Business training at Roanoke Center improves city services

Municipal employees get lessons in ‘lean management’ techniques

By Jill Elswick

What if your police department could predict crime, sending officers to the scene before anything happened? Wouldn’t that be better than calling 911?

Well, as sci-fi as it sounds, the city of Roanoke, Va., plans to implement a new “intelligent policing” model based on statistical analysis.

That’s only one example of how the city has been applying the lessons of recent training to improve its services and efficiencies. Representatives from seven city departments received training in “lean management” at the Virginia Tech Roanoke Center.

“Lean management helps organizations reduce costs, eliminate waste, and streamline processes,” says center Director Kay Dunkley.

Located beside The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center on the seventh floor of the Roanoke Higher Education Center, the Roanoke Center is home to a number of graduate degree and certificate programs tailored to organizations and individuals.

The best opportunities for improvement

Lean management training provides a system for identifying low-cost, high-return opportunities to change.

“We focus on where we can have the most impact with our customers,” says Becky Kates, who led the training for Roanoke employees.

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Signature programs around the commonwealth

Hampton Roads Center, Newport News
- Professional engineering licensure renewal
- Project management short courses and programs, offered through Continuing and Professional Education

Hampton Roads Center, Virginia Beach
- Doctorate in educational leadership and policy studies, offered through the School of Education
- Master of arts in education, offered through the School of Education

Reynolds Homestead
- Arts, cultural, and educational programs for audiences ranging from pre-kindergarten through adult
- Historic Rock Spring Plantation tours and special events

Richmond Center
- Master of public administration, offered through the Center for Public Administration and Policy
- Professional master of business administration, offered through the Pamplin College of Business
- Seminars and customized programs to serve private-sector needs as well as those of state and local governments

Roanoke Center
- Master of arts in counselor education, offered through the School of Education
- Contract training for businesses and industries, offered through Outreach and International Affairs
- Professional master of business administration, offered through the Pamplin College of Business

Southwest Center
- STEM professional development for educators, offered through Outreach and International Affairs
- STEM programs for K-12 students, offered through Outreach and International Affairs

New center opens in Newport News

In Newport News, Hokies and ‘Hoos are on the same team.

After more than a year of preparation, Virginia Tech joined with the University of Virginia this summer to publicly unveil the universities’ jointly operated Newport News center.

The Virginia Tech Hampton Roads Center, Newport News, located at 600 Thimble Shoals Blvd., will offer professional development and corporate training programs. The universities will share office, conference and classroom space.

“This was truly a collaborative effort in figuring out what our needs were and matching them to a place that offered the most flexibility and promise for future business,” says Melissa Lubin, who directs the Virginia Tech commonwealth campus centers in Richmond, Virginia Beach, and Newport News.

Officials from Virginia Tech joined their counterparts from the University of Virginia this summer for the grand opening of the universities’ jointly operated Newport News center. From left are U.Va. Director Kathy Cullen; John Dooley, CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation; Virginia Tech Director Melissa Lubin; Billy Cannaday Jr., dean and provost for academic outreach at U.Va.; and Susan Short, associate vice president for engagement at Virginia Tech.

U.Va. President Teresa Sullivan and Virginia Tech’s Charles W. Steger greet guests at the new center.

Quotes adorn the classroom walls at the center; the decor was jointly chosen by the two directors, Melissa Lubin of Virginia Tech and Kathy Cullen of the University of Virginia.
Budding genealogists often hear this advice: When you unearth the past, be prepared for surprises. A researcher who spent weeks poring over documents in courthouses and repositories has turned up new facts about the Reynolds family.

In 1810, Abram Reynolds bought his first 180 acres in Patrick County, and in 1825 he bought 595 more acres at the base of No Business Mountain, where Virginia Tech now owns almost 800 acres. Abram Reynolds was thought to have lived at the site of Rock Spring Plantation, the boyhood home of R.J. Reynolds of tobacco fame. Virginia Tech maintains the historic home and offers public tours. Abram was R.J.’s grandfather. But it turns out that Abram himself actually lived several miles away.

In a second development exciting to cultural anthropologists who sift through papers and dig up deeds, the existence of the Norfolk-Bristol turnpike has been brought into question.

In the 1800s, the word “turnpike” referred to a road that ran through the lands of private corporations, which exacted tolls from travelers. It’s more likely that a Stuart-to-Lynchburg road allowed passage of horses and wagons through the plantation, the home of Hardin and Nancy Cox Reynolds — parents of R.J. and 15 other children.

“These two discoveries give us a picture slightly different from what had been passed down through oral histories and previously written accounts,” says Julie Walters Steele, director of the Reynolds Homestead.

A Reynolds descendent, Nancy Susan Reynolds, deeded the property to Virginia Tech in 1969. More than 15,000 people visit the Reynolds Homestead each year. The person behind the discoveries? Matthew Traucht, a research fellow who spent much of last summer doing research by the Garden Club of Virginia. His academic background is anthropology, archeology, and landscape architecture. Ironically, he found no evidence that ornamental gardens ever existed on the property.

