

Hello and welcome to the Valley. Today I am your host, Janet Michael. This is Laurel Ridge Community College day. Guy Curtis has abandoned me. My voice is back with me. Randy was my original Laurel Ridge Community College cohort. In from, I think is what we'll call it. Freddy, I'm excited to have you back on the screen today. I'm excited to talk about the laureate, so thank you for making time today. Absolutely. I'm excited to be back. And I might have to kick Guy out of this role. I'm just going to wait because I miss chatting with you. There are some days that he would probably welcome being kicked out of its roles, so I don't think you'd get much of a fight from him every other month or so. I'll remember that. We're going to talk today about the Laureate Magazine, and I remember the first edition of that. It all came during the pandemic. It all came during the name change, and I thought it was a genius name, quite frankly, for the magazine. Can you tell me a little bit about how it got started and what it's supposed to do? Absolutely. So I don't know if you know this, Janet, but you're

kind of the inspiration for it as well in this podcast, because you and I started trying to gather more and more of our stories in our podcast. There's so much out there. The college is full of amazing people, amazing stories. We have amazing donors, community partners. The stories are endless. And so we started the podcast and we started the monthly radio shows and starting to realize we need to capture these somewhere, not only on our website and knowing that magazines aren't necessarily growing or the most popular, but they're still valuable to have that beautiful publication in your hand. It's still so valuable. So that's where the inspiration came from. It's how do we package all these and get them out there? And someone can be sitting at the doctor's office and pick it up and flip through it, or on their coffee table at home. So we started the first edition in fall of 2021. After that, we've been able to produce to every year. And so our most recent one is honoring our veterans. Each edition has been a different theme. Before that, it was our alumni. And then health professions came

before that. And innovation and overcoming barriers. So it's fun for the staff to pick different topics each quarter to focus on. And the veterans is one of the favorites so far. Well, I think it's a really unique way to of letting anybody and everybody out there know that Laurel Ridge Community College has a place for them, no matter what they want to study, no matter what they want to be. There is something there at the college that can help them further that goal.

Absolutely. Looking at all of our different magazines, you can just see the diversity. You can see all the different pathways that people have taken or come from to get to their ultimate goals.

That's what we're really proud of with the magazine. And you can actually take a look at all of our digital magazines at Laurel Ridge, Dot, Edu, Slash laureate, and you can go take a look at all nine of them. They're not only the stories that are inspiring, but the overall graphic design of this publication is beautiful. And so our graphic design team is very talented and we're proud of that. Were you surprised when you started putting

together this issue, honoring veterans with just how many veterans have come through Laurel Ridge Community College? Yeah, we know they're there and we work with the Veterans office, but this is the first time we've actually got a chance to really get to know them and so many at one time. And honestly, we could have made this publication 100 pages. But we do have a budget. We have to stick with them. So it was hard to pick and choose. And individuals like the one you're getting ready to meet stepping up to the plate and allowing us to tell their story for them. We're just appreciative of that and not only our student stories in there, but also we highlight three of our board members that were veterans, including General Frickley. So you can read all about him and his journey and their donors. We have Ernie and and Chris Dale, who established a veterans scholarship at the college. There's just this real publication that you can pick up and find out all kinds of ways in there that we're supporting our veterans with those that stepped up to the plate and joined us and supporting our veterans. Now, take this moment

now to introduce. Major Jason Hagee is retired U.S. Army officer, recently featured in the laureate. And Jason and I go way back. We were joking before we started recording. He was in that podcast series that we did together, branding for Laurel Ridge Community College and Jason, when Brandi sent me the email and said, hey, we're going to do the show and Jason's going to be at. I was so excited because I very clearly remember our conversation recording that podcast, because you were amazing and the things that you had done, the things that you wanted to do. So I'm really excited to catch up and find out about all the things that have happened in between. Good morning, Janet, and thanks for having me on. And yeah, a lot has transpired since we last spoke, so it's been a busy time, but looking forward to it. Always have time for Laurel Ridge. Really enjoyed my time there. So let's back up to that point. What made you decide Laurel Ridge is where you wanted to continue your education? Because it wasn't something that we traditionally think of. I think for Laurel Ridge, it was art, if I'm not

mistaken. Yes, I had retired from the Army in 2013 and worked on a lot of international projects counter humor, human trafficking in Africa, and then macro disaster response with the UN in Geneva.

I really was burned out, and I was turning to art in my spare time as a means of therapy, but I had no fundamentals or anything like that. I looked at Shenandoah University and looked at bigger programs, and some friends said, you really should take a look at what at the time, Lord Fairfax now Laurel Ridge had going, and I did, and I had no intention of going back and getting a degree or anything. But I was impressed right away with the quality of the professors and the quality of instruction there, and drove right in and was proud to graduate. I still am in touch with my professors, most of them today, and they'll tell you, I'm sure Professor Gering and Walter, all that. I bother them all the time with information about, you know, I want to do this sculpture next.

