

>> Hello and welcome to The Valley. Today I am your host, Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College today, so I am back on the screen with Guy Curtis, he is the Director of Marketing. Joining us today is Katherine Werner. She is a Content and Digital Marketing Specialist. I understand, Katherine, that you have a Laurel Ridge story and I am a sucker for Laurel Ridge stories. Welcome to the show. Give me a little bit of your background.

>> My Laurel Ridge story is that I am a proud transfer student from Laurel Ridge so I dedicate most of my academic success to Laurel Ridge. Being able to figure out what I wanted to do, which was communications and pursue that at a four year institution afterwards was amazing. I had such a great experience here that I found my way here. Being able to come back and to have such an incredible thing to market and support has just been a really great experience so far.

>> It's got to make it a whole lot easier as someone trying to market the experience that you personally had so that's got to make it at least a little bit easier.

>> Oh, yeah. For sure. Now, I definitely enjoyed coming back and seeing some familiar faces and getting to know some new ones. What's been wonderful, like you said, it makes it so much easier.

>> Guy and I haven't really gotten in the weeds on how the transfer program works, but we talk about the fact that Laurel Ridge offers it. It really is a life raft for a lot of students who can't maybe get into a four-year college out of the gate because of maybe their grades or certainly because they can't afford it. It really is a really good option to get your feet wet in college before deciding what is it that you want to do on a four year or maybe even not a four year. Is that one of the reasons why you chose Laurel Ridge before moving on to a four year school?

>> Oh, absolutely. I wasn't ready to venture out to a four year institution right off the get. I definitely wanted to explore Laurel Ridge. I utilize the guaranteed admissions program, so that's the way I was able to go to my four year institution. I was able to get all the academics that I needed here and seamlessly move to the next chapter.

>> How cool has it been working alongside of somebody who's been there, done that.

>> With Katherine coming on board, especially her experiences. Even the marketing world, we're trying to understand how to engage our prospective student audiences. She's done an awesome job, especially when it comes to on campus engagement and trying to realize the opportunities before COVID, we did have a lot of on campus activities and we still continue to do that. But the numbers are smaller because a lot of the preferences have shifted to an online

format. With Katherine coming back to the college and supporting our marketing efforts. She saw what it used to look like when the campuses were very busy and they were busy from time to time for certain events. But we want to elevate that and also showcase all the programs and services, the student life, the benefits that many traditional, nontraditional students receive when they come to the college and so bringing Katherine on board has been a great addition to the team, and her experience from a four year transition helps us too, and some of those key marketing strategies we're trying to deploy through our digital content efforts. So it's been a great to have her on board for the coming year. We do want to capture more of those student moments, the student opportunities that they learn in person or online, or through their programs. We hope to have her stage in some of those key areas in capturing some of the social media efforts, event efforts, and things like that. We're very excited to have her on board.

>> Katherine from a personal perspective, I rarely have anything nice to say about social media. But from a professional perspective, it can do wonders for small businesses, for large businesses, for colleges like Laurel Ridge. I would think that you have it very much like I do when I'm working with a social media client. It's like recess the ideas are there and you see them and you're like, oh, this happened to me and I want to make sure people know how great it was for me. Let me snap a picture. Let me get a video. Let me do an interview. It probably feels second nature to you doing it there at Laurel Ridge?

>> Oh, yes. Yeah now I love going to these events. Either if it's student life or academics and capturing it and sharing it is so important because I always say this. You can achieve and do just as much at Laurel Ridge at a community college that you can at a four year institution. Showcasing that and being able to market that and reminding people of that is wonderful and it's a huge plus about the job so it makes it that much better.

>> Guy you and I have tons of conversations off air because we're both marketing geeks at heart. It's got to be a little tougher for you at the college because it's not a traditional business that says, look, I know my target customer. Is a female, 35-50, with kids in college, that has some discretionary income that listens to the radio and spends a lot of time on Instagram. You've got that person, but then you have a half a dozen others that are college kids, high school kids, their parents. It's got to be really, really complicated when you're trying to craft a message to 14 different people.

