

Entrepreneurship in the Central Shenandoah Valley

A Case Study

2023



About SCCF



The Shenandoah Community Capital Fund is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that is on a mission to ensure that every entrepreneur has access to the support, resources, and knowledge needed to start, sustain, and grow a business. As an entrepreneur-first organization, we strive to keep a finger on the pulse of entrepreneurship in the Shenandoah Valley by listening to the needs and challenges of local entrepreneurs of all backgrounds.

A Tour of the Valley

The Shenandoah Valley stretches 143 miles nestled between the Blue Ridge Mountains to the east and the Allegheny Mountains to the west. This western part of the state of Virginia is known for its historical importance in the Civil War and its natural beauty reflected in the Shenandoah National Park, Skyline Drive, and Blue Ridge Parkway as well as various caverns. Family farms and independent vineyards spot the scenery as you travel through the Valley and vibrant downtowns invite visitors to stay, stroll, shop and dine locally.

Local businesses are at the heart of these bustling towns - the makers, dreamers, doers, and tinkerers that make the Shenandoah Valley unique.

In August 2022, the Shenandoah Community Capital Fund (SCCF) set out on a Listening Tour of the Shenandoah Valley to hear firsthand from entrepreneurs - and their local support ecosystem - what is working and what isn't when it comes to launching and growing successful businesses.

Over three tours (Northern, Central, and Southern Valley), SCCF spoke to over 50 entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial supporters. In each case study, we share what we learned about entrepreneurship in the respective region because we believe that only by knowing what local entrepreneurs are up against can we create solutions, events, and programs that truly cater to their needs.



Downtown Waynesboro, SCCF

A Tour of the Valley



Our goal is to share these insights with the greater ecosystem so that all of us - the entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial supporters, and the general public - know in what small and big ways we can better and more effectively support our local entrepreneurs to generate prosperity in our communities.



A TRIP TO THE Central Valley

During the Central Valley Listening Tour, SCCF spent two days traveling between Harrisonburg, Waynesboro, Staunton talking to local entrepreneurs and local champions in the ecosystem.

The tour began with an entrepreneur chat over coffee at Coffee Hound Harrisonburg. Hailey Rogers shared her entrepreneurial journey from working at Coffee Hound to now owning and operating it. From there, the Listening Tour continued within the Shops at Agora, home to seven small businesses operating out of the same space where we heard about the day-to-day challenges of operating a successful small business. Over lunch we chatted with minority entrepreneurs at different stages about their experiences in finding the right space for their business, joining local farmers markets, the need for commercial kitchen space and trends in the coffee industry.



Coffee Hound, Harrisonburg

In the afternoon, entrepreneurial champion Kirsten Moore hosted a roundtable with local founders at her co-working space The Perch and shared with us what she has planned for small businesses in that part of town. The day ended at Sage Bird Cidery, where founders Amberlee and Zach Carlson filled us in on why they launched Sage Bird in Harrisonburg and what their experience in the city was like.

Day two of our listening tour started with some strong coffee at Farmhaus in Waynesboro. Aaron Mallory told us about his trials and errors as a coffee enthusiast turned coffee shop owner. Next, entrepreneur Amanda Walton-Hawthorne told us about her outdoor adventure company DOAH Outdoors and her passion for introducing less experienced community members to the outdoors in Waynesboro. The guided walk through the river park was followed by lunch with several entrepreneurial service providers who shared what their clients were up against in their small businesses.

The second day of the Central Valley listening tour ended in Staunton. At the Staunton Innovation Hub, Charles Taylor, a participant in SCCF's business bootcamp and microloan program, took the SCCF team on his journey as an African American veteran entrepreneur, and his plans for his community going forward.

Community Context

All about the Central Valley's entrepreneurial and economic ecosystem

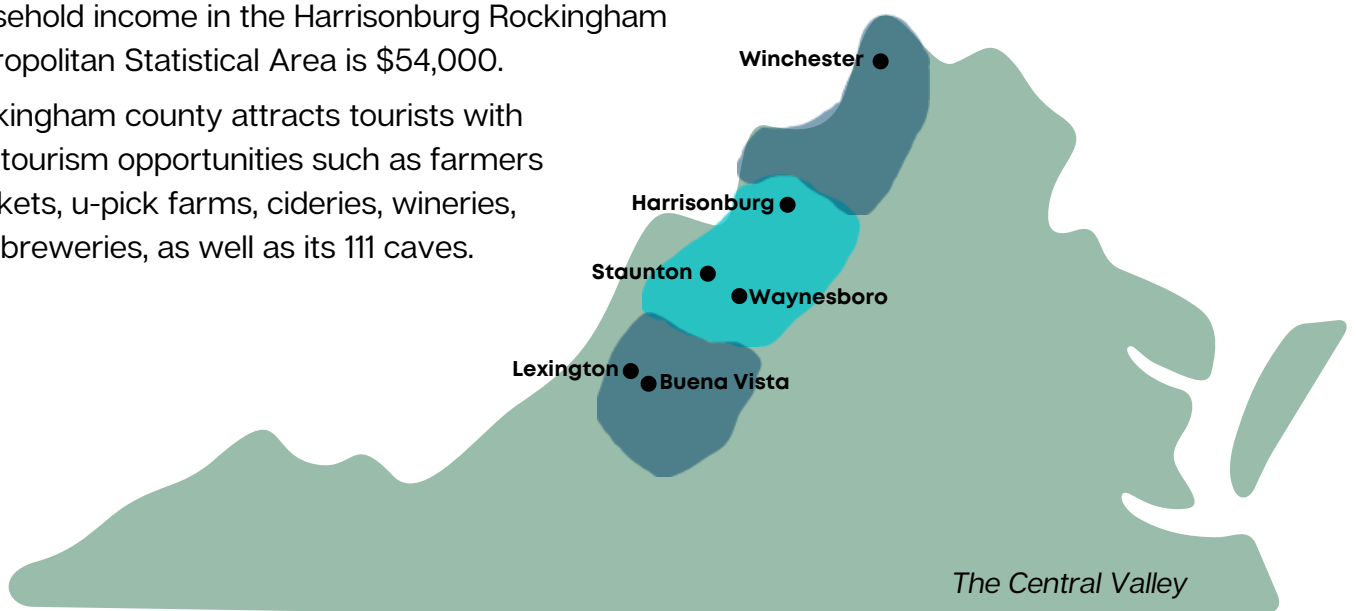
The Central Shenandoah Valley is made up of Augusta county and Rockingham county with a combined population of just over 260,000 people.

