



**CONTACT:**

Carl Mitchell, Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc. CEO & President, (540) 831-6398  
Susan Dickerson, Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc. Marketing Coordinator, (540) 831-6393

***First meetings to help Southwest Virginia small businesses held in Big Stone Gap, Richlands***

**RADFORD, Va., July 18, 2007** – Last week, the first “*Accessing New Markets and Enabling Rural Business Growth*” meetings were held in the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission at Mountain Empire Community College (MECC), a sponsor of the meetings, and in the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission at the Richlands Business Incubator, another sponsor of the meetings.

Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc., the Center and Council for Rural Virginia and Virginia Association of Counties partnered to hold the meetings to assist Southwest Virginia businesses extend their markets to prime companies. The three organizations also want to give Southwest Virginia businesses a stronger voice by seeking their opinions for the upcoming Virginia Rural Summit on Sept. 10-11 in Charlottesville, Va.

Ronald C. Flanary, executive director of the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission, said at the event, “I’ve had the opportunity to work with Virginia Economic Bridge for quite a while, and I am pleased to see these efforts underway for the region.”

Twenty-eight participants represented the following companies at the meetings: Bolwell Financial Consultants, Ltd.; Scott County Economic Development Authority; Virginia Association of Counties; Virginia Department of Business Assistance; Center and Council for Rural Virginia; MECC; Community College; Dickenson County Chamber of Commerce; Virginia Tourism Corporation; Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission; G3 Systems, Inc.; Richlands Business Incubator; Blue Ridge Construction; TEDS, Inc.; VECTEC/Cumberland Plateau e-Business Village; Tazewell Area Chamber of Commerce; Clinch Valley Printing; Virginia Small Business Development Center; People Incorporated of Southwest Virginia; Wise County Board of Supervisors; Performance Engineering, LLC; U.S. Small Business Administration; MECC Small Business Development Center; Data Ensure, Inc.; Southwest Virginia Procurement Technical Assistance Center; Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc. and LENOWISCO Planning District Commission. In addition to the partner organizations, the Southwest Virginia Procurement Technical Assistance Center, the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Virginia Department of Business Assistance presented resources available for small businesses. Sponsors for the events include: Lockheed Martin, Verizon, VCOM - Edward Via Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Mountain Empire Community

College, Richlands Business Incubator - Tazewell County, Crossroads Institute, Radford University and Virginia Western Community College.

“Virginia Economic Bridge has recognized that the majority of economic growth in a community will come from its existing businesses,” said Carl E. Mitchell, President and CEO of Virginia Economic Bridge. “It is our own mission to support their growth through resource sharing and practical, real-world business opportunities. These meetings are just a start to what we can do to assist businesses in Southwest Virginia.”

Mitchell presented information on its Virginia’s Linked Workforce Showcase Program – an initiative connecting rural and urban businesses to develop strategic relationships that can result in federal contract teaming.

Anyone can register for the last three meetings at [www.LinkedWorkforceShowcase.org](http://www.LinkedWorkforceShowcase.org). The registration fee is \$35. The remaining meetings are scheduled for the following dates and locations:

New River Valley (PDC 4) - Tuesday, **July 24**  
Radford University West Campus, Radford, Va.

Mount Rogers (PDC 3) - Wednesday, **July 25**  
Crossroads Institute, Galax, Va.

Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (PDC 5) - Thursday, **July 26**  
Virginia Western Community College, Roanoke, Va.

*Virginia’s Linked Workforce Showcase*, which is underwritten by significant support from Lockheed Martin, is one of the key initiatives of Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc. The business-to-business event provides a unique business networking function by bringing company representatives, who would likely not otherwise meet, together for one-on-one structured discussions aimed at forging successful partnerships. Small businesses present their capabilities and products while learning about opportunities to assist large companies with contracting opportunities that might otherwise be unavailable to the smaller company. Those interested in attending a meeting can register at the Showcase website, [www.LinkedWorkforceShowcase.org](http://www.LinkedWorkforceShowcase.org).

Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc. ([www.VirginiaEconomicBridge.org](http://www.VirginiaEconomicBridge.org)), which is a non-profit organization focused on creating an environment for economic growth in today's technologically advanced society, promotes the economic vitality and external competitiveness of the Commonwealth by fostering business, industry and educational relationships between Southwest Virginia, Northern Virginia, as well as other areas of the Commonwealth.

The Center for Rural Virginia ([www.CouncilForRuralVirginia.org](http://www.CouncilForRuralVirginia.org)) was created by the Virginia General Assembly as a local entity without political status, the Center works in tandem with local efforts and as a partner to the USDA-recognized Council for Rural Virginia ([www.CouncilForRuralVirginia.org](http://www.CouncilForRuralVirginia.org)) to provide the objective, non-partisan data that will enable its partners in government and business to make decisions that will have the greatest, most lasting impact for all Virginians.

Virginia Association of Counties ([www.vaco.org](http://www.vaco.org)) is a group acting jointly and sharing experience to better serve the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia in the face of explosive growth, population shifts, state regulation and economic restructuring. Virginia Association of Counties exists to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of counties to better serve the people of Virginia.

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