Out-Local the Giants

The Valley Today with Janet Michael · Laurel Ridge Community College episode · Nov. 12, 2026 · 25 minutes

Guests: Andy Gyurisin, director, Laurel Ridge Small Business Development Center; Guy Curtis, director of marketing, Laurel Ridge Community College

Transcript

Janet Michael: Hello and welcome to The Valley Today. I am your host, Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College. Today I'm on the Zooms with Guy Curtis. He is their director of marketing and he has an extra special excited guest today. I don't know that I've ever seen Andy Gyurisin not excitable or excited, but Andy is joining us today. He is the executive director for the Laurel Ridge Small Business Development Center. Andy, we're recording this at 11 a.m. on a Tuesday morning and you are way more energetic than anybody should be on a Tuesday.

Andy Gyurisin: It's an incredible day, first and foremost. It's a beautiful fall day. My eyes are open. This community is just so beautiful in what they want to do and what they want to succeed with. Why can't you be excited? I'm just excited to help as many people as they can start their small businesses.

Janet Michael: So for people who aren't familiar with the Small Business Development Center and your relationship to Laurel Ridge Community College, can you give me the CliffNotes version?

Andy Gyurisin: Absolutely. When I think about resources in our community, the best resource I think in our backyard is the community college. For both education of individuals wanting to go through classes or to up-train, but then also for entrepreneurs and small business owners that want to come and learn more about how to make their business successful, how to grow, how to sell, how to open, whatever it may end up being. And so we, for the last 20-ish years, have been hosted by the community college and clients can come to us directly here at the community campus and use the resources to strengthen their small business. So we provide free and confidential one-on-one advising. So the moment you step in the door, you get an Andy, you get a Dale, you get a Madeline for the life of your business at no cost, which is absolutely amazing. And we come with years. Dale's been with us for 17 years, years of experience. And the value as well, and this is the last thing I'll sort of end with, is that we have 25 other centers across the state. So if you come to me with a question that I've never heard of before, I know I can find you the answer. I know I can.

Janet Michael: Guy Curtis, this is a great benefit to have located there on the campus because you do offer so many workforce development classes and you've got workforce solutions with people that are changing careers, starting new businesses, wanting to grow their businesses. This ties in really nicely for you, doesn't it?

Guy Curtis: Yeah, absolutely. As you begin a new business, you're looking for a new skill. You're looking to expand on a new business. And personally, I've benefited as well. Many folks in the region have just recently having conversations with young traditional students who are like, hey, I want to go get a degree or a program, but also I'm starting a side business to have extra income. SBDC, Small Business Development Center here at Laurel Ridge, is a perfect opportunity to explore those options here in the region. Yeah, I even took advantage locally. I was looking for ways to branch out and support nonprofits in a new way. And I actually reached out to Andy and his team. There's so many resources available for you to get started as a new business owner, but also if you have hit the ceiling, it's a great resource. But also thinking as a bigger picture of the college and how we serve our community, all the entrepreneurs, the businesses that are out there, the individuals, it's just another piece of the puzzle in helping our vibrant community survive and move forward and be vibrant in our region. So it's a great place to be in a great place to have free. And it's funny how Andy really is excited about free. I've unfortunately, I had to follow him during a presentation last year, and it was like a big buzzword at a game show free. And so the crowd is cheering, the audience was super into it. And it's certainly Andy's enthusiasm for helping small businesses was there as well. But free, if you haven't heard it so many times, he's going to say it a lot today. And so free is the buzzword.

Andy Gyurisin: Janet, let me just say this. Entrepreneurship is alive and well in the Shenandoah Valley. And I love being able to say that. We see probably about 400 individuals a year, which is people who are either in business, existing business, or that individual who's just, I've got a crazy idea. Let's explore and I want to explore with someone that's not my mom and dad. And so this is a great resource to be able to do that. And when you think about it in the community college side, where we fit so well, I think the statistic and Guy can help me out with this. 85% of the individuals who come to Laurel Ridge stay within the community. And so we are then an added resource for those community college grads who are like, you know what, I'm going to make an impact and a change by starting a business in Clarke, Frederick, Warren, Shenandoah, Fauquier, Winchester. We're going to do this. And so we are that resource to be able to help. I think we pair so beautifully with the community college in that respect.

