

Transcript

Janet Michael

Hello and welcome to the Valley. Today I am your host, Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College Day and I will not be introducing Guy Curtis or Brandy Hawkins' voice. I will be introducing Guy Curtis and Brandy Hawkins voice, which I think is a great way to start off the new year that both of you are on the show with me today. Guy Curtis, you, of course, as director of marketing, Brandy as director of PR and special events. But thank you for gracing me with both of your presences. This is a great new year start for me.

Guy Curtis

We're excited to be here. I know we've always teased about arm wrestling competition, who's going to go today, but for the new year, both of us are going. So it's a bit of a changeup for you, Janet, but we can roll with it and we're excited to be here. Thanks for having us.

Brandy Boies

We arm wrestled yesterday, but it was a tie. We were just both a little tired from the holiday break and we're like, all right, let's both do it fine. We don't have the strength.

Janet Michael

And I'm the winner in that match. So I think that's fantastic. Curtis, though, I am going to put you on the spot for a second. And we didn't talk about this before we started recording, but I have to give you props and congratulations because you are now an award-winning director of marketing at Laurel Ridge. Kudos to you.

Guy Curtis

Yeah, thank you. A major award, if you will. Honestly, it's a team award because we follow the best practices at Laurel Ridge in terms of marketing in our industry. With marketing and PR, as well as other outreach efforts, as well as our frontline staff who work together to ensure that students get to enrollment, marketing get all the folks to show up, but if we're not seeing them through to the end and supporting folks through customer service and ensuring they have the right program and the right fit, the right situation for that individual student, which we really pride ourselves in, making sure students find the right program. or degree or certification they need to better themselves. I was glad to accept on behalf of the college. I give props to the leadership here at the college. They support us with our

budgeting needs and our strategies to deploy best practices. And so it's a team award. So thank you for acknowledging that.

Janet Michael

Brandy, to Guy's point, that's what we're going to talk about today is that entire process. Because sometimes it can be daunting to even decide you're going to continue your education out of high school or restart your education if you've been away for a while. But you could do both of those things at Laurel Ridge. And I wonder sometimes how many people listen to us talk month after month and think, yeah, that's great, but that wouldn't work for me because today we're going to knock down a couple of those because's.

Brandy Boies

Yeah, absolutely. We wanted to join you today at the start of the new year to introduce and talk about how you even inquire, get started, explore here at the college because like you said, someone could be out there sitting in a current job going, gosh, I just wish I would have done that one other thing, or there's got to be something better. Or maybe you're a high schooler or a parent of a high schooler going, we've heard about Laurel Ridge and we hear there are great programs and things going on there, but not sure where to start. So we'd just like to maybe review some of those things and just outline how simple it really is to get started here.

Janet Michael

Yeah, Curtis, one of the cool things about Laurel Ridge are the pathways. You cannot really have a defined idea of where you want to go or what career path you want to take. But you have so many options from pathways that at least get you on the right track. So you can say, oh, they have this pathway and I don't want to do this or that on there. Oh, but that looks really interesting. You've really been able to narrow it down and yet keep it broad for a wide range of people.

Guy Curtis

Yeah, exactly. We do fit the bill for many folks and where they might be. Great thing about it is our programs are affordable and accessible. We've talked about this in the past with different shows. is like really finding a program that aligns with your unique interests, your abilities, and if you want to live, work, and just be local and learn local, the college is a perfect place to be that because we have so many different opportunities to find in-demand careers, jobs that are relevant within our region, but also too, for maybe a traditional student who looks to go to a four-year program at some point, we are a perfect opportunity to start your bachelor's right here at the college. Or if you're a parent, maybe

you're getting back into the workforce for the first time in many years, and you just need that quick skill or certification to get you in that job, or even perhaps a promotion you're looking to gain, we have the skill set and training opportunities to get you to that place. And so I think a lot of the big things too, folks are worried about jobs and industries with technology coming and AI, but we have a lot of programs that are future-proof. So think about healthcare, IT, skilled trades, advanced manufacturing, engineering, education. There are also the latest AI-driven programs that are out there in technologies. We're leveraging that here at the college so that you're ready for a long-term career that's going to be to be rewarding, has meaningful wages to help you and your family. So think about the return on investment as well, too. So the college has so much of those opportunities locally, and we're a great place to start.

