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## Happy Holidays!

For their annual holiday hike, CECE team members hiked to the Roanoke Star. The team also met with community partners from Goodwill Industries of the Valleys and Roanoke City Economic Development.



*CECE team (back row, from left) Scott Tate, Dylan Andrews, John Register, Quina Weber-Shirk, (front row, from left) Elli Travis, Julia Kell, Brenna Valle, and (foreground) John Provo at Roanoke Star overlook*

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## Meet a CECE Advisory Board Member: Michael Gutter, Virginia Cooperative Extension



*Michael Gutter is the director of Virginia Cooperative Extension. Before stepping into his current role, he worked at the University of Florida for 15 years, serving as a professor and associate dean for Extension. He has a bachelor's degree and Ph.D. in Family Resource Management Studies from Ohio State University.*

### **1. What projects are you currently working on with Virginia Cooperative Extension?**

I am working on leveraging the entire campus and making sure people are aware of Extension's presence. We have faculty across many colleges in the university, including the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Veterinary Medicine, College of Natural Resources, as well as faculty at Virginia State University.

This summer, we will be starting a strategic planning process. I'm also working with my leadership team to increase our roles in workforce development.

I'm supporting Dr. Cathy Sutphin's efforts and increasing the role that Extension plays in public health as well. I helped shape something called the National Health Equity Framework for Cooperative Extension, and I executed and implemented a lot of that framework in Florida.

Most of my research in the last five years was around cancer disparities in rural communities and how Extension can move the needle. We've got several papers coming out on that subject.

### **2. What is your favorite part of your job as director of Virginia Cooperative Extension?**

I get to work with amazing people internal and external to our organization every day, and a lot of times I get to leave campus to do it. I'm not from Virginia, and I like getting to explore the commonwealth that I now call home.

Also, surveys tell you so much information. I have learned as a leader that listening to people in-person is an important step in all types of community work. People have to be heard, and a survey question isn't enough. That's mainly because we're humans. Humans want to be engaged as humans most of the time. If we all know that most communication is through body language, then what does it mean if the only way I learned about the needs of a community was through a survey?

We're grateful for CECE because you all help us with some of that. The more that we can be working together to jointly learn the questions the people have, the better.

### **3. What is your proudest accomplishment over the course of your career?**

As a graduate student, I did disparities research. I was motivated to do this type of research because I grew up poor myself. When I was working on my dissertation, my grandfather had stage 4 prostate and bone cancer. I would take him to his treatments and talk to and listen to him.

A month or so later, I was getting ready to move to my first job as a professor at the University of Wisconsin, and my mom let me know that they stopped chemotherapy. They wanted to try a new drug that costed \$1200 a month. They ended up just being able to pay for it one month due to it being too expensive. My grandfather died a month or so later. The drug might have helped, but nobody could afford it.

About eight years ago, I was having a conversation with some colleagues from health sciences. They told me the cancer center needed my help understanding a phenomenon called financial toxicity. Financial toxicity is when people do not have the economic resources to stay in medical treatment. This term, financial toxicity, is what killed my grandfather. And now one of the leading oncology centers in Florida was asking me to join a research team to address it.

I spent the next few years working with cancer patients, talking to them and understanding their challenges. We had a huge research team made up of doctoral students, undergraduate students, economists, and social scientists. We designed an internally funded intervention where my county extension agents, who were all accredited financial counselors, worked one-on-one with cancer patients over the course of their treatment. They worked with social workers and oncology nurses to keep the patients in treatment. And we just published our first journal article that showed we made a difference.

So, my proudest moment was finally being in the position to deal with the thing that killed my grandfather. It doesn't get much prouder than that.

### **4. What do you like most about being a part of CECE's advisory board?**

I'm someone who respects diverse vantage points, worldviews, and areas of expertise. What I appreciate about the board is getting to hear opinions from very informed but very diverse perspectives. And that means I can learn. It puts me in the position to see the engagement and outreach missions of the campus. It helps me understand more about what people are doing in this space. I'm learning all the time. I learn about new people, new ideas, new opportunities. And I'm really grateful for that.

### **5. How would you like to collaborate with CECE in the future?**

I am hoping to continue to build our common threads. One of my good friends, who I co-won the Association of American Medical Colleges community trust-building award with last year, once said that Cooperative Extension is one of the best implementation forces for the work people are trying to do in communities from campuses. We want to be the partner our campus and others look to for helping to address community challenges. We have a strong presence, with 220 faculty and 107 offices around the commonwealth. We would hope we can be one of the go-to partners that CECE thinks about as we continue our work in the community space.

### **6. What is the last book you read that you would recommend?**

One book I would recommend is *Predictably Irrational* by Dan Ariely. It's a good light-hearted read. I asked my graduate students to read this book and they loved it. Half of the book focused on experiments the author did with his college students to show how human behavior works. Funny stuff, and I think my grad students really got a kick out of it.

The other book I would recommend is called *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman. There are all these different parts of the brain, and they don't all do the same thing. They don't all work at the same speed. When we understand that, it changes the way Extension does its job and the way most social scientists think about research and human behavior.

### **7. What activities or hobbies do you like to do in your spare time?**

I enjoy spending time with my kids and pets. On any given night, if I have a couple minutes to relax, I'm playing acoustic guitar. For trips and travel, I go scuba diving. It was a little habit we picked up in Florida. You can do it here in Virginia, just not necessarily with sharks.

### **8. What is the most memorable place you have ever visited?**

Other than underwater, it would be Alaska. I was able to experience true wilderness there. I aspire to go back there someday and see everything all over again. Just once wasn't enough for that level of majesty.

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## **News roundup**

Grant will help build the future of Central Appalachia's construction workforce (Virginia Tech News)

NRV-led consortium earns federal grant for advanced manufacturing strategy (Cardinal News)

Our Experience with the 4+1 Master of Urban and Regional Planning Accelerated Program (VT CECE Blog)

Regional consortium awarded federal Tech Hubs Strategy Development Grant (Virginia Tech News)

Roanoke Region Intern & Early Career Expo provides a next step to tackling the Virginia talent shortage (VT CECE Blog)

Virginia Tech-led coalition gets grant to boost modular construction in Appalachia (Cardinal News)

Virginia Tech wins \$450K grant for modular workforce development (Construction Dive)

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