>> It is definitely a challenge. I guess that's what keeps me motivated every day. But also, I think from the community college mindset, we are serving all those audiences too. So naturally fung along the lines of our mission and who we serve and how we support our community and the greater region. That's the fantastic thing about the job. There's so many unique stories like Katherine's. There's other individuals who are out there who are succeeding and they're all different, unique and there's so many different ways to reach

folks. Even too, from the employer side as our college engages a lot of these graduates, they leave from us or they're looking to get a job right away before they come to us. We're supporting the local workforce and supporting the businesses that thrive here. It is always a geeky thing, like you said, like how do I best reach this audience and what's the most key ways? Like most marketing firms and agencies and businesses, we're trying to maximize how we reach folks. But to do it efficiently and nowadays wow, Janet. There's so many ways to reach folks. It's unlimited. But what Katherine highlights earlier, those unique things that you can gain from a community college just in your back door versus going on to a four year institution. Certainly, that transition could be made so easy with Laurel Ridge. But there's the cost savings too. I think there's always a concern and thought about setting your child off or making that investment as an older adult to go to a four year institution. In a lot of cases, you do need to do that to get your Bachelor's degree and move on. But the cost savings is tremendous too. I think a lot of folks, that's the untold story too. There are those same similar benefits you can get at most institutions on campus. We have a lot of organizations, student clubs, student activities, and program incentives to get involved with our programs at the college. I think markets that we go after. It's just hard to share so much what we do. But having Katherine onboard has been a tremendous help because she's highlighting a lot of those things on social and some of our other digital strategies that bring light to what we could do locally as a community college.

>> Katherine, when you had your time at Laurel Ridge and then went on to your four year and then came back and applied for this position at the college. Did you come into this once they said, hey, you've got the job. This is where your office or your desk is going to be. Did you have this list of things like, here are all these misconceptions that I feel like people don't know or don't understand about Laurel Ridge. This is my list, this is what I'm going to tackle first so that people know and understand it's not what they think it is, it's even better.

>> Oh, yeah. Now, there is definitely things I came in here with wanting to make sure I got across and we're working on that currently and improving our overall strategy for sure. I'm just eager and excited to make sure all of our initiatives are being publicized and shown because like you said, like you can do so much at Laurel Ridge and I do see so much value and I'm a huge advocate for getting your academic started at community college. It helped me so much in life I was able to save and I was able to get involved in all my activities. I wanted to and really explore and get ready for my future. It's so exciting to be back here.

>> I want to make sure too that people understand because I get this a lot in the marketing field. I feel like sometimes your particular position, content and digital marketing specialist back again to misconceptions. People think, oh, all she's doing is walking around the school taking pictures and posting them on Facebook. It is an actual career. It is something that people can do for a living

and it's not just taking photos and creating reels for Instagram. You're working on marketing strategies, you're actually putting together plans. It is an actual job. Can you please explain that to people so I don't have to do it all the time?

>> Of course, yeah. If I would love that. If my main role was just to take photos and then put them on the Facebook, that would be amazing. I would love that. Sign me up. But of course, there's a little bit more to that. There's a lot of analytics you can look at and we're looking on building that out and making sure we are reporting back the data so we can make some data driven decisions so finding the times that are most appropriate for our audience to post on social media, finding the right audience to maybe target for paid social media campaigns and just of course, making sure we're delivering the best organic social media posts as well. There's so much more than just posting photos, so I spend a lot of time explaining that as well, but there is so much more that goes behind it.

>> Let's take a break. When we come back, we're going to talk a little bit more about some of the things that are happening at Laurel Ridge Community College. Spring schedule is out, so we're going to talk a little bit about that as well. We are on the screen today with Guy Curtis, he is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Katherine Werner is joining us as well. She is their Content and Digital Marketing Specialist. We're going to come back and talk more about the college in just a couple of minutes.

>> Hi, I'm Chico a senior at Monta Vista Governor School. Together with environmental nonprofit sustainability matters, we're rebranding recycling. Unfortunately, not all plastics are recyclable. Some localities only take plastic bottles. Others take all number 1 and number 2 plastics. Almost no one takes number 4 through 7. Plastic bags can't go in with irregular plastic recycling, but you can drop them off and other soft plastics. Film drop off spots at most supermarkets. For more on how we're rebranding recycling. Look for hashtag rebranding recycling on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Or visit sustainabilitymatters.org.

