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Tidings from the Director

Reflections on the Institute's Fifteenth Anniversary

BY MAX STEPHENSON, JR.

Director, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance

The 15th anniversary of the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) officially occurs on July 1, 2021. The day is a significant milestone, as many organizations and initiatives established in 2006 in all three of our nation's sectors and, indeed, at our own university, have not attained such longevity. As I write, the Institute is as strong as it has ever been, and we recently saw our fourth successful post-doctoral research scholar depart following an active stint with us. The Institute today is a vibrant research community engaged in an array of inquiry in its chosen domains, with a variety of colleagues and stakeholders as essential partners.

As I have reflected in recent weeks on VTIPG's institutional trajectory across these years, I have sought to identify some of the reasons for our success during a period in which the nation has otherwise fallen into an ongoing and dangerous governance crisis. Our history has coincided, too, with an era during which a share of those we have self-consciously aimed to serve as an institution — the nation's vulnerable — have become the targets of wild and sometimes violent and deadly scapegoating attacks and also have had to confront despair in

many cases, as their life chances have too often crumbled around them.

READ MORE

ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Dr. Vanessa Guerra, Interim Program Director for RHIZOME, LLC and Research Associate in the CAUS Dean's Office, has accepted the position of Assistant Professor in the School of Architecture in the Urban and Environmental Planning Department at the University of Virginia.

Dr. Guerra graduated in 2020 from the Environmental Design and Planning PhD program at Virginia Tech, with Professor Max Stephenson serving as a committee member, and she has been a long-time active Community Change Collaborative member. Vanessa also serves as a member of the Maré research group led by Professors Desiree Poets and Max Stephenson. You can learn more about her work with RHIZOME, LLC in the *Project Updates* section, below.

Congratulations, Vanessa!



Sarah Halvorson-Fried will begin the PhD program in Public Health at the University of North Carolina in Fall 2021. Sarah graduated from the Master's in Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) program at Virginia Tech in May 2016. Professor Max Stephenson chaired her thesis committee for her work entitled "Exploring Factors Influencing Employer Attitudes and Practices toward Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the New River Valley."

Since finishing her MURP degree, Sarah has worked for the nonprofit organization Harlem Children's Zone in New York, New York, as a Research Associate and Senior Research Associate for Research and Evaluation. She completed an advanced certificate in Public Health offered by the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy in May 2021.

Congratulations, Sarah!



Congratulations to **Dr. David Moore** of the Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP)/School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) Public Administration and Public Affairs PhD program! David successfully defended his dissertation entitled, “Making Sense of Networks: Exploring How Network Participants Understand and Use Information From Social Network Analysis” on May 3, 2021. Professor Robin Lemaire of CPAP/SPIA served as chair and Professor Max Stephenson, Jr., SPIA/Urban Affairs and Planning and VTIPG Director, served as co-chair of David’s committee. Professor Karen Hult, CPAP/SPIA and Department of Political Science, and Professor Stephanie Smith, CPAP/SPIA, served as additional committee members. Special thanks to each. David, a long-time research faculty member at VTIPG, is the 39th doctoral student closely affiliated with the Institute to complete their degree since its founding on July 1, 2006.

Congratulations, Dr. David Moore!



Zuleka Randell Woods recently collaborated with Dr. Anthony Kwame Harrison, Edward S. Diggs Professor in Humanities in the Department of Sociology and the Africana Studies program, on a piece entitled, "**Brown Girl in the Lens**," published by the Independent Social Research Foundation.

Zuleka also recently published a book of short stories addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia, **Ba-Ya Play Cook: An Anthology of Short Stories**, which is now available on Amazon.

Zuleka is a doctoral student in the Planning, Governance, and Globalization program and the incoming president of the Community Change Collaborative. Professor Max Stephenson, Jr. is serving as Chair of her advisory committee.

Congratulations, Zuleka!



Mary Beth Dunkenberger, Associate Director for VTIPG, has received the 2021 **College of Architecture and Urban Studies (CAUS) Award for Outreach Excellence** given by the Office of the Vice President for Outreach and International Affairs. Mary Beth has worked with and for community partners for many years with a particular focus on human service public policy, organizational and program evaluation, population needs assessments, community change processes, behavioral health innovations, and healthcare finance.