As Virginia's second largest agricultural producing county, Augusta county is known for a wide array of cultural offerings, historic downtowns, farm-to-table dining experiences and recreational highlights such as the scenic Blueridge Parkway and Skyline Drive. Staunton, founded in 1747, is home to the American Shakespeare Center, the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum, the Heifetz Music Institute and the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia. Staunton is also known for Mary Baldwin University and their annual Queen City Mischief and Magic event - a weekend long festival that turns downtown Staunton into Hogwarts and draws Harry Potter fans from all over the country. Waynesboro, founded in 1801, attracts tourists thanks to a thriving downtown, the Blue Ridge tunnel and plenty of community events year round. Augusta county's top employment sectors are healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing and retail trade. Augusta county boasts 800 miles of river

Rockingham county is located to the north of Augusta county. Founded in 1780, Harrisonburg is the county seat and home town to James Madison University, Eastern Mennonite University as well as Bridgewater College. Not surprisingly, educational services rank second as employment sector, right after manufacturing and ahead of healthcare and social assistance.

With a population of 135,000 people, the median household income in the Harrisonburg Rockingham Metropolitan Statistical Area is \$54,000.

Rockingham county attracts tourists with agritourism opportunities such as farmers markets, u-pick farms, cideries, wineries, and breweries, as well as its 111 caves.



RISE WAYNESBORO

When you first visit RISE Organization in Waynesboro, you don't simply walk into an office. Upon entering, Founders Sharon Fitz and Chanda McGuffin will take you on a tour of Black history and culture that comes to life in the four walls of their space. When the two opened their doors on Ohio Street, they intentionally designed their space to be a representation of the community they serve: Bold colors, quotes, and affirmations combined with an all-Black library featuring close to 2,000 works by Black authors. Their space, in turn, is also a representation of how Chanda McGuffin and Sharon Fitz show up for and in their community: with conviction and determination, giving a voice to the Black community in Waynesboro and beyond.

RISE Organization was officially established after the terrorist attack in Charlottesville in the summer of 2017, and since has become the culmination of both women's lifelong efforts to raise up the voices of the unheard

Today, RISE offers after-school programming, a Black History program, tutoring services, and an advocacy program for Black students and their families in Virginia. The organization is best known for its annual Women's Summit, which brings women from all over the country to the Shenandoah Valley, its anti-racism trainings, and its yearly Community Stakeholders Conference.



Community Navigator Pilot Program



Chanda McGuffin, RISE

This holistic approach has allowed Chanda and Sharon to work effectively with community members who want to start a business. “The largest hurdle that we must overcome when offering support to entrepreneurs from underserved communities is gaining their trust. Their success is defined by their ability to transform their dreams into a profitable business. To do that, these entrepreneurs must first overcome their stagnating fears which is no small feat. We help them navigate these fears through one-to-one consultations and in large group settings such as our Annual Women’s Summit and Community Stakeholders Conference.”, Sharon explains.

During its first year of the Community Navigator Pilot Program, RISE served over a dozen local entrepreneurs through one-on-one consultations and provided close to 60 hours of business training and education to more than 230 entrepreneurs in the Shenandoah Valley.

One of these entrepreneurs is Varlina Jackson. As a Black single mom of two boys, Varlina started a hair braiding business during the pandemic when daycares closed. While she went to cosmetology school, Chanda coached her on several occasions and listened to her business aspirations. Varlina shares, “Chanda really helped me figure things out and she shared SCCF’s business bootcamp with me. I loved it and I greatly appreciate this opportunity. It’s what I’ve literally been praying for!” Her business goes deeper than hair styling, “I’m not at Terry Court barber shop only for hair! While braiding hair, I talk to my clients about hair care and how our hair affects everything BLACK. Those conversations aren’t just talking but I’m trying to bring light on hair discrimination, racism, prejudice, and all the above. Virginia is deprived of many Black stylists for a reason. That has to change.” RISE is helping its entrepreneurs go beyond opening businesses, and making its community a better place.

McCutcheon and Jones Funeral Home and Cremation Services

WAYNESBORO



McCutcheon Family

Carl E. McCutcheon Sr. founded McCutcheon's Funeral Home in 1946 in Waynesboro, Virginia. Almost 50 years later Mr. McCutcheon also took over the operations of Kenneth L. Jones Funeral Home in Staunton, Virginia. In 2019, the two funeral homes merged to become McCutcheon and Jones Funeral Home, in Waynesboro. Today, the funeral home is run by the second generation of the McCutcheon family, Mr. McCutcheon's son, Carl McCutcheon Jr. and his wife Tammy McCutcheon, who serves as the Funeral Director.

Carl McCutcheon Sr. always dreamed of opening a business in his hometown. After spending a period of time living in New York, he returned to Waynesboro, and opened his funeral home just three doors down from his own house. "He worked hard in school to overcome the poor education we received in a segregated school system" remarked Mrs. McCutcheon about her husband.

“When I returned to Virginia, I wanted my business to be an inspiration to Black and other People of Color, to prove that a Black business could succeed.”

–Carl McCutcheon Sr.



McCutcheon & Jones Funeral Home & Cremation Services

Carl McCutcheon Sr. worked diligently not just to be a successful business owner, but also to be a strong father and provide for his family. His son, Carl McCutcheon Jr., emotionally recalled the way his dad supported him throughout his youth, “He made sure I had everything I needed, and I’ll never forget that.” When we sat down with the McCutcheon family, they explained why the family business does more for their community than organizing a last farewell to loved ones. It’s a story about history, community, and pride.

“Funeral homes play an important role in tying together a community in a time of need. The relationship between families and a funeral home is very personal; many people make arrangements years, even decades, in advance, with a funeral home they know and trust. Black funeral homes in particular are a critical part of a community. During segregation, white funeral homes denied Black and other minority communities the ability to appropriately mourn their loved ones by refusing to handle Black bodies, or host funerals for Black families. Instead, the mortician would come to the home of the family to prepare the body, and the funeral service would be held in the house. Historically, Black funeral homes opened so that their communities and families could celebrate the legacies of their loved ones. Today these funeral homes service their community by providing comfort to grieving families.”

Today, the McCutcheon family remains proud of their family business, and the service that they are providing to their community. They’re ready to expand further, and to serve all races and nationalities, to be able to best serve their community. McCutcheon and Jones Funeral Home goes above and beyond to be able to serve your family, so that you can honor your loved ones and their legacy.

Connections Over Coffee

WAYNESBORO

If you stumble into Waynesboro's Farmhaus Coffee on the first Thursday of the month looking for your caffeine fix, you'll be greeted by busy chatter, laughter and the exchange of business cards in their upstairs event space.

As a small local business themselves, Aaron and Bethany Mallory provide space for local entrepreneurs and those who want to become one one day to mix and mingle at the beginning of each month.



Aaron Mallory, Farmhaus Coffee Co.