Janet Michael

Randy, the flip side to that, too, you and I were talking a little bit before we started recording about retirement. You guys had just come from Chris Kutz's retirement, his send-off, and you and I were joking about what retirement would look like for us. I'm guessing there are probably a lot of people out there in their retirement that aren't really settled in their recliner. I say to you, my papap who is probably listening right now. They want to learn a new skill or they want to just be engaged in their community. I've heard of people in their 60s starting a whole new career from scratch because they were bored after they retired.

Brandy Boies

Yeah, there is no age limit here at Laurel Ridge at all. We have young high schoolers that start off at dual enrollment and we've had, I believe, individuals in their 80s or lower 80s graduate from Laurel Ridge. It is never too There's never a path that we can't meet in some way or the other. It's been really cool to have worked here for so long and seen the different individuals that walk through our doors and walk across the stage here. really all walks of life. Absolutely. Any scenario you can think of that an individual might have been in their lives, we've seen it here. And that's why it makes our job so great because we've got so many stories to tell, so much to show off. It's just so cool. It is so cool to see so many people succeed here. So yeah, no age limit at all.

Janet Michael

The thing that I love the most, I think, of all of the things that we've talked about over the years, and there are a lot of things that I love about Laurel Ridge, is the fact that you can start small. You have bite options at Laurel Ridge that get you to that full course meal in the end?

Brandy Boies

Yeah, and what I'd like to say to that is ignore the jargon. Don't worry about learning all the college jargon. Don't think you have to be some scholarly speaker that walks through our doors that is not here at all. You literally have to know nothing about college to get started. There's many ways to start exploring. You can check out our visit page laurelridge.edu/visit and sign up to attend an information session. We offer those online or in person. We're always hosting open houses for specific programs or information specific for programs that our marketing team does a great job at getting the word out about. You could attend one of those. You could just walk through the front door one day and say, Hey, I just want to find out more. And there will be someone to help you find out more. There's someone here at the college, there's individuals to guide you every step of the way. So don't ever feel like, Well, I'm not smart enough to get started. No, that doesn't exist. I don't care what your background is. There's no threshold there that you have to meet before you can walk through our door. Like I said earlier, we've seen all walks, different walks of life, different backgrounds walk through the door in all different levels, and we accept all of them. I've seen valedictorians graduate from high school and come here to Laurel Ridge and transfer to a four-year. We've seen individuals that have been through unimaginable struggles in their life. Maybe they took a wrong turn or maybe life just was very unkind to them, but they've turned it around and we've seen them walk through our doors or crawl through our doors saying, I know there has to be something better. and we've watched them succeed and watch them walk across the stage. And both are just as rewarding, right? Because it's not about us. Laurel Ridge didn't do that. The individual has the courage to walk through the door, right? But once you have that courage, we get you where you need to be. We take your hand and say we're here to support you. And so that's what's really cool about the college.

Janet Michael

That Curtis, you and I talk a lot about leadership. Jay Foreman's been on the show with us several times. You and I both have a very high regard for professional development. That's any other person, I guess I'll say using air quotes, is you have your traditional students out of high school into college, a traditional student who's looking to upskill themselves to get a promotion or get a better job. And then you have all of us that are either in a management position that want to keep our skills top notch or learn a new skill, or people like me that are small business owners that sometimes get lost in running our business and realize, look, I really need to know what's going on with AI, or I'm going to hire somebody And I'm not sure I know how to be a boss. So I need to learn how to manage people. You have all of those options at Laurel Ridge as well.

