

## SMALL TOWNS CONFERENCE SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

### **Amanda Lawson Pillion, Mayor, Town of Abingdon, VA**

Mayor Amanda Lawson Pillion was elected to serve on Abingdon Town Council in 2020. She was elected



Mayor in 2023. In addition to her roles in numerous community and philanthropic organizations over the years, she currently serves as a member of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Board and as Secretary of the Virginia Commission for the Arts, to which she was appointed in 2019 by Governor Ralph Northam.

Mayor Pillion graduated with a B.S. from the University of Virginia School of Education in 1997, and an M.S.Ed. in 1999. During her time at the University, she served on the Honor Committee as a representative of the Curry School of Education, now known as the School of Education and Human Development. In her career as an audiologist, she has worked in private practice and at the Mountain Home Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Johnson City Tennessee, where she published research studying the discrimination of speech in background

noise and in hearing aid efficacy for the National Institute of Health.

Following the election of Governor Glenn Youngkin on November 3, 2021, Amanda was honored to be named to the Governor-elect Youngkin's transition team where she supported and contributed to the development of the new administration. At home, she serves on the Abingdon United Methodist Church Board of Trustees, the Johnston Memorial Hospital Foundation Board, and the Abingdon High School Athletic Boosters.

Along with her husband, Senator Todd Pillion, and four children, Amanda lives in Abingdon, VA.

### **Delegate Israel D. O'Quinn, Fifth House District**



Israel D. O'Quinn represents the Fifth House District which is comprised of Bristol City, Galax City, Grayson County, Smyth County (part) and Washington County (part). As a strong advocate for Southwest Virginia, Israel works to ensure the Fifth District is well-represented in Richmond. His legislative committee assignments include Energy and Commerce, Privileges and Elections, and Rules. He has also served on Finance as well as Militia, Police and Public Safety and is the Deputy House Majority Leader. Israel is a member of the legislative Coal and Energy Commission and the Commission on Electric Utility Regulation and is Past Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. Israel is also Co-Chairman of InvestSWVA which is a business attraction and marketing campaign working to bring new industries to our region. Israel is Past Chairman of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce, which has Five Star accreditation from the US Chamber of Commerce. Israel is a recipient of the The Business Journal's Top 40 Under 40 award, as well as Emory & Henry

College's Young Alumnus of the Year award. While at Emory & Henry College, Israel played on the

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varsity baseball team and graduated with degrees in Political Science and History. He now serves as a member of the college's Board of Trustees. Israel is also a graduate of Patrick Henry High School in Glade Spring, Virginia.

### **Melody Warnick, Writer and Editor, Virginia Tech**



Melody Warnick is the author of two books about thriving where you live: *This Is Where You Belong: Finding Home Wherever You Are*, an exploration of the ground-breaking concept of place attachment, and *If You Could Live Anywhere: The Surprising Power of Place in a Work-from-Anywhere World*, a guide to how location-independent people choose where to live and how communities can attract and retain them. Melody has written for the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Slate*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Guardian*, and many others, while her books have been featured in the likes of the *New York Times*, *Time magazine*, *Fast Company*, and *Psychology Today*. She's also been a guest on many radio shows and podcasts, including NPR's Life Kit and ABC Radio Australia. A regular speaker about how residents can find and create happier communities, Melody lives with her family in Blacksburg, Virginia, where she works as a writer and communications specialist for Virginia Tech.

### **L. Kimball Payne III, Executive Manager, The Berkley Group**



L. Kimball Payne III, ("Kim") served as Lynchburg City Manager from February 2001 until his retirement at the end of June 2016. Prior to that he served as the County Administrator of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, from February 1987 to February 2001, and as Assistant County Administrator in Spotsylvania from February 1984 to February 1987. He currently works part-time as an Executive Manager with The Berkley Group, providing executive recruitment, retreat facilitation, and organizational assessment services to local governments.

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### **Mitchell Smiley, Policy Manager, Virginia Municipal League**



Mitchell Smiley is a Policy Manager for the Virginia Municipal League for Natural Resources and Transportation. With over 15 years of experience working with elected officials at the municipal, state and federal levels on regulatory he has experience navigating regulatory and funding issues across a number of policy areas including cannabis, corrections, energy, health care and public utilities. He is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University with a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science and a Master’s of Public Administration.

### **Josette Bulova, Policy Communications Coordinator, Virginia Municipal League**



Josette Bulova serves as the Policy Communications Coordinator for the Virginia Municipal League lobbying on policy areas such as education, elections, and VRS. A role held since 2021, Josette also works on the magazine and helps plan conferences for the VML affiliate groups. A Christopher Newport alum, Josette earned her degree majoring in Communication with a double minor in Political Science and Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. Josette holds a Local Government Management Graduate Certificate from Virginia Tech and is continuing her education by working on her MPA with Virginia Tech.

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### **Lawrence Spencer, Town Attorney, Town of Blacksburg**



Lawrence Spencer has been the Blacksburg Town Attorney since 2005. Spencer received his law degree from the University of Georgia in 1992 and worked as an Assistant City Attorney for the City of Virginia Beach from 1994 to 2005. His job involves providing advice on a broad range of topics, with a particular focus on land use and development matters, but his work also includes local taxation, personnel and contract issues.