“We opened November of 2016 with the goal of providing a place for our neighbors to gather, connect, and experience community through the lens of coffee. “, the couple explains. From entrepreneurs to service providers, small business bankers and attorneys to city council members and community leaders - you'll meet a great variety of stakeholders from Waynesboro's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The event itself is hosted by the City of Waynesboro that is investing in their outreach efforts and support for local entrepreneurs by providing access to resources, events and community. What started out as a coffee meetup with four participants in September 2022 grew into a 25+ people networking event for entrepreneurs and small business owners over the span of four months.

Behind this idea of the monthly coffee chat is the small business specialist Jay Messenger. Jay was hired in April 2022 to support early-stage entrepreneurs in Waynesboro in starting and growing their businesses, “Outside of our monthly Coffee Chat, I provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs to start or grow their business in the city. After initial consultations, I'm often able to offer small grant awards through a group of local service providers that specialize in services such as legal guidance, accounting, marketing, licensing requirements, website strategy and business development. I also hold a quarterly classroom event called “Start Up” business workshop to help entrepreneurs understand the requirements of starting a business in the city of Waynesboro and state of Virginia. I am one of five cities under the Shenandoah Valley Community Navigator program through the U.S. Small Business Administration - our goal is to provide more support to historically underserved entrepreneurs.”



Connections Over Coffee

At the end of 2022, Grow Waynesboro was awarded a Community Business Launch grant to help vacant storefronts in historic downtown Waynesboro. During the first half of 2023, dozens of local business owners receive business training and technical assistance in preparation for the grand pitch event on [April?]

Hosting the monthly Coffee Chat at Farmhaus is intentional, as Jay explains, “I believe in convening in places that entrepreneurs are already familiar with. A coffee shop is a lot more accessible than a city government meeting room. Plus, it’s important to me to support our local businesses and Farmhaus has been a great partner in this event format.”

About the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Waynesboro Jay says, “There are many elements in the ecosystem that need to work together in order to deploy a cohesive business growth strategy. We don’t currently have a co-working space, incubator or accelerator program to provide consistent startup support to local entrepreneurs. We have some strong players in our ecosystem who already support business growth and expansion, such as the Greater Augusta Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Shenandoah Community Capital Fund (SCCF), the Community Foundation, the Small Business Development Center, Blue Ridge Community College and the Shenandoah Valley Technology Council to name a few. But building up full-time capacity for ongoing quality entrepreneurial support requires a strong vision by leadership and a significant investment in the support infrastructure. I think we have some room to grow, in particular when it comes to supporting Black and Brown entrepreneurs in our community. It’s great to have partners like RISE Organization who are advocating for the Black community in Waynesboro, and I look forward to seeing what else we can do together to move that boulder up the hill.”

Grow Waynesboro’s Coffee Chat takes place every first Thursday of the month from 7.30 to 9.30 a.m. at Farmhaus Coffee in Waynesboro. The event will soon move to Happ Coffee Roasters, Farmhaus’ sister company, to accommodate the growth of the event.

Staunton Innovation Hub

STAUNTON
HUB

In downtown Staunton, nestled between Augusta Avenue and Central Avenue, the Staunton Innovation Hub (SIH) spreads over the length of a block offering 30,000 square feet to foster innovation in the Shenandoah Valley.

The Hub's mission is to rescue barriers to innovation and offers flexible co-working membership, private office spaces and larger anchor spaces. Also included: a rooftop with stunning views of Staunton downtown, conference rooms, phone booths and event space. High speed internet and freshly brewed coffee by Crucible coffee roasters fuel the co-working community as much as chili cook-offs, Spirit Weeks, community service initiatives and Halloween throw-downs.



Staunton Innovation Hub

“We love seeing small businesses and entrepreneurs grow beyond their imagination and the Hub is a great space to bring together the resources needed to make that happen! One of our members joined us in early 2018 as a flexible co-working member who then took over a 1,200 square foot anchor space.”, says Hannah Cooper, director of the Staunton Innovation Hub.

Another entrepreneur who found a home at SIH is Justin McBride with Brisket Taco Company. Justin moved to Staunton from Texas in 2020 and joined SIH while working full-time in his corporate job. He explains, “Moving from the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex of 6.5 million people to Staunton (with a population of 25,000) is a culture shock on its own. Add the fact that it was during a global pandemic, after about a year of working from home and not having much to do outside in the way of activities or nightlife made me feel disconnected and claustrophobic at times. Once I learned what the Staunton Innovation Hub was, it fit exactly what I was looking for: Get out of the house, connect with other people and have a comfortable environment to work in.”



Staunton Innovation Hub

Justin initially dreamed of opening his own Taco restaurant while still living in Texas but due to COVID-19, he put the idea on the shelf. Until he moved to Staunton. His new friends started tasting his brisket and smoked foods, and encouraged Justin to pursue his dream. “After the first Hub Happy Hour I attended more events. Word started spreading about Brisket Taco Co. and I was approached by and introduced to people who wanted to help. Being from Dallas, there's typically a catch. Someone is always wanting to sell you something or has some sneaky ulterior motive. But as I started to let my guard down, I realized those offering their help truly wanted to help me get my business off of the ground and partner in ways that I never would have thought of. Brandon Bishop of Crucible Coffee, for example, has helped educate and advise me on opening a food service business in Staunton. We're also working on a partnership to provide Crucible Coffee to our customers. Anika Horn and Debbie Irwin looped me into some of the entrepreneurial training at the Shenandoah Community Capital Fund (SCCF) and became great advocates of my business to other small businesses such as Slyde @23.”, Justin shares, and gives us a little preview: Once spring and summer are here, we'll see even more of these partnerships come to fruition. Did anyone say live music?

Hannah Cooper talks about the next step for the Innovation Hub, “When we started in 2018, we were 100% pre-leased before we opened our doors. We are home to over 110 businesses and 250 active members. As our membership has grown over the past four years, we decided to extend our mission into the Harrisonburg/Rockingham area by opening up the Harrisonburg Innovation Hub”.

The space will be around 27,000 square feet with a similar membership makeup and it will be located at 25 N Liberty Street taking up a full block just like in Staunton. The Hub will have about 60 private offices, a rooftop deck and an audiovisual room for video and audio recordings. While you can join the waitlist now by visiting Harrisonburghub.com, the official pre-leasing opens in the summer of 2023. The space is scheduled to open in late 2023.