Guy Curtis

Yeah, that's right. Our continuing education professional development area, Workforce Solutions offers a number of short-term four-hour classes to maybe longer online asynchronous courses that you can take advantage of. We also provide corporate training for a lot of the companies in our region. So if you have a workforce you're trying to upskill and develop, perhaps send them to a leadership course, that's a great way to continue keeping them engaged. and keeping them informed of the latest technologies or the best practices, you name it. We do have a couple of great programs that are enrolling now, which is our AI immersive tech program. In terms of technology, it's a certification course, about six months or so, that allows you to get the AI technology, the data tools, and the digital skill set that you're looking to have in the workforce today. But also later, it's a great thing about this college, we're looking to adapt and evolve, but we have a summit later this spring. It's the Laurel Ridge AI Summit. It's going to be April 1st. And we'll have another guest come on and talk about that. But April 1st from 8 to noon here at the college, we'll go over a number of different AI resources. And we're hoping to be that resource, as you talk about professional development, Janet. We're going to showcase the latest and greatest opportunities here locally and help those individuals, also the employers, with enhancing their workforce. So we're excited about these new technologies. But the big key thing is, regardless of where you are with what Brandy mentioned, we're here for you. And I think the best thing to get started is just reaching out, make a call, walking through the doors, and even talk to someone in the community about their experiences. We share so many stories, as Brandy mentioned. mentioned about the successes we have. And so look on our social media, look on some of the news releases that we put out about how individuals have overcome poverty or are bettering themselves or an industry that is successful because they now have the graduates they need to fulfill their workforce. So it's an exciting time, new year, new you, new employee, whatever you want to call it. But the first step is reaching out and talking to someone here at the college.

Janet Michael

I would imagine one of the barriers that potential students place on themselves is the cost. Yeah, but I don't know. know that I can afford it. So let's take a break. And when we come back, let's talk a little bit about funding options, scholarships, all of the ways that you can get into classes at Laurel Ridge for very little investment up front and sometimes no investment up front whatsoever. Can we get in the weeds on that in the next segment?

Guy Curtis

Sounds great.

Janet Michael

We are on the Zooms for Laurel Ridge Community College Day. Guy Curtis is joining us. He is the award-winning director of marketing, along with Brandi Hawkins voice. She is director of PR and special events. And not to be undone, Brandy too has won an award. Guy Curtis, she won an award with me and the Associated Press for a show that we did years ago when we were doing a live show. And it was on the Q program. It was where you were teaching students how to source real news and get true information.

Brandy Boies

Our QEP, right? Was it critical thinking?

Janet Michael

Yes.

Brandy Boies

That was a long time ago. Good memory, man.

Janet Michael

We're all award winners today, and we're going to be back in just a couple of minutes.

Speaker 4

This Tuesday, April Davis will change the world. She doesn't know that yet. All she knows is that she went to justserve.org and volunteered an hour of her time. Browsing through dozens of service opportunities in her community, April decided to spend her Tuesday evening serving dinner to mothers and their children at a transitional house. She doesn't know she'll be serving a particular mother and daughter who will be spending their first night in this home. April doesn't know that the hot meal she'll serve is the first this mother and daughter will have had in a week. or that the simple smile she'll offer as she serves them will help them realize that things are going to be all right. Which is why this Tuesday, April Davis will change the world. See the difference you can make. Sign up for service opportunities in your community. Visit justserve.org.

Janet Michael

Welcome back to the Valley. Today I am your host, Jana Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College Day, so it's basically Laurel Ridge 101 on the show. Guy Curtis is joining me. He is their director of marketing. Brandi Hawkins' voice is with us as well. She's director of PR and special events. We've been talking about all of the walks of life. that can walk into Laurel Ridge and walk out a smarter person, a better person, having a better job

outlook, having more career opportunities. And before we went to break, Guy Curtis, I was saying that I would imagine a lot of people say, yeah, but I can't afford to do that. I don't have the money that it takes to go back to college. And that's another huge perk to Laurel Ridge is it doesn't take a ton of money.