Janet Michael: I think the added benefit, because it's free. Did we mention that it is free? The other thing too, is that I wonder how many people think they already know things that they don't really know. And just a phone call or a meeting with you can teach them all of the

things that they didn't know they didn't know. And so just a conversation is how it should always start.

Andy Gyurisin: One of the phrases that we hear a lot these days, and I think it's post COVID is mostly it is becoming an entrepreneur. I didn't realize how lonely it would be, because we find as entrepreneurs ourselves just locked in this sort of space that's like, okay, I'm working, I'm in the silo, I'm doing all of these sort of things. I don't know if I've ever really explored what resources are out there to support my business. And so when they come to us, I think it's a lot of surprise that resources are there, and plus resources that want to see them succeed. Most of the time our entrepreneurs are just Googling. And I think that that has been good for a long period of time. But I think right now what really strengthens a rural community like ours is that one-on-one. That getting out of that environment that's sitting down and saying to someone, what do you think about this? What are some resources that you can provide for me? What's the data behind all of this? More so than hoping the results come back in a Google sort of format. I'm not saying that's good or bad. I'm just saying we provide a really excellent resource for the pulse and heartbeat of the community.

Janet Michael: I think that is a massive resource, quite frankly. My role at United Way has me dealing a lot with United Way worldwide. And they may have a certain idea of how things should work or things that they want to push more or things they want us to pull back on. But they don't know this community. They don't understand how Winchester works or Frederick County, Page County, any of those places work. And we do. You do. And so that's an incredible asset to be able to have so that they may have these national statistics, but that may not be what's happening in our bubble of the Shenandoah Valley.

Andy Gyurisin: Correct. I had some clients the other day that were needing to figure out how to sell their business. And so they had reached out to some folks who were in Denver or over on the further side of the United States, and they were just giving statistics. And I said, if you want to sell on the Shenandoah Valley, this is the other things that you're going to need. And it was really impactful for them to hear locally the resources that could be available to help. And tying this back in, because I am the biggest Guy Curtis fan in the entire world, the community college, one of the assets of the community college is that someone from the community can come in and say, look, we are seeing a need for this. And the community college will listen and pivot and make something occur based on the need within the community. And that's why I think our partnership within the community college is so strong. People can come to us. We provide the resource from the community. This is what's happening. This is what we're seeing. This is what we're doing. And then we can also get them introduced to people within the community college setting that maybe we even see a bigger change. That's exactly how our drone program came to be in this area. We sat down with Nick Sabo and said, what are you seeing? What do you need over at the airport? And

suddenly this drone program came about. And I think for me, when you think about it in the big four-year schools, that can't happen that fast. But we've been able to really make sure that we, collectively, the community college and the SBDC has their fingerprint on the pulse of this community.

Janet Michael: And we're not exaggerating either when we talk about any stage of business. It could be just an idea. It could be a dream. It could be somebody who's five years in, one year in, 15 years in, or, like you just mentioned, is done and now wants to hand it off to a family member or sell it. You cover a huge spectrum.

