

A WORLD OF GOOD

written by CHRISTINA NIFONG



Michael Hemphill began airing Buzz4Good episodes on Blue Ridge PBS in 2020. This August kicked off the show's seventh season.

Creator of TV show Buzz4Good brings heart to his quest to promote nonprofits.

COURTESY OF BUZZ4GOOD

IN EPISODE AFTER EPISODE, Michael Hemphill shows up. Tossing a football. Hiking McAfee Knob. Donning ballet shoes. Typically, he's wearing a big smile, a black Buzz4Good-branded shirt, and an openness to whatever the people on screen have to share.

"Our nation has more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations that employ 1 out of 10 Americans," he intones at the top of each half-hour production, in his gentle, Alabama-accented voice. "But nonprofits often lack the tools to properly promote themselves to inspire more donors and volunteers and clients to their cause. That's where I come in."

Hemphill is the creator and host of Buzz4Good, a television show broadcast weekly on Blue Ridge PBS. In the episodes, a 501(c)(3) is connected with a local advertising firm who donates their time. As the segment unfolds, Hemphill details the nonprofit's mission and the ad agency's contributions. The audience learns about a nonprofit in their community and, while they're at it, some basic marketing principles.

When Hemphill pulled together his prototype in 2019 – featuring the equine therapy nonprofit, Healing Strides of Virginia – he had zero TV experience and no idea if his concept would fly. But year after year, nonprofits kept agreeing to be included, marketing firms kept donating their skills, media outlets kept airing what Buzz4Good was producing, and investors kept funding the work.

This fall, Buzz4Good launched its seventh season. As of this month, Buzz has created 92 TV shows (66 featuring Virginia nonprofits and 26 highlighting organizations in Alabama) and 114 podcast episodes, lifting up more than 100 nonprofits across the two states. Through PBS's sharing network, Buzz4Good episodes have been broadcast in Chicago, Los Angeles,

New York. In 2025, Hemphill conceived of a new way to promote nonprofit work: a live show where clips from past episodes are screened and nonprofit leaders discuss their organizations.

"All of these have kind of evolved organically," Hemphill said. "And I can't say no."

For Hemphill – Buzz's only employee – this work is not about fame or money or ratings. It's simply a deep desire to elevate as many nonprofits as he can.

"Every nonprofit deserves a TV show of its own," Hemphill said. "If there's a way to do that, that's what I want to do."

IN THE BEGINNING

When Hemphill tells the Buzz4Good origin story, it goes something like this: In 2013, he was working as the marketing director for the Science Museum of Western Virginia. A colleague brainstormed a fundraising opportunity, the Time Traveler Pi-Miller race. It would be 3.14 miles and held at 1:50 am on the November weekend when the clocks fall back, ensuring that runners would finish before they started. To promote the event, the American Advertising Federation of Roanoke offered a free campaign. Hemphill was blown away by the results: 300 people arrived in their headlamps. He never forgot the impact of having a professional team offer pro bono support.

By 2019, Hemphill had been marketing director at Roanoke Catholic School for the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: West End Center Executive Director Karen Pills (left), Michael Hemphill, and 5Points Creative owner Bruce Bryan prepare for the Buzz4Good watch party held at The Grandin Theatre in 2022. Episodes are aired at a local theater in the nonprofit's community, providing an opportunity for community-building.

More than 100 nonprofits have been featured in Buzz4Good's TV shows, podcasts, and live shows – across Virginia and Alabama.

Former Virginia Tech videographer Dan Miroli has filmed nearly every Virginia-based Buzz4Good show, including one showcasing Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center.



previous four years. As he contemplated a new professional shift, the idea of finding a way to raise the profiles of nonprofits grabbed hold and wouldn't let go.

He reached out to contacts who helped create a prototype show featuring Healing Strides as the nonprofit, 5Points Creative as the marketing firm, an experienced film crew, and two hosts. He screened the pilot to an enthusiastic crowd at The Grandin Theatre that November. After the event, PBS agreed to air future episodes and Hemphill began setting a production schedule.

