

# OPINION



FROM THE DESK OF  
**SENATOR  
FRANK RUFF**

for almost twenty years, there have been stories from some schools that almost every student graduates with straight 'A's. Twenty years ago, a Princeton official explained this away by saying "that they only accepted the brightest students, therefore, they deserved high grades".

This process and the goal of being able to claim high graduation rates, has led to grade inflation. The result is that employers are concerned that many young people are not properly ready to enter the workforce. In some cases, they lack the knowledge expected for the job. In other cases, it is a lack of work ethic. This may explain why too many college graduates have not been able to find employment equal to their degree.

### Another Alternative

College graduates and dropouts are sometimes saddled with debt without a degree that is valuable in the job market. Meantime, many skilled professions are begging for employees. I have spent much time and energy to change this equation. My efforts have led to fast short-term training programs that guarantee useful certification in needed fields.

The 'great recession' hit a dozen years ago; it was inane to expect a laid-off worker to train for two years to learn new skills. I pushed for training that would take weeks rather than years. Additionally, students would be taught to the level in which they can be independently certified in the field in which they were trained.

These students, whether they be recent high school graduates or more experienced workers, are now in the workforce with little or no debt. We now have students that did dual enrollment at the community college. In one case, a student at eighteen years of age upon graduation of high school received a job offer of \$60,000 to start.

I am proud that we have successfully trained many to be truck drivers, welders, electricians, mechanists, as well as many other specialties.

### College Options

The takeaway from all this is that students and families have options. When considering options, look at the right education for you, not the most glamorous. The most important issue is finding a career that pleases you. Understand that employers want knowledgeable employees with a good work ethic. As I told a group of educators years ago, "you measure success in degrees, we in the real world measure success by your value to a business."

We love to hear from you! You can reach us at [Sen. Ruff@verizon.net](mailto:Sen.Ruff@verizon.net), 434-374-5129, or P.O. Box 332, Clarksville, VA 23927.

## Ebony eligible for Historic District nomination

At the March meeting of the Brunswick County Board of Supervisors Anne Hartley shared exciting news about the Ebony community during the Citizen's Comment portion of the meeting. The announcement started with a reminder of the highly coveted and reprinted Ebony history book that was compiled over a 6-year period and published by the families of the community in 1993. It was presented to the Board at the January 2022 meeting.

Continuing on the path of recognizing the Ebony community and its significance, on February 2, 2023, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) National Register Evaluation Committee and subsequently on March 16<sup>th</sup> the Virginia State Board Review have approved a proposed section of the original Ebony, Virginia community as eligible for Historic District nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. Excerpts from the DHR notification letter follow:

*Ebony Historic District was recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion A (Community Development, Commerce), Criterion C (Architecture), with a period of significance of 1870-1962, beginning with the estimated construction date of the Ebony Post Office and ending with the construction of the Ebony General Store in 1962. The committee recommended the property proceed to listing with a score of 39 points. The Ebony Historic District has been recorded as VCRIS DHR File No. 012-5368.*

*The DHR National Register Evaluation Committee was impressed by Ebony, a historic rural village that has minimal modern intrusion. While many rural villages feature historic stores, Ebony has four stores that convey the prosperity of Southside Virginia's agricultural economy and the village retains a picturesque setting.*

*The rich history of Brunswick County is underrepresented on the state and federal registers with just thirteen listings, and only one substantial historic district in the Town Lawrenceville. Ebony would be the first nomination of a rural village in the County and as such it is an excellent example.*

The DHR letter also points out that a nomination is not guaranteed until the formal nomination is submitted and accepted. The property is subject to re-evaluation if, at any time, the property is insensitively altered or remodeled, partially demolished, or if additional research reveals it to be less historically significant than originally proposed.

Regardless, whether or not the steps are taken to complete the nomination, this eligibility approval as the community currently stands validates Ebony's historic significance. This is an important reason why there has been so much effort put into reversing the rezoning decision to prevent incompatible commercialization like Dollar General from destroying the historic integrity – in essence, to save Ebony.

The book, "Brunswick County, Virginia 1720 - 1975", published in 1975 by Gay Neale includes the following reference to Ebony: Although Lawrenceville was then [1817] and remained the largest town, there were other places around the county that developed around a store, school, or racetrack. [...] Ebony was the site of a store, school and racetrack. It too, is named after a horse, the greatly prized black horse, Ebony. Many villages that existed then have since faded away.

And almost fifty years later Ebony's authentic look and feel, original stores and post office, homes, and picturesque setting remain today because of intentional efforts to preserve by landowners and multiple generations of community love and pride. This includes original families and those families who have come to the area over the last 50 years as a result of Lake Gaston.

