, so that people get a sense of, yeah, I really need to know this information. I need to register. Can we do that in the next segment?

>> Sounds great.

>> We are on the screen today with Guy Curtis. He is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Joining him is Jelise Ballon, she is Corporate Training Product Developer. We're talking about there webinar looking ahead together, 2022, it's happening on August 31st at 11am. We're going to get more details about that when we come back in just a couple of minutes.

>> Hello, I'm Ryan Garno and I am a graduating senior, at Mountain Vista Governor School. And we are partnering with a local environmental non-profit sustainability matters to help yourself while helping the planet. Here's a helpful daily tip to promote sustainability in your life. The fast fashion repurchase from stores is mass-produced and often uses cheaper materials. As a result, they wear out and end up in landfills. Buying clothing that is eco-friendly, fair trade, or made from recycled

materials is better for the environment. Buying secondhand makes one garment lasts longer, reduces the demand for mass production and also saves you money. You can even donate or so old clothing instead of throwing them away. Every small action we take towards saving the environment is another step closer to saving our planet. Thank you for listening. This has been an ecologically exciting message from mountain vista Governor School and sustainability matters, reminding you that together we can keep the river clean and the Valley green.

>> Welcome back to the Valley Today, I am your host, Janet Michael. We are on the screen today with Guy Curtis. He is Director of Marketing from Laurel Ridge Community College. Joining him is Jelise Ballon she's a corporate training product developer, which sounds really technical, but you're really just putting together programs for all of us business owners out here. Jelise, they need to know more about our industry, about our staffing, about how to be a better leader. You're like I go to educator for the most part.

>> Wow. That sounds very impressive. I don't know if I live up to that, but yes, that's what we strive to do. The whole team within corporate training as part of workforce solutions, we definitely strive to be that source of knowledge, information, and assistance.

>> We've been talking about the webinar that you guys have coming up, Looking Ahead Together 2022. It's on August 31st at 11:00 AM. The post-COVID assessment of our local business community, who should be registering and coming to this event? Should it be low-level staffers? Should it only be CEOs, somewhere in-between? Who should be signing up for this?

>> That's a great question. I think it really depends on the organization. I think that certainly, folks at a high level are going to be interested in understanding the trends, understanding where their organization fits in that and how they compare to others. I think it's also could be really beneficial for HR professionals in these companies to understand what other organizations are struggling with, what services are available to help them with that because this report is not just about a survey of what's happening in the local landscape, but also our response to that and using that data to help our businesses overcome these challenges. We have some information around that to share that would be beneficial. But I would say, anyone who's just curious and understanding what is the local landscape, do we match the national reports and the data we're seeing? Because there might be folks that feel, can't relate to that national data. It's not the same here. They're going to find that they're in good company when they attend this.

>> We talk a lot with guys on the screen with me about leadership. Was that one of the things that came up over and over again while you were doing this report?

>> It's interesting, when we did the report in 2020 and we looked at what the trends were, the Number 1 need when it came to training to help support their initiatives was frontline supervisor training that we saw that rise to the top leadership in general. But we had broken it up in the survey at frontline, mid-level and senior. We

really saw that frontline emerge to the top. One of the responses that we had as a result of that 2020 survey was, we developed a frontline leadership training program through Workforce Solutions called Leadership Basecamp. We've been running that. We launched that program about six months after the data had been collected, so the late summer of 2021. We've already run two cohorts at the campus, but then, we've had about eight different businesses that have asked us to bring it inhouse just for their employees. It's been incredibly popular. It certainly has met big need that these businesses were feeling. We have two more cohorts that we are launching in just a month here. We'll be starting one at our Middletown Campus at the end of August. Then, for the first time, we're going to be offering one at our Luray Campus. We've been talking a lot to local businesses and business development leaders in Luray and Page County, and there's definitely a need for that there. That one kicks off in late September. We're even expanding it to some of our other parts of our region that we serve.

>> The thing that I think is great about this particular report is that you have that data from 2020. Many times, people are comparing something that's happening locally to something that happened nationally, while you have the beginning local numbers and the current local numbers and how things have shifted. Particularly with leadership, how we lead a team now and how we lead our company and our staff is so incredibly different sitting here in 2022 than it was in 2019 or 2021.

>> Yeah, absolutely. What was surprising to me, though, is when you read the national reports, it still very much shows a high percentage of employees are working either from home, or they're doing a hybrid schedule. When you look locally, that's not as much the case than our local region. A lot of our businesses report that they have returned back to a mostly in-person setting. I think that comes a lot from when you look at our key industries, health care, construction, manufacturing, education. These are industries that you have to be present. You can't really do your job remotely. That's really eye-opening the differences both by industry and region, and how things are little bit different here for us in the Northern Valley. But it was also really interesting to look at how things have changed in the last two years, what was important and what businesses were struggling with at the height, when we were just six months into the pandemic versus where we are two years later. Two years ago, people were getting laid off. There was worry about not having jobs. Now, the tables have turned and businesses are struggling to fill roles, and people are choosing not to go back to work, and it's caused this term that's been coined the great resignation. But a lot of folks, the baby boomer generation, the older Gen X, they're retiring. It's really created quite a labor shortage, which has caused a lot of stress for some of these industries and organizations.

