



newsletter

May - June 2021

Community Events

June 3, Artist reception (William R. [Bill] Snow) at the Montgomery Museum, 5–7 pm, to benefit the Community Foundation

June 8, Democratic Primary (p. 5)

June 23, GiveLocal NRV

July 10, NRV Garden Tour

Chapter Events

Picnic, Thursday, September 16

Health and Wellness events, September 13–16

1st Tuesdays (May, June): Board meeting, 10:00 a.m.

1st Fridays (May-September): Hunger Hikes (refer to President's Message for details)

3rd Tuesdays (May, June): Chapter Program, 11:30 a.m.

4th Tuesdays (May, June): Coffee Chat, 8:30 a.m.

4th Tuesdays (May, June): Tea Talk, 4:00 p.m.

If you would like to receive Zoom invitations for the Coffee Talks, please email Leslie Pendleton, lkpendleton@gmail.com.

Look for a Zoom link sent through email a day before the meeting. The meeting will open at 11:30 for greetings and conversation. The program will begin at noon.

May 18 Chapter Meeting Housing Affordability in Blacksburg *Kim Thurlow*

Kim Thurlow will discuss the state of Housing Affordability in Blacksburg, share feedback received through a recent online public engagement effort, and discuss strategies the town is exploring to address the issue.

Kim is Housing and Community Development Initiatives Manager for the Town of Blacksburg and New River Valley HOME Consortium.



June 15 Chapter Meeting Christiansburg Institute: Storytelling and Civic Responsibility *Chris Sanchez and Debbie Sherman-Lee*

Christiansburg Industrial Institute was founded in 1866 as the first high school in Southwest Virginia to educate the formerly enslaved. It is now a grassroots African American cultural heritage and historic preservation nonprofit. Learn how it is working to preserve the remaining facilities and archives of Christiansburg Industrial Institute and to serve as a catalyst for community dialogue, public forums, and multi-cultural events.

Chris Sanchez is Executive Director of CI. He is a truth-telling practitioner, a zealous lover of history, and a passionate community organizer at heart.

Debbie Sherman-Lee chairs the Board of Directors and is a proud graduate of CI.



In this issue

Hiking in the New River Valley—2

Member profile: Sandy Birch—4

Legislative report—5

Veteran Connection—5

President's Message *Leslie Pendleton*

First Friday Hikes and Food Collection

I promise this is not another column about the pandemic, but I do want to talk about an associated topic that addresses a common after-effect of the pandemic. Bear with me!

The April/May 2021 edition of *AARP Magazine* features an article titled “Your Pandemic Recovery Plan” with a summary that reads, “A year of sitting, worrying, noshing and bingeing on old TV series has done little good for our physical and mental health.” I don’t think I can wholly blame the pandemic, but I, for one, have gained 10 pounds over the last year or so on top of some pre-existing (and, might I say, very frustrating) post-menopausal pounds.

In an attempt to motivate myself to remedy this problem, I’ve been researching the benefits of several dietary programs. At the recommendation of Katie Couric, I purchased *The Pegan Diet* (paleo + vegan) book by Mark Hyman, MD. I’ve also been researching intermittent fasting by listening to YouTube videos by Becky Gillaspay, DC. I have concluded that a Keto diet doesn’t feel like a doable or healthy option, at least for me.

To the major point of this column, what I do know is that I need to get my butt in gear and increase my physical activity after sitting in front of a computer for the last year doing virtual counseling sessions via GoTo Meeting for as many as 28-34 client sessions per week. In January, I came

continued on p. 3

Hiking in the New River Valley: Huckleberry Trail

Beth Grabau with Susan Terwilliger and Pat Hipkins—a traveling trio!

The past year has caused many to rethink exercise opportunities and I was no exception. With the March 2020 closing of The Weight Club, I needed to look for other recreation venues and discovered them in abundance in our area. Before that time, I had not visited many local walking or hiking trails. Since then, I have accompanied several adventuresome friends on trails that I never knew existed. In upcoming issues of the Newsletter, I will report on different local trails for those who may also like to familiarize themselves with the variety of available offerings.

