

CONNECTION



Soul Food Kentucky

The helping power
of community

**BIG SANDY HEATING
& COOLING**

TRAVEL TIPS



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Protecting the Vulnerable

The internet powers many indispensable resources, including educational opportunities, telehealth, deployment of smart ag tools and the ability to stay in touch with loved ones. However, it is also the most common place for the recruiting and selling of sex-trafficking victims.

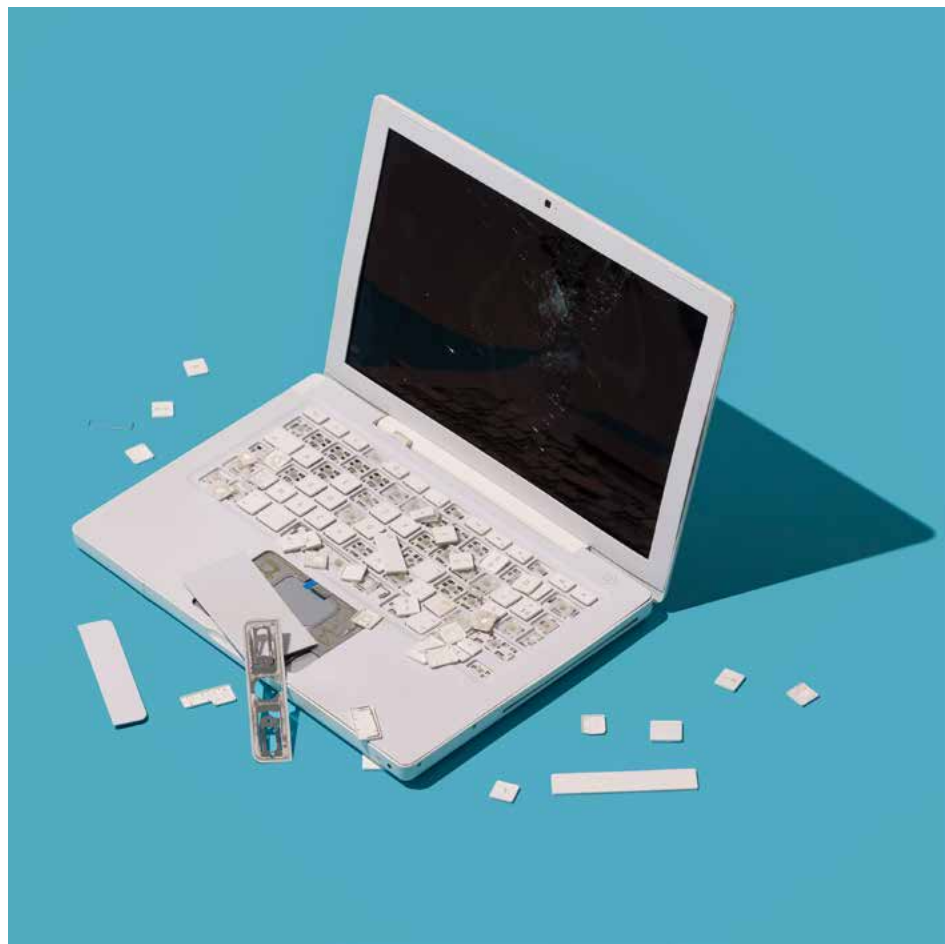
More than 150,000 new escort ads are posted online in America daily. Seventy-five percent of underaged victims report being sold online, and human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal activities in our country.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month, and as we raise awareness to combat these crimes, NTCA members, and the association as a whole, are proud to collaborate with Guardian Group and Operation IFAST—ISPs Fight Against Sex Trafficking. It has been beyond gratifying to see the number of NTCA members step up to be the front line of defense with their “boots on the ground” staff.

Originating with CLtel in Clear Lake, Iowa, and in coordination with Guardian Group, a team of former intelligence professionals, Operation IFAST works to prevent and disrupt sex trafficking of women and children in the United States. Over 100 companies in 22 states and over 1,400 of their employees participate in the program, which helps educate and train their teams to report potential trafficking situations to local law enforcement or the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

NTCA members are committed to helping keep their communities safe and being part of the solution.

To learn more about Operation IFAST, visit guardiangroup.org/operation-ifest. 



Adobe Stock image by stokkete

Hard Reset

What to do with old, broken devices


Many people have outdated or unused electronic devices they aren't sure what to do with after the holidays. While recycling is good for the environment, many phones and tablets also contain rare materials that are much more useful in another device than sitting in a landfill.

