

>> Hello. This is Janet Michael.

In addition to hosting The Valley Today each weekday at noon on the River 953.

I also produce podcasts,

and I'm excited to introduce you to

a new podcast series in partnership with Lord Fairfax Community College.

Having provided higher education in career training for the past half century,

LFCC is tightly interwoven into the fabric

of the Northern Shenandoah Valley in Piedmont regions.

Join me every week for conversations with current and former students to hear

their funny and inspiring stories as we learn about their journey to higher education,

the role that LFCC has played,

where they are now, and where they plan to go.

We'll also talk to current and former professors about their experiences

and best memories of LFCC over the past 50 years.

Get every single episode as they're released on our website at the

river953.com under the podcast tab or you can subscribe for free at Apple Podcast,

Google Podcast, on Spotify, Amazon Music,

wherever you listen to podcasts,

just search for LFCC Stories.

Hello and welcome to The Valley Today.

I am your host, Janet Michael.

Happy Thursday as you are listening to this show today.

We, however, have pre-recorded our conversation on the Zoom screen.

It is LFCC day and it is Workforce Solutions turned at the mic.

That means Guy Curtis is staring at me on the Zoom screen today.

How are you doing, Guy?

We were talking before the show and it seems like we're

both managing to cope our way through this pandemic.

>> Yes. I'm doing pretty well, and thanks.

I'm glad to be back here on the show.

Yeah, I think we're all doing well.

We're all trying to get by at the college.

We're all looking forward to the holidays and we have a small winter break, but I know many folks who are out there are challenged with the pandemic and how they entertain their kids but also stay busy and stay safe.

We're all trying to do our part to mask up and be safe and distance and so forth.

But overall, I think myself and others are doing great,

but we have an awesome opportunity to share a great program that's emerging for us,

and that's the IT world and the need of computers and technology,

or even more so today because of the pandemic,

I think we've been thrust into it through 2020 quickly.

There's a lot of IT needs today,

and that's why we have a great guy, Ken Blackwell,

here to visit with us and talk about the IT needs of our region and his employer.

>> Ken Blackwell is also on the screen with us.

He is with TeamLogic IT.

Ken, Guy was telling me before we started

the show that you also teach at Lord Fairfax. What do you teach?

>> I do. I teach IT classes,

especially for those classes for like IT help desk

and network and technicians that would work in the IT field.

I teach on the academic side,

two parts of Lord Fairfax in sense,

the academic side and then the more Workforce Solutions,
which is the more direct skills.

I do teach on the academic side.

I like to say that besides the fact that I love teaching,

I use that as a recruiting tool as well.

They're my farm team, if you will,

and my interviewing process is 16 weeks long with

three written exams and you got to show up for work.

I've vetted employees pretty well through that process.

>> That is a pretty sweet deal you got there.

>> I get paid to interview people. It's awesome.

>> Explain, if you can,

to the lay person, IT.

We were talking before we started recording that I sometimes

feel like people hear those two initials,

IT, and they think, "Oh my gosh,

that's so over my head.

It's totally not anything I could ever do."

The truth of the matter is it is probably

something a lot of us could do and we just don't realize it.

Explain what IT is at its basic level.

>> That is a little difficult to do because it is a lot of

different things or there's different aspects of it.

Everything from managing IT for companies in our area here in the Shenandoah Valley,

for instance, managing all of the IT assets and solutions,

everything from hardware, software, network, Cloud solutions.

There's so many different aspects of it.

I guess for a lot of people,
they look at it and it's probably overwhelming.

It's one of those situations where the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.

It can be overwhelming,
but I think part of the program at Lord Fairfax is also quite good at helping to narrow that focus and figure out exactly where the right acumen for that student is.

Are they looking for help desk support and end users support?

Are they more of a tune for network management or network design, network architecture,

and those things, or are they on the software side of writing code,
developing solutions, that sort of thing?

No one does all of those.

When someone says they work in IT,
they're not being very specific.

They would usually need to drill down and say what aspect.

Nobody does everything except for maybe me it seems like,
but most people are much more specialized.

>> From an entry-level position,

Guy, you were telling me earlier,

there are a lot of jobs at an entry-level position that requires some education,
which I know you can get through your FastForward program or your Fast-Track program,

what entry-level positions available to

people right now who may be considering a complete change out of,

say, the tourism industry that maybe they're working in because of the pandemic?

