

>> Hello and welcome to the Valley Today. I am your host, Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College Day, as it is the second Thursday of every single month. Guy Curtis is back on the Zoom with me, he is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Guy Curtis, we have some returning guests today because progress has been made since the last time Donna and Annajane were on the show.

>> That's right. If you build it, they will come as well as the new program updates that we have to share at the college. Super excited to have him back again for different reasons, but for newer reasons as well. But it's always great to be on the show because there's always something fun to share at the college, something new, something exciting always happening on campuses of our college. Glad to have Donna back on and Annajane to talk about our skilled trade center that has just opened up and expanding new programs into welding and bringing home programs of the trades of the past that we are so excited to have back on campus.

>> Have you been walking around all week in prep for this show, thinking up something like if you build it, they will come?

>> No, it just popped in my head. I'm an old baseball fan, so I think of Kevin Costner and the Field of Dreams. But yeah, if you built a skilled trade center, the tradesmen will come forward. But we've actually had so many different programs over the years at different places. Years ago, we started at the Fauquier Boys and Girls Club and then we went to Vent Hill, one of our site centers and now we've built this new trades facility that has expanded to our campus and it has brought a lot of these trades programs home. It makes life easier for the students but also the employers knowing where to go to send their employees and where potential job seekers are looking for opportunities in our region. They know where to find the latest training available to them on one of our campuses. Win-win for everybody. But also a partnership too that's informed with Fauquier County and Donna can explain more about that. Of course of all the programs that we're expanding to as well at that location.

>> Donna Comer is with us. She is a program manager for Laurel Ridge Workforce Solutions. Donna, you also wear another hat for the Fauquier County Economic Development. Those two roles really came together in the creation of the Fauquier Skilled Trade Center.

>> Yes. I serve, as you said, as a Trades Program Manager for Laurel Ridge, but then also I'm called the Workforce Coordinator for Fauquier County Economic Development Department. What I do is I work very closely with businesses throughout Fauquier County, understanding their needs and all things workforce. My dual role, my position is just one of many ways that the county exhibits and shows its support of our local community college. Another way, which is a way that we're celebrating very soon, is our skill trade center. They donated the land, Fauquier County donated the land, on which this

building has been built. Yes, in order to build it so that they can come, we need the land to do so. Additionally, we have several other industry and private partners and donors who came together and helped this happen. Some include businesses like SW Rogers, Hazel, Protex Services, Genesis, Home Improvement and Restoration. These are all just a few of the donors and private supporters of the building and the trades in general. They all know that the trades are important skills needed right now.

>> It really is a super representation of the fact that the college and the localities partner together on things which A is very important. But also B, that the college isn't pulling things out of the air when they say, we need a skilled trade center, we need to be training more plumbers and H Fauquier people and welders and all of these other things that comes from the partnerships that have been created in order to build this center. Because if you have the jobs, they will come as well and the jobs are clearly out there.

>> Absolutely. Laurel Ridge has created quite a reputation for itself in that we truly listen to the needs of the area employers. But we also take the time to really dive into some labor market information and we research what skills are needed, what jobs are open, who's hiring and how many. Yes, to your point, it is very pointed and very deliberate, the research that we do, before we see it up new programs.

>> When you and Annajane were on the last time, the building wasn't quite open yet. But as we're sitting here recording, there's a ribbon cutting tomorrow. As people are listening, it just happened and you missed it. But it has got to be really cool to finally see that building be open and classes to be offered and programs to be there, and students coming in knowing that they are on the path to a much more successful career.

>> Yes, mum, it is. It's very exciting. We have six different labs in the building right now. Five of them have different programs. It's also a sense of pride that we can now offer our students, sit in this brand new building and learn these in high demand skills. We've also recently hired some full time trades instructors. That's big news as well that really add a little value and consistency and quality to all of our classes that were wonderful to begin with. But now to have them, we say we have them all home now because as Guy mentioned earlier, we squatted in whatever space somebody would let us teach these classes. We just were patient and persistent and we're able to bring them home and offer our students really valuable skills training.

>> Annajane, I know we're going to get into talking about the expansion of the welding program onto the Fauquier campus. Before we do that though, you are a program manager for several other skilled trade programs that operate in Fauquier but also in Middletown?

>> Yes. I manage the H Fauquier Electrical construction project management

programs, which all three of those run both at Middletown and in the Fauquier region. Then, I also manage our mechatronics program, which is our advanced manufacturing program. That program only runs in the Middletown region at this point in time. Again, just reiterating what Donna said, we're so excited for this new building and the opportunities it's providing our skilled trades. We were able to run construction project management for the first time this fall in Fauquier, which was super exciting, had a really strong cohort that started that class in September.