Here's how to dispose of your old devices properly:

Phones: Most phone manufacturers will let you trade in your old phone when you buy a new one. But if you still have old devices, retailers like Best Buy, Staples and Home Depot offer in-store drop-off for unused devices. EcoATM also has more than 6,000 kiosks across the country where you get cash for your old phone.

Computers: If you can't upgrade your computer to extend its lifespan, many manufacturers have take-back programs. Barring that, Best Buy has a trade-in calculator for PCs, while Apple offers its own recycling program for Macs. You can also donate your computer to an organization like Computers with Causes that will find students, foster homes or shelters where your computer can make a difference.

TVs: Often, finding a new home for your TV is the best option if it still works. Consider Goodwill, schools and libraries. If it's completely dead, Best Buy has a haul-away service that can send your old TV to one of its recycling partners.

Looking for a recycling center near you? Visit earth911.com to find the closest e-waste center. 

GAME ON



Adobe Stock image by Milijan Zivkovic

Growing numbers of seniors are playing video games to stay sharp

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Today's gamers might not fit the picture many people have in their heads. As the generation that grew up with Sega and Nintendo has come of age, the Entertainment Software Association's 2025 annual study found that the average gamer is 36 years old. The same study found that 28% of gamers in the United States are over the age of 50.

"It's easier to play video games now than at any other time in history. You don't have to go to an arcade. You don't have to buy a console or PC, although many players still do," says Aubrey Quinn, senior vice president of communications and public affairs at the ESA. "Video games can be played anytime, anywhere, with devices almost everyone has on them all the time—smartphones and tablets."

Other than having fun, older gamers say they're drawn to the pastime because it helps them keep their minds sharp. And, as our world becomes increasingly digital, more people are turning to video games as a way to support their mental, social and emotional health.

IMPROVED COGNITIVE ABILITY

While everyone can benefit from enhanced attention, short-term memory

and hand-eye coordination, these can be especially important for seniors looking to keep their minds active. Puzzle games can help improve recall and mental agility, while action and adventure games can encourage problem-solving and support spatial reasoning, particularly those games that require navigating 3D spaces.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Over the last decade, social interaction has become an essential part of gaming for many players. Connection with players online or on the couch can help older individuals improve their social relationships and build healthier emotional lives. A comprehensive literature review in the journal *Brain Sciences* in 2024 found that older people who played games showed a significant improvement in sleep quality and psychiatric symptoms.

BETTER BALANCE AND MOVEMENT

As motion controls have become standard for modern gaming consoles, games built around movement have also become more popular. These games provide a fun way for older players to stay active and can improve balance, all in a safe and low-stakes environment. 🎮

PRESS START

Haven't touched a video game since the heyday of arcade cabinets? Don't worry. It has never been easier to get in the game.

One-stop shop—Much like a smartphone, every major console has its own digital storefront with access to thousands of games. Once you're set up, you can start playing without leaving the house to buy physical games.

Play your way—Accessibility for games is at an all-time high. "Aging often includes the need for extra support in games," says Aubrey Quinn, senior vice president of communications and public affairs for the Entertainment Software Association. "Accessibility features like large text, clear subtitles and chat speech-to-text are making it easier for older players to experience the benefits of play." Even if players have limited dexterity or mobility, there is a wide array of customized game pads and adaptive joysticks that can help anyone play without frustration.

What to play—Aubrey finds that baby boomers and Silent Generation gamers are often drawn to puzzle games like *Candy Crush*, *Wordle* and *Tetris* that are easily available on mobile platforms. A significant portion of those players also enjoy simulation games, action games and shooters. If you're jumping in for the first time, games like the *Portal* series and *Journey* offer engaging problem-solving and exploration at your own pace.

Keeping Eastern Kentucky Connected

Celebrating 250 years of American community, innovation and connection

As our nation marks **250 years of independence**, it's a time to reflect on what has always made America strong—communities that look out for one another. Here in **Eastern Kentucky**, that spirit of connection runs deep, and **Foothills** is proud to carry it forward in a modern way.



RUTH CONLEY
Chief Executive Officer

With a **100% fiber network** capable of delivering **Multi-Gig internet speeds** to every home and business we serve, Foothills is proving that rural America can lead the way in technology, not lag behind it. We've built more than a network—we've built a bridge that connects our hills and hollers to the world.

We're not just your provider—we're your neighbors. We live here, we work here, and we're proud to serve the community we call home.

While we're committed to keeping our prices as reasonable as possible, some challenges are beyond our control—especially when it comes to television programming. Each year, national networks increase their programming fees, forcing providers everywhere to make difficult choices. Even major services like **YouTube TV** have faced these issues, such as the **recent blackout with Disney**, when millions temporarily lost access to popular channels.

