

WELCOME TO THE 59TH ANNUAL

VFW

GUN SHOW & FLEA MARKET

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Welcome to HILLSVILLE

The Mayor of Hillsville reflects on the Labor Day Flea Market

"The Labor Day Flea Market has been very vital to the growth of Hillsville over the years," said Hillsville Mayor Greg Crowder. "It put Hillsville on the map. Hillsville is famous for the flea market and gun show. When I'm at the NASCAR races, I can be in New Hampshire and people will ask me where I'm from. They'll say, 'Isn't that where the gun show and flea market is?' And I'll say, 'Yes, it is.'"

"The VFW that started it in 1967 and it was just a gun show inside the building," Crowder recounted. "It started growing a little bit and Mary Martin, whose husband at the time was selling guns, she ran a beauty shop. They didn't have a spot for her inside, so she decided to sit outside and sell beauty supplies in front of the building... and done great. It wasn't but a couple of years later that the whole VFW paved lot was full. Well, the next year Elbert Hunley opened his field up, and the flea market started expanding down in the field."

The mayor remembers his first Flea Market experience and that was quite a few years ago.

"My first one? Well, Elbert Hunley of Hunley Bottom was my next door neighbor," said Mayor Crowder. "I collected old pop bottles. So between Charles Hall's yard and Elbert Hunley's field, they let me set up a stand there. That would have been in '74 because I was nine years old. I've been wheeling and dealing since I was a kid."

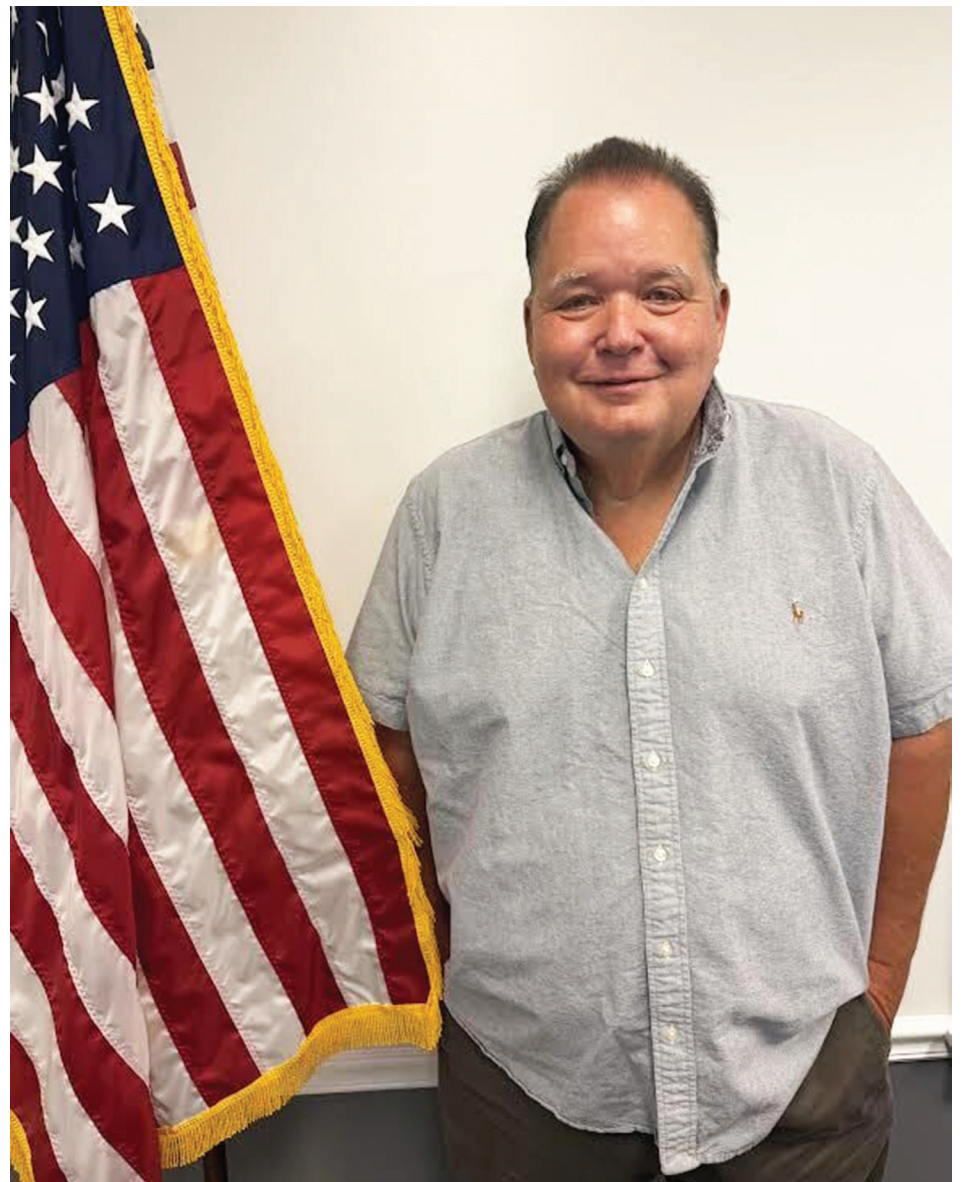
The mayor still gets into the act every year by selling goods from a lot he owns on the corner of Howlett Street and West Stuart Drive.