Welcome back to the Valley Today I am your host Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College day Guy Curtis is on the Zoom screen with me, he is director of marketing. Katherine Werner is with us as well, she's content and digital marketing specialist. We've been talking a little bit about all of the faces of Laurel Ridge Community College. Katherine herself was one of those faces and then came back to be able to tell other people about how great her experience was there. Spring registration though is open now. I remember when Brandy used to do the show with me live in the studio, it always used to crack me up that in November we're talking about Spring. It was a good thing for me because I was just thinking, okay, that means Spring must be just around the corner, even though the truth of the matter is we are not even into winter yet. Spring registration is a great time for people to really start thinking about what they want to do next year.

Yes, absolutely. Think about the timing of the spring semester and opening it in November. There's so much going on, so you have current students who need to re-enroll and complete and persist and you can finish their programs at the college, but also the new students that we're trying to attract. For a traditional student coming in, a nontraditional student coming in for a degree or a certificate program that is credit based. It takes a while to work through financial assistance and making payments for tuition, figuring out your class schedule, a big reason why we open it so much sooner, but if you are thinking about starting any time, there's a lot of ways to do that. Jane, you mentioned so many different phases we're going after depending on your needs, if you're a person that's out there looking to start a new career, a new you thing, with new years rolling around very soon here, many folks make those resolutions and make a change. We do have a lot of programs that are fast track in nature. If you're looking to enroll just after the new year, when you can get things settled and after you get through the holidays, we have a lot of opportunities if you're looking to fast track with a CSE career study certificate or a very specific credential program to get a skill set to move into a new career fast. Within four to six months of training and sometimes less, depending on the program area, you can do that. You can see yourself in a place, possibly in a new job, later in the spring or early summer. Traditional students, if you are in high school and you're thinking about careers, and you're thinking about the new year, a lot of them are making decisions now about which college universities are going to go to. Even Heck my freshman right now at Sarando, he's got to start thinking about his career in three or four years from now in terms of where he's going to go to college and how he's going to get training, but he's got career coaches, counselors, that are folks that he can speak to. Certainly parents that are out there who need support and helping educate prospective students and their students that they're considering. We have tons of resources, we have career coaches that are embedded with all the high schools, we have counseling and front line coaching staff that are here on campus that can serve folks that can meet face to face or on Zoom or whatever it might be. Also have a great resource, our free online career coach website that provides a lot of those career outlets and job opportunities within our local region, which is tremendous benefit to have. Obviously, you're signing up for a program, you're thinking about what you want to get into, but what's in it for me? Am I going to get the job in return out of that investment? We have a ton of folks on staff, as well as online resources. Back to Janet, why we start the enrollment for the spring semester so soon, all that shared, that gives you some insight. But if you're ready to enroll now up to the last minute, we are taking enrollments up until January 16th. If you miss that initial traditional spring semester start, there are other shorter short course classes, seven week classes, as well as fast track programs that are enrolling throughout the year. We'd like to say we start traditionally with our typical fall and spring semesters, but we also have open enrollment and other programs that are rolling throughout the year. Our fast track programs like commercial driver's license, IT programs, Healthcare, advanced manufacturing, number of programs that are enrolling throughout

the year that can help folks get into a new year and new you if you will.

It's interesting to me how our conversations have changed over the course of the eight years that we've been doing this show together. Eight years ago, the word tradition, and traditional student and traditional education has really gone by the wayside because there's almost no such thing anymore because so many people later in life, or as mid adults is what I'll call people in their '30s or '40s are deciding this isn't the life that I thought it was going to be and I want to do something else, and to do something else, it's going to require upgrading my skill set, it's going to require some degree. There are a lot of people that are coming into the community college network now that never would have even considered college to begin with, much less thinking about starting something totally new right now. The diversity of the types of students that you're meeting at the college, on campus and online.

Absolutely, the programs that we offer at the college are reflective of those in demands and changes. Think about AI and what it's doing now and certainly post pandemic with cybersecurity, IT jobs and having technical skills is ongoing and forever going. Then folks who are looking to transition, many people change their careers multiple times throughout their working life. Also, adults are working longer too because of just a number of reasons, they're healthier and they want to continue to work and perhaps pay for experiences they would like to take advantage of. You got to reskill in order to stay up to speed. There are some traditional areas that are out there that are not advancing as fast, but technology is definitely forcing us think of how we do things. The college we're looking at in a lot of different ways, how it impacts a traditional student accomplishing their traditional work they have to get through, but also other older adults and folks who are coming back to us and want to reskill, look at ways to leverage this new technology change, we are looking at that always and constantly. What we said eight years ago is somewhat relevant today, I think the big picture of it to Janet is knowing all your options and staying up to date is the key of that. Continue education, professional development. If you're looking for a new promotion, a new skill set, new career, we're the right place for you to do that. The key is to stay up to date, and be relevant, that's for sure.