If billion-dollar companies struggle with rising costs, imagine the challenge for small, community-based providers like Foothills. But even with less negotiating power, we never lose sight of what matters most—**our customers and our community**.

This milestone year reminds us that America's success has always depended on its local strength—the people and places that hold our country together. At Foothills, we're honored to play our part by keeping Eastern Kentucky connected, informed and ready for the future.

Because after 250 years, one truth still stands strong: **When communities stay connected, our country grows stronger.** 📶



CONNECTION

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

VOL. 13, NO. 1

The Foothills Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Foothills Communications, ©2026. It is distributed without charge to all customers of the company.



Foothills is a member-owned cooperative that has been serving residents and businesses in Eastern Kentucky since 1951. In the early days, we only offered telephone service over copper wires. Over the years, we have expanded our network and now provide broadband internet and cable TV services over fiber optic facilities to much of our service area, which includes Magoffin, Johnson and Lawrence counties, as well as parts of Boyd and Carter counties and Prichard, West Virginia. We love being part of the communities we serve. Our customers are our families, friends and neighbors.

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Foothills Mission Statement

"To provide the latest in communications at affordable prices with exceptional service."

Produced for Foothills Communications by:



On the Cover:



Soul Food Kentucky's volunteer board of directors includes, from left, Brian Conn, Rene McCoy, Jerry Kroll, Donna Kroll and Danielle Preston.

See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of John Michael Laney

NEED HELP PAYING FOR SERVICES?

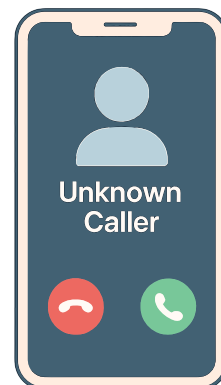
Lifeline assistance may be an option for you. You are eligible for Lifeline benefits if you meet income requirements and qualify for and receive one of the following benefits:

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- The Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension benefit

To find out if you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit lifelinesupport.org or call 800-234-9473.

TIRED OF ROBOCALLS?

The Do Not Call Registry can help reduce the number of unwanted telemarketing calls you receive. Learn more at donotcall.gov or call 888-382-1222. You must call from the telephone number you wish to register. For TTY, call 866-290-4236.



No tickets? No problem!

Stream the big game from the best seat in the house.



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Discovering Hidden Gems

Travel vlogger highlights off-the-beaten-path destinations

Story by KATIE TEEMS NORRIS

Gems exist in small towns all around you, but you might not know it. Take some time to explore interesting locales within a short drive or take a longer trip to make memories. YouTubers are traversing the country and taking audiences along for the ride—join them in uncovering the magic in places others may overlook.

BUILD THE DREAM

“There are so many things around me within driving distance that I had no idea about. And I believe that’s also the same for everybody else,” says Tony Hossri of the YouTube channel Build the Dream. Based in Georgia, Tony films his outdoor explorations and city tours for his vlog, or video blog.


With a little research, you can also find beautiful hikes and fun small towns. Tony searches the name of a building or other historic

sites on Google when he’s looking for places to experience. He also uses the AllTrails app to find great hiking destinations.

See what you can find and start making memories. While visiting Cincinnati, Tony saw around 50 people riding scooters. He joined up with the group on his bicycle. “They got to this random tunnel area where they had this giant scooter trick fest,” he says.

While researching online is a good place to start, Tony says, “Let your phone be a tool to give you a better life, not a way to waste your life by endlessly scrolling.” If using distracting apps gets in the way of having new adventures, consider deleting them like Tony did.

“Look up a neighboring town, neighboring city, neighboring hike,” Tony recommends. “Do everything you can to get out of the matrix to live a more fulfilling, memorable life.”

Visit buildthedreamnow.com and follow Build the Dream on YouTube to start getting ideas for your next adventure. 

The South Carolina Lowcountry is a great destination for travelers looking for adventures on the water and culinary experiences.

