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[Home](#) / [business](#) / [local](#) /

## Jennifer Scott champion for Hanover County

By Jeremy Slayton



Communication comes naturally to Jennifer Y. Scott.

It was true when she was 9 years old and won her first speech competition in West Virginia.

It remains so today as she leads her Hanover County-based business, Touch Points Public Relations, and heads the Hanover Association of Businesses and Chamber of Commerce.

In her different roles, she is an advocate for her clients, for local businesses and the county she now calls home.

"I'm trying to build a company where all of us get to do good work, enjoy it and make our clients successful," said Scott, who grew up on a sheep and cattle farm in West Virginia.

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**It was a 1992 road** trip to Kansas City that ultimately led to her employment with the West Virginia Farm Bureau and started her on a career path that brought her to Hanover County.

As a senior at Marshall University, a four-wheeler was the impetus for Scott to enter the West Virginia Farm Bureau Discussion Meet in 1992. She won the statewide competition to earn a spot at the national contest in Kansas City, Mo., and landed her a four-wheeler for her father.

Scott was joined on the trip to the Midwest by the executive director of the West Virginia Farm Bureau, who acquired a press pass for Scott to gain media access to the American Farm Bureau Federation national event. The featured speaker was then-President George H.W. Bush.

It was an eye-opening trip for Scott, who at the time was a part-time reporter for the WCTR-FM radio station in Huntington, W.Va.

On the return trip to Marshall University, Scott lamented the fact the West Virginia Farm Bureau wasn't working with the media to talk about agriculture issues on the state level.

The director told Scott when she was dropped off at campus that he would be back within a week with a job offer. The farm bureau subsequently created the information director position and offered the job to Scott.

She accepted it even though it was a risk — on both her and the group's parts — but one that was worth it as it launched the broadcast journalism major on a new career path.

"I realized that's what I'm good at — I'm good at starting new things and helping them grow and take off," she said.

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**Scott talks about the** importance of being involved in her community.

She laughs as she recalls how former colleagues still tease her about her networking "rule of Jennifer" — you can't hang out with the people you know; go and network with those you don't.

She often attends Hanover Board of Supervisors meetings to inform the county's elected leaders of concerns within the business community as well as to stay in touch with government affairs that may affect business.

"Jennifer has very good ideas and is more than willing to share her ideas," said Hanover County Administrator Cecil R. "Rhu" Harris Jr. "Equally as important, she is willing to listen to the county perspective in regards to these opportunities."

Scott's dynamic and outgoing nature seems at odds with her self-description as "being more introverted than people think." In high school, she was not the cheerleader, but the mascot — the Wildcat, in her case.

"I'm one of those quiet people who lives to get involved and is not afraid to get involved," she said.

On the professional level, Scott works with businesses large and small. She started her company in 2004 because she sought more flexibility in her schedule.

She had one client at the time and a nine-month window to make it work before using up her savings. Then

she landed a project with Capital One Financial Corp. and she knew stepping out on her own was the right decision.

About 25 percent of her work focuses on traditional public relations. However, the bulk of the job involves change management — assisting companies that are implementing some type of change.

Scott, 41, and her team — Touch Points has three employees, including herself — assist corporations, such as Coca-Cola, Humana and General Dynamics, going through a change that may negatively affect productivity or morale.

"Sometimes you go into these places ... and everyone is trying to get the project done, and everyone forgets what happens to the employee," Scott said. "We're the specialty team they bring in to be advocates for the project and for the employee."

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**Scott said her company** relies heavily on word of mouth.

Reputation is important because it stays with you and follows you no matter where you go, she said.

She gets the word out about her business by being one of the sponsors of the Richmond Forum.

Scott's forward-thinking approach to projects and ability to identify potential problems are among her strengths, said Richmond Forum Executive Director Bill Chapman, who worked with Scott at the now-defunct advertising and marketing agency RightMinds.

"I think one of the real talents that she has is the ability to assess a situation and very quickly recognize the sensitivities and concerns of different stakeholders, even to the point where she is often anticipating stakeholders' concerns that a client hasn't identified," Chapman said.

Scott's well-regarded reputation led to one of the most shocking moments in her career. , Touch Pointswas once hired sight-unseen during a phone conversation because it came so highly recommended.

"That's how we built our business," said Scott, who teaches a reputation management class at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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**Three years ago**, Scott took on the role of executive director of the Hanover Association of Businesses and Chamber of Commerce.

It is a part-time paid position that may seem more like a second full-time job because of the meetings she attends on behalf of the group's more than 450 members.

She accepted the extra responsibility because of her love for Hanover and her desire for it to be the best place it can be for the residents and businesses she represents.

Plus, she has a great respect for entrepreneurs like herself.

"They are the backbone of this country. They are what makes this country phenomenal," she said of entrepreneurs and small-business owners. "They see something and go after it."

Prompted by her love of the county, she was an instrumental force in launching Hanover Tourism Supporters, a grass-roots effort to explore ways to use tourism to attract visitors – and their disposable income – to the county.

"She's shared lots of good energy and thinking ... in moving that project along," said Michael H. Gladstone, president of the business association and a director with the McCandlish Holton law firm. "I think that is an example of her wonderful energy and efforts on behalf of business in the county."

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**Scott traces her work** ethic to her childhood growing up on a 350-acre sheep and cattle farm on a rolling mountain range in Spanishburg, W.Va., just outside Princeton, W.Va.

She was born in Anchorage, Alaska, where her father was stationed with the U.S. Army before deploying to Vietnam, and moved to West Virginia when she was 2.

Her Scot-Irish family of longtime sheep farmers worked the same West Virginia farm since 1888. She said the farm is where she learned about hard work, teamwork and a sense of community.

She sees similarities between her childhood home and Hanover, making it the perfect place to live and raise her two sons. She lives on 10 acres in the rural northern part of the county that she jokingly refers to as a "squirrel and nut farm" because trees are everywhere on the property.

Despite the busy schedule, Scott said evenings and weekends are about her sons and their activities, such as T-ball, tae kwon do and Boy Scouts.

"I think Hanover has so much to offer, a great combination of small businesses, history and tourism," she said. "All of the things that make it a great place to live."

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