Literally, unless you are a 10 year old, there is something at Laurel Ridge Community College for you and there could be something there for a 10 year old if you're Sheldon from Big Bank Theory.

That's true. If you're a really advanced child, you want to get started sooner. Honestly yes, I think there are some opportunities for those younger ages. We have some community events and things that are going on on campus, but you have to stay relevant, stay up to speed with what's going on. Our college is meeting those needs head on. We're excited for the New Year and folks who want to retool with us are ready for you.

It's not even just Middletown. It used to just be Middletown, but now you've got multiple campuses across the Shenandoah Valley. You have the ability to be completely online with some of the class offerings that you have, so it doesn't even matter where you live. I was checking the stats for the podcast last week, and I had 87 people in California downloaded an episode of the podcast, which I thought was like the craziest weirdest thing ever. The only thing I can figure is maybe they used to live here, or they knew somebody that was on that particular show or something along those lines, but literally somebody in California could take a class at Laurel Ridge if it's an online class.

What? You have followers that far, that's great.

It be crazy, it's the weirdest they're like outliers. Those are my LA crowd. West Coast crowd.

I remember when we were doing shows during the pandemic, some webinars, if you will, we were getting downloads across the US for various reasons because we had very timely topics like how to engage a workforce, a remote pandemic environment. We had several ones around that topic that were very engaging, so we were getting folks all over the place. But it's only moving forward. There are a lot of the programs that we are offering now that are meeting those needs and especially some of the FastForward and G3 funding that come with that. It's getting folks excited about the in demand career fields that Virginia is demanding, so those funding streams on top of what's in demand locally is literally what's bringing folks to us. Being relevant, what I mentioned before and up to date, that's where you need to be and so I think that's how our college is reflecting what those demands are within our region.

We talk on a regular basis about the information sessions, but particularly for the trades that there could be somebody out there that is a very hands on person and they just don't want to go online. They don't want to deal with trying to find something, navigating something on their phone, or dealing with a tablet or a laptop. That's where those in person info sessions come in really handy because they can ask specific questions about that program and get answers for how it might impact their life. I think offering those is very smart.

They're definitely geared for that. They're coffee table discussions. They set up open house style format, if you will, that allows folks to engage with our program staff, the program leaders who have developed a lot of the programs to meet today's demands of a skilled workforce. You also have the instructors who are there that can talk a little bit more about what's learned in the classroom and see and touch and showcase what those hands on experiences are like. We have quite a few of those sessions that are upcoming in November, December, and January. Depending on who you are and maybe you're exploring a new career and looking to get into a whole new industry, for example, those information sessions are awesome opportunities. We have one coming up on November 30th at 04:00 PM. It's in person at Middletown, but if

you want to watch it live online, you could do that. That's our IT fast track programs information session. You can enjoy three different ways. You can also watch it on demand afterwards if you wish. That's November 30th at 04:00. I also have a health care information session that's geared for our fast track sessions. Again, if you're looking to get into the career with not a lot of time and energy invested, you can find a job right away with these fast track sessions. Healthcare is on December 13th at five o'clock. It's based in Middletown, but you can watch it live online, but then you receive the on demand replay. Then trades Janet? Yes, that's another big area. That's hands on that. It's great to get the C folks face to face so that is done in person, January 18th and fore from 05:00-07:00 on a Thursday night or February 24 in Middletown, and 09:00-12:00, that's on a Saturday. Those in person opportunities or online, depending on the information session or quite way just to get more information about the programs themselves, what it's like for a student. What expectations they may have as far as a student handbook and obligations to attend that program, grades and whatnot, and how to study and how to learn. What else to the funding options. What options are out there to help subsidize the course and program that I'm getting into, which makes it much easier for folks who are looking to do a little return on investment in terms of time and energy and funds out of their pocket to make that change. I think that's the biggest challenge for most folks is that, can I see myself in the job that they're advertising today in the newspaper, and how can I get there quickly with the skills that I can gain from the college? I think coming to those sessions are a great way to put those pieces together and figure out the puzzle that if I'm trying to balance taking kids to and from practice or if I'm trying to figure out another job that I'm working full time as well, that's a great thing about a lot of our fast track programs at the college where they are credential or career study certificate, they can be done part time, evening hours in most cases. In some cases they do have weekend opportunities that allow for folks to make that transition easily to that new career and when they're ready and they can complete their programs, so that's the beauty of those sessions. Coming in person or coming on online to join or watching those on demand replays later helps you put those pieces together.