>> When you guys come and do the show and we talk about the different types of jobs, I don't think people sometimes really realize the huge demand for those jobs. They can hear us say it. My husband recently reactivated his LinkedIn profile and now he's getting a tone of these emails that based on what his profile is and his skill sets are that there is a construction management job, there is a CDL position, there are all of these things that it really does come a little bit closer to home when I see that. I'm like, we talk about that on the radio. We talk about that too. It really is right here in our area. People just need to know where they can go get the training.

>> Definitely. We're definitely seeing an increase of students coming in to take the classes as well. I think our level 1 numbers for this fall were very high and strong and we're building that pipeline to hopefully support those employer needs. Now, we have the facility to really be able to do that. We were always very on limited class size before in our temporary homes, but now with this more permanent facility and much larger facility, we're able to support the numbers that the industry is demanding, and also more space to provide more hands on skills training room for more equipment or building out mock electrical wiring booths and all of those good things that the students look for but also the employers want students to have coming into the workforce.

>> Donna, Annajane makes a good point. You mentioned a second ago the labs. These are not classes where people come and sit with a textbook in front of them for 45-90 minutes a day. These literally are hands on, build this, fix this, weld this, do this to learn the actual skill themselves. You really do have to make sure you've dotted all your Is and crossed all your Ds.

>> Yes. They are not just classrooms. Each of them are equipped with very pertinent and very specific tools and equipment so that the students can use them and learn while they're in the classroom. For instance, we have the heavy equipment operator program. The new lab is equipped with three simulators, excavator, a bulldozer, a motor grader, and we have an attachment that can switch out to a wheel loader. There are four different pieces of equipment that students can come and learn how to operate using the simulators in the lab.

>> The welding program in particular has been really popular. I have heard at Middletown, it's now going to be able to expand in to Fauquier at the skilled

trade center. Let's take a break. We come back, let's talk a little bit about what that's going to look like and the impact it's going to have, being able to offer that class in the Fauquier area. Can we do that in the next segment?

>> Absolutely.

>> We are on the screen today with Guy Curtis, Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Joining him is Donna Comer and AnnaJane Crips. They both are program managers of all sorts of different programs in the skilled trades, working out of the Fauquier Skill Trades Center that is now open. We're going to come back and talk more about the welding program and some of the other manufacturing programs that they have to offer in just a couple of minutes.

>> Hey sisters, you know who it is. I'm Omar a senior at Mountain Vista Governors School. Together with environmental non-profit sustainability matters, we're rebranding recycling. Keep it clean honey, your bottles and cans don't have to be spotless, but they should never have chunks of food still attached. Pizza boxes with bits of cheese or lots of grease can't be recycled either. Though you can compost greasy boxes at your lovely home. Furthermore, on how we're rebranding recycling, look for hashtag, rebranding, recycling on Facebook, Instagram, and Tiktok or visit, sustainability matters.earth.

>> Welcome back to the valley. Today I am your host. Janet Mikayd is Laurel Ridge Community College Day guy. Curtis is on the screen with us. He is their Director of Marketing, talking about Workforce Solutions, or Ridge Workforce Solutions today. Donna Comer is with us. She is a program manager. Wears a few hats. Most of those hats though point front words to skilled trades. Is that a good summary Donna?

>> That is an excellent summary. I'm going to have to remember that and use it myself.

>> Anna J. Grips is with us as well. She also is a program manager with Workforce Solutions. Handles a lot of the trades too. Some of them we're going to talk about here in a second, but I want to start with welding because I had no idea until you guys were on the show the last time, how much money a welder can make. This is a really good paying job that if you have the skill for, you could really make a good life for yourself and your family.

>> Absolutely. Welding is a sneaky level credential because if you were to use some of the labor market information resource tools that we use and search welder, maybe not so many jobs would pop up. For instance, I did it in preparation for the show this morning and the last year, if you were just to search welder, 100 jobs would pop up for the last year. The last 30 days, if you just searched welder, there are 22 open jobs. Those are still some pretty good

numbers, but the thing about welding is if you then search many different other jobs within the construction trades industry, and you read those job descriptions, you're going to find that welding is a necessary skill. Then if you search certain stock codes and whatnot that might require welding skills, you'll find 1,000 job openings or those numbers will go from 100-600, so welders are in high demand, that skill is in high demand. You can do anything from pipe welding, even underwater pipe welding, to fabricating, to ornamental design. Welding skills are used across a wide range of display. Like I said this morning, in preparation for this chat, I just took a quick look because the labor market information that we do use or ridge is up to the minute. This morning I logged on and I checked it out In the first three jobs that popped up when I was doing my search were in the HVAC industry and maintenance and repair, and industrial machine mechanics. That's just the first three, The list went on and on. One could absolutely make a good living welding.