This month's column is a short review of the layout of the Huckleberry Trail, probably the most well-known hometown walking venue. It is a paved and relatively flat trail that extends over 11 miles from northern Blacksburg to the Christiansburg Recreation Center with an extension to Christiansburg High School. Another segment of the trail starts at the Blacksburg branch of the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library at Miller Street and Draper Road and joins the north-south trail near Virginia Tech.

The northern-most section of the trail from the Gateway Park on Meadowbrook Drive to the Blacksburg Fire station on Price's Fork opened in 2019 to connect the Huckleberry trail with the hiking trails in the Jefferson National Forest. The original trail terminus was the library site in Blacksburg and followed the old railroad bed of the Virginia Anthracite Coal and Rail Company from Blacksburg to Christiansburg. In the 1990s, the

Friends of the Huckleberry along with local governments and businesses supported the development and later expansion of the Huckleberry Trail. The history of the trail is described more fully at the trail website: <https://huckleberrytrail.org>

The map shows a simplified rendition of the Huckleberry Trail that indicates access points with some parking. Those sites include the Gateway Park on Meadowbrook Drive, Heritage Community Park on Glade Road, Blacksburg Fire Station #2 on Price's Fork (3 dedicated spaces), the Montgomery Floyd Regional Library (spaces in an adjacent municipal parking lot, limited to 2 hours), the Coal Mining Heritage Park on Merrimac Road, the New River Valley Mall in Christiansburg, and the Christiansburg Recreation Center on North Franklin Street.

The different entry points offer access to a variety of popular walking, jogging and biking opportunities. My personal favorite segment of the trail is from the mall to Merrimac Road, which travels through the Coal Mining Heritage Park. Evidence of old mining operations and the former Merrimac community, access to the park loop trail, views of Slate Branch Creek, and passage through an old narrow railroad cut are highlights.

Another favorite stretch is the newest portion of the trail from Price's Fork to Meadowbrook Drive. This segment provides views of rolling farmland, wooded hillsides and crosses a boardwalk over a wetlands area. Even in winter I have viewed quite a variety of birds on walks in this area.

The access point at the library has historical interest because it initially follows the old rail line. Much of this segment was recently realigned when the Virginia Tech airport was expanded and now follows a very circuitous route across campus and under US 460 to join up with the northern part of the trail. As is the case for most of the parts of the trail in commercial areas, the walk is less peaceful near busy streets. But regardless of which segment you choose, you will find many fellow travelers enjoying this great community resource.



Map of Huckleberry Trail, showing access points



Newest portion of the Huckleberry Trail, from Price's Fork to Meadowbrook Drive

President's Message *continued*

to the hard realization that I can't continue to keep up that pace AND take care of my own physical and mental health.

Speaking of exercise, it's very timely that this newsletter includes a new column on hiking, something many of us enjoy and have continued to enjoy during the pandemic. Obviously, hiking and walking are good prescriptions for losing those extra pandemic pounds. I'm always excited to learn about new hiking



spots, especially those that are not too difficult.

With hiking in mind and given the fact that our Chapter hasn't been able to collect food items for people and pets during the pandemic, I am organizing "First Friday Hunger Hikes" for the next five months. Chapter members can socialize while exercising, making it more fun! We will collect canned food items or monetary donations for local food banks. Refer to the table for details including dates, times, and locations of hikes as well as the local food banks that will benefit from our donations.