Guy Curtis

No, you're right, Janet. Traditionally, our college a third of the price of most four-year institutions. So if you think about an academic program for credit, such as a degree or a career study certificate, by far much less expensive, but also the values there, too. So I think that's another thing to consider. We're academically as strong, just like any other institutions that are out there. So thinking about the return on investment, that's one thing, but also federal financial aid. We have also got state funding that the college receives for a lot of our in-demand programs. You may have heard the word G3 before. G3 tuition assistance is a great program that's focusing on high-demand fields. So you think about all those major ones we've talked about, healthcare, IT, education, engineering, public service, it goes on. There's a good list of those programs. And it helps Virginians what those costs potentially. So they're trying to incentivize folks across the state to go into these high demand areas that employers desperately need folks get into. There's also fast forward. And if you haven't heard, there has been some reduced funding because fast forward has been such a popular program across the state. We haven't received as much funding locally at the college for it and across the state as well. So other municipalities, other entities have stepped up to support some of those fast forward programs. For example, just recently, Winchester Economic Development Authority is supporting us on a scholarship for those who are deciding the city of Winchester and the zip codes that are aligned with it. Frederick County Economic Development Authority also has contributed some funding. We also have other funds such as the Hazel Family Fund, the Building the Future Fund, and there's multiple locality scholarships throughout our region. So if you think about state funding, we have federal funding, in some cases on a unique situation and program, you'll find other funding opportunities. And it gets to be crazy. There are a lot of programs that we provide, but also the funding sources we provide, there's a lot of options. And so the best thing is to let us help you navigate those funding options and it will help you figure it out. So I think that's the key part of it. But just know that depending on your situation, if you know the poverty rate, families of four who sit at the 400% rate, which is usually around 128,000 a year, will typically get a cost of the class at no cost. And that's through G3 and some other funding sources. I think that's the biggest barrier for a lot of students is just asking, oh, I wouldn't be eligible. I wouldn't be available to to take this scholarship or get this federal financial aid. And many students don't come forward, but asking for someone to help you navigate those options is the first big step to do.

Janet Michael

Didn't we talk in the last month or two about dual enrollment and the fact that students in high school, juniors and seniors in high school can get their first 30 credits at no charge if they're dual enrolled? So even if you're still in high school, you can still take advantage of some of those cost saving measures.

Guy Curtis

Yeah, absolutely. That's another great way to save with us. If that is your plan to, in high school, work on your degree, certification, write in class, and then eventually transfer to a four-year institution, it's a no-brainer to start with us. But also, too, you can finish out. So if you skip those 15 credits to start with at no cost within your high school, but look to move to a degree or applied program at the college, you're already off on a great starting point. Locally, you can save a ton and get off on the right foot when it comes to debt. Hashtag slash student debt. That's something that we've been talking about for years. Many folks are worried about that. But also too, just know that these programs are going to provide that return on investment. So think about getting into a program area that you'll find a job locally and most likely quickly because it's a high demand area. I know many folks are concerned about the relevance of a degree, but it's still strong as long as you're aligning your interests, your abilities with those in-demand careers. And that's the key piece.

Janet Michael

Randy, you had Jeff Sinclair on a couple of months ago. He's a veteran that's going through the pharmacy program at Shenandoah University now, but he came to Laurel Ridge and there's something that he said during our conversation that I have repeated to so many people when he talked about the value of Laurel Ridge is get that two-year degree. Sometimes you think you're going to go off to college and you start at a four year and you do your first year, your second year, and then you realize, and then life takes over, or you realize this isn't for you and you walk away with having two years of education, but no real piece of paper. And by coming to Laurel Ridge, after two years, you have that degree. You've at least got something to fall back on and then can choose to move forward later. I thought that was one of the most brilliant things that he talked about because it gives you that foundation.

Brandy Boies

My daughter is a great example. I'm such a lucky mom because I didn't even push this on her. This was all just naturally inspired. I guess in high school she took a few dual enrollment classes. Some of our dual enrolled students will finish their associates as soon

