

# BLUESTONE COMMUNICATIONS

The Nationally Affiliated Student-Run Public Relations Firm at JMU



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Julie McCracken is a senior director at Padilla in Richmond, Virginia. Julie received her undergraduate degree from JMU in 2001. While at JMU, she majored in Communication Studies with a concentration in public relations and minored in marketing.



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# ACCOUNT UPDATES



## 1 for All

The 1 for All account team has been working to increase engagement with their First Amendment campaign on JMU's campus. The team hosted a JMU PRSSA meeting and facilitated a discussion with PRSSA members and SCOM students about the First Amendment and its impact on daily life. In addition to this event, the team is increasing audience engagement through their daily interactive posts on the campaign's Instagram. To wrap up the semester, James Madison will make one more surprise appearance on campus. Details can be found on Instagram (@oneforallJMU)!

## Bluestone Communications

The Bluestone team recently hosted an interactive video lecture with their client, Alpha Pitt Smokers about using social media to enhance brand identity and online visibility. The team has also been bolstering relationships with current employees, program alumni, and other communications professionals by highlighting them on Facebook, in our newsletters, and by reaching out to arrange for agency-visits. The team is now preparing an end-of-semester event to display each account's work this semester and to welcome new employees for the Spring.

## Matchbox Realty

The Matchbox team is excited to continue working on multiple tactics including social media management and content creation. The team is also creating two unique video series that will highlight different aspects of Matchbox, as well as an informational booklet that can be used to distribute information to key audiences and potential residents. The team can't wait to finalize these projects and finish out the semester strong.

## Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative



The Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative team has finalized their creation of the Operation Round Up logo and it will be implemented on various materials; including bill-inserts and bumper decals. The team is excited to be contributing to the promotion of Operation Round Up because it is such a great cause. Additionally,

the team has been working on creating social media content. Specifically implementing Instagram Highlights and Stories, brand hashtags, and Operation Round Up story posts. The team plans to continue creating social media posts and graphics, finalizing brand guidelines, and writing Operation Round Up stories.

# SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEES

Here at Bluestone, we like to highlight our employees for all of their hard work and dedication to the firm. Check out each of our employees that have been recognized this semester and what their peers had to say about them.



Ally Fogel

"Ally has gone above and beyond as our account executive. This is her first year at Bluestone Communications, but you would never know it with the skill and expertise she has."



Lexi Bates

"Lexi has really stepped up these past couple weeks by helping take on more creative tasks. She is always able to get everything done and is such a great group mate!"

"Lexi always has a positive attitude."



Kaitlyn Harper

"Kaitlyn never fails to make sure that our team members aren't taking on too much and offers to help if they are. She definitely makes it possible for us to have an open and relaxed team atmosphere!"



Connor Davis

"Connor volunteered to write press releases and feature stories to pitch our Freedom Food Festival to the media. This is not an easy or quick task and he did an amazing job and deserves to be recognized for it."

"Connor is enthusiastic about his work and brings joy to the firm."



Caroline Rice

"Caroline is incredibly passionate and dedicated to all that she does."

"Caroline did an incredible job at the Freedom Food Festival event. We could not have done it without her and I'm so happy to have her on our team."

**THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR  
HARD WORK THIS SEMESTER  
AND FOR REPRESENTING  
BLUESTONE COMMUNICATIONS!**

# PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT



*By Jordan Bradley, Client Relations Director, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative*

They say practice makes perfect. And it is true--to some extent, at least. The more you work at something, the more excellent at it you become. This concept applies to most all areas of life. As a high school athlete, my coaches always told us that practice was the only way to improve our skills. As a dancer, choreographers offered faithful practice as the only viable path to a flawless performance. Apply practice to academic work, and stellar grades are the usual result. This same principle also applies in the public relations field. When we practice our PR skills,

they progress. Working with Bluestone Communications this semester has given me the opportunity to practice PR in a real world context.

This semester, I've had the pleasure to work on the SVEC account team as client relations director. Initially, I was intimidated to dive headfirst into working with a local client, but I can honestly say that my team has enjoyed working on the account. I've been able to explore multiple facets of the PR process. In this article, I'll highlight just three of the skills I've most loved practicing.

**1. Writing.** I've always loved writing. In grade school, writing, English, and grammar were my favorite classes. As part of our scope of work for this semester, our account team was tasked with rewriting the text for brochures for our client. We wanted to create a brochure with simple instructions conveyed in straightforward language.

**2. Social media.** Using a social media editorial calendar, we've been able to draft posts for platforms like Facebook and Instagram. We've collected photos taken by SVEC member owners and have used them as featured images, as well as

utilized the photos for background images for Instagram story content. Additionally, we've penned captions based on SVEC specific programs and holidays significant to the electric trade. Creating social media content for an organization is different from content for personal use, but many of the same basic tenets apply: aesthetic appeal, frequent posting, and audience engagement.