Adobe Stock photo by makasana photo

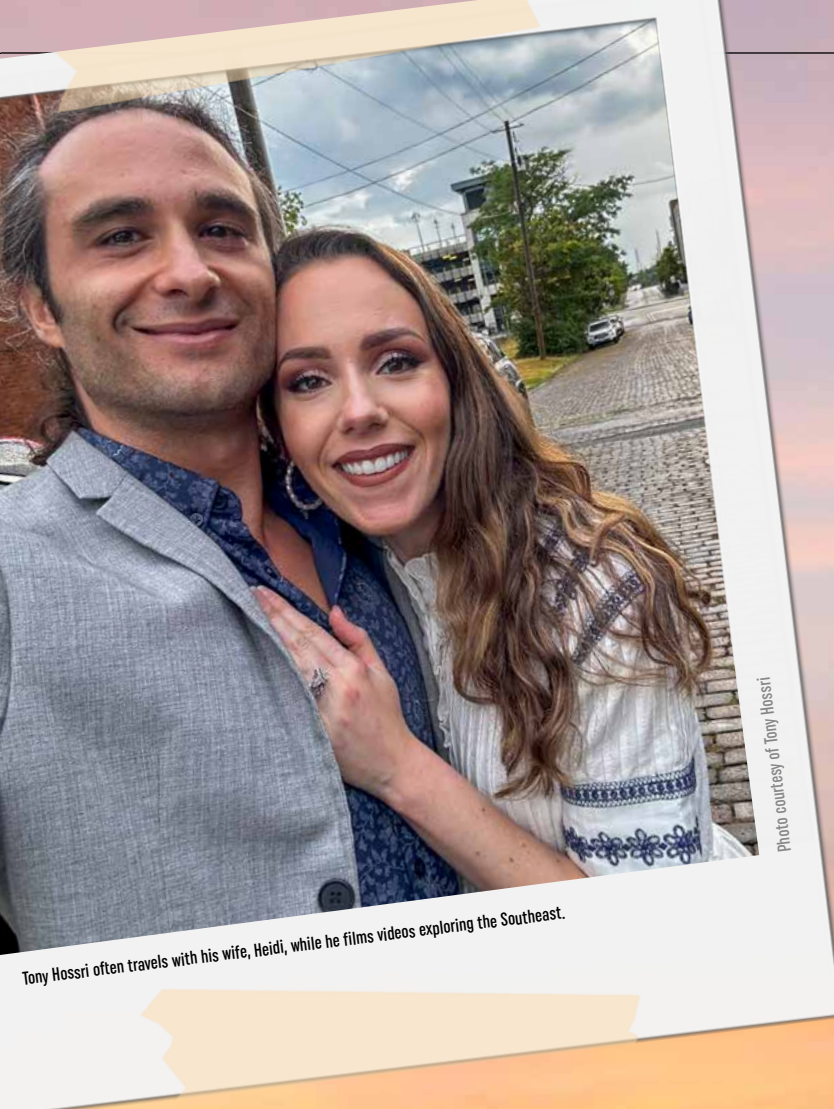


Photo courtesy of Tony Hossri

Tony Hossri often travels with his wife, Heidi, while he films videos exploring the Southeast.



Travel Safely

Did you know posting your vacation on social media can pose a risk to you and your home? Consider waiting to post about your travels until after you've returned.



Nearby Adventures



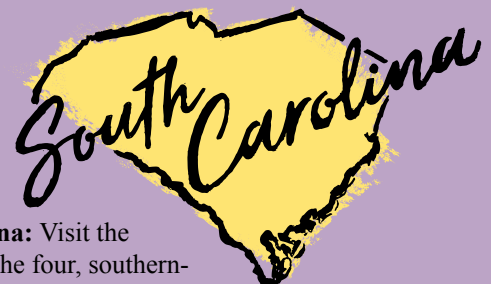
Alabama: Monte Sano means “mountain of health” in Spanish. Since the late 1800s, visitors have been coming to Monte Sano State Park in Huntsville for hiking, biking, climbing and bouldering. Go to alapark.com.



Kentucky: In Corbin, Cumberland Falls, measuring about 68 feet tall and 125 feet wide, earns the title of the Niagara of the South. Go to explorekywildlands.com.



Tennessee: Located three hours east of Nashville, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area includes 125,000 acres of the Cumberland Plateau. Go to nps.gov.



South Carolina: Visit the Lowcountry, the four, southernmost counties in the state, for water-based outdoor adventures. For ideas and destinations, go to southcarolinalowcountry.com.



Soul Food Kentucky

Volunteer-led group works to end childhood hunger

Story by LAURA MCGILL

The genuine passion Brian Conn and Jerry Kroll have for their mission is clear when they talk about Soul Food Kentucky, a nonprofit that distributes food to local students to combat childhood hunger.

Alisa and Bob Gound established the organization in Johnson County in 2015, after Alisa saw the acute need and felt God's calling to help. Her efforts started small, with her family providing food for four students. Seeing the positive impact, she knew the program needed to expand. And in the years since, it certainly has.