### **Mike Lockaby, Attorney, Spilman, Thomas & Battle, PLLC**



Mike Lockaby is a Member in Spilman's Roanoke office. He serves as County Attorney for Botetourt County, Town Attorney for the Town of Bedford and Town of Clifton Forge, and general counsel to the Bedford Redevelopment and Housing Authority, the Economic Development Authority of Amherst County, and the Southside Network Authority. While he is comfortable in most areas of local government practice, his primary areas of practice include infrastructure and utilities, public finance/bonds, economic development, affordable housing, and public-private partnerships. He provides special project counsel within his specialties to public entities across Virginia. Mike is Chairman of the Local Government Section of the Virginia State Bar Board of Governors, Chairman of the Local Government Attorneys

Housing Practice Group, Secretary for the Virginia Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors Board of Directors, and a member of the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc. He is also a member of the National Association of Bond Lawyers. Mike earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Virginia and his law degree at the College of William & Mary Marshall-Wythe School of Law.

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### **Mel Jones, Research Scientist and Associate Director, Virginia Center for Housing Research, Virginia Tech**



Mel Jones is a Research Scientist and Associate Director of the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech. Mel leads housing studies and housing research in Virginia and across the country. She specializes in quantitative analysis and data driven policy connecting housing to broad issues including economic and community development, individual economic opportunity, and well-being. Mel's expertise is demonstrated in her recent work: the West Piedmont Planning District Commission Regional Housing Study, the Virginia Beach Housing Affordability Study, and the City of Bluefield, WV Housing Study and Implementation Plan. Mel earned a BS in Economics and a BA in International Service from American University as well as an MS in Applied Economics and a Master of Urban Affairs and Planning from Virginia Tech.

### **Stephanie Davis, Ph.D., Collegiate Associate Professor, Virginia Tech**



Stephanie D. Davis, Ph.D., is a collegiate associate professor at Virginia Tech and the program director for the graduate certificate in local government management, the graduate certificate in public and nonprofit financial management and the graduate certificate in nonprofit and nongovernmental organization management. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in public budgeting, public personnel management, local government administration, local government financial management, urban policy, and policy implementation. Prior to her position with Virginia Tech, Stephanie served in local government for 20 years as a Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology Director, budget, and management analyst, and as Vice President/Consultant for a national consulting firm. Her research interests include inter-local relations, budgeting and financial management, and capacity building in small communities. She served from 2018 to 2023 on the Commission on Local Government for the Commonwealth of Virginia. She also served as a 2021 International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Local Government Research Fellow and developed a manager's manual on strategic planning in small communities. Stephanie holds a Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration, a Master of Public Administration, and a Bachelor of Science in Economics.

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### **Michael Gallagher, President, MK Leadership**



Michael Gallagher has been an inspirational leader for over 20 years in both the public and private sectors as an engineer and a public works director. His passion is to help others reach their God-given potential through his unique ability to recognize opportunities and maximize effectiveness. As a mentor, coach and founder of MK Leadership - alongside his wife Kristin - Michael strives to foster growth-minded individuals to become the leaders they were born to be through a range of life-altering services. As a Maxwell Leadership Certified Team member, he offers one-on-one and group coaching, personalized assessments in DiSC and Working Genius, interactive workshops and leadership training programs that focus on personal and professional development. Michael's knowledge, enthusiasm, dedication, and expertise have earned him recognition as an invaluable asset in the world of leadership development. He continues to empower individuals and organizations by uncovering possibilities for growth, performance improvement, success, and profitability. Michael is a person of value, who values people and adds value to them.

### **Kyle Laux, Senior Vice President, Davenport and Company, LLC**



Kyle Laux began his career with Davenport in 2003 and since that time has served as Municipal Advisor to local governments throughout the nation. Kyle's experience in public finance is diverse and he has led efforts in financial modeling, capital planning and credit rating strategy development for large cities and counties, small towns and regional entities. Kyle also has considerable experience working on behalf of established issuers and entities obtaining their first credit rating. Mr. Laux graduated from Kenyon College with a degree in economics.

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### **LeAnna Surratt, Town Manager, Town of Hillsville**



Originally from Grayson County, LeAnna Surratt quickly established herself as a key leader in local government finance. After earning a bachelor's degree in accounting and a minor in computer information systems from James Madison University, she became the Town of Hillsville's treasurer in 2014. Her earlier career included roles such as assistant to the CFO, auditor, and tax preparer/bookkeeper. LeAnna made history as the youngest person to become certified as a Master Governmental Treasurer through the University of Virginia's Treasurer's Association certification program. She is also a proud member of the Virginia Municipal Woman's Leadership Institute - cohort 2. Known for her successful implementation of collections strategies, she has significantly contributed to Hillsville's financial stability during her tenure. She was recently promoted to Town Manager and retained a portion of her Treasurer's duties. Being part of a small town, she has had to balance various duties from 501c3 management to event planning and project management.