### College Questions that Should Be Asked

As families consider the next step for their young people after high school, it is a good time to review the changes that have been occurring over the years. Once upon a time, college was for those who had worked hard and applied themselves in their high school work. That has changed! Each college has worked hard to increase their size and with that size brings prestige. Colleges are fast to brag when they have record breaking freshman classes. This has created new problems.

It is believed that there is greater prestige in graduating from the most elite colleges such as an Ivy League college, University of Virginia, William & Mary, or Virginia Tech. These schools have increased their enrollment to satisfy the desires of families and legislators that want to please their constituents. This has put increased pressure on less prestigious schools to maintain or grow their enrollment. As this has happened, sometimes colleges have admitted students that are not prepared and, therefore, remedial classes are needed. This makes it difficult for students to graduate in four years.

### Financing

Considering the cost of a year in college, that extra year strains finances. For the colleges, that is no problem. Thanks to the federal government, student financial assistance is available without clear understanding of how it will be repaid and, recently, that it will have to be repaid. Quasi-government entities such as Sallie Mae require little of a student other than a signature. This easy money has given colleges a green light and let expenses run rampant. In an attempt to be everything to everybody, be it dorms, classrooms, or exercise facilities, they simply raise tuition and fees knowing that students will be able to easily borrow the money needed. Inflation of higher education has outpaced everything including healthcare costs.

### What Are Families Buying?

Once getting good grades indicated that a student had worked diligently and deserved those grades. However,

## Governor announces \$4.5 million in new workforce grant opportunities

RICHMOND – On April 3, 2023 Governor Glenn Youngkin announced \$4.5 million in new workforce grant opportunities for workforce development through an open, competitive bid process. The applications and more information can be found on the Virginia Career Works website at [virginiacareerworks.com](http://virginiacareerworks.com).

"We are transforming how the Commonwealth delivers workforce development services to both businesses and hard-working Virginians. Through these grants, we are looking for innovative and proven ways to equip more Virginians with the tools they need for a better economic future," said Governor Glenn Youngkin.

The funds, awarded through the Governor's discretionary allotment from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I program, are dedicated to efforts that boost workforce development opportunities in Virginia. The application deadline is Friday, April 21, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

"A strong workforce equals a strong Virginia economy. We must utilize all our resources to upskill current workers and prepare younger generations for the workforce of tomorrow. I strongly encourage our workforce training partners to put their best ideas forward to maximize the use of these grants," said Secretary of Labor Bryan Slater.

The newly released grant opportunities include five categories:

**Soft Skill Training** – Total of \$1 million with a maximum award of \$150,000 per application. A 50 percent match is required from the applicant or a partner organization. The intent of this project is to provide opportunities for innovative soft skills trainings to individuals in low income and disadvantaged, rural communities. Skills to be provided to these populations must include at a minimum the following: adaptability - how quickly participants can respond to change and how easily they may master new skills; communication - expression of ideas clearly and engage in productive interaction with others; critical thinking, time management, accountability; problem solving, public speaking, professional writing; and teamwork, leadership, professional attitude, and negotiation.

**Transportation to Learn** – Total of \$250,000 for a maximum award of \$25,000 per application. A 50 percent match is required from the applicant or a partner organization. The intent of this project is to increase youth

exposure to the benefits and opportunities of workforce development programs, such as registered apprenticeships and in-demand occupations. Projects should enable youth (in-school and/or out-of-school youth, 14 to 24 years of age) with barriers to employment to visit in-demand trades employment opportunities that are available in their local communities.

**Technical Skills Training** – Total of \$1.5 million with a maximum award of \$200,000 per application. A 50 percent match is required from the applicant or a partner organization. The intent of these funds is to increase the number of technical training offerings in information technology and healthcare fields statewide to meet the growing needs of Virginia businesses.

**Youth Outreach and Marketing Development Grant** – Total of \$250,000 with a maximum award of \$25,000 per application. A 50 percent match is required from the applicant or a partner organization. The intent of this project is to develop and implement outreach programs that engage and inspire high school students to pursue education, training, and careers in the skilled trades. Outreach strategies must educate parents, students and guidance counselors on the benefits of skilled trades.

**Opportunity Grant** – Total of \$1.5 million with a maximum award of \$150,000 per application. A 50 percent match is required from the applicant or a partner organization. The intent of these funds is to increase the number of participants in workforce development training activities statewide, with a specific focus in work-based learning activities, including but not limited to on-the-job training, registered apprenticeships, internships, and customized training. The training activities must lead to job placement in in-demand occupations as listed in the request for proposal's Attachment A.

The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was signed into law on July 22, 2014. Under the ACT, Title I funds are available to states for the development and support programs that provide job search, education, and training activities for adult, youth, and dislocated workers seeking to gain or improve their employment prospects. Funds are also used to establish the one-stop delivery system for workforce development services.

Each year, the Governor has discretion over a portion of the funds that may be distributed to projects based on a competitive grant process.

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### Our Mission: to be a written and visual record of what makes our community special

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