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Project spotlight

CECE Economic Impact Study with the Wellspring Foundation focuses on recovery in SWVA after Hurricane Helene



Emily Mayo, Damascus Trail Center supervisor (at left), speaks about the impact of Hurricane Helene with Allison Mays and Dylan Andrews at the Trail Center in Damascus, VA.

In September, CECE contracted with the Wellspring Foundation of Southwest Virginia to measure the impacts of the Virginia Creeper Trail on the economies of Washington and Grayson counties. While this remains one of the goals of the center's work, they are now also focusing on understanding how the damage sustained after Hurricane Helene will impact communities such as Damascus in the long term.

Allison Mays, director of the Virginia Tech Southwest Center, has been instrumental in helping CECE connect with the region and hear from local business owners and residents. It is clear that the Creeper Trail is the lifeblood of Damascus; however, with significant damage to the trail and large sections closed for the foreseeable future, CECE's additional work will help determine what extended trail closures mean for the communities that rely on it.

"I want to note the extraordinary work done by those in the region to help with recovery," said Dylan Andrews, economic development specialist with CECE. "Mayor Katie Lamb and Town Manager Chris Bell have been pillars of strength helping the community navigate these times. Individuals that have lost so much continue to support their neighbor and do all they can to help one another."

CECE helps with cleanup efforts in Giles County

Members of the CECE team traveled to Giles County to assist with cleanup efforts following the devastation of Hurricane Helene. The team was grateful for the opportunity to support Giles County as they rebuild and recover.

[View the Giles County cleanup photo gallery.](#)



Office Assistant Kim Gray, Graduate Assistant Makenzie Mann, and Communications Specialist Julia Kell pose for a picture by the New River in Pearisburg, VA with the trash the team collected.

November trivia question!

This issue's economic development trivia question is:

What master's degree is the most common among CECE faculty?

- a. business
- b. planning
- c. economic

[Submit your guess here.](#) We'll reveal the correct answer in our next newsletter.

September Trivia Question:

Which Virginia county has the most incorporated towns?

- a. Loudoun
- b. Rockingham
- c. Accomack

Answer: Accomack County. Accomack has 14 incorporated towns, while both Loudoun and Rockingham have 7.

Faculty spotlight

Everyday Ut Prosim: How Ph.D. student and economic development specialist Elli Travis serves



A few hours before the start of the Better Together: Rockin' Food Truck Rodeo on Sept. 14, Elli Travis, the volunteer board president of Downtown Christiansburg Inc., surveys the scene. Photo by Christina Franusich for Virginia Tech.

Elli Travis, senior economic development specialist with CECE, puts #UtProsim in action through her work with Downtown Christiansburg Inc. (DCI) as the volunteer board president.

DCI worked with the Town of Christiansburg, VA to plan the September food truck rodeo, merging it with a popular town concert series called Rockin' Main.

"This is something I learned through my Virginia Tech work evaluating partnerships: The best way for two organizations to build trust is to do something successful together, and preferably fun," Travis said.

[Read more about Elli.](#)

Meet a CECE Advisory Board Member: Marc Nelson, City of Roanoke



Since 2011, Marc Nelson has worked for the City of Roanoke's economic development department. He began his role with the City of Roanoke as a special projects coordinator, was promoted to economic development manager in 2019, and became director of economic development in 2021. Before he moved to Roanoke, he worked as a budget analyst for the North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management and as a development services coordinator and liaison for the City of Savannah, Georgia. Nelson has a bachelor's degree in history and a master's in public administration from the University of North Carolina.

1. What made you interested in working in public administration?

After I graduated from college, I worked for a couple of years and then spent a year in law school. Where I went to law school, they were very focused on the private sector, big firms, and generating money. It wasn't something I wanted to do for my career. I was searching for different solutions, and a good friend who was the Wake County manager in Raleigh, NC, suggested I look into public service. I looked at a couple of public administration programs, and I felt very gratified when I made the decision to get a master's and focus on public administration.

2. What do you like most about working for the City of Roanoke?

I love that I get to work with a great team. We have an exceptional group of people in economic development. The idea that you can work across lines and cover all different kinds of things, from public safety and public works to accounting, juvenile intake, and libraries is something I really enjoy. There is a spectrum of ways you can make an impact in our organization.