And what do you think? And I don't know what it is about Laura Ridge, but the professors and the community built around it were just better than

any of the other educational experiences. I had to include grad school and undergrad and multiple other education opportunities. So it's a special place. I remember during that last conversation that we had as well, and I'll put a link to that. So anyone that didn't hear it can go back and listen to the conversation that we had back in 2021. But I remember you talking very much about how supportive they were for all the different projects you were producing, some films you were going to be a documentarian. You had a very broad range of art, from sculpture to all of these different things. Yeah. They leaned in and pitched in to help. They participated in the short film that we made, and I don't think I would have gotten the art residency at Gettysburg National Battlefield without their recommendations, and I certainly didn't have a portfolio to apply for it without them. And your undergrad and grad school, you're a number a lot of times are sitting in a seat. And that was not my experience at Laurel Ridge. And I'm forever grateful to them and the institution for that. I was joking with you two

before we started recording that. We just had that conversation in 2021, and yet it feels like it was 10 or 15 years ago. You've lived practically a whole entire life. In just the few short years since we last had a conversation. You had a film series. It was getting ready to be picked up by HBO. There were all these things, and then things took a turn for you. You got a phone call that pretty much changed the trajectory of what you were going to do the next couple of years. Yeah, that's right. The performing arts, as you well know, took a nosedive. So my play that I did while I was at Gettysburg, there just wasn't any way to shop any of it because there were no theaters operating. So I sat down and had a long conversation with myself, and I decided to take what I'd gotten at Laurel Ridge in the design and the writing programs in particular, and dive into some entrepreneurial pursuits. I completed a program at Georgetown Dog Tag, Inc., which was phenomenal. Stanford's Graduate School of Business, their ignite program. And then at MIT, I did a program through them for additive manufacturing,

which is 3D printing, and I was ready to go in the fall of 2021, with a launch on Kickstarter and an opening rollout to my company. And in July, some of the friends veterans group in Hollywood called Veterans of Media and Entertainment, who I'd also done a fellowship with, reached out to me because they had known I spent eight years in Africa with the Army and had a lot of contact with United Nations and refugee issues, and asked me to help a professor at Harvard get these 74 documentary filmmakers out. And I didn't do very much. I just made a call and introduced some colleagues from United Nations High Commissioner for refugees to the Harvard professor. They took care of it. They got them out, and I thought I was done. I actually went camping in West Virginia, and when I had returned, there were like 50 text messages on my phone and phone calls. And then the veterans group was like, hey, we're all going to Fort Bragg now for Liberty and North Carolina and come down. We're going to save Afghans. And we met an extraordinary young man who had raised \$7 million on Instagram to help out. And we just started

chartering flights and setting up safe houses and working with international partners, Senator in Canada, Prince David, the McRaney dynasty and Georgia ambassador and I yeah, I just everybody knew somebody who needed help. So we set an operation up. And when the \$7 million ran out, we transitioned and moved to a ground game and started moving people out to Pakistan and putting them in safe houses there and processing their stuff. And we're still in that mode. We still have folks that are waiting for resettlement options and work, and every month trying to scrape together the funds to keep the houses going and pay for medical bills and food and stuff like that. And so while I had to put everything on hold, I'll just tell you that the purest thing that I've ever done, and I think everyone who was involved in the operation would agree with that. I don't know these people. I probably will never meet them just to be able to get in and talk with them. It's important to them. A lot of them are in hiding, and we're doing it all on WhatsApp and signal and through emails. It's just been amazing. Before we

go to break, can you tell us where we can go and support this effort? Is there a website or a fundraising mechanism or something that those that are listening today can support you in this effort?

Sure. It's actually a Virginia nonprofit. It's called Operation Snow Leopard. I'll send you the link to it. [Ops snow leopard.org](http://Opsnowleopard.org). It's run by my friend, good friend Karen Kraft, who was the one that kind of dragged me into this. She's a veteran out in Hollywood, producer, worked with Discovery Channel for decades, Shark Week and all of that.