"I save up all my leftover event T-shirts and I'll sell pallets of them out there for \$2," said Crowder. "We set up an 80 by 80 and load them plumb down with like 20,000 shirts and we'll sell most of them. That's the kind of good deal you can find at the flea market. People sell good stuff at a discount price like name brand tools, hunting supplies and even high end clothes for cheap."

Through the years, Mayor Crowder has witnessed many things at the flea market/gun show. In the 80's the remnants of a hurricane tore through Hillsville, producing 30 and 40 mph sustained winds.

"It just wiped out the whole weekend," said Crowder. "It destroyed people's tents, merchandise blew all over and the rain... it was awful."

On another occasion in the 70's, some rowdy teenagers released chickens and goats from their pens. These farmyard critters mingled amongst flea market patrons and caused a significant amount of mayhem... though exactly who let the animals loose was never fully determined.



Hillsville Mayor Greg Crowder.

One of the most notable events in the history of the Labor Day Flea Market was the purchase of a highly sought after piece of revolutionary era currency.

"In the early 2000's they sold a 1777 silver dollar for a million dollars," said Crowder. "The deal went down inside the VFW."

Everyone has something they particularly enjoy at the Labor Day Flea Market and the mayor is no exception.

"My favorite part is I look through that whole flea market and try and find that diamond in the rough," said Crowder. "I'm a collector. I collect everything. I collect guns. I collect knives. I collect bottles. I collect dishes, pottery. I mean, it's just in my blood. I usually find something cheap that's really good but you got to be able to spot it because you got so many people selling estate sales or somebody's bought out an antique shop and they put it out there for sale. People don't know what it is and it's worth a lot of money."

One of the items the mayor collects are slug plates, which were used in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These removable pieces of metal were inserted into glass molds, as they were being formed into bottles. This allowed local



Flea Market Drinks Bobby Phipps of Rock Pile Farms serves up a sample of one of his famous ciders Friday during the Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.

soda, beer or medicine bottle to bear the names of a specific town or logo stamped into the glass molds.

"The best thing I ever got was a Meadows of Dan slug plate bottle for \$20," said Crowder. "There were rumors that they made one but no one had ever seen it. I got one from Ivanhoe and there's only two or three of them known to exist. Back then pop was basically Kool-Aid. The store made it and then they sold them in bottles. Mt. Airy, Rural Retreat, Crockett has the best ones and I got all of them. That flea market got me trained to know what to look for early. The Ivanhoe plate is worth about \$1,000. The Meadows of Dan and Crockett are each worth about \$1500."

The Flea Market at Hillsville is nationally, perhaps even internationally known but making it happen requires much time and effort. The Piper's Gap Volunteer Rescue Squad handles emergency calls throughout the entire event. Six Hillsville police officers are on duty during the day and three will stay on duty through the night. Town crews are constantly hauling trash away to the dump, which charges a tipping fee and office workers spend several hours each day collecting registrations.

"Believe it or not, the event itself is not a money maker for the town," said the mayor. "It's very, very expensive

for us but where we do get it back is the businesses and our citizens who own the land. It's real good for the landowners. Like there's a little lady that sits down in Hunley's field and rents her little yard out and pays for all her medicine for the year. What money we make is on the meals and hotel tax and we get the meals tax from the vendors too. Our restaurants and hotels are full for five or six days, so they have the biggest days of the year over them days. It's a huge economic impact for Hillsville and the surrounding areas."

The Hillsville Flea Market and Gun Show were adversely impacted by COVID, as were most all large event venues but in recent years, rates of attendance have been steadily climbing. This year, the flea market is expected to draw between 150 to 175,000 people to the area over the course of four days.

"It's a place to find the stuff that you're not going to find anywhere else," said Crowder. "It's a place you can find that that needle in the haystack, that extremely valuable item for a very fair price. That's still here and still happening. What the flea market has become is a great place to buy anything at a good deal. It's fun. They sell everything from canoes, swamp buggies, Indian Motorcycles ... you name it. You just got to walk far enough to get to it."

