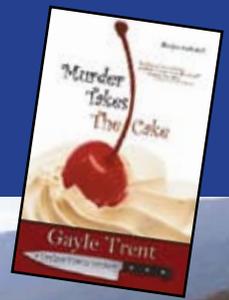


Alumni Spotlight, page 2  
Author Gayle Trent remembers her  
days as a VHCC student.



# The Hilltopper

The Alumni Newsletter of  
Virginia Highlands Community College



Delighted by the standing ovation he received before a sold-out crowd last spring, Grammy Award Winner Richard Leigh has agreed to return to the VHCC campus on Thursday, April 23, for an encore performance.

Leigh's upcoming concert will include the dedication of the Keyser-Aday Theatre at VHCC, a tribute to longtime faculty members William Van Keyser and Gary Aday. The two have led the theater program at VHCC since the early days and mentored Leigh when he appeared on the campus stage during his days as a VHCC theater student in the early 1970s.

Perhaps best known as the writer of the Grammy winning Crystal Gayle hit "Don't it Make My Brown Eyes Blue," Leigh has written eight No. 1 hits and fourteen

top-10 hits. He has been nominated for Grammys in both country and pop categories and in 1994 was named to the prestigious Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame by his peers.

Anne Murray, Martina McBride, George Jones, K.T. Oslin, Ronnie Milsap, Conway Twitty, and Ray Charles are just a few of the musical legends who have recorded Leigh's songs.

Tickets for the VHCC Concert are \$20 and are available through the VHCC Educational Foundation, 276-739-2449. All proceeds from the concert will benefit the Keyser-Aday campaign, which will support student scholarships and the arts on the VHCC campus.

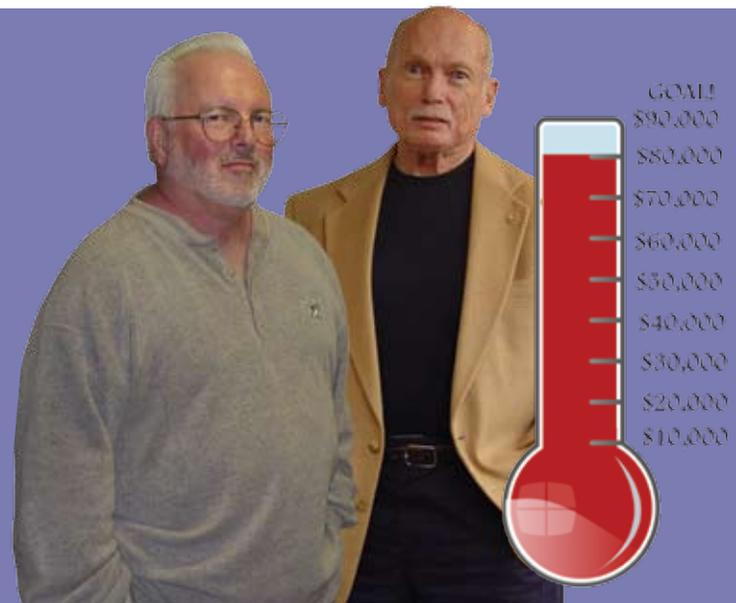
More information about Richard Leigh's career is available online at [www.richardleigh.com](http://www.richardleigh.com).

Playbills and photographs from past performances decorate the corridors that lead to the VHCC Theatre, a tribute to the incredible careers that began when two talented theater enthusiasts met one summer in 1972. Within months, they would be working together on the VHCC campus, choosing scripts, building sets, directing young actors and introducing Southwest Virginia audiences to the works of such noted playwrights as Harold Pinter, Noel Coward, and Samuel Beckett.

To celebrate the prestigious teaching careers of William Van Keyser and Gary Aday, the VHCC Foundation last spring launched an effort to establish the Keyser-Aday Theatre at VHCC. About \$80,000 has been raised to date, but your help is needed to reach our goal by April. All contributions will be invested in an endowment to provide scholarships for VHCC students pursuing careers in the arts and to support art programs on our campus.

More information is available online at [www.vhcc.edu/foundation](http://www.vhcc.edu/foundation) or by contacting the VHCC Educational Foundation at (276) 739-2449.

Your support is very much appreciated!



# Alumni Spotlight: Gayle Trent

Someone once told Gayle Trent she couldn't become an author because she lives in Southwest Virginia. Not true, she said, offering her nine published books as proof.

"It's important for people in this area to know that they can achieve whatever they want to achieve," she said. "You just have to put your mind to it."