as they graduate high school. She was not one of those. She took a few classes. Those were even less money. The total free classes hadn't happened yet, so we had to pay a little something. It was barely anything, and when she graduated, she's continued her classes here at Laurel Ridge, she only had to stay one full year to complete her associate's degree. So after one full year and under, I want to say \$5,000, at least she had an associate's degree. I don't even think it was \$5,000. Honestly, I haven't crunched all the numbers, but she had an associate's degree and now she transferred. She's doing ODU online. And when I see those bills, I'm like so appreciative that I only have two years worth of the four-year bill. It's just such a great opportunity. So yeah, he's absolutely right because she has that associate's degree. If for some reason that four-year college doesn't work out or she decides to go a different path. The thing with college credits, not just degrees, they never expire. So I was meeting with a potential student the other week and she's like, well, I took some classes back in the, they're not good anymore. And I was like, hey, wait a second. They never go bad. Like they don't expire. Now we need to go through and see which class that now applies to, but it never goes bad, right? Like you're always going to have that with you for your entire life. One thing I wanted to mention, since we weren't touching base on your enrollment and high schoolers, if you're sitting in high school right now or you're a parent of a high schooler and you're wondering how to get started, the best resource that you have is right there at your high school. We have career coaches in every high school. So find out who your career coach is. They're probably sitting in the guidance office. Just go talk to that career coach who is also employed with Laurel Ridge and find out what what path might be great for you because they're not there to just talk about Laurel Ridge. They can also talk to you about any college opportunity. It's not someone that's going to be biased to be like you're going to go to Laurel Ridge no matter what. No, they're going to talk to you as a student or they're going to talk to your student. If you're a parent, find out what their interests are and maybe what their future might hold and help them come to a decision or at least start exploring some paths. So remember the career coach in high school.

Janet Michael

When you mentioned your daughter's taking her classes, some of her classes now at ODU Online, Laurel Ridge offers online classes, you have programs, Guy Curtis, you and I have talked about the CDL program at length that is nights and weekends, and it could be a six week or it could be a little bit longer, a six month class. You have a lot of flexibility too in being able to take these classes so that they fit into your work schedule, your school schedule, or you're a stay at home mom and can only do it in the evenings when you have coverage for the kids. There are a lot of options for when to take these classes.

Guy Curtis

Yeah, that's right. And that's where a lot of students are leaning towards. There was a few studies recently that the majority of students today, the traditional students, are looking for online options. And the college is meeting that challenge. There are quite a few areas under college and university transfer. For example, we have a few programs like business administration, computer science, education. There's a general studies certificate, or I should say associate's degree, liberal arts, you name it, social justice. There's a bunch of different things that are offered online. There's also things that are, depending on the area you're trying to get into, Like IT, for example, there's a quite a few number of those that are available in a hybrid format. So you may have to meet at campus once a week and the rest of the work is done online. Even some of the skilled trades programs, for example, they do have a hybrid component to it where they're doing hands-on learning in the classroom, meeting with that industry instructor, but also they have some book work to get through. And that actually speeds up the process. So that's where those fast track programs come into real play where you're doing a bit of work from home, but also in the classroom. So you still get a blend of both, but also allows for that flexibility. So in other words, you have a dedicated time, whether it's a weeknight or a weekend course that you meet in person, but the majority of the hybrid learning is also online. So that's very helpful for anyone's schedule. And the flexibility is huge. You can set your schedules, your family life around that.

Janet Michael

Brandy, you were talking earlier about all of the student support services and that you have the ability to help anybody when you were talking a minute ago about any walk of life can come through the front door and you've likely got something that can help them. I was joking with you that I love the name of the cub house that you've created so that parents of children can bring their kids with them to meet with a professor to find a spot to do their homework with the Internet and Wi-Fi. You have printing options. You have all all sorts of things for someone who may not have what I call those luxuries right in their own house.

Brandy Boies

Yeah, we have built a remarkable support system, support community, I'll call it, here at Laurel Ridge. The cub house that you just mentioned just opened last year. And it's this really cute little space that is kid friendly, but also has some adult tables and chairs in it as well. So just like you said, it's for our students that are parents to have a place that they can bring their kids to chill, play next to them while they're doing their work, or maybe meeting with a group, a study group, maybe meeting with a professor working on a project

here at the college. It is not daycare. You can't drop your kid off and leave, but it's a place to do your work while your kids are also enjoying some fun time. So that's just right here on the Middletown campus in the back of Cornerstone Hall. We have a food pantry that also houses hygiene products and clothes, and it's free to anyone in need. So if You don't need to fill out anything. You don't need to provide any explanation. If you just need to go grab some food, no questions asked, you can go do that. And our TRIO program is still very strong and amazing here at the college. That's for individuals that are either first-generation students, meaning no one in your immediate family has gone to college, low income or a disability of any kind. If you qualify for one of those three, you can apply to be a part of the TRIO program. We have free tutoring. I always say the A+ students, their secret is they got help. They weren't ashamed to ask. They weren't ashamed to say, Hey, that's a little hard. Can you help me? So you can get free tutoring. We also hire our students to become tutors as well. So that's a great opportunity. We have a social worker now, a full-time social worker here on campus that students can connect with. And then that social worker connects them with resources in the community. So no matter what obstacle you may be facing in your life, we at least have someone here that can take your hands and say, Let me show you the way. Let me show you the resources. to get you where you need to go. Because our main goal is to help get you to your goal of walking across the stage with your degree.