The Staunton Innovation Hub has become home to a network of entrepreneurs, business owners, service providers and entrepreneurial supporters that make up a major support system to entrepreneurs in the space. Community manager Amy Lessley is the master connector. She not only provides support to the businesses in the hub but also connects them to the resources they need to be successful. “We host a happy hour each month that is typically sponsored by one of our members. Recently, our member Passport Title Company hosted and connected with another member who is in real estate - they had no clue about each other and now they’re doing business together. That’s the value of the community we’ve built here. But for me, connecting people isn’t just about their businesses. It’s about connecting humans. And yes, sometimes I have found that these personal connections turn into business opportunities down the road but it all starts with seeing and valuing each other as members of our community. All levels of interest and every subject matter is welcome here and they often come together in unexpected ways. But there’s beauty in that, because it makes the whole - our community - greater than the sum of its parts.”, Amy says. While co-working spaces were severely affected by the pandemic, the Staunton Innovation Hub hardly saw any attrition. As community manager, Amy checked in with members one-on-one and hosted weekly coffee chats via Zoom. While people weren’t coming to the Hub during the height of the pandemic, they kept their memberships and returned once it was safe to do so.



Staunton Innovation Hub



Burrow and Vine

STAUNTON



Megan Burrows, Burrow and Vine

Megan Burrows is a daughter, sister, wife, mom, friend, creative, yogi, and plant lover, and within the past year has added entrepreneur to her title. When she decided to switch from a comfortable 9-5 job to the risky world of entrepreneurship, it meant sacrificing a lot of perks. She traded consistent working hours for a non-stop work week, vacations for a never-ending to-do list, and the peace of mind of knowing what she was doing for constant fear of failure. As scared as she was to take the leap, she knew her current job wasn't igniting her passions or creativity. With the help of family, friends, and community partners, she had the courage to step out on her own, chase her passion, and open Burrow and Vine in Downtown Staunton.

Near the end of 2021, Megan was preparing to open a home tools and gift shop in Waynesboro but kept hitting road bumps along the way. Around the same time, a friend of hers in Staunton found a leasing opportunity and immediately thought it would be great for Megan, "I had friends in Staunton who really wanted me to bring my business there, but I felt tied to Waynesboro as a resident, and being part of the revitalization in that area. When I saw this other space in Staunton however, it just felt right." Shortly after seeing the space, she went to a trade show in Atlanta, GA, to pick out merchandise for her Waynesboro shop. While she was there she couldn't stop thinking about the Staunton location, "As I was walking around picking out products I kept saying 'oh this would be great in Staunton' or 'I know where I'd stage this in the Staunton store.'"



Megan Burrows, Burrow and Vine

Come the beginning of 2022, Megan had begun making connections with the Virginia Small Business Development Center (SBDC), where she got involved with their grant program and worked out her business plan. Afterward, the SBDC connected Megan with SCCF's loan program to set up her financing, "Finances were a really scary thing to me, and I felt like I didn't know enough to be handling them," Megan said, "But, the SCCF loan team helped me walk through everything and reassured me that I had the tools I needed to get it done. The whole process felt so 'me-first' instead of 'business-first' which I really appreciated." She also credits her mentor, Diane McCarthy, at the SBDC for helping her work through her imposter syndrome and cheering her on.

Megan closed on her loan with SCCF in the spring of 2022. Her loan allowed her to open the doors to her new space, get merchandise up on the shelves, and propel her from her previous day job to a new world of entrepreneurship! "Taking out a loan was scary, but I made sure I had all of my finances in order first, as best I could, and that was incredibly helpful," Megan said.

"After I came home, I signed the Staunton lease. It felt like a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and like **the town was giving me a big hug.**"

-Megan Burrows,
Owner of Burrow and Vine

Burrow and Vine still has a similar feel to Megan's original business plan, but is more plant-focused in her Staunton space, "As a plant lover, I realized downtown Staunton has all these great retail shops, but nowhere to buy houseplants! So, that became my niche." Alongside various house plants, Megan sells plant accessories and tools, home decor, artwork, macrame, and more! She also hosts creative workshops, classes, and yoga sessions (more of her passions) monthly on the second floor of her shop.

Megan celebrated Burrow and Vine's six-month anniversary in November 2022. As she reflected on the first year of her entrepreneurship journey she said something that made our ears perk up, "In the beginning, failure felt like the feeling I have right now. But right now, I don't feel like I'm failing. My fears were always about time and money. Living through what I was afraid of, and realizing I didn't die, has made me realize my fears really weren't as bad as I made them up to be in my head."

Inspired by her outlook we asked, what is next for Burrow and Vine? "You know it's funny you ask that because just today I was asking myself 'why am I doing any of this?'" She told us, "It's conversations like these where I start talking about my future plans of opening another space, adding lines of revenue, and finding new ways to build community and I realize that's why -the constant growth and evolution to fill community gaps in needs and interests."



Burrow and Vine

B-Cubed

HARRISONBURG

When COVID-19 broke out in March 2020, small businesses struggled to remain open during lockdowns and the subsequent economic standstill. Black-owned businesses were even less likely to handle forced closures due to a lack of financial assets and relief. An analysis of nearly 6 million PPP loans made between April 2020 and February 2021 showed that Black-owned businesses accounted for only 8.6 percent of all PPP loans (National Bureau of Economic Research 2021).

Harrisonburg Councilman Chris Jones saw a critical need to support minority-owned businesses during the COVID-19 outbreak. He initiated conversations with Harrisonburg Economic Development and Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) to create a program to serve Black and Brown-owned businesses in Rockingham County. Building upon the Bricks and Clicks model (more on this below), a program was created to develop resources to enable Black and Brown entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses. To implement this model, the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce joined as partners to launch the Black and Brown-Owned Business Growth Program (B-Cubed).

MillerCoors donated \$15,000 in seed money, and in April 2021 the first B-Cubed cohort was launched.



B-Cubed

The Blueprint: The Bricks and Clicks model

The Bricks and Clicks small business retention and expansion program was a result of a partnership among HDR, Harrisonburg Economic Development, and the SBDC. The team learned after a few rounds of group trainings and small grants that business owners benefited more from one-on-one assistance. "When small business owners attend trainings, they get hit with a lot of general concepts and ideas that they have to translate to action items for their business," says Andrea Dono, executive director of HDR. "We wanted to match entrepreneurs with experts who had experience in the areas they needed direct support in and allow them to take a deep dive together. The participants walked away with specific recommendations that were customized for their business and then received a small grant to put ideas into action. We added a networking support component to B-Cubed and ran with it."

Tailored business support for Black & Brown entrepreneurs

Today, B-Cubed is a partnership among the City of Harrisonburg, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, and the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center. The program provides a range of services and resources to assist businesses, no matter their current business stage.