I talked yesterday to the City of Winchester, and they're revamping their transportation program. You don't even necessarily have to have a car aside from the online classes. You can hop on a city bus and come to Laurel Ridge to take a class and come spring, you'll be able to schedule that ride in an app and not even have to wait at a bus stop to get yourself to Laurel Ridge Community College.

I'm thinking about taking advantage of that myself. If I need to run to Winchester real quick or something. But transportation is a big barrier, and Winchester Transit has been a huge partner in helping make sure students are coming to our campus. That update about that app, Janet sounds really appealing just for obviously for students who need to look for more tailored, specific route and a way to get to the college campus if they don't have

transportation, or maybe there's one car in the household and husband or spouse, whoever has that car and they can't get to it, or maybe you're having car troubles, it's a great way to figure out a way to get to campus and that's the one of the bigger barriers in addition to funding and child support and things like that.

Where is the best first place for people to start? Someone in any of the walks of life that we've talked about today, what should they do as their very first step?

We would encourage folks to visit our website lorreridge.edu/explore. It's a landing page that brings you to all the pathways that are very relevant in our region in terms of programs and services that we offer. Some really big ones that are out there on that landing page is education, public service and safety, science, math and engineering, logistics and transportation, computer, IT, healthcare, business. Just to name a few. But that learning page will lead you to those pathways of potential careers that are high in demand within our region. Once you learn there and explore specific programs, perhaps you're looking for time that it's offered, or is it a transfer program that leads you to a four year institution? Is it a completely online program? Is it fast track? Is it a degree you can filter and sort through some of those options. But also too, if you visit our career coach page lorreridge.edu/jobs, that's another site that I can showcase. I'm not quite sure where I want to go, but I'm not quite ready to talk to someone. But there is a quick six question assessment or 60 question assessment. If you want to fill that out, get a feel for what industry, what pathway might be best for you. You can use that tool to gauge where you might want to go, or again, you can also browse those career outlets and those career paths from a different view, not just from a program side of it, but more really just the sector of the jobs and outcomes, the occupational categories, if you will, that will help you decide which way to go. Those are two great resources, depending on where you are, you want to talk to a coach. If you could find someone, a friend, family member, or perhaps the staff that are here on site at our college. We have a FastForward coach. Her name is Lisa Heiser that works within our workforce development office. She's a great person to lean on to understand what programs and services might be eligible from a fast track standpoint. But we have three other outreach folks that support the front line staff when it comes down to exploring more career. Michelle Crips in the [inaudible 00:25:54] market, Thomas Monk in the Middletown market, Brand Doors in the Lorre Page area, and also [inaudible 00:26:00] County markets. Those are great staff. Those coaching staff will be awesome folks to speak to, to get more details and really cut to the chase in some cases to help you find out what you want to know a little sooner versus you doing your own investigative work. Coaching staff are great, but if you're still in high school, talk to your high school. Talk to your guidance counselors depending on if your private school or home school, there are staff that are out there to help you work through some of those decision points and those puzzles together when it comes to figuring out your pathway and where you want to go. Those are great resources to start with.

Then Katherine, I'm thinking two people should check out your social to see the experience part of it. Not as much the education, but to see, oh my gosh, that looks fun. That looks like a college experience that I wanted to have and didn't think I could afford.

Absolutely. We'll be hosting that type of content on Lorre Ridge Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and so on, just to showcase all of our initiatives.

Thank you both for taking some time this morning to chat with me. I do appreciate your time.

Thanks for having us. It has been great to talk to you on this lovely fall, November day. It's following your season. Everything's turned orange, Janet.

I know and it's a very short window because it's all going to be brown and dead in another week or two, so I only have a small window. Katherine, it was great to have you on the show and I look forward to working with you more on stuff moving forward.

Thank you for having me.

I will be back tomorrow for a brand new episode of The Valley Today a few minutes afternoon, so meet me here then.