But just as the venture was taking off, COVID hit. Hemphill's dream seemed destined to be one of its casualties. In one last swing, he asked friends if they'd be willing to bridge the gap. Longtime Virginia Tech videographer Dan Miroli stepped up to film. Salem financial planner and philanthropist Jim Pearman agreed to cover expenses.

"And as for the show's host? Well, I was who I could afford," Hemphill said.

The bare bones team pulled together three more episodes in which Lead Point

NONPROFITS



LEFT: In 2026, Hemphill launched a Substack, *Night is Coming*, and hopes to publish a book detailing the story of the Christiansburg Institute, a beloved school for black students that was shut down once Virginia schools were desegregated.

ABOVE: Rev. Kenneth B. Wright, who graduated from Christiansburg Institute in 1959. The Christiansburg Institute was featured in Season 1 of *Buzz4Good*.

Digital produced a new logo and website for Southwest Virginia Ballet, Wheeler Media created digital media assets for R.A.M. House, and Wordsprint initiated new branding for Mill Mountain Zoo. The Grandin Theatre again hosted watch parties. Before long, WFIR approached Hemphill about airing a weekly podcast with marketing tips. Hemphill promoted the shows on his website, in a newsletter, and on social media. Slowly, *Buzz4Good* gained traction.

In 2023, Hemphill expanded *Buzz4Good* to his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. In 2024, *Buzz* celebrated 50 episodes produced over five years.

"Every time I'm like, 'Michael you can't do this,' he's done it. So I just quit saying, 'You can't do this,' to him," said 5Points Creative founder and owner Bruce Bryan, whose firm has donated marketing work for 13 episodes. "Nothing he does surprises me anymore."

Across seven seasons, *Buzz4Good* has

featured nonprofits of every kind, from those serving the hungry and unhoused like Feeding Southwest Virginia and The Least of These, to arts organizations including the Dr. Robert L.A. Keeley Healing Arts Program and Arts Connect Neighbors. There have been episodes about Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center of Roanoke, Friends of the Blue Ridge, Habitat for Humanity of the New River Valley, the Franklin County NAACP, Tudor House, Blue Ridge Literacy, the Harrison Museum of African American Culture, among many others.

For the nonprofits highlighted, the impact can be profound.

"It's an opportunity that we don't get very often in the nonprofit world," said West End Center for Youth Executive Director Karen Pillis. "To say a dream out loud and have someone help you make it come true. It's really special."

West End Center was featured in 2022, in Pillis' first year as leader of the after-school

program. "We still use [the episode] for marketing purposes," she said. In addition, the video helped the center win a significant grant and led to ongoing website support from 5Points Creative. "We were just really blown away with all that happened through *Buzz4Good*."

AN 'ORIENTATION OF SERVICE'

Hemphill carries a notebook with a list of nonprofits hoping to be included on *Buzz4Good*. "I've yet to find a nonprofit that we could not make into a compelling TV show," he said.

After initial contact, Hemphill begins what is the most challenging part of his job: raising the \$10,000 it takes to pay for the filming, expenses, and distribution.

"I do feel a kinship with the nonprofits because 100 percent of our production is funded by charitable contributions, grants, and corporate sponsorships."

Once funds are secured, Hemphill and his videographer (Mirolli has shot nearly every Virginia episode) sit down with the nonprofit's leaders. Total production time is two months. Once an episode airs, the nonprofit is free to use it however they like.

For Spikenard Farm Honeybee Sanctuary, 41 acres in Floyd County featured in Season 4, sharing the video on social media and to their large and international newsletter audience was a powerful way to reach far-flung members.

"It just created a lot of good energy for the community," said Spikenard Director Alex Tuchman. The broadcast was so meaningful that Tuchman asked if there might be an opportunity for a second episode, this time celebrating the nonprofit's 20th anniversary in 2026. Hemphill agreed.

The new episode was a departure. It didn't include marketing help, but solely shared the story of Spikenard — its German founder, its lauded biodynamic principals, its innovative concept of healing people, land, and insect populations as a holistic endeavor.

Tuchman said the *Buzz4Good* team went above and beyond, both times.

"You could really tell that there's a lot of love and heart and care ... and the orientation of service," Tuchman said. "It was just so beautiful and inspiring." ☆

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