

Hello and welcome to the Valley. Today I am your host, Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College day. Guy Curtis is back on the zooms with us. He is director of marketing for the college.

You were missed, guy. Curtis and I, we were joking before we started recording that. It didn't sound maybe like Brandi and I missed you last month, but you were actually missed. Well, thank you. I felt missed, I guess, but I'm so happy that she was able to fill in and share more about our efforts with the laureate and the storytelling that we do at Law Ridge, and it's hard to get the same kind of story out again and again. But there's always different things to say and share and so, so happy that you filled in for me while I was away on vacation. I think moving forward, we're going to probably arm wrestle for the opportunity to get on the show with Janet. So more to come hopefully from her and other new great stories as well. She made a huge mistake when she said on the air that I was in part the inspiration for The Laureate because of that podcast series we had put together. So once I had picked up a copy, I carry it with me

now in my bag so I can pull it out and tell people, have you seen this? Because I was part of the inspiration for why they. That's why it's so hot. Janet started and she saw a great version. Yeah, actually we've had quite a few issues sent out across the region and they're being picked up quickly. So if you need a copy, we definitely have digital versions on our website. So feel free to tune in to that. But yeah, what a great way to highlight the stories, the success, the impact that we're providing to our local service region. I like that it is the broad range of students that you serve at Laurel Ridge, because I think so many times we think of kids coming right out of high school, into the community college setting before maybe they're going to a four year, or they're learning a trade and they're going to go right into the workforce. But a lot of the students that come through Laurel Ridge are also adults. They're either learning a new skill, they're going back to school. They want to up their career path in some way, shape or form. So I'm happy that you've got Caroline Wood with us today. She is the associate

vice president of support services and academic support for Laurel Ridge Community College.

Caroline, I think a lot of times people think, oh, I'm too old to go back to school or I don't even know where I would start. That's where you come in, right? Absolutely. We've all played that, um, to old game. And the truth is you're going to age no matter what, so you might as well up your game while you're doing it. So yeah, we actually at Laurel Ridge, we are number one in student success in the workforce, meaning the 23 colleges, community college and community college system. We are number one in student success, because what we've done at Laurel Ridge is we've really operationalized support. We're not just helpful, it's in our DNA to have care teams, to make sure that each student knows they matter and has help as soon as they needed or wanted, whether it be somebody who doesn't know what they want to do, they can come in and we have coaches that will talk to them about, you want to upgrade your skill set or do you want to do great, you want to transfer or do you want to become a nurse? Our

outreach coaches can sit down and talk through that with a student to help them figure out what direction they might want to go, and then they are assigned a new student coach when they apply. And so that new student coach helps all students go through the application process, maybe fill out financial aid and get any documentation they might need so they have a person at each step of the way. Once they are done all of that, they meet with an advisor. An advisor will be with them throughout their college experience, helping them with their academic journey so that advisor will help them set classes and do things like that. And then we also have what we call wraparound services. So somebody who might come to us and say, oh gosh, I can't manage my time. I haven't been in school forever. I don't have enough money to buy groceries. So we have academic coaching for students who might not be used to managing their time that way or need help with some academic skills. And we have a food pantry for students. Perhaps they may have to cut back a few hours that they aren't able to afford food. Gardeners who can

afford food right now, it's so expensive and we don't ask about income. There's no income requirement. Any student who wants or needs food is more than welcome to walk into our food pantries. And we actually have this past year hired a social worker. And so she coordinates with our, um, student support team and works with students who might need to access other resources, for example, Snap, or if they need help with paying utilities or childcare or things like that, she can help them access those things. We know that while we call our product education, learning is at the core of what we do. So many things can interfere with learning and take up a student's time and bandwidth, and they're not able to learn if we can't look at them holistically. So what we have. Done in support at law, which is really look at what students need to be successful, and we make sure that we are there every step of the way, getting students in and getting them through to graduation. And in fact, when we talk about being number one, we are measured at multiple points in the process for being number one for enrollment in