I hope many of you will join me for these First Friday Hikes. Contact me by phone (540-230-8139) or email

Date	Time	Location	Donations to Benefit
Friday, June 4	9:00 am	Pandapas Pond (meet at the building with restrooms)	Vittles for Vets
Friday, July 2	9:00 am	Virginia Tech campus (meet at entrance to Hahn Horticulture Garden)	Blacksburg Interfaith Food Pantry
Friday, August 6	9:00 am	Heritage Park (meet in parking lot)	Micah's Backpack
Friday, Sept. 3	9:00 am	Huckleberry Trail (meet at entrance near Blacksburg Library)	Radford/Fairlawn Daily Bread

Volunteer Opportunity: Literacy Volunteers *Beth Grabau*

Looking for new activities as we get back to a more normal schedule? Or a way to give back to the community through an hour or two a week of volunteering? This just might be an opportunity for you.

The organization Literacy Volunteers of the New River Valley (LVNRV) has an ongoing need for individuals to help with various programs in our area. After being inspired by a story on NPR in 2019 about the success of a local individual aided by volunteer John Hess, I walked into the LVNRV one afternoon to find out how I could help. I met the fantastic director of LVNRV, Linda Jilk, who gave me a tour of the facilities and a choice of tutoring opportunities. I walked out an hour later paired with a student who desperately needed basic computer skills.

The organization is located on Main Street in Christiansburg where they have many educational resources, provide learners with computer access, and offer a welcoming atmosphere for those who need the services. The mission is to foster, advocate for, and instruct adults for greater independence through literacy. Programs include teaching basic reading and writing (basic literacy), preparing students for the GED exams, tutoring in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and providing help with digital literacy. Tutoring can be provided one-on-one or to groups at times and public locations convenient to learners and tutors.



LVNRV provides training sessions for those who wish to volunteer and resources to support educational opportunities. Through my experience with LVNRV, my eyes were opened to just how important these tutoring opportunities are for those in need. Can you imagine not being able to study the driver's exam manual, register to vote, read prescription instructions, or complete job application forms? My first tutoring experience was to help a student gain digital competency to apply for a job, a task she found overwhelming and was incapable of completing on her own. The person I am currently tutoring never previously had an email account and couldn't use the internet. Registering for the COVID vaccine was also a recent student achievement.

Tutoring has been a challenge for the past year, but Zoom has been a lifesaver in allowing continuing tutoring opportunities to proceed. Hopefully, widespread vaccination and a continued reduction in COVID cases will soon allow face-to-face meetings and more literacy opportunities for the community in need.

If you are interested in engaging with Literacy Volunteers of the NRV, please learn more by visiting www.lvnr.org.

Meet our Chaplain, Sandy Birch

Since 2010, Sandy Birch has been opening our AARP chapter meetings with a reflection. What to call these words? Meditation? Devotion? Inspirational message? Even Sandy has struggled to define what she does:

All the board officers, committee chairs, and liaisons were recently given a task—to update our job descriptions—so I thought it best to check out the chaplain’s existing description. On our AARP website, I found I am to provide spiritual guidance for the chapter and deliver a short devotional message at each of our public meetings. After 10 years on the job, and often using text from refrigerator magnets and wall plaques for guidance, I’m not sure how spiritual or devotional I’ve been, so I thought I’d change my title—maybe call myself the Invocator, but that sounded too much like an Arnold Schwarzeneger character. Maybe the Inspirator, but that feels like a piece of medical equipment. So we’ll stick with Chaplain (I can hear your sighs of relief), but perhaps expand the spiritual part to represent multiple faiths and philosophies, including secular and humanist interests, and changing the devotional part to maybe inspirational.

In 10 years, Sandy has offered about 80 reflections. Yet, she always sounds original and fresh. Where does she get her ideas? In a self-deprecating way, she mentions refrigerator magnets and wall plaques, but more accurate is to note her keen ability to observe and her sensitivity to the feelings and interactions of people. Her reflections are rooted in familiar, everyday experiences. For example, in March 2016, stopped at an intersection, she connects the all-way stop to a St. Patrick’s Day shamrock. From there, she thinks about order, taking turns, the chance to practice kindness by waving another driver through, maybe receiving a smile in return. Even when a driver does not wait for his or her turn, she can practice patience and forgiveness. She concludes: “So today, perhaps our Irish eyes will indeed be smiling as we approach our all-way stops and we see if we can experience a little bit of kindness, gratitude, peace, patience, or forgiveness—and that wee bit of order that says all is well in the world.”