>> That's key if you're looking for

new employment opportunities to align yourself with what's in demand, especially if you're considering a training program, but over the last three months, labor market information is sharing that over 200 jobs have popped up recently in the computer support specialist area. That's just obviously one area that Ken mentioned, but there's a lot of ways as you dive in IT, a lot of directional paths you could go in terms of a career pathway within that market.

Those skills that are needed are a part of a lot of our FastTrack entry level type training programs to get folks ready for that particular career.

Whether it's an ITIL,

which is information structure,

or IT set up,

Network Plus, Security Plus,

are all basic core skills that are needed for that support specialist position.

An also emerging need is a Cloud-based type skills too.

As you progress or once you get into some essential level trainings,

Linux as well as Amazon Web Services Cloud-based training

will help folks understand that environment.

I guess the storm that's been thrust into these jobs that are popping up over this pandemic is because many folks are working from home remotely, they're now virtual, staff needing to up their skills.

There's also some vacancies as well that are being created,

but also more job opportunities.

Like Ken's company that he has,

there's a lot more support that's needed in different positions that he's looking to fill in the immediate future.

With all these jobs popping up, the pandemic has really thrust us in more virtual ways than ever before.

There's a new opportunity at the end of this as well too.

Obviously, the bright side of this pandemic, we're forcing folks to work virtually where businesses are doing things much differently and how they conduct themselves.

Even at the college ourselves, we're doing things a lot differently than we had before when we were in person.

But nowadays with these new jobs that are emerging, it's a great way to get into great paying wage, a long-term career that shows a lot of opportunity and growth.

Of course, just like healthcare and construction trades and other areas in advanced manufacturing, IT has a tremendous pipeline that's always going to be there and a need for.

So those who are thinking about new career opportunities, this is a great chance to get into a pathway that's going to have some great outcomes for them, some great wages to support themselves as well as their family, and some neat challenging things.

If you love technology, I'm a closet IT guy myself, I enjoy the latest software update on my phone or how to convert my Windows laptop from 07 to 10.

Just some of the small software things, but when it comes to technology and wanting to be the local AV Club guy. Go ask

Guy.

How do you hook that up to your TV?

Some of those things, if you have some of those natural interests to get into the technology world, I strongly suggest to look into those careers that involve IT.

>> Ken, when you're teaching a class,

what kinds of students do you see initially come in that are taking these classes?

Are they people who, like I said,

have this interest from a hobby perspective?

Are they people who are very much into a thought process?

What kinds of people are

starting off with these classes and what do you see when they graduate at the end?

>> Boy, that's really hard to give a good demographic.

I've had students in there that are dual-enrolled and are

juniors in high school that are taking academic classes at Lord Fairfax,

and I've had 60 year-olds who are transitioning to a second career or,

in our area as well,

a good number of people coming out of military backgrounds.

A lot of veterans that are probably on GI Bills paying for class, for all I know.

It really is across the board,

but if I look at it from just a professional demographic,

I would say it breaks into two.

It's those that are beginning their careers,

getting out of high school or out of college.

It's odd that some of them have four-year degrees and then they'll go

back to Lord Fairfax for Workforce Solutions or

even academic classes to get more specific skills to help them in the job market.

Maybe they've gotten more generic or liberal arts degree or something like that and they're looking for something more concrete.

I've had that a couple of times lately actually,

where some students and

potential employees actually had four-year degrees and were going back.

It really is across the board.

Again, it breaks down into those that are looking for new career opportunities.

Those that are either looking for a career change or looking at it as a way to bolster their skill set so that

even if they're not necessarily looking for a job directly in IT,

they're still bolstering their skills.

What job out there today doesn't have an IT aspect to it?

I'm constantly correcting people here in the area that they're in

a manufacturing owner of a manufacturing company.

They're telling me, "I make these widgets,

that's my business," and I'm like, "No, it's not.

Your business is doing really good transactions with Walmart and Amazon.

Don't kid yourself."

It's not usually about your product anymore.

It's about how easy it is for the customer to do business with you.

That's an IT thing.

It's not a widget thing.

>> Well, their manufacturing process too is also an IT thing,

because you have to get that widget from inception to an actual final product,

which more often than not involves computers

and machinery that is running on some IT process.

>> I'll give you a great example of that.

I've been working with a small company here.

They're based in Ashburn, but they got a manufacturing facility here in Winchester.

They make custom doormats.

You can order these things with your initials on them or welcome home or whatever you want on them.

Those are customized.

They're made overseas in India and I think Egypt or somewhere.

But they're customized here.

So part of the work that we're doing with them was assembling and helping them create CNC printers, which is basically an inkjet printer about the size of a ping-pong table.