Janet Michael

Guy Curtis, it really is as simple as a walking in the door and saying, hi, I think I want to go back to school, but I don't even know what to do after that. And somebody is there on site to be able to sit down and talk with you. But you can call, you have online options through the website. How would people go about beginning that path?

Guy Curtis

Yeah, you could drop in at our Luray Page Center. Luray, Virginia. You can also visit us at the Fauquier campus in Warrenton to walk in, as well as obviously the Middletown campus. But there is another resource too, if you're not quite sure, or you're maybe undecided, or just kind of hesitant to start with. Brandy and I have talked about this for years. We've gone to various rotary groups and different presentations to share about our career coach site. If you go to our website, laurelridge.edu, and land on the homepage, it's called just simply Explore Careers. It's a place where you can look at the upcoming in-demand careers in our region. And there's a new feature that goes a little flame emoji that shows the hot in-demand career in our region. So that's a great place just to explore the careers and perhaps takes a skill assessment, maybe a six question, 30 or 60 question assessment tool to kind of see where you might align to some of those things. So if you're

undecided, that's one great place to start. Certainly the people here on staff would be by far even faster. But if you're shy to start and maybe don't want to have that initial contact with us, start with the career coach site. There's also data around the job. So think about, as I mentioned earlier, in-demand jobs in our region. The site also pulls in a job feed related to a career path that you're exploring. So think about maybe healthcare. You might see some job openings from Valley Health or some other small practices. And the cool thing about it too, it's a free resource. And I need to shout that out loud. Free! The free resource itself is so valuable so that you can just explore it. Anybody as a student, community member, whoever you may be, a community connector, someone in the region who maybe represents A nonprofit or wherever you might be, use that career coach site to kind of explore those options. And the neat thing as well is that if you're an employer wanting to get in front of our captivated audience, think about students looking, maybe some faculty and staff, perhaps community members who are just browsing the site, you can go in as an employer and post the job there at no cost. So you can get in directly in front of the job feed. The job feed's really cool. It pulls in things from Indeed and some other sites. But the cool thing is to see those jobs related to that program that's up available at the college, but also the direct output of what's my return on investment. It's going to take me this long to complete and here's the jobs and what they pay. And the cool thing too, you can also drop a pin on like Luray or Warrenton, perhaps even looking to DC. So it's a really great widget to explore those options. But certainly other areas too to explore is coming to our information sessions. Brandy mentioned them before. She's offering those very regularly with her outreach team, but also those opportunities to just do a tour, come in to do a self tour or even just have someone walk you through some of the buildings and the spaces and just have introductions with the folks that are here. We're very welcoming, open environment at any of our locations. and it's a great time just to start. Yeah, explore your options, come see us, make a phone call or show up in person, and we'll be glad to help.

Janet Michael

And who knows, you might run into Kim Blosser or wandering the halls, President Kim Blosser, and she'll show you where whatever room is you need to go, as we learned a couple of months ago. I still am going to randomly show up at school and wander the halls hoping I run into Kim.

Guy Curtis

That's very possible. I think everyone in the college has that kind of heart of service. And so regardless of who you are, whether you're maintenance or the president, We're going to show you where you are and where you need to go. Everyone really embraces that and it's a great place to be.

Janet Michael

God, Curtis, thank you for taking the time today. I do appreciate the update.

Guy Curtis

Yeah, thanks for having us on and glad both Brandy and I got to go and tag team it today.

Janet Michael

Brandy, I'm excited that you were on the show and that you two played nice. No arm wrestling on the Zoom today.

Brandy Boies

We enjoyed it. Thank you so much.

Janet Michael

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