our region or how students progress and and our retain and then completion. So we are not just good at getting students through the door. We are good at helping students actually complete and achieve their academic goals. You touch on a lot of things there that I think people probably don't know about, and b are huge things that would keep them from taking that first step. I, Curtis and I that conversations in the past with other people from Laurel Ridge talking about the Fafsa in particular, and I think so many of us as parents are familiar with it because we had to help our kids go through it, that we may not realize it's also for us as well. And how would I go about filling out a Fafsa by for myself? Having someone that is going to walk me through that is so incredibly valuable. Oh my gosh. I know I always think about the Fafsa, but as you know how every year around tax time we all get a little antsy. That's how I feel about forms. I'm always afraid I'm going to do it wrong, and it's just really helpful to have somebody just sitting next to you, even if you're the one who has to bring the

information to the table. Just having somebody say, no, it's okay, you're doing it, you're taking it right. And then also to have somebody say, okay, this is the money we can get for you from financial aid. But there are also are other resources. There's scholarships that are just need based. And we have G3, which is our state program, so that anybody who is below 400% above the poverty line in a G3 program doesn't pay tuition at all. Our financial aid and our new student coaches are so incredibly helpful. We just have an incredibly caring team, and that's part of our values, is that spirit of care and generosity. Because going to school is really overwhelming. It takes a lot of courage to be vulnerable, and I think that often getting through the front door or making that first phone call is actually the hardest. So we want to make sure that students know that we are going to take care of them the entire time, and that we are a judgment free zone, and that we understand what it feels like, especially adult students returning after many, many years who might not have had a positive high

school experience, feeling like they're not good students, and the negative self-talk we do, we're here to pump them up and get rid of that negative self-talk. When you think about it, as adults, once we have graduated from high school or from college, when in reality is the next time we're going to take an actual test, aside from maybe the DMV every, what, ten years and having to renew your driver's license, you just don't take tests. Because I could imagine myself sitting here at 50 something years old. I have always wanted to go back to school. I loved school, I love to learn stuff, but I have no idea what when I go back to school for and how would I start? Even though I have all this knowledge that guy Curtis has imparted upon me over the last nine years, it just seems like you are able to take that I wish into I can exactly. And one of the things that the state and Laurel Ridge has focused on is getting rid of the barriers. At the very beginning, for many, many years, we forced students to come in and take a placement test. So, right. You walk through the door and boom, there's a test. And so thankfully,



we have gotten rid of all of that since adult students can self play and they don't have to be faced with a test right when they come in. Which honestly, I always say, if I took a placement test right now, I would be in developmental math. You know, math is that you forget it. I would yeah, I would be in third grade again. That's I could not do it. The research has shown that those really weren't effective predictors. We don't use those anymore. So it's really much easier and even less scary now it's really about filling out an application. And it's more of I would say potential students could frame it as a curiosity if you have a curiosity about yourself. But if you're curious about what could be, what might be, we are here to really explore dreams, and our coaches work with both the Workforce Solutions, which is our non-credit bearing side, and then the credit degree programs and transfer programs. They work with them to figure out what is appropriate, what could be, and what program would best fit. Those dreams. I would suspect that a lot of people walk in the door and they say, look, I am not

happy in my current job. I'm not making enough money to support myself and my family. So I want a larger paycheck, and I would really like to do something that I enjoy, but I don't really know what that is exactly, or what kind of a job would come with this thing that I don't know what it is that I enjoy. And having you there as that resource probably fills in a lot of those blanks. It really does. And we utilize programs like the Education Wizard that can help them do career assessments and things like that to figure out talent. Now, when adults come back, they usually know adults are usually a little more focused and often either want to transfer or we have. A vast majority of adults choose health sciences. So what's really also nice about what's that? A lot of people say, I want to be a nurse. That's the obvious thing. But when they come back that we can share with them, there are other things besides nursing in health care that you might be interested in. For example, if you don't want to see patients, there's always medical coding. Or if you don't like as much for those physical therapy

assistants, or if you're more introverted and want to be in a lab, there's medical laboratory technology. So there's so many options that people just don't. They don't know all of the jobs that exist. We all are surprised when we people that do interesting things and we're like, oh, I didn't know somebody did that in the world. That's what they used to say about me and the radio. Really? You just walked into the station one day and said, I want to talk to people on the radio. And they said, okay. And that's exactly that's what I would say is to anybody listening is have that courage to walk into Laurel Ridge and say, I have a dream, but I don't know what it is yet. You know, and we are happy to help you figure out what that dream is and get there. I like to add, like there's a lot of the adults out there have transferable skills, and folks may not realize if I'm trying to transition out of a career into a new one that's in demand, perhaps a lot of us have their own thoughts and idea of what that career could be or should be based on people we know, and what I love about our website and some of our resources that