Wallace Crews, C&C Country Cooking



B-Cubed

How it works:

- B-Cubed begins with one-on-one business counseling from the Shenandoah Valley SBDC. The business counselor learns about the entrepreneur, the business, and their needs, and works with the entrepreneur to draft a strategy to success.
- As the entrepreneur works with the SBDC, together they identify potential projects/activities to undertake to help the business. This may be bookkeeping assistance, financial management, marketing assistance, etc. The technical assistance that the program offers varies depending on the needs of the entrepreneur. Some assistance will be through group workshops, giving the entrepreneurs a chance to meet each other.
- At times, B-Cubed is able to subsidize or secure discounts for entrepreneurs to attend conferences/meetings (e.g. the 2022 Shenandoah Valley Entrepreneurship Summit, 2022 SWaMfest in Richmond).
- In addition, B-Cubed offers mini-grants to the program participants, typically around \$3,000.
- Finally, when the entrepreneur is ready (but typically after several months in B-Cubed), they receive a free one-year membership from the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber membership gives the entrepreneur the opportunity to meet people at Chamber events to network, meet new potential clients, and grow their business.

To date, B-Cubed has convened 7 cohorts, **servicing 37 businesses**. Of those, 18 businesses have progressed to receiving a mini-grant.

Allison Dugan of the Shenandoah Valley SBDC explains, “An important aspect of SBDC assistance is equipping business owners with the information and resources that help them make good decisions. We teach by working alongside our clients, we show them how to fix nagging problems so they can do it for themselves in the future. Technical things become a little less mysterious when we work and learn together, like how to navigate the backend of a website or by creating a budget and cash flow projections step by step. We are there when they need us, and we meet them where they are, with focus on the most pressing thing first and then chip away at the other challenges and goals they have for themselves, and their businesses. This is our approach with all of our clients, including those who are part of B-Cubed.”

The Central Valley Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

The B-Cubed team describes the entrepreneurial support system in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County as strong and committed. Peirce Macgill, B-Cubed representative at Harrisonburg Economic Development, adds, “There are so many resources, it can actually sometimes be confusing for entrepreneurs. From start-up to early stage to well-established, there are resources for every business. Organizations supporting entrepreneurs in our area include: Harrisonburg Economic Development, HDR, Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce, the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center, the Shenandoah Valley Technology Council, the Gilliam Center for Entrepreneurship and community outreach department at James Madison University (JMU), the entrepreneurship center at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), and the Shenandoah Community Capital Fund. We have bootcamps for start-ups and meet-ups for entrepreneurs and techies. Above all of this however, is the spirit of entrepreneurship in Harrisonburg (and the Valley). Here, entrepreneurs help each other. They lift each other up and want each other to succeed.”

Challenges for Black and Brown Entrepreneurs

Raising capital is a challenge for any entrepreneur, but Black businesses were disproportionately affected by pandemic (source). When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Black business ownership declined more than 40%.

“On the surface, Black entrepreneurs can participate in whatever bootcamp or workshops are available, however, in most cases, we do not always feel welcome. In most instances, we know and feel as though the space created to help businesses thrive was not created with us, African Americans, in mind.”, explains Chris Jones. He continues, “we know we must code-switch and dim our cultural perspective to fit into a space designed by and for predominantly white people. It’s just not the same as attending a training or one-on-one consulting session with another Black entrepreneur who knows what it’s like, who has a shared experience.”

The Future for Black and Brown-owned businesses in the Central Valley

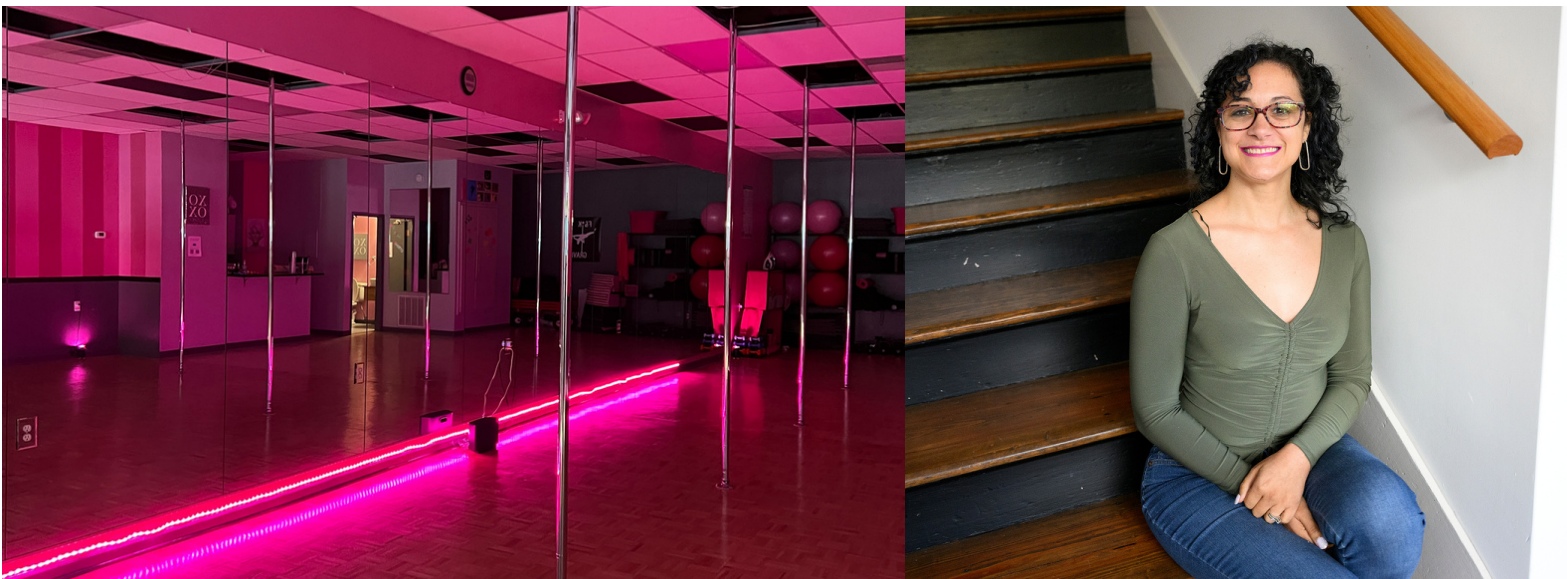
Peirce Macgill shares his hopes for the B-Cubed program, “We are continually growing and improving our entrepreneurial ecosystem. It’s amazing what has been accomplished in the last 5 years. It is a wildly different support system today than it was even 10-15 years ago. More people are becoming actively involved and more programs are being developed. It keeps me motivated to keep doing the work!”

Pink Ambition

What do you do when your business partnership starts to go south? For many entrepreneurs, having a business partner is a huge weight off their backs because you're able to split responsibilities and lean on each for support. Unfortunately, a partnership does not always play out the way one or both parties expect. Within her first year of business, Karen McIntyre, owner of Pink Ambition Pole Fitness, had to transition from partnership to sole proprietor. What ensued afterward were many moments of doubt, trouble with reorganizing finances, and navigating life as a business owner independently. What got her through it? Her passion for the business and the local support organizations in her community.