Gayle first put her mind to earning a college degree, graduating from VHCC with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Office Technologies in 1987. Many of the faculty members recognized her writing talents and encouraged her to continue her education, she said, "but, like a lot of kids, I was eager to get into the workforce. Yeah, it's a DUH moment now, but then, I really, really wanted a car!"

So Gayle went to work as a secretary, working in an accounting firm, then a law office, and finally for the Virginia Workers' Compensation Commission. And while she truly enjoyed the work, she longed to spend more time with her family and to finally give writing a try.

She began working first as a freelance writer, accepting assignments that allowed her to pursue a wide variety of interests, and eventually working her way up to writing "cozy novels," a blend of mystery, romance and humor. Her most recent mystery, "Murder Takes the Cake," was released last October, and Gayle is now working on the sequel, "Dead Pan."

The creative process is really a lot of fun, she said, noting that she first sketches out a basic plot, then begins adding details. She is always asking the question "what if?" and always looking for new adventures for her quirky characters.

In "Murder Takes the Cake," for instance, the basic plot had already been decided before her agent suggested that she somehow work a popular hobby into the story line. Because she had recently taken a cake decorating class, she decided to transform lead character Daphne Martin into a cake decorator who has returned to her native Virginia to set up shop.

The lead character in "The

Quick and the Thread," the other novel Gayle is currently writing, is the owner of an embroidery specialty shop on the Oregon Coast. Gayle will be using the pseudonym Amanda Lee for the embroidery series.

Gayle now lives in Bristol with her husband and two children and continues to work as a technical writer for a California-based company on a freelance basis while finishing her two latest novels. She said she finds time to write every day, often discovering that her creative juices flow best while she is in the car-riders line waiting for her children to be dismissed from school.

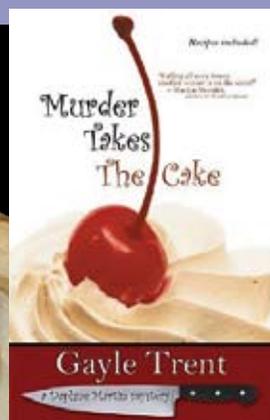
She also finds time to share her love for reading and writing.

She eagerly accepted a recent offer to work with elementary students in Jonesville, she said, explaining that she will teach them to develop stories and put their thoughts into words. She still attends writing conferences, using the opportunity to meet some of her favorite authors or polish her own writing talents. And, she attends book signings, always glad to meet her fans and field their questions.

Looking back at her days at VHCC, Gayle said she remembers the people most. English faculty members Ben Jennings, Judy Miller and Dolly Tarver were complimentary of her writing, she said, while Debbi Clear and Virginia Crumpler in the Office Technologies department encouraged her to become a teacher. She has fond memories of her job as a Work-Study student for Gilda Stokes and Daniel Dye in the Business, Humanities, and Social Sciences Division, she said, and she remembers the beautiful music that Dave Collins used to play on the old piano in his office.

"I was always getting him to play 'Memory,'" she said.

To learn more about Gayle Trent and the books she has written, please visit her website at [www.gayletrent.com](http://www.gayletrent.com).



**Gayle Trent is currently working on a sequel to her latest book, "Murder Takes the Cake." The photo at the top of the page was taken during Gayle's days as a VHCC student.**

# Staff Spotlight: Patty Fullen

When Patty Fullen arrived on the VHCC campus in the mid 1970s, she was a young student with plans of becoming a teacher. All of that changed, though, when she landed a Work-Study job in the Office of Admissions and discovered that she had a penchant for helping students.

Now, with 32-years experience leading VHCC's financial aid program, Patty has seen a lot of changes on campus. New programs have been established, new buildings have been constructed, and the College's financial aid award has grown from about \$500,000 in 1977 to more than \$4.5 million.

"My favorite part has been working with students and knowing that I could help them," she said. "It's been good to know they could concentrate on their class work without worrying about how they were going to pay for college."

A graduate of R.B. Worthy High School, Patty said she chose VHCC because she wasn't quite ready to leave home and, by then, the College had established a reputation in the community as a good place to start. She laughed, remembering that she and her friends used to joke that they were going to UCLA - Upper Corner of Lower Abingdon.

Once on campus, she began exploring different career options - being accepted to the radiography program that was brand new at the time - before ultimately deciding to pursue an associate's degree in Office Technologies. Her Work-Study job in the Admissions Office gave her the experience to land a part-time job as VHCC's Veteran's Coordinator while she finished her degree and then, in 1977, to become the secretary of the Financial Aid Office.