Leadership program launches

In an effort to groom civic leaders, the Reynolds Homestead has launched Leadership Patrick County. The nine-month program aims to broaden participants’ perspectives by offering them a chance to interact with community leaders and agencies. The program was developed in partnership with the Patrick County Chamber of Commerce.

Leadership Patrick County participants engage in a group development exercise at the Reynolds Homestead in Critz, Va., about 65 miles southeast of Blacksburg.

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Engineering interest in science

Southwest Center offers hands-on STEM training for students and teachers

By Rich Mathieson

Among the almost 9,000 students and 3,000 teachers who received training at the Virginia Tech Southwest Center in the past year, one visitor stood out.

Like a towering Transformer, Techtron offered a unique welcome to the center in Abingdon, Va. The 14-foot-tall ‘robot’ was on hand to help spark interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Director Penny McCallum says the center offers programs throughout the year designed to provide children with a real university experience.

Kids’ Tech University, for example, aims to engage 9- to 12-year-olds. The program, in its sophomore year at the center, uses real researchers to lead exciting interactive sessions on those infamous “why” questions that have always intrigued children. The next program will take place Oct. 19.

The center also hosts a STEM Conference each year for sixth-grade girls and their teachers. It features hands-on workshops led by female chemists, engineers, doctors, programmers, and other professionals.

A STEM Institute allows teachers to experiment with activities and technologies that they can use and apply in their classrooms. “Several teachers have been there every year for seven years,” McCallum says. “That speaks very highly for what we offer and what they learn from the program.”

Take a guided video tour of the Reynolds Homestead at http://tinyurl.com/reynoldstour
Richmond Center aiding school’s turnaround

By Rich Mathieson

For more than a year, a school system in Hopewell, Va., has been working with experts from the Virginia Tech Richmond Center to find ways to improve test scores and raise on-time graduation rates.

This year, 37 “priority” schools across the commonwealth are being required to develop improvement plans after failing to meet annual state benchmarks aimed at reducing proficiency gaps between low-performing and high-performing schools.

Carol Cash, an assistant professor in Virginia Tech’s School of Education, leads the three-year school improvement grant with Hopewell High School. “We sat down with the school and asked, ‘What is it you’re looking for and how can we help?’ as opposed to saying, ‘Let us come in and turn around your school,’ ” she says. “You don’t turn around a school with an outsider; you turn around a school with the people inside the school.”

Virginia Tech has provided professional development and coaching for administrators, plus discipline and classroom management strategies for teachers, Cash says.

“We want to help the school leaders become a more effective team so that when the grant is over, the progress they’ve made can be sustained,” she says.

At a retreat this summer at The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, Cash joined Ted Price, an assistant professor in the School of Education, to help a group of Hopewell teachers and administrators build better communications skills.

“We want them to come away communicating better as a team, not just as individuals,” Price says.

Melissa Lubin, director of the Richmond Center, says such a program is a natural extension of the work done at the center.

“At the Richmond and Hampton Roads centers, we offer graduate degrees in education leadership, so we have expertise in these areas,” Lubin says. “We’re used to working closely with school systems and with teams within schools on professional development and continuing education. This grant has allowed us to go deeper into an institution and work with an intact team in a specific school.”

“The experts from Virginia Tech are teaching us team-building activities and helping us understand each other’s strengths and weaknesses so we can better complement each other and enhance what we’re already doing,” Principal Rodney L. Berry said. “They’re helping to show us what we can do to get better at our craft.”

Roanoke Center continued

Kates, a quality manager with Blacksburg, Va.-based Adaptive Technologies, instructs students to look for the “low-hanging fruit.” Once they’ve found success with their first project, Kates says, they begin to make an impact on organizational culture. Ideas for additional projects spring up quickly.

Roanoke has witnessed that phenomenon. Many of its employees are already on their second round of a lean project. The public works team, for example, streamlined the process for residents to obtain a permit for public assembly. The team is now looking at the related issue of how to manage street closures.

Meanwhile, the human resources team improved its “onboarding” process, which refers to the time it takes to get a new employee in the system and productive. Other departments have cut administrative and material costs as well. The point is to save money for the city or, alternatively, to provide a higher level of benefit to its residents.

Roanoke police Lt. Stephen Keatts believes the intelligent policing model will return a 20 percent benefit to the city.

“We’re making great progress on the reorganization of the Police Department,” says Keatts, who is excited about the potential to make Roanoke safer. “We’re rolling criminal analysis function into what we do. If we can predict where crime is going to be, it will be like going to Vegas.”

The new intelligent policing model is expected to roll out by Jan. 1. The city plans to hire three statisticians to do crime intelligence tasks, which will free police officers to spend 30 percent more time on the street and lieutenants to spend 60 percent more time on the street.

“You’re going to see more officers in your neighborhood,” Keatts says.

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Roanoke Center

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