Karen started as a pole instructor in 2009 at a local studio in Harrisonburg. A few years later that studio closed, but Karen developed a deep passion for pole fitness. She and another friend from the studio felt the need to keep pole fitness alive in Harrisonburg, so they decided to start a new pole studio. Pink Ambition Pole Fitness opened its doors in 2015, but Karen quickly realized the partnership wasn't sustainable.

After a couple of months, Karen made the difficult decision to dissolve the partnership, "It wasn't easy going from a partnership to a sole proprietorship. Our taxes were an absolute mess our first year from changing our title," she recalled. In addition to the financial web she had to untangle, she also lost the ability to bounce ideas off another person and share the workload, "I had a lot of moments of doubt, but I was passionate about pole, and my business, so I just tried to stick it out and make the best of the situation."



Pink Ambition Pole Fitness,

Karen McIntyre, Pink Ambition Pole Fitness



Shenandoah Valley Entrepreneurship Summit



Karen McIntyre, Pink Ambition

Thankfully, despite losing a business partner, Karen found a lot of business support in her community, “Right after the 2020 pandemic started, I got connected with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR), because they were giving out grants to help businesses stay afloat. The grant came with a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) advisor who has been great at providing me with guidance.”

With this new-found support system, Karen flourished. The SBDC pointed Karen towards SCCF, so she began attending events like Entrepreneurs Off the Clock, and the Shenandoah Valley Entrepreneurship Summit, to learn from and connect with other entrepreneurs. She also became part of Harrisonburg’s B-Cubed program for Black and Brown business owners. Because of the support from these organizations, Karen said, “My business and I have grown more in the past two years than I did in my first five years of business!”

Karen described her entrepreneurial journey as, “trust your passion,” because in doing so she was able to push through the hard times to be successful.

“By having organizations believe in me and support me, **my whole mindset changed.** I started putting myself out there more in the community, began networking, and started actually marketing my business.”

-Karen McIntyre,
Owner of Pink Ambition Pole Fitness

Sage Bird Ciderworks



HARRISONBURG

Amberlee and Zach Carlson, Sage Bird Ciderworks

How does a front porch cider-making hobby turn into a full-scale cidery? Just ask Zach and Amberlee Carlson, owners of Sage Bird Ciderworks in Harrisonburg!

In 2015, Zach and Amberlee found a love for making hard cider at home out of gallon jugs. A few years later they acquired their own apple press and were able to expand their understanding of using cider-specific apples. What started out as a fun pastime, and something to share with friends and family, soon presented itself as a viable business plan. “In 2018 we were driving through downtown (Harrisonburg) and realized a cidery would be a great addition to downtown.”

Although there are a number of breweries in Downtown Harrisonburg (the area is a major hub on the Shenandoah Beerwerks Trail), there weren’t any cideries close by. Zach and Amberlee sensed that their community could use a place for cider lovers to gather and the idea of Sage Bird was born.

What has it been like, owning a business in Harrisonburg? “A big part of our success is that we were already a part of the Harrisonburg community. We had already invested in this community for years, so those relationships helped us a lot. **We would never have wanted to do this anywhere else, it had to be Harrisonburg,**” said the Sage Bird duo. In addition to the support of fellow entrepreneurs, Zach and Amberlee also turned to Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, who helped them with the logistics of establishing their business, and getting their feet off the ground.

Sage Bird officially opened its doors in 2020, and to date has hired three full-time employees and developed a scholarship program for its staff. “We want to put a big focus on our staff development because they’re going to be the best for us if they’re the best for themselves.” The staff scholarship FUNd, as it’s called, is for employees (who have been at Sage Bird six months or more) to invest in themselves- in something they want to know more about, something they’ve always wanted to do, or something that will improve their lives.

Since opening, the cidery has become a key part of the downtown community, hosting Thursday night trivia, rooting on the JMU football team on Saturdays, and hosting Pride Nights every month in partnership with Friendly City Safe Space!



Sage Bird Ciderworks

The Perch

HARRISONBURG

What's better than a light-filled co-working space with conference rooms, phone booths and strong coffee, roasted-on-site? Having that co-working space upstairs from one of Harrisonburg's culinary institutions: - Magpie Diner.

Launched by Kirsten Moore in 2015 (originally as The Hub), The Perch offers professionals, entrepreneurs and innovators in the Central Valley a space to collaborate, ideate and be part of a community that share at least one ambition: to work, live and play in Harrisonburg. Space manager Amanda Presgraves explains, "Our community shares a cool flexible workspace, chats over coffee around the kitchen island, makes important connections, and supports each other in the work we all do individually. It elevates everyone in terms of productivity, outcomes, and belonging, but also just in terms of feeling connected and having fun at work."

More than a co-working space, The Perch team is intentional about creating space for their members and to connect with the Harrisonburg community outside of co-working.

On the first Friday of each month, The Perch is one of the stops of the city's artwalk. As part of Harrisonburg's First Friday initiative, The Wing Gallery features a new artist every month with an opening reception. "Supporting the arts is an important aspect of what we do at The Perch. We often forget that artists are also entrepreneurs and having a place where they can display and sell their work, talk with the community, and grow their audience is not unlike any other small business. We benefit by having an ever-changing gathering space with beautiful, original art."



The Perch at Magpie



Caffeinate/Innovate

But it doesn't stop there. On the last Thursday of every month, The Perch team invites regional innovators from the community to share their story at Caffeinate/Innovate: a monthly morning speaker series that combines an in-depth moderated conversation with Q&A over freshly brewed coffee and awesome networking. From an Icelandic bicycle company to a pole fitness instructor, speakers prove that innovation happens in many unexpected ways in the Valley. Kirsten Moore adds, "I love hearing stories of innovators in our region. It doesn't matter what the topic is, those stories inspire and make us think bigger and more broadly about our own ideas. We're all better because of those conversations."

Kirsten's latest project is taking shape right across the street. Liberty St. Mercantile is slated to open in May 2023. With an event venue for up to 300 people on the second floor, the ground floor will be the new home to new startups Asdelia Mae (a children's clothing boutique), Parentheses books (an independent bookstore), Living | Room (a home decor and gift store), and a yet-to-be-named wine bar. Plus a new location for Blakemore Flower Co. (a florist and flower shop), Chestnut Ridge Coffee Roasters, and Rocktown Yarn. Liberty St. Mercantile will even have flexible kiosk space for early-stage entrepreneurs that want to validate their products before taking on a brick and mortar store on their own. Retail doesn't have to be scary, but it can be a huge financial commitment. Finding ways to support those small businesses starting out is really important to me. Having this building right across from Magpie and The Perch is an automatic feeder for those stores and just creates such a vibrant, thriving neighborhood feel. My hope is that it benefits ALL of the north end businesses.