Karen had a big hand in all of that. We would appreciate anything. Nobody's paid. We're all volunteers and have been for going on three years now. And I need to say one thing. Um, we're all built around the Afghans. You know, the Afghans were saving themselves. We just came in to provide the support. So we have a whole crew of former Afghan military folks that have set up all these networks on the ground, and nothing could have been done without them. They're the ones that are really carrying the flag for. Your own fellow countrymen. It sounds like it's been quite an

impressive operation. So let's take a break when we come back. Can we talk a little bit more about that, and maybe have you give some advice for people that are considering Laurel Ridge in the future, in particular? Military, former, current military and their families? Can we do that in the next segment? Absolutely. We are on the zoom today with Brandi Boyce. Brandi is director of public relations and special events for Laurel Ridge Community College. Major Jason Hatch, retired U.S. Army officer, is joining us as well. He was recently featured in the Laureate Brain. He's going to tell us where we can go online to see the digital copy of that when we come back in just a couple of minutes. Hey, guys, I'm Holly and I'm Bonnie, and we would love to meet you at our brewery, Winchester Brickworks. That's right. Our family friendly tasting room in Old Town is the perfect place to hang out any day, because we're open seven days a week. We've got refreshing beers, seltzers and slushies, plus food trucks and events on the weekends. And the best part is, we are so excited to be part of this brand new passport

program where you just need four stamps from
Winchester area breweries and cidery so you get
some great free swag. So pop on by our brewery and
we'll get you a passport. You can find out more at
Winchester Brew trail.com.

Welcome back to the Valley today. I am your host,
Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community
College day. Renee Boyce is joining me. She is
director of public relations and special events
for Laurel Ridge Community College. On the screen
with us as well is Major Jason Hatch. He is
retired U.S. Army officer recently featured in The
Laureate, which is what prompted this whole
conversation. Today, Randy is going to tell us
where we can get a hardcopy and a digital copy of
that in a few minutes. Jason, what advice do you
have for other veterans out there, or their family
members who aren't sure continuing their education
is the right step? I think through our service, we
are so busy that we spend so much time focusing on
the mission and deployments that we kind of
sideline our passions or hobbies and interests,
and I think a place like Laurel Ridge is a great

place to go back and reignite those passions.

Honestly, I would never have a vision of myself getting involved with art or anything writing or anything like that, until I walked through the doors of campus there and got that kind of personal touch and the kind of mentoring that I received while I was there. So I think for veterans, you can go right from active duty or whatever service you were doing and take a Beltway job or contractor job. But if there was something that you're passionate about, I really encourage you to consider pulling that off the shelf and giving it a go, and especially doing at a place like Laurel Ridge, because you're not going to run out of supporters and people that want to see you succeed there. And you might find a pathway like I did, which leads to stuff that I find on a daily basis to be fulfilling and a very, very good way to take what I learned in the military and transition it into things that I want to do in regular daily life. I don't know if that makes sense. Randy Jason makes a good point because it doesn't either have to be art related. It could be

medicine, it could be accounting, it could be any number of things because people have different passions. Now, I am not at all passionate about numbers. So you are never going to have me try and pursue anything that requires math. But maybe health care is something they want to expand on.

There are so many options for them to look into at Laurel Ridge. Absolutely. And as you're speaking, Jason, it's it's so important as humans, not just veterans, that we tap into our passions. Right?

It's for our mental health, for our daily motivation and purpose. Right. So we have to pay attention to that and and follow that calling. And it might be numbers. Right. But I've always loved math. And what's fantastic at Laurel Ridge for veterans is we have the Veterans Center that provides that extra support and can help guide individuals in that way. Janet, you and I have talked about this before. There's a path for everyone there, whether you're a veteran or not, and we should just all be pursuing our passions in life, right? Jason, you mentioned during the break when we were chatting for a little bit about how

most of our veterans go into the service because they have this innate sense of needing to serve, wanting to serve. And that doesn't stop when they retire or when they leave military service. And for you, Laurel Ridge also provided an avenue to be able to find out what other ways they could serve the community if they weren't serving the country in an active military role. Yes, that's correct. I'm passionate about national service. Doesn't matter if it's military or United Way or AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, whatever. I think that's what really makes us great. It's something I saw when I was in Africa, was I would have the Minister of Defense come up to me for the country, and he's like, give me something for my soldiers to do. So they won't plan a coup or something like that. I really didn't have an idea of what to tell them. But then when I got out and I did an AmeriCorps tour and saw what all the different organizations that are community level that that are giving back to their community, making life better and overcoming challenges. Longridge was a good epicenter for that because you have young,

you have old, you have the experience, and you have all the zeal and youthful enthusiasm for going out and getting stuff done. And I think veterans, you've already raised your hand once. In my opinion, it's worthwhile to keep that going and keep giving back. And you probably have stuff that in your experience, toolkit that would help these other groups to overcome some things, and you'll learn stuff along the way. Being the old 50 year old creepy guy in AmeriCorps really helped me to understand the millennial generation, see their outlooks, and push away all of the negative memes that, like my generation and maybe previous generations, had about them. I'm like, these are very bright, smart, young people that care about things that I never even considered, you know, when I was that age. And I think that. Two way road, so keep serving. That's really the good message. I think that I would like to leave everyone. I think to something you mentioned in the first segment, you were talking about some of the different programs that you have participated in at Stanford, at MIT. I think so many times,