Today, led by Brian and Jerry, along with a dedicated board of directors and caring volunteers, Soul Food serves 19 schools in Johnson and Floyd counties. It works hand in hand with school resource staff to make sure that 600 students head

home each Friday with food for the week-end. Since its founding, Soul Food volunteers have prepared 21,096 take-home bags containing a total of 84,384 meals.

MEETING THE NEED

Jerry, Soul Food's vice president, says students going without food has a domino effect. "The schools provide weekday breakfast and lunch for students," he says. "But if they do not have food on the week-ends, the kids come to school on Monday morning feeling hungry, tired and burned out. They cannot concentrate on learning. They need a reliable source of food."

As the organization's president, Brian's role includes writing grants and seeking support from businesses and foundations. "I just could not imagine our local students without Soul Food," he says.

Funding is always a challenge. Soul Food receives financial help from individual donors, as well as through fundraisers at local businesses. It also receives generous contributions from charitable organizations. "Every dollar we receive is put to work helping these students," Jerry says.

LEND A HAND

Volunteers gather at Destination Community Church where they fill each bag with enough food to provide two breakfasts and two lunches. Once they fill all the bags, they pack them into large totes, which are delivered to the participating schools.

Deliveries have been made easier thanks to a van donated by Randy Rippberger, from Perfect Plumbing in Genoa, Illinois. More help came from Zach Hesselbaum,

from Law Hesselbaum LLP in Aurora, Illinois. Zach's donation helped offset the cost of wrapping the van in Soul Food's logo and graphics. And speaking of that wrapped van, the design and wrap work was done at a discounted price at New Horizon Graphics in Somerset, Kentucky. Jerry lived and worked in Illinois before retiring to Johnson County, and some of his connections there support his volunteer work in his new community.

THE SCHOOL VIEW

When Soul Food deliveries reach participating schools, resource staff take charge and ensure the registered students receive their bags each Friday afternoon. "In our case, we receive the food items in bulk shipments, and our high school students fill the bags," says Libby Auxier, family resource coordinator at Paintsville Elementary School. "We provide hot entrees and snacks during the school day, but we cannot go home with students over the weekend. We are so grateful that Soul Food steps in to ensure students are able to come to school on Monday mornings ready to learn."

Kathleen Burchett, now a counselor at Central Elementary School, has a connection with Alisa that goes back to when the idea of Soul Food was just forming. Kathleen was working at Highland Elementary School at the same time Alisa was looking for a way to help students. When she learned about Alisa's desire to help, Kathleen was able to connect her with the original four students that very first year.

"It is amazing to look back and see just how far the program has come and how many students it has helped," Kathleen says. "Ten years later Soul Food is still making a huge difference in our efforts to fight food insecurity. It is community support that keeps it going, and I hope that everyone who can help will get involved in some way." 🗨️

OPPOSITE PAGE: Jerry Kroll prepares to unload food items from the van. **RIGHT:** From left, Donna Kroll, Tammy Ward, Troy and Jimmy organize boxes.

SOUL FOOD KENTUCKY

5204 KY Route 321, Prestonburg

606-369-0442

soulfoodkentucky.com

Follow on Facebook and Instagram
@soulfoodkentucky



Jimmy McCoy, left, and Troy Preston unload boxes of cereal bars.

COUNTING ON THE COMMUNITY

Every dollar donated goes directly to fund the Soul Food program. The volunteer-led effort counts on support from local and regional donors. "No one here receives a paycheck. Without our donors, we would not be here," Soul Food Vice President Jerry Kroll says.

SOUL FOOD COMMUNITY PARTNERS

AES Foundation
Appalachian Wireless
ARH Foundation
Car Guys for Life
City of Prestonsburg
Commonwealth Credit Union
Destination Community Church
First Christian Church, W.O.W.
Floyd County Community Foundation
Highlands Foundation
Hope in the Mountains
Kentucky Colonels
Kinzer Drilling/Amazing Grace Foundation
Kiwanis Club Paintsville
Made to Crave
Pallottine Foundation of Huntington
Peoples Bank
Southside Free Will Baptist
Walmart, Paintsville



FORGED IN FIRE

Metalworking opens opportunities for rural farriers

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

There have always been parts of metalworking that feel a little bit supernatural to Jim Poor. While most of the craft is the product of diligent training and hard work, some elements of working with heat and metal are stubbornly unpredictable and come down to a touch of each smith's own personal sorcery.

"In my world of making tools, lastability is the most important thing," he says. "There's a lot of heat treating that goes into tooling, and that's magical stuff because you can't see it. You do it, but you can't really know the results until you send it out to the customer. So, it becomes kind of like black magic."