**3. Brand guide.** Our account team has also been actively working on a brand guide for SVEC, which will contain information about the company's values and standards, as well as insight as to the company colors, language, etc. This particular project has been exciting to work on, as it has allowed us to get to know SVEC more intimately.

It's been wonderful to be able to put into practice all of the public relations theories, concepts, and skills that I've been taught in university courses. I look forward to what the remainder of the semester has to offer and allowing continual practice to eventually make perfect.

# THE POWER OF INTERACTION

*By Madison McDaniel, Account Associate, Matchbox Realty*



The moment I logged into the Instagram, I knew I was going to have a lot on my plate. This past summer, I interned for STX, a global sporting goods leader for lacrosse, field hockey, and ice hockey. As a lacrosse player, I have admired STX and used its products for my entire life. Now, I had the power to post almost whatever I wanted to the STX women's lacrosse account that has about 60,000 followers.

My boss was very eager to hand over the account to me. She said, "This is a pretty exhausting task and I am ready to take a little break from it." After she said that to me I naively thought to myself that she couldn't have given me an easier task. I quickly learned that she was right, it WAS exhausting, but I learned a lot about running a largely successful Instagram account.

The greatest thing I learned is that INTERACTION IS KEY.

The more interaction we had with our followers, the greater feedback we would get. The most effective ways to interact with followers are:

### **1. DM and Comment Responses:**

The STX women's lacrosse account gets about 10 direct messages per day either from young girls sending in stick tricks or saying how much they love the brand. Whenever we would respond to them with a "Thank you" message, the usual response would be along the lines of, "WOW! Thank you so much for responding. I will only every use STX products." Similarly, when people comment on our posts, we tried to respond to as many as possible. Just a simple acknowledgment would bring so much joy to the girls and show them that the company cares.

**2. Polls and Questions:** I received an overwhelming amount of information through these two story features. Whenever I didn't

know what to post, I would ask the followers what they wanted to see. Making polls helped me see what the followers want if I was stuck between two ideas. When I would ask questions, sometimes the followers would give me great suggestions I had never heard of! These two tactics were a really fun way to see how I could create content that the followers wanted.

**3. Contests:** If we ever felt like we had been lacking in interaction, we would create a contest. For our contests we would have caption contest, "tag a friend who.." contest, etc. There would be an immediate jump in engagement and followers during the contest period. Not only would people interact with our post, but they would visit our page too. Contests are fun, but should be used sparingly because if you use them too often then they lose their magic of winning.

These are just three strategies I used over the course of my internship, but they were some of the most successful. When in doubt, interact!

## Connect with Bluestone Communications

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 [bluestonecommva.com](http://bluestonecommva.com)



# AFTER JMU...

## JULIE MCCRACKEN

**Senior Director at Padilla**  
**JMU Class of 2001**

Julie graduated from JMU in 2001. She was a Communication Studies major with a concentration in public relations and a marketing minor.



### Could you describe your career path?

I entered the agency world right after graduation, starting as an intern at what was then Carter Ryley Thomas Public Relations & Marketing in Richmond, Va. It was a small, employee-owned firm that felt like family from the minute I walked through the door. That same agency has grown and evolved through various mergers and acquisitions over the years, eventually becoming Padilla, a full-service communications agency with more than 210 employees and six offices across the country. As the agency grew, I had the opportunity to grow with it, rising through the ranks from intern to senior director. I'm lucky in that I've had the opportunity to work on many once-in-a-lifetime kind of projects and accounts, including the 100th anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight and the title sponsorship of the NASCAR Cup Series, and been able to try my hand at almost all aspects of communications across many different industries.

### Could you describe your role as a senior director at Padilla?

I am a member of our Corporate Practice, and as a senior director I am responsible for managing and growing clients, generating new business, contributing to agency promotion efforts, supporting agency initiatives and supervising employees. I would consider myself a generalist, but am passionate about employee engagement, change communications and corporate responsibility, which are really my three areas of expertise. In my role, I typically lead the strategy development and oversee the execution of a client's campaign or program. Every day is different, which is what makes agency life so exciting!

### What is the number one skill that students entering the public relations field should have?

From a hard skills perspective, you have to be a strong writer to be successful in this business. From a soft skills standpoint, which I think is even more important – definitely curiosity! Ask questions, observe, push yourself and never stop learning.

### What is your advice to students preparing to graduate?

Savor every moment, and make the most of every opportunity! You're wrapping up the best time of your lives – cherish it, and then embrace everything that comes next. Trust your gut and don't be afraid to take risks. And, most of all – as I tell my kids – treat everyone you meet with kindness and respect.

### What is your favorite memory from JMU?

I can't pick just one! From living in the Village my freshman year to sitting on the quad on a spring day to amazing professors and hands-on experiences, I loved everything about my time at JMU – it truly is one of my most favorite places. And the people – I can't say enough about the people! I might be biased, but there's something special about Dukes. They're smart, hardworking, fun and generally just good people.