Caroline teams provide is the career services part, including like free assessments to determine whether or not should even go to this career path.

Do I like the idea of being outside, or working with my hands, or dealing with people face to face day to day? And so I think their team is really great with that. But also we have some great online resources too that can help you self navigate. Take a quick assessment rather than a test, an assessment say, hey, six questions or less, which way do I want to go? Or even 30 questions. Something to dive into deep. Further, as far as understanding what my transferable skills my previous experiences can help get me to.

So that's what I've always loved about the different services that are provided at the college, and how I can help an adult or anyone who's just trying to start their career, perhaps for the first time. Which way to go. And I think the key, and we've talked about this for years, finding that in-demand career and hopefully align it with your skills and your ability and your interest. Nursing is one of our top acquired

program that speaking to Carolyn's point, but there's so many other things indirect and direct patient support that's provided by a hospital setting, for example, that folks don't know about. There's so many things behind the scenes that you can do in the hospital setting or a doctor's office and so forth, that folks miss out on those opportunities. So those transferable skills that you've had a working life of, say, 2015 or more years as an adult, you can transfer those opportunities that will help you be successful in your new career. And we have folks out to get their let's take a break. When we come back, you can give us a sense, Caroline, of what someone could expect when they make that first step, or if they've done it before and now they're coming back. But it's been a while and we do that. That sounds wonderful. We are on the screen today for Laurel Ridge Community College Day. Joining me is Guy Curtis. He is director of marketing for the college. Joining him is Caroline Wood. She is the associate VP of support services and academic support. We're going to come back and talk more

with both of them in just a couple of minutes.

Don't let a cringing DJ ruin your wedding day.

Celebrate confidently instead with Summit Events

Co, the premier entertainment company in the

Shenandoah Valley. Summit events is serving 200

couples a year with five star review DJs, photo

booths, 360 booths, live music and more. You can

celebrate confidently with Ben Avery, Summit

Event's founder and chief party officer, who was

just named the top of Virginia Entrepreneur of the

year. Don't risk your wedding booking professional

at Summit Events Kokum that summit event Qualcomm

and on Instagram at Summit Events Co.

Welcome back to the Valley today. I am your host,

Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community

College Day. That means Guy Curtis is on the zoom

with me. He is their director of marketing.

Joining him is Caroline Wood. She is AVP of

support services and academic support. We talked

in the first segment about all of the things that

I think too many of us don't realize. Laurel Ridge

Community College provides to new students coming

in right out of high school, but also to those

adults, those of us adults that maybe Caroline,  
when we have to fill out some sort of form, aren't  
all that thrilled that we have to check the box  
that says some college. We'd really like to check  
the box that says degree or something. That's a  
little more final than I have some college, but  
that's the perfect student for you. Someone who  
maybe took a couple of classes and then life got  
in the way, work got in the way, and now they want  
to come back. They're a perfect person to come  
back to Laurel Ridge Community College. Absolutely.  
And they might have taken a couple of classes. And  
because life got in the way, might not have done  
well in those classes, which of course, then again,  
you get the I back up the negative self-talk again.  
But those are great students to come back. If they  
went somewhere else, we can take those credits in.  
And also we do give some credit for prior learning.  
So if people have other experiences like they were  
in the military or so through workforce, sometimes  
we'll do credit for prior line and that can get  
them credits as well. So we get students as much  
as they can from their work and their educational