Andy Gyurisin: Absolutely. And I think that's the most important part is to make sure people realize that this area is open for entrepreneurial business. That you may have this crazy idea and we just need to sit down and figure out. It's not my job to tell you this is not a good idea. It's my job to give you the tools so that you can figure out if it's a good idea for you and if you can make it happen. That's the strength that the SBDC has. If you can walk away stronger, even if you choose not to open that business right then and there, but open it maybe a year or two from now with more knowledge and more information, that is crucial right there to everything that's going on. And again, five years in business, if you're doing social media the same as you were doing it, I don't know, early 2026, you're doing it wrong. And so what resources do you have available to make sure that you're even staying on the forefront of just the stuff we do every day? To make sure that we're still being relevant and using the correct information. How does AI fit into this? How does local partnerships fit into this? It's an enormous sort of element. And then, and this will be my last little part because I know Guy is itching to talk, but the big part is when you think about selling, how are you selling at the right time? You don't want to be that person that's saying, okay, I'm going to sell in two years and then you do nothing. And then your business is valued at less than it was two years prior. How do you make sure you maximize the opportunity to sell your business and build that legacy for your family? And I think that's incredible and a great conversation to be having.

Guy Curtis: To add to Andy's point about the rural community and the connections, I think the times I've visited with Andy and also the events he puts on with his team. Yes, they're a free resource, but they're connecting with other business owners who are going through the same challenges and opportunities that you might be as a new business owner or one looking to create a new business or perhaps sell one. And so I think even visiting with them, I see those connections even deeper because they've figured out locally how to work with your county or perhaps the marketing opportunities, the unique market we're trying to saturate or market to, or perhaps connect with. And so I think those other deeper connections only, not only just his staff and their knowledge and their experience, but it's the folks they know who are in a similar capacity that could benefit from your new small business that you're

supporting. And so I think that's another layer that is so impactful. And then two, I know we're going to probably talk about this at the break, but the events and opportunities to understand the emerging technologies, AI, social media, and yes, those solutions are great as a small business owner, but you need that human in the loop to make that final decision that is important for your business. Listen, Andy has those connections and this team does. And so that experience is tremendously beneficial and priceless. Yeah.

Andy Gyurisin: When we come back, Janet, let's talk about 2027 and beyond. What does small business look like?

Janet Michael: That's going to be amazing for when we come back and a nice teaser so that folks are like, Ooh, what's happening? We'll do all of that in just a couple of minutes.

[Break]

Janet Michael: Welcome back to The Valley Today. I am your host, Janet Michael. We are on the Zooms for Laurel Ridge Community College Day. Guy Curtis is joining me. He is director of marketing. His guest today is Andy Gyurisin. Andy is the executive director for the Laurel Ridge Small Business Development Center. We talked a little bit in the first segment about its relationship to the college. Andy, it's interesting to me because much like the community college, a cornerstone of what the SBDC does is education. It is educating people, whether they're a small business owner yet, whether they have been for a while, or whether they don't want to be anymore. You do a lot of those through classes and workshops and all sorts of events. And you've got several coming up even now through the end of 2026.

Andy Gyurisin: Yeah. We, in fact, even have one today, Janet. That's how incredible it is. Canva is hosting their very first ever in Virginia World Tour Community Lab over at our Fauquier campus tonight. Free, 5:30 to 8. Come on down. Just a great way to connect with other business owners, as well as making sure you're using one of the great new tools out there available. We've got some things happening down in Front Royal, in fact, of being found, trusted, and chosen in 2027. We're going to talk about a lot of quarter four stuff and that quarter one slowdown. We're going to be doing that down in Strasburg. And then we are in Warrenton again for another conversation around digital media, because that's what everyone's talking about right now. Are we using AI? Are we using social media correctly? All of those things are still relevant. But I will tell you this, the biggest trend, Janet, for 2027, which we are excited about, local collaborations, local partnerships. That is what will always happen. We, as small business owners, will never have the same budget or be able to market as well as Walmart or Amazon does in any way, shape, or form. But you know what we can do? We can out-local them, which is the biggest asset that our community has. And I want to make sure I'm shouting that from the top of this Laurel Ridge Community College over here.

Janet Michael: I think one of the benefits, too, for our community is that while you can look at the Walmarts and the Amazons of the world, because they have those large budgets, they tend to lean more into the AI stuff. And we are very human here. We have very human connections. We want to see people that we know. We want to talk to people that we know. We're able, small businesses in the Shenandoah Valley and small businesses across the country are able to take advantage of that human component, which I think makes it so much better for us.