They print these things with pneumatics and robotics and everything that's done automatically.

The customer goes online on a website and tells them how they want it monogrammed or whatever.

It goes and it prints them out on these big tables.

So you think you're in the doormat business, but you're really not, you're in the technology business because that's what facilitates the work that you do.

There's that aspect of it to the manufacturing side of it in the robotics and automation.

But then there's the back-end processing and transaction processing and the business side of things, everything from marketing, transaction processing, and so forth.

It really cuts across the board, security cameras, Internet and Wi-Fi access throughout the plant.

I could just go on and on, the technology touches everything.

>> I think that's what Guy goes back to what we were saying earlier, is that you really saying IT isn't necessarily what people think it is because there are 100 or 1,000 little things under that umbrella that could be in your wheelhouse that maybe you're discounting and you shouldn't be?

>> Yeah. I think

the speaking advanced manufacturing in other industries like health care, for example,

their IT is so large,

and so part of our day-to-day business and

what's coming in the future it's a great choice to get into IT for sure.

There are so many opportunities and pathways that people don't really consider.

I think that's something that what Ken was speak to.

That was a great example to see how two industries are working

together to provide a service or product, and it's all through the web.

Now with the way we're doing business these days,

what this pandemic and what we're facing in terms of the new normal,

there is a huge skills gap.

There's a lot of folks out there who have the potential,

but they don't have the necessary skills that keep moving forward,

and all of our courses and programs are aligned to do that at the college.

We're very excited about the new year,

what it would have to provide for those,

we're looking for those great opportunities to get into

some type of new career pathway

that's going to provide long-term benefits for them and their family.

>> Well, let's take a quick break.

When we come back, Guy, I do want to make sure we talk a little bit about the Fast Track program because I think it's a phenomenal program and that you can get through it quickly and that there is some funding available for people who are taking some of those classes, and the guaranteed interview, that I know Ken offers through his company as well if you're going through those classes.

Let's take a break. We come back, we'll talk a little bit about that and maybe talk some more with Ken about what he sees from an owner of an IT company here at Winchester.

Ken, what you see the needs are for employees for you?

When we come back in just a couple of minutes, we are on the Zoom screen.

Guy Curtis is with us from LFCC Workforce Solutions.

Along with him is Ken Blackwell, from Team Logic, IT, we'll come back and talk more with them after this break.

>> Do you know anyone who is struggling with financial hardships because of coronavirus?

Our new webinar called, coping with the money crunch can help.

We'll talk about immediate options to consider, revising or creating a spending plan and lots of community resources, then we'll cover how to narrow your priorities, contact creditors, and avoid scams and risky loans.

The webinar is free and you can either join by phone or through Zoom on a smart phone, tablet, or computer.

You can find out more by visiting the Northern Shenandoah Valley Financial Education Program on

Facebook or calling Karen Poff at 5-406-354-549.

Let me show you how to make your own plan or help someone you care about get through the crisis.

Call 6-354-549 or visit @nsvfinancialeducation on Facebook today.

>> Welcome back to The Valley Today,

I am your host, Janet Michael.

Happy Thursday, as you are listening to the show today,

we of course have pre-recorded on the Zoom screen.

It is LFCC day.

Guy Curtis is joining us from

LFCC Workforce Solutions along with him on the Zoom is Ken Blackwell, from Team Logic, IT.

Guy, when we went to break, we were talking a little bit about all of the different types of jobs that fall under that IT umbrella.

I'm going to have Ken give us a rundown of what an entry-level position looks like.

But before we do that,

explain the Fast Track program to me one more time.

>> Sure, it depends on the track you're looking to get into.

We have a Fast Track program called IT Fundamentals.

It's a great way to prep and certify in the CompTIA World.

I guess that's one of the beginning of programs that we have as far as Fast Track.

We call that a Fast Track program because it's a short period of so many weeks.

A lot of them are about 4-6 weeks depending on the program you start off with.

But we do have some other long-term credentials or certifications and career studies certificates on the academic side of the college, as well as the non-credit side,

which helps students either depending on their situation,

there's a lot of training that could be provided in a short period of time or longer period time, depends on where the student comes from that's some of the things that Ken spoke too,

there's a lot of different types of students that come to us.

If you need a job immediately,

the Fast Track programs are what you're looking for, whether it's CompTIA, getting started in that CompTIA World.

Amazon Web Services as you grow your skill

set and branch off into Cloud and other different types of areas.