history through our department, and that will help them get a leg up as they come back to us. And again, a new student coach will be able to help that student ask the questions, because of course you don't know what you don't know. So our staff is trained to ask the questions, have you done this? Have you been to college before and go through those things? So it's a really good opportunity for students to get their footing and start. And if adult students want to transfer, we had there are a lot of four year online schools. I would always suggest that students consider starting with us, even if their goal is to transfer and get a bachelor's degree at an online school. We have online programming as well. It is just so much less expensive to start with us. And the truth is, if you're getting a bachelor's degree, the bachelor's degree is going to be from that institution. It's important to really save money when we're all going to the grocery store. In fact, at our bills. I just want to reinforce that this is the absolutely most economical model. And as I said, we're number one in student success.



So we have a fantastic product that an educational environment where the learning and the foundations of learning are there, as well as our support services. So we really are the best choice for adult students, whether they're looking to get an applied degree, go straight as a workforce or start looking to get a bachelor's, maybe masters, even a doctorate one day. See, that's what I want. I want people to have to come talk to my goal. But I don't want to have to deal with blood in order to do that. So I want the other doctor. My doctor. It's an education. It's bloody at all. It is very, very clean. And let's go back to what you were saying a second ago about how economical it is to go to Laurel Ridge. And again, Guy Curtis and I've talked about that so many times. I have that conversation out and about in the community all of the time. People grossly underestimate how and when it's a cheap, but how cheap it really is to get an education at Laurel Ridge. And as an adult, you're more concerned and worried about your budget than most of your younger kids coming out of high school, because usually mom or dad are

helping foot that bill. But when you are the mom or dad, you got to make sure that you're getting the most bang for your buck. And Lower Ridge certainly offers that. We really do. I mean, when you're looking at some private schools, anywhere from 20 to 40 a year compared to five, it's just a tremendous difference. And a difference that means that maybe you can pay for your children's education. I would just never encourage people to get into the student loan debt cycle, especially if we're training adults. I think that we're hearing all of these folks talk about student debt and how it's preventing them from buying houses or just delaying the start of families, and we are absolutely the best choice, I think in the VCs in general is the best choice in the state of Virginia. And here's the other bonus is that you're not because of a low investment on the front end, you're not sacrificing anything from the educational perspective, you can still come in person. And. Do classes. You can still take your classes online. You can still get a degree of some sort. You can get a certification. You can join

clubs. You can be involved in the college community. You get all of the things that you get anywhere else at a much lower cost. Absolutely.

And it's really interesting if I talk about clubs, we have one of our star students from last year. She's probably been on the show before. Her name is Sidney. She was actually a yes. She's Laurel Ridge famous. She really is. She was a returning adult student. And you know what? She came to us because she got a mail about G3 and she studied cyber, came back and studied cyber, and as an adult got involved with thought she was caring I think pride and she was Npcc, which is our honors society. And she was, I believe, a student ambassador. And so that's what's really exciting too, is there's a versity of students that are engaged at Laurel Ridge. So it's not just 18, 19, 20 year olds. You have adult students involved in our activities as well, and it just brings such a depth of interest. And really, the diversity helps us be better people because we understand more perspectives. And that's been really fun to watch as young people can learn from returning students

and returning students learn from real people. So it's wonderful. She made that point, actually, when she was on the show a couple of months ago, that when she first came in, she thought, oh my gosh, I'm going to be the only old lady, I think is how she referred to herself in these classes. And then, as it turned out, she was not the only one. At one point, I think in one of her classes, she said that they outnumbered the younger kids, and that was the whole dynamic. She talked about how much she learned from these new students coming in, and I think one of the other people that was on with her was one of those younger students who talked about all of the things and the life lessons and things that they picked up from the older people in their classes. So it really does work both ways. It really does. The last week of school is when all those ceremonies are, and it was really fun to watch, particularly at Middletown, because of Sydney and some of the other students that were graduating, just watching the dynamic between them. Sydney used to always joke that she was afraid people would think she