>> The other really cool thing about most of the trades, if not all of the trades, is that there is a lot of incentive that's out there. NJ people can apply for fast forward funding. There's G three funding. There are a lot of assistance programs, particularly for trades programs that can help people get through it quicker and with a lot less out of pocket cost.

>> Yes, for sure. Fast forward funding is probably one of the biggest buckets of funding that comes from the state of Virginia. That funding, the only requirement is that you are a resident of the state of Virginia. As long as you're a resident of the state of Virginia, you can take a class for a third of the cost of tuition. All of our skilled trades classes are now part of that funding. All Donna, explain more about how excited we are that welding is now included in that it was not previously and then there's additional funding on top of that G3. There is a financial need component attached to that, but the baseline for that is a lot higher than traditional financial assistance. Definitely funding opportunities available for people interested in taking these classes.

>> That's really important Donna, because sometimes that is a barrier, Sometimes it's not just the time to do the classes, it's the cost that might be associated with it.

>> Absolutely. Our students are faced with several different barriers at times and cost is certainly one of them. The fast forward grant money can open doors for them, which is as Annajane said, new for our welding program. Our welding program has undergone a redesign. Up until recently, our welding program was very much skills based and it was not fast forward funded. It was still very much reasonably priced, I will say that. However, every little bit helps. After spending about two years chatting with different employers throughout the Law Ridge service area, we decided that we needed to beef up our welding program just a bit. Welding what we noticed was we were serving two different populations because as we've already discussed with welding skill. Someone can do a wide range of different things. That we would have people come in

and take our welding class who just wanted to fix something on their farm or maybe they had a long honeydew list and they wanted to learn how to do it for hobby welding, or maybe they needed the skill for a job they already had. But then we had a whole population of people who really truly wanted to pursue welding as a career and they were looking to get certified in welding. What we've done is we've redesigned the welding program and one can come in and take an intro to welding and that class would be for someone just anchoring, trying to explore the art of welding for whatever reason, whether it is for personal reasons or for career reasons. They could take what we're calling a DIY class, which is a little bit longer than that intro class. It will touch on a few processes, but there will be no certification or testing or anything at the end of either of those classes. For that person who really truly wants the certification and they're looking more at welding as their career, then we have a great springboard to that in our Welding Fundamentals class, which will come with a certification at the end of class and then they could move on to what is called a welding fabrication class. That class will focus on blueprint reading, welding math. Get into some of the nitty gritty that maybe the DIY welder isn't so interested in, but the career welder needs to have and needs to understand.

>> That makes a lot of sense. Because I could see wanting to take, I'm totally signing my husband up for the D welder, because we got faucets outside that leak. That's what he needs to learn how to do in order to be able to fix them. It's perfect for people that say, this is what I want to do, but sometimes that's one of those careers that you don't know where to start. People here, all you have to apprentice, all you have to do this, the equipment is really expensive. This knocks down a lot of those barriers.

>> Something else that we're doing, that's brand new to our program is we're adding a little bit of theory. Now, if you're in that fundamentals or that fabrication class, you'll be given a book and you're going to have to homework. As I said, you're going to be learning the whys, behind what you're doing. Then for those two classes, we now have the fast forward grant money to help students along, remove that barrier, remove the cost barrier.

>> Donna and I, have talked a lot about several of the different trades programs over the years. The one thing too that has always impressed me, and you touched on this a little bit at the top of our conversation, Donna, is the partnerships, that you've created. There are really high possibilities for people that go through these welding classes or any of these trades classes to literally have a job. If not, by the time they're finished, when they've graduated from one of the partners who has come to you and said we need more welders, we need more H-back people. It's also a really good pipeline to employment for people who sign up for these classes.

>> Oh, yes. All of the trades classes. While I can't guarantee anything, certainly, but we often tell students, if you come come and sign up for a class

and then go to an employer and tell that employer you've taken the initiative and you're learning and you're speaking the credential or the skills, you're already going to be attractive to that employer. We have people reach out to us every single day trying to find the employees. Yes, these skills will definitely lead to gainful employment.

>> Annajane, that's true across most of the trades that you offer, people have access to the fast forward funding, the G3 funding. That's not specific to the welding program.