3. What projects are you currently working on in the City of Roanoke?

We received \$7.5 million through the Virginia Business Ready Sites program to develop a site at the Roanoke Center for Industry & Technology. Roanoke is short on major sites, and we struggle to find 50-100 available acres. This project is an opportunity to develop. We're going to put \$2.5 million of our own match in for a \$10 million cost to build an 82-acre site in a very successful industrial park. I'm proud of that because when I first started the job, projects like this were on my list and something I wanted to make sure we accomplished.

4. Can you share a memorable project or achievement from your career?

We are currently working with the Corporate Research Center, Virginia Tech, Roanoke Blacksburg Innovation Alliance, Virginia Western Community College, and Carilion Clinic on a project to build out wet and dry lab space in the region. A lot of companies in the region spin out and need a place to land but struggle to advance due to a shortage of lab space. We had a couple of different studies done and went through the [GO Virginia process](#). We went to the legislature, lobbied, and received \$15.7 million to renovate a property we identified in Roanoke for wet and dry labs. We're undergoing construction now, and we're out recruiting companies. That was a big achievement. That was something where you set a goal, and you actively had to do the work to reach it. I really enjoyed that.

5. What do you enjoy most about being a member of CECE's advisory board?

By being on the board, I get to have a connection, not just to the larger university community, but to the state as a whole. That's one of the great things about what CECE does. There's a larger world that CECE is involved in, both in community engagement and economic development, that from my standpoint in one city, I don't necessarily see. By being on the CECE board, I get a greater understanding of what's going on in other places and how I can help the university and other areas of the commonwealth.

6. What is the best advice you ever received?

Look for the yes-and propositions. All or nothing leads to a short career.

7. What's a book you read recently that you would recommend?

Right now, I'm reading a book called *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* by Haruki Murakami. The author is both an avid marathon runner and a writer. He talks about how the dedication and the commitment he puts into running is something that carries over to all aspects of his life, including his work as a novelist. He writes in a very direct fashion. It's very Hemingway-esque, in the sense that it packs a lot of detail into very few words and sentences. The book is helpful because it informs how a passion you have for something in your life can help other passions you have in your life flower, and I think that's valuable. As someone who does Brazilian jiu-jitsu, I relate to the messages the book shares.

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

Mahatma Gandhi Park in Chickmagalur, India. I went on a five-week trip to India when I was working in Savannah as part of a rotary club exchange trip where young professionals had the opportunity to travel to other countries. We were in Southwest India in a state called Karnataka. We went up to a hill overlooking the entire city. The population in that city is about 30-40% Muslim, and from the top of the hill, you could hear all five of the mosques call for prayer at the same time. I've never experienced harmonic convergence like that in my whole life, where you hear music coming from every direction. It was 15 years ago, and I still remember it very clearly.

News roundup

[CECE board meeting focuses on child care and community problem-solving](#) (VT CECE Blog)

[The Crooked Road turns 20](#) (Cardinal News)

[Tech Hub Consortium gathers in Danville to shape the future of additive manufacturing in New River Valley and Southern VA](#) (VT CECE Blog)

[Tech Hub consortium gathers at Virginia Tech's Kelly Hall to discuss the future of manufacturing](#) (VT CECE Photo Gallery)

[VCEDA seed grants sow small business growth](#) (Virginia Business)

[Vibe check: Is a Great Resignation 2.0 ahead? Amid mixed signals, HR execs try to read the room](#) (Virginia Business)

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Your investment in the Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement means more access to resources for underserved communities across the Commonwealth.

CECE provides expertise, resources, and project support to catalyze action that benefits local communities and economies, specifically in community development, talent, entrepreneurship, and technology. CECE's evidence-based research and university connections help to address needs identified at the local level through strategic partnerships and direct services.

Every dollar you donate allows CECE faculty to bring their knowledge and experience to communities from Abingdon to Arlington, Cave Springs to Chuckatuck, Melfa to Martinsville, and New Market to Newport News, ensuring that every region in Virginia can thrive.

Together, we can build stronger communities and brighter futures across the Commonwealth.

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