Congratulations, Mary Beth!



Dr. Anna Erwin will be joining the faculty of the School of Earth, Environmental, and Marine Sciences (SEEMS) at the University Texas Rio Grande Valley in January of 2022 as an assistant professor. Until that date, she will continue as a Post-Doctoral Research Scholar at Purdue University. Dr. Erwin is an alumna of the SPIA Policy, Governance, and Globalization PhD program (2017), for which Max Stephenson served as her advisory committee chair.

Congratulations, Anna!

PROJECT UPDATES

Roanoke Valley Collective Response Steering Committee and New Strategic Task Group Focused on Recovery Housing



Mary Beth Dunkenberger, Associate Director of VTIPG, has joined the steering committee for the **Roanoke Valley Collective Response**, which was formed in 2018 and continues to be a major force in addressing the opioid and addiction epidemic in the Roanoke region. Mary Beth will also co-chair, with **Niles Comer** of Mercy Ventures, LLC, the RVCR's new strategic task group focused on recovery housing.

Assessing the Economic

Effectiveness of the AbilityOne Program at Melwood



Dr. David Moore, Lara Nagle, and Mary Beth Dunkenberger of VTIPG are collaborating with co-PIs **Dr. Sarah Lyon-Hill** and **Afroze Mohammed** of the VT Center for Economic and Community Engagement on a fiscal and programmatic assessment of **Melwood**, a nonprofit organization providing employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in the greater Washington, D.C. area.

VTIPG and Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce Partner for Internship Program

VTIPG collaborated with the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce to create a new internship opportunity in the 2021 spring semester.

Alisande Tombarge, a second-year MURP student recommended by SPIA **Professor Max Stephenson**, was tapped to fill the new role, created in response to a request from the Chamber. Tombarge served as a legislative intern, assisting with a new initiative to track bills of



interest during the 2021 Virginia General Assembly session. The internship provided an opportunity for her to understand how the General Assembly process works and to learn about the role chambers of commerce play in the local business community.

In addition, Tombarge worked with **Leo Priddy**, Chamber Marketing & Communications Director, to craft weekly posts for the Chamber's new **"Engage"** blog to keep members informed of the status of legislative bills as the General Assembly session progressed. Tombarge wrote short blog posts on topics related to the operations of the General Assembly and helped the Chamber prepare for its Post-Session Legislative Update event, creating fact sheets for distribution to Chamber members and local legislators and helping moderate the question-and-answer period at the event.

Tombarge graduated in May 2021 with a graduate certificate in local government management in addition to her master's degree. While in the MURP program, she also completed internships with the New River Valley Regional Planning Commission and The Berkley Group. A member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, Tombarge is now working as an associate planner for the City of Waynesboro, VA.

RHIZOME: Launch of the New CAUS Living Learning Community



Professor Max Stephenson, Jr., Mel Jones (see *Faculty Spotlight* section, below), and others served on the advisory committee planning for the launch this year of **RHIZOME**, a new College of Architecture and Urban Studies (CAUS) living learning community (LLC) at Virginia Tech focused on how the built environment—and related disciplines addressing it including, architecture, design, and planning—affect vulnerable populations and the environment. RHIZOME will create new spaces and project-based opportunities for students to explore how non-linear, community-based praxis and decision-making can be implemented to improve quality of life.

Planning for this initiative was led by **Kathryn Clarke Albright**, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in CAUS, and **Vanessa Guerra**, Interim Program Director for RHIZOME, LLC and Research Associate with the CAUS Dean's Office, who graduated from the Environmental Design and Planning PhD program at Virginia Tech in 2020 and who has been an active Community Change Collaborative and Maré research group member. Dr. Guerra presented the project this year at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale Italian **Virtual Pavilion** Sezione del Padiglione Italia.