Jim has been trying to unravel the mysteries of metalworking since he was 12 years old. When he was growing up in Abilene, Texas, his father shod horses on the racetrack circuit, and Jim helped him after school. Once he graduated from high school, Jim found himself shoeing horses after work to make extra cash. It was at one of those jobs that he heard about the Texas Professional Farriers Association.

"One of my customers used to read the local news to me while I was shoeing his horses. And one day he read that this group was going to be at the Abilene County Fair shoeing horses for \$40," Jim says. "I was only getting \$25, so I thought I should see what these guys were doing."

Meeting other local farriers and blacksmiths opened up new opportunities to turn his side gig into a full-time job, hone his craft and even compete across the globe.

"I love competing the most. It's a small community, but it allowed me to travel all over the world and have so many

experiences," Jim says. "I don't think anything else I could've done with my limited education would allow that."

HEAT TESTING

Despite his years of experience, Jim remembers having plenty of nerves the first time he smithed competitively. It was 1985, three years since he started shoeing professionally, when he decided to take part in an event in his hometown.

"I thought it was pretty interesting, but it was scary at the same time," he says. "There were people there who knew a whole lot more about this craft than I did. I was still pretty young, but I just loved it."

A few months later, Jim joined some of his TPFA colleagues at a competition in Oklahoma, followed shortly by a trip to the nationals in Jackson, Mississippi. Farrier competition is divided into novice, intermediate and open divisions, with competitors earning points based on how well they finish and how many others are in their division. Farriers face off in classes where they have a set time to complete a task. Judges rate their performance.

For all his lack of experience, Jim climbed the ranks in short order. After just three competitions, he was already shoeing in the open class. Those competitions quickly became highlights of his year, regularly testing himself against hundreds of other farriers as part of major competitions in Texas, California, Florida and Calgary. At one of those events in California, Jim met Kathleen, the woman who would become his wife.

"She can do just about anything, but she does more of the artistic work than I do," Jim says. "We met each other out there



Competitors race the clock to get their work ready for judging.

and just became inseparable from that day forward. We dated but could only meet at competitions for several years. Of course, that was another reason to go.”

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Over the course of his competitive career, Jim earned a position on the American Farriers Team nine times, while Kathleen helped establish the first women’s international team, Women Horseshoers of America. After years of traveling the world to compete and teach, they established Flatland Forge in Tuscola, Texas, where they now focus on making farrier tools like tongs, punches and 27 different styles of hammers.

“Most people are pretty surprised we produce that many different hammers. But I’ve found out that some people are just collectors,” Jim says. “They may not even use them. They just like the look of them and the craft of them.”

In many ways, Jim envies aspiring farriers and blacksmiths today. With the rise of the internet, it is much easier to discover new techniques and learn from the best artisans in the world. Even before the internet, that accessibility was what drew him back to the craft as a young man. But the best advice he can give to anyone forging their path now is the same as it was then.

HAMMER DOWN

For anyone looking to build a career as a farrier or blacksmith, Jim Poor’s advice is simple: “Find people who are close by to you, and don’t be a jerk. You’ll get a lot of help.”

The easiest way to do that is connecting with a local group. Jim joined the Texas Professional Farriers Association as a young man, while his wife, Kathleen, connected with the Western States Farriers Association early on. If you’re looking for organizations in your state, start here:

ALABAMA

Alabama Professional Farriers Association
President Sam Howard
Email: sam.howard18@icloud.com

KENTUCKY

Derby City Horseshoeing Association
President Zeke Evans
Email: horseshoes92@gmail.com

INDIANA

Indiana Farriers Association
President Dustin Shuck
Email: dustinshuck@yahoo.com
Website: indianafarriers.org

SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina Farriers Association
President Dusty Newby
Email: dustynewby@gmail.com

TENNESSEE

Rutherford County Blacksmith Association
President Matt Clarady
Email: rcbablacksmiths@gmail.com
Website: rcbablacksmiths.org

“What I’ve always loved most is that blacksmithing is something that you don’t need money to learn. All it takes is effort,” Jim says. “You have to be a self-starter. You’ll work 10 times more hours than somebody with a day job. But all you need to succeed in this craft is a willingness to learn and work.” 📧

The Comfort of Home

Big Sandy Heating and Cooling keeps customers cozy

Story by ANDREA AGARDY

Jerry Price, president and owner of Big Sandy Heating and Cooling, takes pride in the fact that his company is known as “the king of comfort.” And you don’t have to take his word for it—just ask the readers of The Paintsville Herald. They’ve consistently chosen the business as their favorite heating and air service in the newspaper’s annual Best Between the Lakes readers’ poll.