From secretary, she worked her way up to Financial Aid Assistant and then, in 1986, Financial Aid Officer.

How has the job changed in all those years?

"Of course there were no computers back then," she said. "We did everything with paper and pencil. We would help students fill out their financial aid form and then mail it in and wait. Today, everything is online and it can be submitted in just a few minutes."

The number of federal, state, and scholarship programs has also grown tremendously, creating a mountain of



administrative work to ensure tuition is paid in a timely manner and auditors are happy. Regrettably, administering all those programs has left her with less time to spend working with students.

"That's the thing I miss the most because it's what I enjoy the most," Patty said.

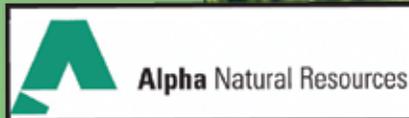
When the time comes for retirement, Patty said she would like to take a part-time job in a more creative realm away from the paperwork and regulations of her current position. Home decorating has always been something she's enjoyed, she said, and she's also dreamed of having a small boutique. Her son, Hunter, is currently planning a wedding, and Patty said also she likes the idea of becoming a grandmother in the future.

Until then, she is happy to be a part of the VHCC family and to continue the work she has done for more than three decades.

"My favorite part has been working with students and knowing that I could help them. It's been good to know they could concentrate on their class work without worrying about how they were going to pay for college."



Put on your dancing shoes!  
Tickets for Spring Fling 2009 currently are on sale in the VHCC Career Planning Office during the day or in the Learning Lab in the evenings for \$8 per person or \$15 per couple. Tickets at the door the night of the event will be \$10 per person. Mark your calendar now, schedule a babysitter, and plan to join VHCC students, faculty, staff, and alumni for an evening of fun featuring DeeJay Blake Frazier at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. The dress code is dressy casual - no jeans or t-shirts please. For more information, please call (276) 739-2574.



The 2nd Annual VHCC Educational Foundation Golf Tournament, sponsored by Alpha Natural Resources, will be held on April 27 at Glenrochie Country Club. Lunch will be served at 11 a.m., followed by tee off at 12:30. Snacks will be provided at the 18th hole. Those interested in playing should contact David Matlock at (276) 739-2473 or dmatlock@vhcc.edu.

Grab your sunglasses, polish your toenails and get ready for VHCC Family Night at the Saltville Wave Pool on Friday, June 26, from 6-8 p.m. The event is free to students, employees, alumni and their families, and hot dogs and soft drinks will be served. If you haven't been to Saltville's newest attraction, you're sure to love this 150-foot long pool that features ocean-like waves and a children's fountain. Need directions or more details, call (276) 739-2456.

What do you get when you combine America's favorite pastime with old friends from your college days? How about VHCC Alumni Night with the Appalachian League's Bristol White Sox at Devault Memorial Stadium! We've reserved the pavilion on July 17 to welcome new friends and old, share a snack, and get ready for a spirited game between the Sox and the Bluefield Orioles. Keep watching the VHCC website for game time and details.



## Where Are They Now?

**Al Dunkleman:** After graduating from VHCC in 1996, Al earned a BA in Sociology from UNC -Wilmington and an MA in Sociology from East Carolina University. He has served as a sociology instructor at Cleveland Community college in Shelby, NC, since 2002. A singer/songwriter, Al released his first CD of original songs "Take the Road Less Traveled" in December 2006. Al formerly served as VHCC's SGA President.

**Beverly Bolling:** After graduating from VHCC with an Associate in Applied Science in Nursing in 1974, Beverly began a rewarding career at Abingdon's Johnston Memorial Hospital. She has since received a BSN and MSN/MBA from King College.

**Shannon Pettiford:** Shannon graduated from VHCC in 2000 and in 2005 earned a BS in Computer Science from ETSU. She has been working in the IT industry for the past 3 years and currently is employed at Regal Entertainment Group in Knoxville as a Systems Analyst. She is working toward a master's in Telecommunications Management.

**Jeff Musick:** Jeff graduated from VHCC in 1989 and transferred to James Madison University, where he received a BS in Business Administration in 1991. Jeff is currently serving as the Senior Vice-President of Technology at the Bank of America in Statesville, NC.

**Christina Danser:** Christian graduated from VHCC in 2001 with a degree in Nursing. She is currently the Recovery Room Supervisor of the Ambulatory Surgery Department of the Bristol Surgery Center.