RHIZOME will be housed along with two other LLCs at the new residence hall within Virginia Tech's broader **Creativity and Innovation District (CID)**. Residents of the CID will benefit from the state-of-the-art creative and collaboration spaces and daily interaction with the diverse members of the CID community. RHIZOME will engage 50 students in its first year. For more information about the initiative, please [watch this video](#).

Departmental Diversity Grant from the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences for *Maré from the Inside* Exhibit and Book



The College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences has awarded a Departmental Diversity Grant to **Professor Desiree Poets**, Department of Political Science and ASPECT core faculty at Virginia Tech, in collaboration with **Professor Max Stephenson, Jr.** and **Professor Nicholas Barnes** (St. Andrews University, UK), to support a campus visit during the Fall 2021

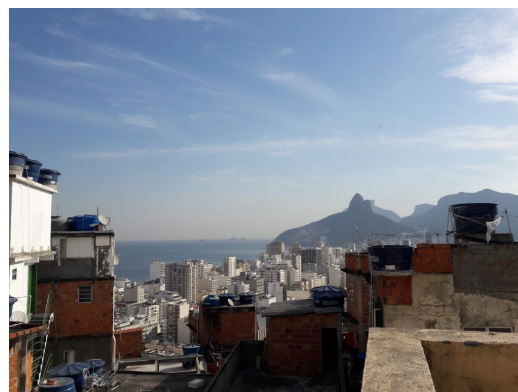
semester of the international team members who produced and curated the **Maré from the Inside** exhibit, including, among others, Italian photo-journalist **Antonello Veneri**, Maré

resident and activist **Henrique Gomes**, and Maré resident and scholar **Andreza Jorge**.

The exhibition team will engage with relevant courses during their visit and will also participate in a panel sharing the history and relevance of the exhibit. The exhibit is currently on display at Virginia Tech's Newman Library in Blacksburg, VA, until September 30, and may also be [viewed online](#). The companion book to accompany the exhibit, *Maré From the Inside: Art, Culture and Politics in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil* (2021), edited by Nicholas Barnes, Desiree Poets and Max Stephenson, Jr. and offered by Virginia Tech Publishing may be downloaded as an [e-book here](#), or you can purchase a [softcover version on Amazon](#). A Portuguese version will be published soon. Each of the editors developed chapters for the volume, as did **Molly Todd**, a current PhD candidate in the ASPECT program at Virginia Tech, whose advisory committee is co-chaired by Professors Max Stephenson, Jr. and **Laura Zanotti**. Henrique Gomes and Andreza Jorge also contributed to the book, as did several other scholars.

Maré Research Group

The Institute is actively involved in a range of inquiry lead by a group of researchers, including **Professors Desiree Poets** and **Max Stephenson, Jr.**, Senior Research Associate **Lyusyena Kirakosyan**, postdoctoral scholars **Nada Berrada**, **Vanessa Guerra** and **Neda Moayerian**, PhD candidate **Molly Todd**, Director of Communications for the Graduate School and communications expert **Cathy**



Grimes, and undergraduate analyst **Helena Vasconcellos**. Members are continuing to work on several articles; as noted below in the *Conferences, Events, and Print* section, one article has already been presented, another will be presented in mid-July and two more are in development. Additional articles will follow as the group pursues its shared interest in the intersection of democratic agency, informal advocacy, as well as the continuing effects of coloniality and systemic cultural oppression on favela populations in Brazil.

Reynolds Homestead Partnership – Critz Community Enhancement Project

Professor Max Stephenson, Lara Nagle, and **Andy Morikawa**, VTIPG Senior Fellow, and **Community Change Collaborative members** will continue to assist with community visioning in



Patrick County, this time for a Reynolds Homestead project recently awarded funding by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Led by **Julie Walters-Steele**, Executive Director of Reynolds Homestead, with design support from the **VT Community Design Assistance Center (CDAC)**, the project is a community-driven program and design study for a community center that will provide a gathering space in Critz, VA, serving Patrick County and the surrounding region. The center will be focused on promoting equity and offering activities that include educational and professional development programs, after-school programs, cultural heritage programs, entrepreneurship training, and health and wellness programs. The project is one of **thirteen proposals totaling \$4.1 million** recommended by Governor Ralph Northam to create jobs, improve infrastructure, and provide workforce training in Virginia's Appalachian region.