>> No. Welding is the most recent addition to that group of programs, but all the other skilled trades H-back, electrical, plumbing, heavy equipment operator, construction project management, mechatronics, they all are included in that fast forward funding availability. Students have the opportunity for that reduced cost to develop those skills to go into industry and fill those needed jobs.

>> That's another situation, Donna, was saying, that there are employers. A lot of those skilled trades, that are waiting in the wings for you to graduate a class, to be able to say, we need you and you and you.

>> Absolutely. One of my programs is mechatronics, which is our advanced manufacturing program and our manufacturing facilities are in desperate need of technicians. A lot of times they will send their employees that are maybe on an operator level or not at that technicians skill level to upskill their own employees to become technicians because it's so hard to find qualified and skilled people in those positions.

>> You have a couple information sessions, that are coming up at the first of the year. I like that you schedule them that far out, because somebody might be listening today and you've planted the seed, but it may take, winter and the holidays, and the first of the year, for them to say, 2024 is going to be the year and then you have these information sessions that are there, for them to attend and really start getting serious about it. What are they and when are they scheduled?

>> Janet, the information sessions are a great way to visit us in person to see our facilities, to see our program managers as well as the instructional staff that are supporting our programs. We do have a great session coming up on January 18th, at the Volker campus. It's a Thursday afternoon from 3:30-6:30. Those who are considering maybe more on the Middletown side, or if you missed the first one on January, February 24th, on a Saturday, from 09:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. will be at Middletown. These events are awesome because they're open house style. Come when you can and get more information about the skilled trades as well as upcoming classes, find out more information about our funding solutions. There's a good chance we'll have our career coach on site to talk through some of your career options. But if not, talk to some of the

industry experts who are teaching some of our classes, who can give some more insights about what trade is best to get into, or the areas that they might be thinking about. Those are great ones, but certainly, our website is always a good place to visit, and certainly, our campuses too anytime before those sessions. If you visit [lowerridgeworkforce.com](http://lowerridgeworkforce.com) and search "Trades information sessions", you should be able to find them or just search "Trades", and you'll be able to find more information about all the programs we have up and coming, including a number of videos and walkthroughs of how the trades look, what it's like to be a student. There's also student handbooks, as resources to understand what certain classes may entail and some of the expectations of that student, and they're progressing through to getting a certification, as well as talking to some of our staff. Our campuses are open, usually, Monday through Friday, 8:00 to 5:00. You can stop any time to talk to the Operation or Registration team who can assist folks with more financial assistance information, paperwork to get started, and certainly, help you understand the options they have. Those two sessions are great, because you can come out and meet Donna and Annajane in person, these great two hosts that we've had today. Thank you for coming on the show. Again, generating trades information session in Volker in February 24th in Middletown.

>> The website is a huge resource, especially, for parents that are trying to nudge their children into a particular field, or what are you going to do when you graduate, in June of 2024? This is a great way for them to gather their own ammunition.

>> Or if you have an older brother, or a sibling that you're really trying to convince, hey, it's time to start a new career. But yes, we want to encourage folks to bring anybody they know, friend, family, a co-worker, that they would think would be a great candidate to get in the skilled trades. It's not for everyone, but it's definitely rewarding for those who enjoy being outdoors, being in different environments to help build things and construct things and that's what it's all about, building the future. Certainly, we've done that with the great programs we've added to our Volker campus and what Donna and Annajane are doing at both of our campuses.

>> Donna and Annajane, thank you both, for taking some time to fill me in on all the details today.

>> You are welcome, thanks for having us.

>> Yes. Thank you for having us.

>> Guy Curtis as always is lovely having a conversation with you.

>> Thank you. It's a sad week, because the Riles, they're already done in the playoffs,

>> That was an ugly night, in my house. Let me tell you, but my husband



mounts back. This is how baseball goes. I was like, who are you right now? He has the added benefit that he's also a Braves fan. He still has a little bit of hope left and that the Braves are still in it.

>> It's still postseason baseball, which is always great baseball to watch. Thanks for having us today, Janet, and there's a blast. Looking forward to talk to you next month.

>> I will be back tomorrow. Tomorrow I'm talking to maybe, some of the potential welders and potential H-back people out there. My conversation tomorrow is with three FFA students. A senior at Sherando High School with senior at James Wood High School, and a sophomore, at Millbrook High School. Talking about the FFA fruit sales. What goes into those, why they're important fundraisers and all of the skill sets that these kids have to learn in order to make the most sales, because they do contests, and all kinds of really cool stuff. We're going to talk about that tomorrow, a few minutes afternoo. Meet me back here then.