Andy Gyurisin: Absolutely. There's not even a question about that. One of the resources that I always talk to people about is put yourself out there more as a small business owner, either with a reel, making sure people can recognize you, or a picture of you, maybe a picture of you from today and not from when you graduated high school, on your website, so that people, when they come into your business, whether even if it's a retail or if it's service, they have that immediate connection to who you are. That is crucial right there. But don't get me wrong, there is a need and there is a desire for those Amazons and Walmarts. Those are crucial elements to the small business ecosystem that we have out there. However, there is a real big cutting edge that we have as small business owners. And I think a part of that is the digital side. Whether or not you agree or love AI, it doesn't matter. It's here and our small businesses need to be saying to themselves, how do we work smarter, not harder? And that's the crucial element to it right there. And so as we come into 2027, the question is, how do I do better at what I love to do and then use these digital technologies to do the things maybe I'm not as excited about doing every single day? There should be no reason why your social media is taking you hours to do. That is done. If you are a nonprofit, it shouldn't take you hours to write a grant anymore. Those days are behind us. What you should be doing is being out making local partnerships, local connections for everyone that's out. I don't know. That's my goal. That's my goal for 2027. Get more people finding ways to partner with other businesses in our community.

Janet Michael: Right? Guy Curtis, I think that's another misconception about community college in general, too, is that if you're not taking classes to get a degree or get a certification, then it's not for you. But you can take classes in how to use Excel to create a budget. You can take AI classes. You can do individual classes to grow your personal knowledge and your business knowledge at Laurel Ridge Community College.

Guy Curtis: Yeah. Whatever flavor or pleasure you have with getting a training or a skill, I think college offers so many ways to do that. We have your traditional semester-based classes. You can sign up for academic credit. There's also the workforce development side where you have a three-hour course in data analysis or perhaps Excel, like you mentioned, or even AI. But also, like, I'm looking at the lineup of the events that Andy has featured in a couple weeks here, town hall opportunities to kind of network with others. Like, how are you

leveraging Instagram to showcase your business or service? How are you leveraging your email marketing? And I think back to his point earlier, too, about how those local connections are so meaningful. I'll go to the local barbecue place, Matt and his team at Shaper's. We know Matt so well because he's very visible and social. So that connection goes even deeper, I think, within our region. So I think big picture-wise, how the college supports that, depending on the flavor and the area you want to get into. And Andy hit on it earlier. We're meeting the needs of our local community, and we pivot very quickly versus other larger organizations. And so whether it's workforce development, small business, or perhaps a longer degree program, it's impactful. Just the other day, I was actually connecting with someone on social media about how they're showcasing their reels on Instagram, for example. And I was tuned in to how he's showcasing a product and he's using it every day. But as a young student, he's like, yeah, I want to go get my degree in management and business. But it's also his connections along the way and the experiences. And so I think perhaps the college brings all that full circle, whether you're looking to start a business or start a new degree, whatever it is to get a new skill to get to the next level. It's all those pieces together are helping you be better at what you do day in, day out.

Janet Michael: Andy, isn't it expensive to come talk to you at Laurel Ridge?

Andy Gyurisin: No, no, it is free, Janet. It is free. And let me also say this real quick, because it's really important. If you are starting a small business or have been in business for a long time and you haven't thought about how you can connect stronger with the community college, you should be. In a variety of different ways. One, the students, if you are looking for intern opportunities or if you are looking for job force opportunities, this is a great resource. Again, going back to that knowledge that people stay within this community. The resource of our professors and our faculty staff, it's a goldmine over here for people who have backgrounds in accounting and business, even cybersecurity, which is crucial right now for a small business, all the way to even physics and biology for those of us in the agricultural world that maybe want to figure out how to strengthen the product that we've got. I think that there is some really cool assets here at the community college that we maybe as a community, we don't think about enough because it's in our backyard and we forget about it and whatever may be happening. But I would encourage individuals, if it's been since COVID that you've been on our campus, tour our campus and just start asking people, what resources do you have to support my business? Because I can guarantee you 90% of the people that work here have owned a small business at one point in their time or are currently doing something that has to do with small business. And I love recommending our faculty staff to individuals to help strengthen what they're doing.