CONFERENCES, EVENTS, AND PRINT

Entangled Ontologies, Decoloniality and Decolonization Virtual Symposium at Virginia Tech

On March 4, a Virginia Tech team including **Max Stephenson, Jr.** (VTIPG/SPIA), **Desiree Poets** (Political Science), **Laura Zanotti** (Political Science), **Lara Nagle** (VTIPG/SPIA), **Anthony Szcurek** (Political Science, now faculty at Saddleback College), **Neda Moayerian** (VTIPG/SPIA), and **Zuleka Randell Woods** (SPIA) hosted a day-long **virtual symposium** for domestic and international scholars to present their working papers for a special issue (now under review at the academic journal, *Interventions*) focused on the productive tensions and differences that exist between ontological, epistemological, and material critiques of the (post)colonial. The symposium also featured the work of graduate student and early career scholars, including Virginia Tech graduate students **Molly Todd** (ASPECT) and **Hannah Glasson** (ASPECT), and adjunct faculty **Pallavi Raonka** (Sociology, Radford University).

An Introduction to Community Development

In April, **Professor Max Stephenson, Jr.** served as an invited reviewer for *An Introduction to Community Development* edited by Rhonda Phillips and Robert Pittman (3rd ed.), Taylor and Francis Publishers.

Exploring the Ethical Politics of Storytelling in Communities of Struggle for Social Change

On April 7, **Professor Max Stephenson, Jr.** and postdoctoral scholar **Dr. Neda Moayerian** of VTIPG co-presented with **Shannon Turner** of StoryMuse, **Professor Kim Niewolny** of the VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, and **Professor Bob Leonard** with the School of Performing Arts during an evening of engaged dialogue in a virtual **Learning Circle event** focused on the ethical praxis of storytelling for social change. The event was part of the first annual Virginia Tech Ethics Week.

2021 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA)

Professor Max Stephenson, Jr. served as an invited reviewer of eight submissions for the Social Context of Education/Division G - Section 5: Inquiry, Transformation, and Communities, and eight submissions for Special Interest Group, International Studies, at the 2021 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Orlando, Florida, April 9-12, 2021.

78th Annual Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association

Professor Desiree Poets, Professor Max Stephenson, Jr., and **Cathy Grimes** presented "Exploring the Expression and Practice of Collective Agency Among Rio De Janeiro Favela Residents During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Contesting and (Re)Framing the Dominant National Narrative through Community-Based Newspapers," at the 78th annual conference of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, April 14-18, 2021.

Film Review: Sky and Ground by Tayla Tibbon & Joshua Bennett

On April 18, **Dr. Neda Moayerian** and **Professor Max Stephenson, Jr.** published one of the first film reviews for a newly designated section for the same in *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, providing context and critique for the award-winning international film, *Sky and Ground*. "Among the underrepresented narratives of ethnic minorities affected by the war, the film *Sky and Ground* (initial release, 2017) offers a compelling account of the perilous experiences of a Kurdish Syrian family, bombed out of their home in Aleppo, seeking to migrate to Berlin to join family members already settled there." Their published review can be **[accessed online here.](#)**

Vibrant Virginia Book Chapter Presentation On the Addiction Crisis

On April 26, **Mary Beth Dunkenberger** and **Dr. Sophie Wenzel** (Center for Public Health Practice and Research) presented "[Responding to the Addiction Crisis Through University and Community Collaborations: A Vibrant Virginia Book Webinar](#)" as part of the VT Center for Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)'s Vibrant Virginia virtual conference series.

Professional Development Workshop Facilitators for University of Mosul, Iraq

On May 6, **Professor Max Stephenson, Jr.** presented "The Academic Publication Process" to University of Mosul (Iraq) faculty as part of a professional development workshop series sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and administered by the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute.

Similarly, on June 3, **Dr. David Moore** delivered a lecture on research data management to faculty and students from the University of Mosul as part of the same workshop series.