The significance of that vote of confidence from the community is not lost on Jerry. “Our customers are what it’s all about,” he says. “That and our employees are the most important things. So, being voted Best Between the Lakes for over 10 years means a lot.”

As a full-service heating, ventilation and air conditioning company, Big Sandy Heating and Cooling serves residential and light commercial customers across a service area that spans more than 16 counties in Eastern Kentucky.

In addition to selling new HVAC systems from well-known brands like Lennox, ICP, Rheem and WaterFurnace, the company offers repairs, system replacements, emergency service, indoor air quality upgrades and maintenance plans. It is also a dealer of Kohler whole-home standby generators. Financing is available on all products and services.

MARKING A MILESTONE

Big Sandy Heating and Cooling is commemorating a major milestone in 2026—its 50th anniversary. “We plan on celebrating all year,” Jerry says.

The company was founded on Feb. 9, 1976, by James D. Skaggs, who eventually turned the operation over to his son, James P. “Jim” Skaggs. “Jim and I were friends, and he ended up talking me into coming to work for him in January 1995,” Jerry says.

Jerry’s first role at the company was in sales and estimates. Five years later, when Jim was ready to retire, Jerry bought the company. Last July he also purchased Burchett’s Heating and Cooling in Paintsville, a Trane dealer, and added those customers to Big Sandy’s clientele.

What started out half a century ago as a family operation is still a family business, just with a different last name at the top of the organizational chart. Jerry’s wife, Holly, is Big Sandy Heating

and Cooling’s accounting and human resources manager. The couple’s son-in-law and Holly’s sister-in-law are also part of the team, along with a group of longtime dedicated employees.

“We have 18 employees now between our office staff, sales, service technicians and installers,” Jerry says. “I know a lot of people say this, but it’s really true with us—the 18 employees we have, they’re more like family to us because we don’t have a big turnover.”

FEEL THE LOVE

Big Sandy Heating and Cooling is a proud participant in Feel the Love, a program sponsored by the LII Lennox Foundation, the charitable arm of Lennox, a worldwide manufacturer of



Holly Price is the company’s accounting and human relations manager.

Photos courtesy of John Michael Laney



Jerry Price is proud to take part in Feel the Love, a program that provides free heating or air conditioning systems to worthy recipients across North America.

HVAC and refrigeration equipment. Feel the Love provides free heating or cooling systems to individuals and families across the United States and Canada who have served their country or their communities.

“We’re a Lennox premier dealer, and Lennox provides a unit or system, and then Big Sandy provides the labor and materials to install that,” Jerry says. “We’ve actually installed over seven systems, probably valued at over \$50,000, at no cost to some lucky recipients in our area.”

Feel the Love recipients have included police officers, nurses, firefighters and veterans. “We’ll get all the applicants, and we interview them and choose who we feel deserves it the most,” Jerry says. “Somebody who just gives back to their church or to their county, a deserving individual.”

In addition to spreading the word about the company’s milestone anniversary through television, radio and newspaper ads, Jerry is hoping to share a little extra love as part of Big Sandy Heating and Cooling’s birthday festivities. “One thing I’m looking at for 2026 as part of our 50th anniversary is partnering with Lennox on installing two systems this year,” he says. “The value of those can be anywhere from \$7,000-\$10,000 depending on size, efficiency and what type of unit.”

BIG SANDY HEATING AND COOLING


29 KY Route 825, Hagerhill

606-789-HEAT (4328); toll-free 833-683-COOL (2665)

Follow Big Sandy Heating and Cooling on Facebook and Yelp. To learn more about the Feel the Love program, or to nominate someone to receive a free heating or cooling system, go to feelthelove.com.

POWERED BY FOOTHILLS

A Foothills customer both at his business and his home, Jerry is a big believer in the cooperative’s offerings and its approach to customer service. He’s such a fan, in fact, that before Foothills offered service in his area, he willingly paid another provider a higher rate for a while in order to be able to sign up for Foothills’ service as soon as it became available to him.

“We had other providers that were trying to get us to sign contracts, and we knew Foothills was coming,” Jerry says. “So, we ended up paying those other providers more when we wouldn’t sign a contract. They were charging us like three times more than they should, and we were holding off for Foothills. We’re very happy with their service, and we’re glad to have them.” 

The Ultimate Comfort Food

Beans or no beans, chili always hits the spot



Is there any food in America that creates more of a stir than chili? It's certainly a bowlful of contention.