community colleges in general get such a bad rap because of the misconception of their quality of education. If you hadn't gone through the Laurel Ridge experience first, a lot of those programs wouldn't have been available for you to even take or try or be a part of. So it really does elevate your wanting to learn something new. And your access to some of these very high end programs. Yes, I honestly, I did it backwards. I went right to undergrad at University of Wyoming, and after my experience at Laurel Ridge, you'll find that encourage any prospective student to to go and do community college before you jump on to a four year campus. I think that the value I got out of it, you're never going to get that kind of personalized instruction ever again. And it's not as if the material, the level of expertise is any different and it's not done. Big ten universities, major research schools and all of that. And the professors at Laurel Ridge were as completely as competent as anything I saw anywhere else. But they actually knew who I was. And they will know these students as well. So yeah, my children, my

grandkids, I will encourage them to do something like this because it gives you that time and the ability to take a look at things and maybe decide what is the right path for you, rather than just jumping in and getting in on the treadmill towards a degree that may not be your position. I would imagine it's a huge confidence builder too, because whenever you start something like continuing your education, you got all these things in the back of your head. Oh, I don't know if this is right for me. I don't know if I'm going to be good enough having that sort of atmosphere. And those types of professors really do help you build that confidence to move forward. I absolutely. I've been a diplomat. I've been combat leader through war. But going to present your project before the board of jurists that are looking at an art project, it's frightening and difficult. And thankfully, I had the professors at law page to coach me through. This is probably what you want to say. And this is that was invaluable. And again, I wouldn't have been able to go on to to do the MIT stuff and Stanford or

Georgetown without the support I got there. And you're still getting that support. You were telling Brandy and, uh, during the break, too, that you're still working with some of your professors on a current sculpture project you've got going on. Yes, I do, I hit them up all the time. I've drug them in and had them help us with the Afghan project. They're probably regretting ever shaking my hand. But that's the other great thing about it is, unlike the other educational experiences I had, I don't feel like I could go back to my professors, even the ones that I really admired, and asked them to help me with something like that. And Laura Ridge, I feel that I could, I do, and they respond in every case. So it's a special place. So, Brandy, where can people pick up a copy of The Laureate? Where can they see it online and read about all the other stories, Jason's in particular, but all the other stories about veterans who have come through Laurel Ridge. So you can visit Laurel Ridge, dot edu slash laureate to access digital copies of all the editions. We have been delivering stacks of

magazines to all of our local libraries in our service region, as well as government centers and various other locations, so you can usually pick them up out and about. But if you'd like us to mail you to be on our mailing list, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can just go to Laurel Ridge, dot Edu and send us a message in our chat that you'd like to be added to the mailing list, any of our social media pages. You can send us a message. Just saying you'd like to be added to our laureate mailing list, and we'll be sure to get you on there and let us know if you want a particular copy. And we do have some extras of the older editions. And then, of course, we're still got a few stacks of the veterans edition. Jason, I'm going to get a hard copy and we're going to have to meet up so you can autograph. Might be the least valuable autograph you have on. Sure. If somebody wants to learn more about what you're doing and what your future projects are, if they want to learn more about the art and the sculptures or any of your filmmaking, is there a place they can go to do that? For the Afghan

project, you can look up at [Snow leopard.org](http://Snow.leopard.org), and I'll give you the link to that so you can share with your folks. One of the things I did do during the Afghanistan project was I did a daily evacuation update brief, which was really, uh, open source intelligence brief meant to inform people that we're in Afghanistan and policy makers and stuff that the daily happenings, what was going on, where not to go, where the Taliban might be doing an operation or whatever. And Substack, I found to be an extremely valuable way of transmitting that information. So I'm working with them now in a mentoring program. My sculpture is going to be about addiction. That's a problem that where I grew up in Wyoming and through my family, everybody who's listening, I'm sure has had somebody that's had issues with that. And so I will run that on a Substack. I don't have the actual link to it yet, but I plan to launch that in the next week. Jason, thank you so much for your service. Thank you for your time today. Thank you for all of the work that you've done since retiring for the military, for the Afghan people,

for all of us. Thank you so much for everything.

Thank you. I really enjoyed my time there. And thank you from Laurel Ridge. We appreciate you and all that you're doing out there. Just for your statement about service resonates with our mission, and that's what it's all about. Us going out and giving back, whether it's local or across the world. It's just important that we're all giving back. So thank you for being a great catalyst for that. Thank you all. And Brandi Laurel Ridge, dot. Edu. Go find some classes. Go sign up, come to an info session, do all of the things. Absolutely.

You can get in touch with us right on the home site again through the chat feature. We're enrolling now for the fall semester, enrolling year round for our FastTrack program. So reach out anytime. It's never too late. I appreciate you coordinating this whole thing today. Absolutely.

Thank you guys. I will be back tomorrow with a brand new episode of The Valley today a few minutes after noon. So meet me here then.