In addition to the monthly reflections, Sandy prepares our annual remembrance of members who have died. Her remembrances are gracious, respectful, and celebratory, helping us all to remember the gifts of these lives.

Sandy has spent a lifetime in public service. Her first career job was teaching math. When Jeff, her husband, began his position as a professor of statistics at Virginia Tech in 1976, there were no jobs for math teachers in Montgomery County. So she took a job at the Water Resources Research Center, in water conservation education. She traveled around the state to help the public, including school children and museum visitors, learn about water conservation. Her master’s degree is in environmental education.

Next, she worked for 22 years as instructor and administrator for Computer Science at VT. Her main job



Jeff and Sandy Birch

photo by David Knachel

was to teach professionalism in computing. She started two student organizations: CS-squared (CSCS)—Computer Science Community Service and the Association for Women in Computing. Her favorite activity was organizing the Women in Computing Day for middle school girls. She also planned job fairs for the computer science students, including helping the students know how to interact with companies.

After Sandy retired in 2003, she became the Lay Associate in Ministry at St. Michael Lutheran Church in Blacksburg. She worked with senior citizens, called the “OKs” (“Older Kids”). She loved especially giving the children’s sermons. She also assisted with funerals. Ben Crawford, also a member at St. Michael, invited her to become the AARP Chaplain.

Sandy also offers invocations at the Blacksburg Sports Club. For many years, June Mullins and Sandy managed the Children’s Gift Store at the Montgomery County Christmas Store, providing wrapped gifts for all the parents who shopped at the store. They both retired from that responsibility a couple of years ago, and Sandy now works in the Seniors section of the store. In 2013, the Blacksburg chapter honored her service with the Community Spirit Award.

Sandy and Jeff met in a 12th grade calculus class in Seattle. They have two sons, Brad and Brian, and four grandchildren. Before coming to Blacksburg, they lived in Northern Virginia, while Jeff was in the Navy.

Jeff and Sandy are great Hokies fans. They are season ticket-holders for men’s and women’s basketball and football, and they enjoy volleyball and softball. They also like to travel. In April, they celebrated their 53rd wedding anniversary at North Myrtle Beach. They sometimes travel to a city and rent an apartment for a week, pretending that they live there, walking to the zoo, buying groceries, like other residents. They have especially liked Boston, Washington DC, and Chicago. They have enjoyed their cabin at Claytor Lake for 35+ years.

Sandy enjoys the connections with friends at AARP meetings and appreciates how people experience affirmation when they are recognized by other members. Perhaps defining what Sandy contributes to AARP is less in a word than in the way she makes us feel as we listen—hopeful, inspired to be our best selves, able to look on our experiences with a fresh and positive attitude. Sandy sums up her motivation by commenting, “I really believe in love.”

Legislative Report *Doug Feuerbach*

Two AARP supported bills recently passed through both houses of the VA General Assembly during a special legislative session and were approved by the Governor; one addressing Prescription Drug Price Transparency and one establishing a State-Facilitated IRA Savings Program.



Prescription Drug Price Transparency (HB 2007)

According to AARP, Americans pay the highest drug prices in the world and those prices continue to increase at rates far higher than general inflation. In 2017, 23% of Virginia residents stopped taking their medications as prescribed due to cost. The Prescription Drug Price Transparency bill requires that health carriers, pharmacy benefits managers, and drug manufacturers report data about prescription drug prices and that the VA Department of Health (VDH) make that information available on their website. The bill was approved by the Governor on 3/14/2021 and becomes effective on January 1, 2022.