>> From the other end of that labor spectrum is Gen Zers are working for different reasons and different benefits. It's not, I'm going to work so that I have a job that gives me money to feed my family. They're looking more for, I want to feel like I'm part of a team, and I want these extra things that I want to be able to accomplish and feel like I've done something worthy. It's a whole different labor market now.

>> It is. That was actually one of the questions we asked in the survey after we ask them how these organizations, how they had been impacted by this labor shortage, as we ask them, what are you having to do differently to attract and retain talent? Are you raising salaries? Are you offering additional benefits, and sign-on bonuses, and training? Organizations are definitely having to get creative in what they're doing. We're seeing a shift towards organizations. But I think a lot of us have been a bit in survival mode for the last two years, and organizations, the leadership is starting to realize we've got to move out of survival mode and start looking at how we take care of our people because they're our best asset, and were really struggling to retain them. I saw that tone throughout a lot of the survey of the focus and the shift on, how do we increase morale? How do we build teams? How do we lift up our leaders and train our employees to work better together and to be successful? That definitely was an overarching tone this year.

>> Well, and frankly, for a lot of small businesses, I would think it's a whole lot easier to put some of those things in place to appreciate the people who work for you. Just say, hey, if you want to go volunteer for this non-profit, I'm going to give you a couple of paid hours off to go and do that, so you can check that box for your well-being. That is so much easier sometimes than writing a check when you don't have the money in the account. To me, it seems like look at these things. It could ultimately be a better fit all the way around.

>> Yeah, absolutely. Certainly, salaries have had to be adjusted to attract folks. But what we're hearing from local businesses is that, it's not enough to retain them. That's where those other things like investing in their professional development, investing in training, and giving them that greater work-life balance, supporting their desire to give back to the community like you mentioned. Those are the things that are retaining folks. It really is more about what culture do you have in your workplace? Is it something that someone wants to show up every day and stay there because the salary might attract them, but it's not going to keep them.

>> You mentioned, in the first segment when we were talking about how you were gathering this information, that the majority of the people that responded were small business owners. How did you go about figuring out who you were sending this to, and then sifting through the results to see how that all shakes out from a numbers perspective?

>> Yeah, that's a great question. One of the benefits of being in the community and being the Workforce Solutions for the Community College is that we have a very large database of local contacts. The invitation to complete the survey was sent out to that database of local business contacts and business leaders. The change is constant. I don't know how many we have on that list, but it's in the thousands. Then they were invited to complete the survey and it was anonymous. Although, we did have a number of organizations that opted in with their information because they wanted to receive a copy of the report. We made that available, and they were the first ones to receive a copy before it's been available. But we did ask that basic demographic information because it was anonymous. We did want to know what size

the organization is, what industry they're in. Those were some of the questions that we asked on the survey so that we could look at the data through those lens of the size of the organization industry, and those sorts of things.

>> When we're talking about local, I think local up and down the Shenandoah Valley. You've got this big bubble covered with that database.

>> Our service region expands seven counties and that extends as far east as Fauquier County, and as far south as Page County. We've got Clark County, and of course, what we think of Winchester, Warren, Shenandoah, or Rappahannock. It's a bit of a diverse region, and sometimes, especially those of us faced in Winchester, we tend to think very local in our bubble. But our service region does expand pretty close to Northern Virginia, and as far south as Page County, so there's definitely some diversity there.

>> How do people register for the webinar?

>> We're very excited if you can pre-register through laurelridgeworkforce.com/webinar, that it's a great place to start to let us know that you're attending. Again, if you can't make the date of August 31st at 11:00 AM, feel free to sign up and watch the on-demand replay that will be available afterwards. That's a great location. Again, that's laurelridgeworkforce.com/webinar.

>> Jelise, do you expect this to just be an hour or 90 minutes. How long do you think this will run?

>> We've set aside an hour, but that's because we do want to allow plenty of time for Q&A. The information sharing will probably just take the first 30 minutes of going over the high level data, and then allow some time for discussion and Q&A.

>> Then you mentioned registering also gets you an actual copy of the report?

>> Yes. That's definitely a benefit. Even if you can't attend live, if you want to see the report and look at the data with your own eyes, then you still need to register, and then we will send you a copy of the report.

>> That's great to have on so many different levels. If you wanted to go up the leadership chain, or you're just what you consider to be a regular staff member, but it resonates with you and you want to have that conversation with the person above you, this is a great information and evidence to have, to get people thinking, let's be Looking Ahead. Because as we've all learned, we can't keep doing what we've always done.

>> Absolutely.

>> Thank you both for taking some time to chat with me today. I do appreciate it.

>> Thank you, Janet, it's always a pleasure.

>> I will be back tomorrow. I will have a brand new episode of The Valley Today,

ready to go for you a few minutes afternoon Strolling Strasburg with Olivia Hilton.
That's going to be a fun conversation. Meet me back here for it.