They all support a lot of local in-demand jobs that we mentioned earlier, which is the computer support specialist.

That's one entry point.

But there's some other programs at the college that do fit.

If you want to get into software development, web design, networking,

there's other ways to branch off that depending on

your interesting desires and your abilities,

there are some branches that you can get into IT that support a lot of industries, that could provide great career opportunities.

With some of the programs within Workforce that we wanted to mention that Ken's company supports is also a guaranteed job interview.

A lot of the CompTIA,

Fast Track programs over a short periods of time,

lead themselves to the next step.

For the first program to complete,

which is the CompTIA A plus program

that offers your first opportunity to guaranteed interview.

Or you can sit on one of Ken's classes and at the end of 16 weeks, we'll interview you for a job opportunity.

But anyway, it's good to know where you can be connected with folks like Ken.

But also if you're looking for a quick way to interview,

you can interview after completing a few of

our Fast Track programs with guaranteed jobs with local companies.

We have at least seven or eight other companies besides Ken's company.

So depends on the time of the year and the need.

But of course now, many companies are looking for

those IT professionals to help the skills that they're trying to address.

Those are many of those.

The other thoughts side of the two is a lot of these Fast Track programs come with fast-forward funding to subsidize 2/3 of the cost of the course.

Most cases, as soon as only you're paying a third of

the price and even less depending on their financial situation.

We have a new program that's actually about to expire.

I hate to mention it out,

because we have a show that's far going to be old news in about a week or two.

But anyways, we have a program called REV that's covering up to \$1,500 towards courses.

We also have an area where if you're looking into get into some of the degree programs up to

\$3,000 worth of a credit and it's called REV, Re-Employing Virginians.

That's a new funding source that's quickly going to expire on December 14th.

But fast-forward, we also have many

of local localities that support us with care scholarships.

At any rate, let us do the navigating for you in terms of funding,

a lot of the Fast Track programs do have funding and whether or not you're impacted by

COVID-19 due to job loss or reduction in hours, or reduce in pay.

We have a lot of funding sources.

A lot these Fast Track, there's a lot of number of options to fund the course for you to get started, to get into a career quickly.

>> Don't like cost or tuition be the barrier to making the phone call, because you're going to find once you make the phone call that it's probably not the barrier that you thought it was.

>> Absolutely. There's so many funding options when it comes to these unique grants are timely because of their impact of COVID-19, what localities are trying to do to support our individuals within the community, but also a lot of student that worked for you.

If you are interested in some of these areas, there's a good chance that most of the funding for these programs will be taken care for you.

>> Ken, in the first segment,

Guy was talking about the need for computer support specialist and that there were over 200 job listings for someone with that particular title.

What exactly would that person do?

Is that an entry-level position?

>> It can be, there's a couple of different levels,

but a lot of it is at entry-level where you would come in basically manage problem incidences from the customers they're

calling in with a problem or maybe some system has automatically detected a problem.

The nature of the work is it's different,

not just every day, but it seems like every few minutes.

The phone rings or something comes in on an automated system and the job is to go out and triage that to try to figure out if you can solve it.

If it requires this technical skill beyond the entry-level position,

then you would collect the right information and escalate that to a more senior person,

but getting that right so that you're collecting

the right information that that senior person would

need to very quickly resolve the issue,

that's the entry-level position in this world.

From there, every day you're learning something new,

exposure to different types of systems,

different types of problems that you would be investigating,

and then as you hone those skills,

then it makes for a very effective way of moving up the ladder,

if you will, as your skills increase.

But that's what an entry-level position would typically look like,

and that's pretty consistent really across most organizations,

whether it's dedicated IT support organization or internal corporate IT department, would largely look the same.

>> Well, and it's interesting because you're describing someone I feel

like that is good at critical thinking,

likes having a problem presented to them.

Maybe they were that kid that always sat down and in 25 minutes solve the Rubik's Cube,

and when handed back to you and say, "Okay,

now give me something else to try and figure out," but doesn't want

a job that is the same thing at the same time every single day.

Even though I say that, there are IT jobs that are that,
that are very much if this, then that.

It really does have a wide range of people and skill sets under that IT umbrella.

>> I think in this world that I'm in,

this type of business,

the soft skills, the people skills are a huge part of that as well.

Having someone really good technically but difficult to communicate with,
impatient, any other negative attributes

about them typically don't do well in this type of an environment.

They don't need to be just absolutely outgoing life of the party,

but they need to have some ability to communicate with people,

to show empathy with the customer,

and understand that if the customer is calling us,

overwhelming majority of our customers are commercial,

if they're calling, they have better things to do.