If your heart lies in Texas, beans take a hike. Southerners, though, love their beans. In the Midwest, it's all about comfort with ground beef, tomatoes and beans, or a simple, creamy chicken chili full of flavor. But every bowl of chili, no matter where you live, has one thing in common—each is a serving of comfort that wraps around you like a well-worn blanket.



Food Editor
Anne P. Braly
is a native of
Chattanooga,
Tennessee.

Photography by **Mark Gilliland**
Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**

WHITE CHICKEN CHILI

Prep time: 20-25 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour

- 4 boneless chicken breasts
 - 1 teaspoon dried basil
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1 teaspoon onion powder
 - 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
 - 1 teaspoon dried thyme
 - 1 teaspoon dried parsley
 - 1 tablespoon butter
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - 1 large onion, chopped
 - 3 stalks celery, chopped
 - 3/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
 - 2 cans whole green chilies, chopped
 - 3-4 cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
 - 2 teaspoons cumin
 - 1 cup sour cream
 - 1/2 cup heavy cream
 - 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
 - 1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Additional chicken broth, if needed

In large pot, add chicken breasts and completely cover with water, 4-6 cups. Simmer chicken breasts with basil, salt, onion powder, garlic powder, thyme and parsley until completely cooked.

Remove chicken from broth. Reserve the seasoned broth for the chili. Once chicken is cooled, chop and set aside.

In a large pot, add butter and olive oil, and saute onion, celery and bell pepper until vegetables are tender. Add chopped chilies and two cans cannellini beans. When mixture is warm, mash beans with a potato masher.

Add 2-3 cups of the reserved broth, chicken, cumin and 1-2 more cans cannellini beans. Let simmer 30 minutes to 1 hour. If mixture becomes too thick, add more broth. Add sour cream, heavy cream and fresh cilantro. Stir well. Taste and adjust seasonings. Just before serving, stir in grated cheese and ladle into serving bowls.

TEXAS-STYLE CHILI

Prep time: 45 minutes

Cook time: 3-4 hours

- 1/4 cup ground ancho chile pepper
- 1 tablespoon ground chipotle chile pepper
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 cup cornmeal
- 1 4-pound beef chuck roast, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes
- 8 slices bacon, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 small yellow onions, large dice
- 5 garlic cloves, chopped
- 3 jalapeno chiles, cored, seeded and finely diced
- 4 cups low-sodium beef broth
- 2 cups water, plus more for the chili paste and deglazing the pan
- 1 1/4 cups dark beer
- 1 cup canned crushed tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon molasses

- 2 teaspoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Additional chicken broth, if needed

Mix the chile powders, cumin, oregano, coriander, cinnamon and cornmeal in a small bowl and stir in 1/2 cup water to form a thick paste. Set aside.

Season the beef with the salt and set aside.

In a Dutch oven, fry bacon over medium heat until the fat renders and the bacon crisps, about 10 minutes. Remove the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate. Pour all but a few teaspoons of fat from the pot into a small bowl. Set aside.

Increase heat to medium high. Sear the meat in three batches in single layers until well browned on one side, adding more of the reserved bacon fat as necessary. Place the seared meat on a plate. Add about 1/4 cup of water to the pot and scrape the bottom with a wooden spoon to release all the flavorful brown bits. Pour the dark liquid over the seared meat.

Reduce heat to medium and add 3 tablespoons of the reserved bacon fat to the pot. Add the onions and cook, stirring frequently, until softened. Add garlic and jalapenos, and cook 2 minutes more. Add the reserved chile paste and saute until fragrant.

Add the broth and stir with a whisk until spice mixture is completely dissolved. Again, scrape the bottom of the pot to release any spices. Stir in the water, beer, crushed tomatoes, molasses and cocoa powder. Add reserved bacon and seared beef back to the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cover, leaving the lid just barely ajar. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the meat is tender and the juices are thickened, 2 1/2 to 3 hours. Taste and adjust seasonings. Ladle the chili into bowls and serve with desired toppings.



TWO-MEAT CHILI

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 1-1 1/2 hours

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 1-2 tablespoons flour
- 2 28-ounce cans chopped tomatoes
- 1/2 cup chili powder (more or less, to taste)
- Salt, to taste
- Cumin, to taste
- 1-2 8-ounce cans tomato sauce

Brown meats together in large chili pot with onion and green pepper. Drain grease and stir in flour. Add remaining ingredients, starting with 1 can tomato sauce. If it seems too thick, thin it out with more tomato sauce.

Simmer for at least 1 hour. Serve with sour cream, corn chips and shredded cheese. 🍴





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