Local Synergy: University Research Participating in the Dynamics of Development

On May 28, **Professors Max Stephenson, Jr.** and **Laura Zanotti** presented "Tacit Knowledge, Cultural Values and Agential Possibility in Rural Haiti," at the research meeting "Local Synergy: University Research Participating in the Dynamics of Development," University of Fondwa, Haiti.

Community Foodwork and Extension Education: Applying a Trauma-Informed Framework

On June 15, **Eric Bendfeldt**, Associate Director, Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation, and **Professors Max Stephenson, Jr., Kim Nielwolny, Tom Archibald,** and **Anne Stewart** (James Madison University) presented "Community Foodwork and Extension Education: Applying a Trauma-Informed Framework" at the 2021 Joint Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS); Agriculture, Food & Human Values Society (AFHVS); Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS); and the Society for the Anthropology of Food & Nutrition (SAFN), June 9-15, 2021.

Community Change Collaborative Speaker Series



Thanks to the hard work and engagement of the **Community Change Collaborative graduate student members**, CCC hosted several compelling and insightful speakers for its speaker series during the Spring 2021 semester.

Sage Crump, artist, culture strategist, and facilitator who supports cultural workers/arts organizations involved in social justice to build social movements, presented a [virtual public talk](#) and participated in a [podcast interview](#) led by CCC graduate student members **Courtney Surmanek** (graduate student affiliated with IPG and pursuing degrees in MFA Theater, Directing, and Public Dialogue and MURP), **Gabe Velasquez** (MFA student, Arts Leadership), and **Molly Todd** (PhD candidate in ASPECT).

Nengjie Jiang, independent Chinese documentary director, producer and photographer, connected virtually for a live podcast interview with CCC members **Yezi Yang** (PhD candidate in Geosciences), **Kim Felix** (PhD student in Planning, Governance, and Globalization), and **Neda Moayerian** (postdoctoral research associate at VTIPG and the Center for Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)).

Ramon Verdugo and Jessica Bauman of The Frontera Project presented a virtual public workshop and participated in a [podcast interview](#) led by CCC members **Molly Todd** (PhD candidate in ASPECT) and **Jon Catherwood-Ginn** (Associate Director of Programming at Moss Arts Center and PhD student in Planning, Governance, and Globalization) to share their work focused on lifting up stories of the U.S.-Mexican Border that are too often ignored — stories reflecting the richness and complexity of that region — to create conversation and connection with audiences in the United States.

An archive of "Trustees Without Borders" podcast interviews conducted by CCC members and hosted by **Andy Morikawa**, VTIPG Senior Fellow, can be [found on Soundcloud](#).

Upcoming Conferences

14th International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research

Dr. Vanessa Guerra, Molly Todd, Professor Max Stephenson, Jr., and Helena Vasconcellos will present "Examining Collective Agency in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic," accepted for the 14th International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, Montreal, Canada, July 12-15, 2021.

Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) Annual Conference

David Moore, Lara Nagle, Mary Beth Dunkenberger, and Charysse Hairston will present a workshop, "TAP SwiftStart Workforce Development Program: Overview and Assessment Findings," at the 2021 [**Engagement Scholarship Consortium \(ESC\)**](#) Annual Conference, Pennsylvania State University, September 13-15, 2021. Ms. Hairston is the Assistant Director of Workforce Innovations, This Valley Works; Total Action for Progress in Roanoke.

COMMENTARIES & ESSAYS

SOUNDINGS

A commentary series authored by VTIPG Director Max Stephenson.

June 28: [**The "Strange Sap" of Unreality and Intolerance**](#)

June 1: [**The "Banality of Evil" and the Evanescence of Democratic Governance**](#)

May 17: [**The GOP Descent into Nihilism**](#)

May 3: [**Political Agency, Personal Responsibility and our Nation's Governance Crisis**](#)

April 19: [**Ramsey Clark and the Challenge of Morally Imaginative Leadership**](#)

RE: REFLECTIONS & EXPLORATIONS

Online essay series hosted by VTIPG and edited by Professor Max Stephenson Jr., written by graduate students across the University to reflect on their ongoing work in governance and policy related concerns.