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THE VFW POST

is at the Center of the Labor Day Flea Market and Gun Show

WILLIAM PATRICK PAINE

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The 59th Labor Day Flea Market and Gun Show is set to begin this coming weekend and expectations are that this year's event will draw even bigger crowds than last year. This is part of a positive trend, as last year's flea market attendance surpassed numbers from the previous year. According to Flea Market Manager Katie Hopkins, the Grover King VFW Post 1115 on West Stuart Avenue has sold well over 600 spaces, which is more than last year's vendor total. As always, the gun show booths in the interior of the VFW are completely sold out.

Vendors can set up a 10' by 20' space at the VFW for a cost \$100. All vendors must pay a town license fee of \$22 with food vendors paying and additional \$18 health fee. Same day registration is allowed but there are only field spaces without electricity available at the VFW. Everything else is sold out.

"We gather the registration fees for the town, and then we, as the VFW, cut the town a check so that our vendors don't have to be running up to town to get that all done," said Katie Horton. "It makes it easier on the town.

Instead of cashing in 600 checks, they get one big check from us."

The VFW also offers "dry camping" in an adjacent field at a cost of \$100 for four days and that includes sewer disposal, as the VFW has a dump station on site.

The VFW offers non profits such as church or scouting groups the chance to set up in a 6 X 10 'pop up spot' at no charge. These spots are strictly meant for organizations that aren't selling anything and they must be from Carroll County or Galax City to qualify.

The Hillsville VFW is under new leadership with Alec Horton acting as Commander of Post 1115. His wife, Katie Horton is taking over the volunteer position of the Flea Market Manager for the first time this year. Skylar Browne is the Senior Vice Commander, whose main role is recruiting new members but says, "I'm not above picking up trash, cleaning things or greeting people at the gates."

John Bissonnette, the new Junior Vice Commander of Post 1115, is charge of the gun show, which has seen some changes due to recent legislation. Out of state residents are prohibited from purchasing hand guns but this restriction does not apply to residents



VFW Crew. These individuals from the Grover King VFW Post 1115 are actively involved in making the 2026 Labor Day Flea Market and Gun Show a success.

Standing from left is Skylar Browne (Vice Commander of Post 1115), Katie Horton (VFW Auxiliary and Flea Market Manager) and John Bissonnette (Junior Vice Commander of Post 1115).

of Virginia.

"As long as a Virginia citizen has no issues in their background, they can take a gun home that day," said Bissonnette.

The Grover King VFW's flea market revenue comes from space rentals but donations for the Buddy Poppy Program also serve this organization's mission, which is to advocate on behalf of veterans.

"It provides whatever they're in need of at a time of crisis," said Bissonnette. "Let's say they have a medical operation in Winston Salem. We can provide some housing, some food or gas or even mow their lawn."

Katie Horton is looking forward to her first go as Flea Market Manager. She is a Lifetime Auxiliary member of the VFW and thoroughly enjoys this annual Labor Day event.

"I'd say that it's a great community activity because we have four days where we have vendors who come together from this region and from

all over the country," said Horton.

"We get to talk and catch up and tell people why Hillsville is a great place to come back to, even when it's not the flea market. There may be people you usually don't run into at Food Lion or Walmart that you get to see during the flea market. There's others you don't see, except for that one time of year because that's the only time they come to Hillsville and you get to share a deep-fried Oreo with them. Like there's a quilt lady that we love seeing. We go to see her every year because that's just part of the ritual of it. It's one of those neat community moments. It's a whole new group this year and it's going to be fun."

"My favorite part of the event is the people," said Skylar Browne. "We have a real melting pot there. The flea market is a big part of the VFW's history and it's what mainly keeps us going. So it's really important for us to be engaged in it and try to make it better and get it to grow."

How to become a **FLEA MARKET** **VENDOR** at the VFW

Staff Report

For anyone interested in setting up as a vendor at the VFW Post 1115 Flea Market – during either Labor Day weekend or Memorial Day weekend – the procedure is very simple.

The flea market is coordinated for the VFW by a full-time flea market manager, and a separate flea market office telephone number has been established. All flea market business can be conducted by calling (276) 728-5237 or e-mail Fleamarket@groverkingvfw.com. If the staff is unable to answer your call right away, you can leave a message on the answering machine. But please be patient; this time of year there are usually up to 20 or 30 calls at a time waiting to be answered.

Flea market vendor space rental also

can be accomplished by printing out an application that is available online on the only official VFW Post 1115 web site: www.groverkingvfw.com. This web site is updated on a regular basis.

Information for next year's Flea Market is distributed at the gate as vendors check in for the current year. Vendors with no e-mail are encouraged to pay the full amount and get all their paperwork before they leave.

Due to the expense involved in making vendor rental registration as simple as possible, a \$20 non-refundable deposit per space is required with each registration. Cost for a 10' X 20' outdoor selling space is \$122.