State-Facilitated IRA Savings Program (HB 2174)

It is vital that Americans save for their retirement. AARP reports that workers are 15 times more likely to save for retirement when they have a retirement plan available to them from their employers. Many employers, however, do not offer retirement savings plans. The State-Facilitated IRA Savings Program bill requires the establishment and administration of an IRA savings program through which eligible employers who do not have their own retirement programs must enroll their eligible employees who choose to opt-in. Non-eligible employees, eligible employees who's employers do not qualify for the state program, and self employed workers may also participate. The bill was approved by the Governor on April 15, 2021 and the Retirement Program must be up and running by July 1, 2023.

Another AARP supported bill on Nursing Home Reform, requiring adoption of the staffing recommendations for nursing homes from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), was tabled and will be taken up again in 2022.

Democratic Primary June 8

On June 8, Democrats will choose candidates for November's General Election: Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, 7th District House of Delegates, District A Board of Supervisors. Republicans picked their candidates at a May 8 convention. See [elections.virginia.gov/citizen-portal/](https://www.virginia.gov/citizen-portal/) for information.

Veteran Connection: Books for Vets

Board member Tom Hohenshil has been on a roll! With your book donations and books donated through other clubs and organizations, Tom has collected nearly 2,000 books for our *Books for Vets* project in only four months. Hooray Tom!

To date, participating clubs and organizations have included the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, the New River Valley Counselors Association, the Alleghany, VA Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Blacksburg Sports Club, Mt. Tabor Ruritan, Blacksburg Lions Club, Blacksburg Partnership, Blacksburg Connect, Blacksburg Rotary Club, and Heron's Landing and Indian Run HOAs.

Tom's outreach has also extended into neighboring communities and even into North Carolina. Through Tom's efforts, he has motivated the Roanoke and Pearisburg AARP Chapters to initiate their own *Books for Vets* projects. Recently his friends in North Carolina also made book donations to our project. Thank you, Frank, Sue, Jan, Larry, Michael, Marlene, John, and Elvis!

On behalf of Tom and the entire AARP Blacksburg Board, many thanks to each of you for your generous donations to this very worthy project. Your book donations have and will continue to benefit veterans receiving care through the Veterans Administration Centers in Salem, VA and Beckley, WV. Due to the success of the project, we are also considering ways to expand our project in other ways to positively impact veterans. You can donate books through May 31 at the Blacksburg Community Center.



Blacksburg Chapter #2613

Chapter meetings are the third Tuesday of each month via Zoom at noon. Members will receive the link by email a day before the meeting. Board meetings are the first Tuesday of each month at 10 am.

Chapter Officers 2021

President • Leslie Pendleton, lkpendleton@gmail.com
Vice President • Lisa Moose, lisa.m.moose@outlook.com
Secretary • Terry Wildman, wiley@vt.edu
Treasurer • Pat Ballard, pballard@vt.edu
Assistant Treasurer • Ruth Anne Niles, rniles2@icloud.com

Board of Directors

2021: Doug Feuerbach, Judith Jones, Lisa Moose, Leslie Pendleton

2022: Linda Correll, Chuck Burrell, Kai Duncan

2023: Todd Solberg, Tom Hohenshil

Newsletter editor: Carolyn Rude, carolyn.rude2@gmail.com

AARP Website www.blacksburgaarp.org



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Blacksburg Chapter

Member Application for 2021

mail this form or join/renew online at blacksburgaarp.org/online-payments

Name: _____

Spouse/Partner: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Annual (*Calendar Year*) Dues: **\$15.00** (*includes spouse or partner*)

New ___ Renewal ___ 90+ years old (free) ___

Please consider an additional donation to support our AARP chapter and its projects. \$10 ___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ Other \$ ___

Donations to the Blacksburg Chapter help us carry out our mission and community service activities while keeping member dues as low as possible. However, donations to the chapter are not tax deductible.

Please make your check payable to "Blacksburg AARP Chapter #2613."

Mail the check and this form to:

AARP Blacksburg Chapter • P.O. Box 10082 • Blacksburg, VA 24062