They're not lonely, they're not just looking for someone to talk to you.

They've got a problem and they need it resolved in

a reasonable period of time because it has a business impact.

The other nice thing I think about this is when you

get exposure to a lot of different types of businesses,

as I said a minute ago,

one minute I'm working on

someone printing door mats and the next minute they're manufacturing food,

and the next minute I'm talking to someone who's

in a medical practice and they've got a patient that,

for whatever reason, technology is keeping them

from giving the level of care that they need.

It literally is across the board different types of industries, and we get a lot of exposure to those types of industries as well.

As an entrepreneur, that's something that I really enjoy, is helping my customers be successful in their business, knowing that that's what makes me successful.

>> Well, and it really is one of those things where you'll put your blinders on because you're going to be completely shocked when you get into this field about the opportunities and the people and the businesses that you can come into contact with.

It could bring your next career opportunity or your next husband or wife or any number of different things.

>> Sure. Absolutely. We're out and about in the community.

Even in COVID periods and stuff like this,

been somewhat challenging for us because a lot of what we do is through the Internet,

through phones and things like that,

but there are certain times when there's just nothing

that takes the place of someone there to try and screw or push a button.

We have to be there on site.

So we have to be super careful about that and work with our customers,

but it does give us exposure to a lot of

different businesses throughout the Shenandoah Valley in Northern Virginia?

>> I think that would be the one thing that would keep me from going full on into IT,

is that I've got to be hands on.

I can't talk somebody through how to fix anything,

even when I'm trying to walk them through how to do something as simple as Facebook.

I'm like, "No, I need to see what you are doing so that I can tell you what you are doing wrong."

I'm way more hands-on than I think IT would allow for me to be right now.

Guy, I know, before we wrap up,

you have an information session that's coming up in January.

Give me the details for that.

>> Certainly. We have an online IT information session,

so you can watch it live on January 14th from 4:00-5:00 PM, it's a Thursday.

If you preregister, we'll get you the Zoom link details.

That's an introduction to a lot of the IT credentials and certifications that we offer within the workforce area and fast-track programs that are offered at the college.

That's a great time to really learn more.

If you can't make that day and time,

you can pre-register and you'll get the on-demand replay afterwards,

so that's another new thing too.

A lot of our information sessions and other new virtual thing that we've been able to do is do replays so that people can watch them at their convenience.

That's a great way to get started.

Many of the programs that are kicking off for the college

are starting late January, early February,

so depending if you're all looking to get into

a long-term degree credit program

or if you're looking for a fast track training program opportunity,

they are starting early in the year,

but the session on the 14th of January is a great way to learn more about those.

Some questions with our workforce coach,

who's not in place but will answer some of those tough questions.

I'll put a face with the name thing.

We also have our program manager there, Sam Brill.

She'll give some more information about our IT programs and how companies like Ken's are hiring directly from our program.

That's a great way to connect some of the dots, figure out your next steps in terms of your IT career, and we hope to see people show up for that one.

If not, definitely reach out.

If that is not a good day and time, we're more than happy to help work with you.

Our workforce coach, Julia, she just started with us recently.

She has a ton of experience with helping folks navigate through this career of decisions.

We also have a ton of online resources too, which is the LFCC online career coach, or you can provide

a few simple answers to a set of questions to see if IT is the right career for you.

We have some time resources as well as staff to help guide folks and help them make the best decision for themselves and their family.

>> Lfccworkforce.com is the best place for them to start to get all of that?

>> Correct. Lfccworkforce.com is a great place to look for

the IT certification online information session happening January 14th, or you also can take a look at a few of our pages there.

If you're a prospective student looking for the handbooks and how to get started some of these courses,

we have a quick direct link there too.

I won't say it out loud because it's very long,

but if you search it through our site,

if you reach out to myself,

we're happy to help you direct you where you need to go,

but lfccworkforce.com is a great place to start for that session.

>> Awesome. Well, we are going to wrap up our conversation today for LFCC day.

We have been chatting on the Zoom screen with Guy Curtis from LFCC Workforce Solutions.

Joining him is Ken Blackwell from TeamLogic IT.

Thank you both for meeting me on the Zoom screen this morning, I do appreciate it.

>> Thanks, Janet.

>> Thank you, Janet. Great to see you.

>> I will be back tomorrow. I have a brand new episode of The Valley Today ready to go

for you just a few minutes afternoon. Meet me here then.