Janet Michael: Guy Curtis, where can people go? They can find classes, they can get contact information, everything lives on your website, correct?

Guy Curtis: Yeah, there's a couple of places to find the Small Business Development Center. LaurelRidgeSBDC.org is a great website to kind of explore the upcoming events Andy has mentioned, his services and way to connect with this team. But certainly laurelridge.edu can help get folks to those more specific degrees or program areas within specific classes that we offer. But I think to Andy's point, coming to our campus and exploring and asking questions is a big first step. It's definitely has changed a lot. We're actually breaking ground on another building for our power line worker program. This campus has dramatically changed in four or five years. And so it's time to visit if you haven't been to us recently.

Janet Michael: And then Andy, if somebody's interested in any of the things that you're doing, all they have to do is call, they can go on your social media, they can connect with their local chambers because you partner a lot with them.

Andy Gyurisin: Yes. Use the resources that are around you. Drop the SBDC name everywhere that opens up doors that makes you ultimately cooler in the eyes of a lot of people. But talk to your chambers. Your chambers are a great asset. Talk to your economic development partners in your community. Don't be scared of them. Go and talk to them. They are there to see you succeed. And then, last but not least, just show up. Come to campus. Walk into the front doors. Don't even bother just saying hi to everyone. Just yell out, where is the SBDC? And people will point you into the right direction. And that's what I encourage you all to do. Give it a shot. I have done it several times, and it is a blast, by the way.

Guy Curtis: I can assure you that if you walk into campus or even in specifically to the SBDC office, you're going to know when Andy's there.

Janet Michael: You do?

Guy Curtis: People do know. There's not even a question about that.

Janet Michael: Thank you, Andy Gyurisin, for taking the time to chat with Guy Curtis and I today. I do appreciate it.

Andy Gyurisin: There is nothing I would rather be doing than talking to the two of you. This has to be one of my greatest experiences, I would say, of my life, or at least of this Thursday. So I love that, no matter what. And so if anyone is listening to this, reach out to us. Tell us. Write a message to Guy or I just to say, we heard you on the radio. We heard you on this podcast. Whatever it is, just send us a message. Say you heard it. And then come over and visit our campus. I promise you, you're going to have a blast. It is the coolest in the entire world.

Janet Michael: And I will also point out, because we had this conversation, I think, when Andy was on with Brandy the last time. Andy has a very unique email address, which is andy@laurelridge.edu. It is apparently quite coveted.

Andy Gyurisin: I am the only one to have just my name. I think there was confusion as to why Gyurisin was the most challenging name, especially for hiring people with the last name of just Curtis. Gyurisin was way longer and that sort of thing. And so then they gave me this andy@laurelridge.edu. So I think we should put a preface out there, Janet, that if someone wants to work for the community college and their name is Andy, I am so sorry, but you're going to be an andy two or an andy three, or maybe we just won't see you working here. Who knows?

Janet Michael: Okay, Guy Curtis, we need to schedule Andy as a regular guest. If for no other reason than it makes my day go better.

Guy Curtis: Absolutely. The entertainment value is unbelievable. Andy, thank you so much. You are a great cheerleader of the college, and it's just awesome to know that you're helping folks with free resources as a small business development owner. So thank you so much, Andy, and thanks again, Janet, for having us on.

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

Transcript lightly edited for readability. Produced by Laurel Ridge Community College from The Valley Today episode, used with permission.