was the creepy mom with snacks. Instead, she was the mom. The snacks are playing on that, so you know that it's exciting and amazing and really inspiring. You don't just learn about what you're taking classes, and you learn about life and about relationships and about your community, and that really is exciting. And I think it's something we don't think about that often when we think about college is because we are in the community. Everybody that comes here lives in the community. So you're really just strengthening the community that we live in, and there is nothing to say that you can't then transfer, because we've done tons of shows to talking about transfer credits. You can transfer to ODU, you can transfer to Liberty, to UVA, to Virginia Tech, to a lot of different schools around the area. About half of our students come in with the goal of transfer. We really do transfer programming well, and a director of admissions at Virginia Tech is one of our best advertisements. He always says that he would prefer students go to Laurel Ridge first and then come to Virginia Tech. That that we do our

students do better when they have graduated with an associate's degree. And in fact, our students perform when they have graduated with an associate degree that are sometimes in what they call native students who started as freshmen. So we have several transfer institutions that most of the students go to. They can go anywhere, but it's JMU, George Mason, a lot go to Liberty, some go to Shenandoah, ODU lot do the online ODU or online Liberty. Those are the two online schools where I would encourage you to come get an associate's and transfer there. If you were looking at online and a lot of our Middletown students go to James Madison, a lot of our fourth year students go to George Mason because it's commutable if they need to stay local. So do I just walk in the front door of any of the campuses for Laurel Ridge and say, hey, I heard that I can come back to college. Oh my gosh, we would love it if they did. You just walk through that front door at the Middletown, Luray or Fauquier and we will be happy to help you. Or if you want, on our website, there's a chat you know, you can just put in. I'm interested in

coming or pick up the phone call and we are happy to get you started. Well known you along. We know it's very easy to put education off, so we will help nudge you along to get you to the finish line.

Guy Curtis. There are opportunities at least once a month, if not every other month, to come and attend an information session. Maybe it's about a particular class or a trade, or maybe it's just to wander around the school and get a tour, because a lot of us also don't know what's behind the walls of these giant buildings. As we drive by them.

Yeah, that's a great way to mention. We do have an awesome tour opportunity almost on demand, if you will, with our coaches. So if you can request one, as Caroline mentioned, as far as requesting a tour or self-guided tour group tours. Those are our options out there with the coaching staff. But in terms of upcoming events, actually today as the shows airing, we do have, uh, trades fast track program information session this evening from 430 to 730. If you missed that, you still have a chance to come out and talk with coaches and other staff as well. But later in the month is actually

a lot of fun too, and very excited for the semester to kick off. It's not too late to get enrolled. We have classes starting as early as August 26th, so some of our classes begin then, as well as September. So a chance to come out. But we do have new student welcome days on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th. So if you do commit, there's still time to get involved with some of those in-person events where you get a lot of the support you need the day of. So there's still plenty of time to apply, enroll and get started, and you can come to one of those events and be around other people who are doing the exact same thing that you are. If it's still just a little too intimidating to walk in the door by yourself, then come to one of these events where you're going to look around and find out that person is just like me, and that person is just like me, and they're going to then be your college friends for the rest of your life. Exactly. Yeah. So our first day of class is August 26th. So the Thursday evening before August 22nd will be at Laredo with new Student Welcome Day. Students can come in and get a little student 101. And then



Friday evening here at fourth year on August 23rd, we're having a new student welcome day. And then Saturday morning, August 24th of Middletown. New students will be able to come in. And if the younger students can bring their parents over, students can bring their kids. But we have parent sessions too. So we teach you how to parent a college student and let you know that we make sure the campus is safe and all of those things. So it's so much fun. Thank you both for taking the time to give me the rundown on all of the cool, fun things that are happening at Laurel Ridge, I appreciate it. Thank you. Thanks. Uh, doctor Michael. You know, that sounds great. There's is kind of fancy way of wraps. We'll see you of the doors here pretty soon, right? Yeah. I just want people to have to call me doc.

Thanks so much for having the staff for another great time. I will be back tomorrow with a brand new episode of The Valley today. It's a conversation with one of my favorite people on the planet, Chris Conner, director of Winchester City Parks. We're talking about a ton of new things

that are going on at Jim Barnett Park and in the surrounding areas. So meet me back here for that conversation just a few minutes after noon.