**Dr. Don Garrett:** Donnie Garrett graduated from VHCC in 1988 and then quickly earned a BS, MS, and Ed.D. Dr. Garrett has enjoyed a long and rewarding career in Education (both in & out of the classroom) with the Johnson County Tennessee Board of Education.

**Dawn Brown:** Dawn graduated with Science and Radiography degrees from VHCC in 1993 and 1995, then attended Radiation Therapy School in Roanoke. After a six year career as a Radiation Therapist, she studied to become a Certified Medical Dosimetrist. Dawn is currently employed at Pardee Hospital in Fletcher, NC.

**Matthew Ratliff:** Matthew graduated from VHCC in 2001 and began a career working as a network technician for the Washington County Public School System in Washington County Virginia. After serving as the Senior Systems Administrator for EMW in Herndon, VA, Matthew and his wife moved to Johnson City, where he is now employed by Bailey Computing Technologies, Inc. Matthew specializes in everything Cisco and Linux and also has built Microsoft Active Directory Enviroments.



Michael Doss, a graduate of Holston High School, is one of four VHCC students currently receiving a \$5,000 scholarship provided by the Washington County Family Fraternity of Moose.

The \$20,000 gift from the Family of Moose has allowed VHCC to establish the largest student scholarship in the history of the College - enough to pay tuition, buy books, and provide some living expenses for an entire year.

To be considered for the scholarship, graduating students from Washington County's high schools must have a grade point average of 3.0 or higher; a proven record of service to their school, community and/or church that reflects the mission of the Family Fraternity of Moose; and be enrolled at VHCC on a full time basis. Preference will be given to members of the Washington County lodge if all other criteria are met.

For additional information about scholarships available at VHCC, log on to [www.vhcc.edu/foundation](http://www.vhcc.edu/foundation).



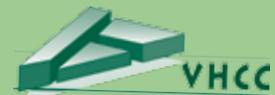
We're so glad we found you!

Whether you earned one of the more than 10,000 credentials awarded at VHCC or simply took a class or two on our campus, you're important to the history and the future of our campus.

Our alumni live around the world, across the country and just around the corner, and they are all entitled to a host of benefits and opportunities planned with you in mind. We invite you to register for our alumni directory, browse our website, drop us a note, and take time to attend a campus event.

If you prefer to take a more active role, we welcome your help in planning a special activity that will allow alumni just like you to reconnect with old friends. Let us know how you're doing, too, by providing a brief update or a family photo for use in our next edition of *The Hilltopper*.

You can join the Alumni Association via our website at [www.vhcc.edu/alumni](http://www.vhcc.edu/alumni) or contact Anne Dunham in the Office of Public Relations, Marketing and Alumni Development at (276) 739-2456 or [adunham@vhcc.edu](mailto:adunham@vhcc.edu). The mailing address is P.O. Box 828, Abingdon, VA, 24212.



The VHCC Office of Career Planning has partnered with Experience, a powerful web-based recruiting tool used by employers, to provide students and alumni with opportunities to view available jobs and post their resumes. We'll even help you polish your resume before it becomes available for viewing by potential employers!

To get started, go to <http://vhcc.erecruiting.com>, then click on create account and enter vhjobs in the space provided for a password token. Follow the directions to create an account that will allow you to post a profile and resume, and to browse regional and national jobs and internships.

If you need additional help, please contact the VHCC Career Center at (276) 739-2574.

It's been nearly 40 years since the first 209 VHCC students enrolled, taking night courses at the Washington County Vocational-Technical School while construction continued on the College's nearby 100-acre campus.

As we look forward to celebrating this major milestone this fall, we invite you to be a part of the Forty for Forty Society, a special campaign that allows alumni to contribute one dollar for each year of VHCC's operation. Your \$40 investment will provide student scholarships or can be designated for another purpose.

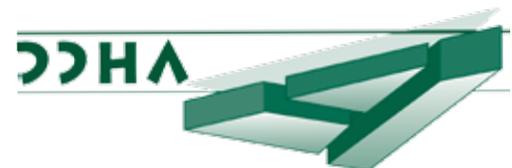
There's no better way to show how much you treasure your VHCC education than by investing in our current students.

Please send your tax-deductible contribution to the VHCC Educational Foundation, P.O. Box 828, Abingdon, VA, 24212 or call us at (276) 739-2449 for more information.



A publication of the VHCC Office of Institutional Advancement - Anne Dunham, public relations/marketing specialist, adunham@vhcc.edu

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