While private offices and dedicated desks at the Perch have a waitlist, general memberships start at \$125/month and include perks like conference room use, free coffee, discounts at Magpie, copier and office supplies, super fast wi-fi, and, of course, a great community of co-workers!

Asdelia Mae Boutique

HARRISONBURG

Jenna Cauchi is the founder of Asdelia Mae Boutique, a children's boutique clothing store coming to Harrisonburg, VA. Jenna's role as a mother of two has fostered a passion for children's clothing. Shopping for her children has become an enjoyable experience that builds special memories for her family, and she looks forward to dressing her kids up for special occasions. But, as any parent knows, children don't wear the same clothing size for very long. Rather than let the outfits she had bought collect dust and go to waste, Jenna began reselling the clothes on Instagram. This is when her consignment account, Thrifty Momma Resale was born!



Jenna Cauchi, Asdelia Mae Boutique

Thrifty Momma Resale was Jenna's introduction to entrepreneurship, "I started the account by reselling my kids' clothes, and then began consigning for other moms as well. I did it all online until my friend Carlynn Patten, who owns Uplift Studio, invited me to sell at a pop-up market. I loved that experience because it gave me a lot of validation for what I was doing." That validation was critical in helping Jenna recognize the business owner inside of her, "I always dreamed about opening my own store, but I lacked the confidence to do it. I didn't think I had what it takes." Jenna, a Bridgewater College graduate and former elementary school teacher, didn't have any experience starting a business, but she had the spirit of an entrepreneur. All she needed was the framework to help her get started.

At one of Jenna's pop-ups in 2022, she met SCCF staffer Nick Koger. Nick encouraged her to join Business Bootcamp, "I was enrolled in another business course that taught me some basics, but I felt like I was missing the local aspect. Business Bootcamp helped fill in the gaps in my education, taught me what steps to implement, and gave me a community and the confidence to keep going." Jenna's biggest milestone came when she attended an SCCF networking event, "Sarah, who owns BMC Bakes, invited me to one of the Entrepreneurs Off the Clock events. There, I met Kirsten Moore, the owner of Magpie and The Perch. I told her about my dream to open a children's boutique, and she told me that she is opening The Liberty Street Mercantile, a collection of small businesses and local makers. I wasn't looking for a brick-and-mortar store at the time, but it just fell into my lap. I felt like it was obvious, I had to take the opportunity!"

In the summer of 2023, Jenna is opening Asdelia Mae Boutique, an upscale children's and consigned clothing boutique, in Harrisonburg, VA, "The name 'Asdelia Mae' comes from my grandmother's maiden name, Asdelia, and my other grandmother's middle name, Mae, who were both incredibly strong and inspiring women to me." Jenna's strong sense of family is evident in the name of the boutique, as well as her mission for the business. The boutique will offer boys' and girls' clothing in unique, timeless, fun styles, but Jenna's dream goes beyond just clothing, "I want to be more than a store. I want to host community wide-events for families. I want to provide a space to make those special memories." She doesn't aim to become a huge store, her goal rather, is to become a piece of the community.

It's entrepreneurs like Jenna, who have the idea and the passion, but are just missing the tools to launch their business, that Business Bootcamp can help. **"Five years ago, I never could have imagined being here right now. I hope my kids recognize the dream I am pursuing.** I hope they see my happiness through tearful eyes and smiles. I hope they learn that a challenge is growing and never settling. I hope they find motivation in failure and success. I hope they are learning that life is a journey and it's never too late to write the next chapter," Jenna shared on Instagram. She says to other female entrepreneurs, "Let your passion lead, invest and believe in yourself." Thanks to the support she found from fellow entrepreneurs, and the connections she made, Jenna was able to do just that.

Juice Works 3D

HARRISONBURG

Andrei Dacko is the founder of Juice Works 3D. Juice Works 3D brings 3D digital skills to kids in the form of mobile after-school and summer camps. Based in Harrisonburg, VA, the program teaches kids ages 9 to 12 about digital design, digital fabrication, and automation. By educating kids outside of the classroom, Andrei is able to circumvent the traditional evaluation method of exams, and instead evaluate his students through skill-based learning and application, “It’s very student-centric. I want kids to be their own champions, be their own decision-makers and leaders in their learning journey,” Andrei said about his mission for the program.

His drive to empower kids comes from his own frustrating history in school, “When I was in school, my teachers didn’t understand me. I wouldn’t be able to sit still and just read because I learned better when I was working with my hands and moving around. I was always doing my own thing, but I never knew it was called entrepreneurship, because my school didn’t teach that. If it had, I probably would’ve started my entrepreneurial journey a lot earlier in life.”

Andrei’s camps are offered in three different digital “technology tracks” which include: Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) milling, a subtractive manufacturing process, 3D Printing, an additive manufacturing process, and Robotics & Automation, “Each track is offered in two levels. Once a student graduates level one, they can advance to level two.” Andrei focuses on teaching hard skills, such as design process, measurement, CAD modeling, and programming, as well as soft skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and presentation, “My programming aims to hit a list of competencies that you would get graded on in school, but without the stress of grades, or the expectation for every kid to check the same box” Standardized testing, an anxiety-inducing grading system, and lack of opportunity to think outside the box, are key reasons why Andrei believes the education system is broken.



Andrei Dacko, Juice Works 3D

The name Juice Works 3D comes from taking the creative fuel, or “juice” as Andrei calls it, out of kids, and manifesting it into real work for our three-dimensional world, “The idea for the business, as it is now, came to me back in 2010, but the technology wasn’t where it needed to be. In 2016, the machinery I planned to use was finally advanced enough to be easily transported, and I could take it on the road with me.” Now, Andrei’s able to travel from schools to churches, to co-working spaces with his program, making it more accessible to all students across the Valley!

In the fall of 2019, Juice Works 3D ran its pilot program in seven schools. Andrei then purchased the first five robots for the program in March 2020 and launched the program the following June. Due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, Andrei spent the rest of that year building and refining the Juice Works 3D curriculum. He was able to run the first official camp in March 2021, and since then has run three spring camps and seven summer camps, “In less than three years we’ve reached over 400 kids. To reach that amount of kids in a traditional school setting would take at least 20 years!” said Andrei, a testament to the program’s success.

In 2022, Andrei joined SCCF’s Startup Shenandoah Valley accelerator. He was a part of the fourth cohort, a unique group because it was focused on tech entrepreneurs. The program gave Andrei a sense of community amongst other entrepreneurs that he felt he had been missing, “I can be very introverted when working, so having the opportunity to poke my head outside of my business, and see who’s around to make connections with was great. The S2V program provided a forum for us to empathize, give advice, and support each other.” It also gave him a structure to work through problems with a mentor to guide him, “Having Logan Morris as a one-on-one mentor was really helpful and insightful in introducing me to potential solutions for my business. The other resources in the program helped push me outside of my comfort zone and actually begin to put things down on paper.” In addition to one-on-one mentoring, S2V gives entrepreneurs access to 8-weeks of business coaching, a Builder 10 Assessment, and the Asana management platform.