### **Sheryl Bailey, Visiting Professor of Practice, Virginia Tech**



Dr. Sheryl Bailey has nearly 30 years of experience in administration and finance as a senior executive in state and local government and the private sector, including gubernatorial cabinet and state authority director experience in Virginia, as well as extensive higher education experience. She currently serves as Visiting Professor of Practice in the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech and as Principal of Forward Strategies Consulting, LLC. In these roles, Sheryl teaches graduate financial management and public policy courses, hosts the Virginia Local Government Finance Network, provides regular economic updates to diverse groups, designs and presents customized professional development training, and assists organizations with tailored economic and financial analyses that support building financial resiliency and advancing strategic goals and missions.

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### **David Manley, Executive Director, Joint Industrial Development Authority, Wythe County**



David Manley is the Executive Director of the Joint Industrial Development Authority, the public economic development organization for Wythe County and its two towns, Wytheville, and Rural Retreat. Since 2014, David has worked on dozens of economic development projects and aided in bringing announced capital investment of nearly \$850 million to the community which will support approximately 2,900 jobs. In 2022, David served as the 40th President of the Virginia Economic Developers Association, a professional organization of over 600 public- and private-sector economic developers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. David was elected alternate director for Virginia on the board of directors of the Southern Economic Development Council in 2023. He is a member of the non-profit organization board of directors that restored and reopened the historic Millwald Theatre in downtown Wytheville, a co-founder of and advisor for Wythe-Bland Young Professionals (a non-profit service organization), and a founder and co-chair of the Wytheville Wine Festival, a

celebration of food, music, and wine in Southwest Virginia. He also serves with other professional and community organizations. David is a native Wythe Countian where his family's roots run deep. He graduated from the University of Virginia with a Government degree. Prior to joining the Joint IDA in 2014, David oversaw the establishment and operation of West Wind Farm Vineyard & Winery for over a dozen years. David is particularly interested in rural economic development, building effective partnerships, public policy, cooking, and travel.

### **Dana Cronkhite, Director of Economic Development, Dickenson County**



Dana Cronkhite is the Director of Economic Development for Dickenson County and has been appointed as the Executive Director of the Dickenson County Industrial Development Authority. She earned a master's in social work at the University of New England. Dana is a Dickenson County native and returned to her home with her husband and daughter upon her husband's retirement from the Marine Corps. Prior to joining Dickenson County, she worked in the private sector in operations and in business development and marketing in the behavioral health field. Dana's favorite quote is, "Economic development is the social justice movement of the 21st Century." She believes that advocacy and empowerment are requirements for economic growth in Southwest Virginia, and she is proud to play a small part in the

efforts to improve the collective well-being of the citizens of Dickenson County.



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### **John Kilgore, Director of Economic Development, Scott County**



John has been serving as the Director of Economic Development in Scott County, Virginia for over 20 years. He is responsible for marketing the county to recruit businesses and industries by serving as the contact and public relations person for all activity. Other areas of responsibility in this position include serving as chief administrator of the state designated Virginia Enterprise Zone in Scott County; coordinating existing industry programs and meetings surrounding economic development; coordinating the strategic planning process and assisting board members with implementation; serving as liaison between the EDA board and other boards and councils; networking with local, regional, and state economic development groups; and developing and monitoring the annual budget. John received his Bachelor of Science Degree in

Business and Public Administration from the University of Virginia's College at Wise in 1985. He has also completed the Basic Economic Developer Course in Excelsior Springs, MO, the VIED Course at Virginia Tech, and graduated in December 2006 from the Economic Developers Institute in Oklahoma City. In 2018, he graduated from the TVA Rural Economic Development Institute. He is currently serving on the TVA Rural Economic Development Cabinet since 2019, the VEDP Business Development Marketing Committee, representing VEDA on the Rural Board, the Crooked Road Board of Directors (Virginia's Heritage Music Trail), and as Chairman of Friends of Southwest Virginia. He is past President of the Crooked Road Board.

### **Nichole Hair, Executive Director, Mount Rogers Regional Partnership**



Nichole Hair has over 20 years of experience in a variety of roles related to local government. Nichole began her career as a Planner for the Town of Christiansburg. While with Christiansburg, she was able to elevate her career to Planning Director and Zoning Administrator, which led to her desire to pursue a career in local government management. Nichole served the Town of Pulaski as the Deputy Town Manager for four years, overseeing the areas of Community Development, Economic Development, Planning/Zoning, Code Enforcement, a farmer's market, and senior center. Nichole joined the Mount Rogers Regional Partnership, formerly known as Virginia's Industrial Advancement Alliance, in June 2020. Nichole began her career in the Mount Rogers region as the organization's Economic Development Manager, assisting partner localities with special projects related to community

development and economic development. In late 2022, she was presented with the opportunity to lead the Mount Rogers Regional Partnership as the Executive Director. Nichole received her bachelor's in political science and urban planning and a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech. She holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of South Dakota. Nichole is a certified paralegal as well as certified zoning administrator. Ms. Hair serves as an adjunct instructor in the Local Government Management Certificate Program at Virginia Tech.