May 5: [**Public Values and Management Complexity in the Protection of a Tropical National Park**](#) by **Isidoro Hazbun**, CPAP

April 29: [**Community, Social Imaginaries and Capacity Building**](#) by **Dr. Neda Moayerian**, VTIPG, CECE

April 15: [**Can Natural Disasters Yield Positive Long-Term Outcomes?**](#) by **Dr. Raj Kumar GC**, SPIA

TRANSITIONS

Dr. Neda Moayerian has served as a graduate research assistant and postdoctoral scholar at VTIPG over the past several years, and has been a dedicated member of the Community Change Collaborative during that time. Dr.



Moayerian completed her PhD in Planning, Governance, and Globalization (2020) with a dissertation focused on community cultural development and sustainable tourism. Dr. Moayerian worked with Professor Max Stephenson, Lara Nagle, and Mary Beth Dunkenberger on several community-based research projects and has been an integral and valued colleague in aspiring to and implementing VTIPG's mission. Dr. Moayerian begins a new chapter with her return to her native country of Iran. Best of luck, Neda, and thank you for your many contributions to VTIPG!



Heather Parrish has begun a new position as the Executive Assistant to the Department Head in the Grado Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering at Virginia Tech. Heather has supported many central administrative, technical, and communication functions at VTIPG during her time with us. Thank you, Heather, and best wishes in your new role!

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



Mel Jones is Associate Director of the [**Virginia Center for Housing Research \(VCHR\) at Virginia Tech**](#). Her research addresses housing challenges across the Commonwealth

and nationwide. Mel conducts local and regional housing studies that help communities understand housing market dynamics and develop strategies to meet the needs of current and prospective residents. Recently, Mel completed the **New River Valley Local + Regional Housing Study** in collaboration with the New River Valley Regional Commission (NRVRC) and Housing Forward Virginia. Mel also provides technical and analytical support to local governments, non-profit organizations, and businesses as they develop policies, programs, and technologies that address affordable housing needs. For example, Mel and her team have provided ongoing analytical support for the Fairfax County Workforce Dwelling Unit program and data analysis to support Loudoun County's housing strategy.

Mel and the Center are committed to building and contributing to research teams that can address any housing challenges Virginia communities face. As such, Mel and VCHR have collaborated with VTIPG faculty on a number of projects. For example, Mel, Philip Agee (VCHR), Mary Beth Dunkenberger (VTIPG), and Lara Nagle (VTIPG) partnered with faculty at George Mason University and Virginia Commonwealth University to document the programmatic impacts of Virginia Housing, Virginia's housing finance authority. Currently, Mel and Andrew McCoy (VCHR) are supporting VTIPG faculty Mary Beth Dunkenberger and Lara Nagle exploring opportunities for recovery housing in Commonwealth communities.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Laura York is a recent graduate (May 2021) of the Master of Public Health (MPH) program at Virginia Tech. Laura concentrated in Public Health Education and received a Graduate Certificate in Gerontology as well. Previously a graduate research assistant, Laura has continued working on several projects with VTIPG and in collaboration with the Center for Public Health Practice and Research since completing her degree. She has loved the opportunity to use her education to be a resource to the community and be a part of the positive impact Virginia Tech has in communities across Virginia and beyond.

In her final year of the MPH program, Laura co-created the **COVID Companions (CC)** program with the goal of improving the quality of life of isolated older adults in the New River Valley. CC aims to do this through increasing connections between older adults and NRV community members and raising awareness of local resources available to older adults in the NRV. The “buddy” program pairs an older adult with an NRV community member to engage isolated older adults via phone calls, video chat, or pen pals. The program also provides the older adult with a free electronic tablet to aid in this communication process.

Laura’s passion is to serve the community through the skills and knowledge she has gained during her years of experience in the Public Health field, and she is very thankful for the opportunities at IPG and Virginia Tech that have prepared and allowed her to serve the NRV and surrounding areas.

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