STARTUP SHENANDOAH VALLEY (S2V) is a 16-week business acceleration program that enables you to take your business to the next level. It's designed for businesses in light manufacturing, food processing, agriculture, information technology, and professional services, or anyone who is ready for rapid, iterative development, at every level – from building to refining and scaling the business model.

Beyond his own business goals, Andrei is enthusiastic about the opportunity and potential for tech in the Shenandoah Valley, **“When I was scouting this area (Harrisonburg) to move here back in 2016, I felt like it was an area with an untapped capacity for innovation. It had the right type of people that are passionate about making change and weren’t worn out by it yet. I feel like right now the region is starting to hit its stride in that area.”** Since moving to the area, Andrei has become a driving force in promoting the importance of tech opportunities for young kids. He has been in conversations with big-name tech companies like Riddleberger Brothers, Cadence, Merck, and Dynamic Aviation Group to support his mission, “I appreciate these companies taking a lead in the industry and supporting scholarships to bring our program to underserved students. It shows that they’re investing in their future talent, and setting an example for other industry leaders.” In addition to support from industry leaders, Juice Works 3D recently secured its first private school learning center partnership, “I’m really grateful that Ron Hoch, Head of School at the Redeemer Classic School, has embraced their STEM program and brought Juice Works 3D on for an entire year. We ran six camps there last fall, and will run another six this spring.” Looking ahead to 2023, Andrei looks forward to increasing these private school partnerships, raising more scholarship funds, and growing Juice Works 3D to offer a third level to his curriculum.

“I had to leave the school system to make the type of change I’m seeking to make for the children that are our future.”



Juice Works 3D Camp

Broadway Co-working

BROADWAY

What do a heavy metal Youtube Show and an innovative product made from red oak trees have in common? They both have a home base at Broadway Coworking, located in the small town of Broadway in Northern Rockingham county. With a population of 4,500 people Broadway offers small business owners and entrepreneurs a 10,000 square foot co-working space to get work done away from home and its distractions.

Unlike co-working in large metropolitan areas, you won't find any hoodie-wearing hipsters hiding behind their screens all day. Eugene Bare, owner of Bare Web Design & Marketing who manages the space on the day-to-day explains, "We want the community to have a place where they can create and work without their kids or dogs staring at them all day. Working from home can be isolating; there's always a pile of laundry to be folded or trash to take out. At Broadway Co-working, community members can focus on doing their thing while making connections. One of the great benefits of joining a space like this is that you can always ask for advice or help if you get stuck - be it in terms of a business question or your product or service. We believe that running a business is hard enough, surrounding yourself with people who are walking that same path makes it a little easier, and a lot more fun."

Hop's Metal Show, a popular Youtube show, for example, is produced at Broadway Co-working thanks to the stage, greenscreen and recording setup available to members. Its creators Jeff Reid "Hop", Chris Diehl "String" and Larry Yankey "Love" started this show as a tribute to their favorite genre of music: Heavy metal and hard rock. On the show, Hop, String, Love and their guests discuss videos and the music from new releases and bands from the genre; they even interview bands and live stream at times. The show has over 11 thousand subscribers and over hundreds of thousands of views on Youtube. "It's been cool to see Hop's Metal turn their passion into a successful Youtube channel that has even built strong friendships with fellow metal fans as far away as Japan!", Eugene shares.

Another creator at Broadway Co-working is Paul Powers, inventor of Shenandoah Smoke Blocks. This product was born of Paul's passion for grilling and utilizes the native red oak trees on his woodlands. Currently Paul is in the process of bringing Shenandoah Smoke Blocks to market which should happen in the spring/ summer of 2023 just in time for grilling season!



Broadway Co-working

Also part of the Economic Development Committee of the Broadway Hometown Partnership, Eugene describes the town's entrepreneurial spirit, "The Broadway business community is rejuvenating itself in new ways. We now have very few open storefronts downtown because of the rise in new businesses opening. And we also have a lot of home-based businesses and a Community "Good News" Paper, The Chimney Rock Chronicle. There are definitely some entrepreneurial sparks in this town! As the local co-working space, we want to be a place where entrepreneurs - home-based or not - can come and learn, make their businesses stronger and more resilient while connecting with other business owners."

Cari Orebaugh Sinnett, Assistant Town Manager, adds, "Because Broadway is fairly small, we have a business climate that is personal and warm. I'm excited to see what opportunities the new Shenandoah Rail Trail, that will connect Broadway to Front Royal, brings for our community. I think we can leverage some of our existing business infrastructure such as Broadway Co-working and our seasonal community market to highlight our local small businesses and offer more support to those that are just starting out or looking to take the next step."

Broadway Co-working offers day passes, desks, private offices and custom workspaces to meet different needs. Small business owners looking for fast Wifi, meeting space and a great community of fellow entrepreneurs can join until capacity is reached. Coffee, snacks and printing included! Learn more at BroadwayCoworking.net

With four higher education institutions, three co-working spaces (a fourth one underway), several entrepreneurial support organizations, regular events and a diverse stack of dreamers, doers, tinkerers and makers, the Central Shenandoah Valley is well underway to breaking down silos and meeting the needs of local founders. Flagship events like the annual RISE Women's Summit, Shenandoah Valley Entrepreneurship Summit, Caffeinate/Innovate and Grow Waynesboro's Startup Coffee Chat create a shared space for entrepreneurs of all stages to meet, convene and learn from each other.

Recommendations:

- Extend ecosystem building into smaller communities in the Central Valley and meet entrepreneurs where they're at.
- In conversations within the ecosystem, a need that keeps arising is that for an accessible, shared commercial kitchen space.
- Align economic development efforts more closely with supporting local entrepreneurs in starting and growing their businesses.
- Create ongoing programming to support entrepreneurs in their first two years of business, e.g. incubation programming
- Create better way-finding for entrepreneurs at all stages: Help all entrepreneurs, minority-owned business owners in particular, navigate the ecosystem with more ease and confidence so they can find the support is available to them.
- Increase capacity of existing entrepreneurial support organizations: Greater financial support of B-Cubed, RISE Organization and the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center would ensure these programs' sustainability and allow them to expand their offerings to more BIPOC entrepreneurs.
- Coordinated efforts among higher education institutions: What opportunities can colleges and universities leverage to support student entrepreneurs in the region? How can the student bodies become more engaged in their local entrepreneur community while gaining valuable work experience?
- Greater variety of financial vehicles and more equitable access to grant and loan products specifically for BIPOC and women entrepreneurs.