This year's Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market will be Sept. 4-7, 2026.



There is no telling what you may find at the Hillsville Memorial Day Flea Market, such as this Indian Motorcycle Sales and Service vehicle door.



Food and food vendors are never at a shortage at the Annual Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.



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Customers check out officially licensed rock 'n' roll t-shirts at the Hillsville VFW Memorial Day Gun Show and Flea Market.



An old-school lunchbox from the 1970s featuring the Bee Gees was one of many vintage items available Friday at the Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.

VFW GUN SHOW & FLEA MARKET



This metallic fowl creature stands as a testament to the ingenuity and unique, both readily available at The Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.



Vintage signs and reminders of days past are fun to search for and find at The Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.



Toys of many kinds are also available each year during the Hillsville VFW Memorial Day Gun Show and Flea Market.



From soda to liquor to dairy, even the antique dealers have all your needs covered at the Memorial Day Gun Show and Flea Market in Hillsville.



Old albums and CDs are usually on the menu each year at the Hillsville VFW Memorial Day Gun Show and Flea Market.



The freshly-cooked cuisine one can expect to find in Hillsville during The Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market.

History of the Grover King

VFW POST 115

Grover King VFW Post 1115 has been an active force in the Hillsville and Carroll County community for more than 80 years.

It began on May 15, 1935, when 27 veterans from World War One, one from the Spanish-American War and one other area veteran chartered Virginia's 37th Post of The Veterans of Foreign Wars of The United States.

They decided the Post should bear the name of Carroll County's first serviceman killed during the First World War, Grover C. King, who died on the battlefield in France on July 15, 1918, three days short of his 28th birthday.

At first the Post held its meetings in the courthouse. Construction began in 1954 on the organization's first building, and the first meeting in the new facility was held January 17, 1955. It was dedicated in July 1956, and by 1961 the costs of the building were paid in full and the VFW held a

note-burning ceremony.

In 1966, VFW Post 1115 purchased land adjacent to the Post Home, primarily to provide additional parking spaces. A disaster struck on January 15, 1968, when the roof of the building caved in due to the weight of snow. The VFW decided then to construct a new, larger building to accommodate all of its growing needs. The result of this planning is today one of the premier facilities in all of Hillsville and Carroll County – the VFW Post Home on West Stuart Drive, known as "The Carroll County Activity Center."

Fifty-nine years ago, this building and the expansive grounds around it became the site of what is today the largest gun show and flea market



east of the Mississippi River. The event each Labor Day weekend has helped to put Hillsville on the national map.

The membership of our sponsoring VFW Post is now over 400 strong – more than 200 from Hillsville and Galax and the rest from nearly every state in the nation as well as several foreign countries – making VFW Post 1115 one of the largest single Veterans' organizations in the state.

It is also one of the busiest, conducting many activities and pumping thousands of dollars into community service every year.

Alec Horton is the current Post Commander and he welcomes everyone to the Gun Show & Flea

Market.

No organization such as this can be so successful without the backing of an Auxiliary. The 1115 Auxiliary, formally the Ladies Auxiliary, was established on April 9, 1954, by 40 Charter Members who were wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of the men who served our fine Nation at times when it needed their service the most.

Members of Grover King VFW Post 1115 and the Auxiliary have taken a leading role in the community all through the years, serving in various capacities both in and outside the VFW.



Locals and visitors alike will flock to the streets of Hillsville during the Annual Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market.

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Gorgeous stained windows are an example of some of the treasures you will undoubtedly find each year at The Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.



Old and rare records available Friday at the Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.



Sarah from Baker Girl Cakes was serving up blackberry cobbler Friday during the Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.



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HOW THE ANNUAL **GUN SHOW & FLEA MARKET** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ STARTED

Come to Hillsville, Virginia, just about any other weekend of the year and you will find a nice but laid-back town of just a few thousand folks.

But come to Hillsville on Labor Day weekend – usually the first weekend in September – and you will find that sleepy little town has become a bustling metropolis of flea market and gun show sellers and buyers half a million strong.

VFW Post 1115 has been sponsoring the Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market since the late 1960s and it has become one of the biggest events of its type in the state – perhaps in the nation. Pierce Webb, a Laurel Fork native, had retired to Florida and he developed a hobby for collecting and trading guns. Early in 1967, he visited his friend, Glenn Jackson, also a native of Laurel Fork.

This was shortly after the original Post Home collapsed under snow and ice.

Webb told Jackson that gun shows are popular down south and he wanted to see one started right here in Carroll County. Gene Pack, the Hillsville Police Chief, liked the idea and discussed it often, as did

Dennis Quesenberry, a serious collector of fine guns. Jackson, a member of the VFW, knew that the Post was hard-pressed for funds to meet monthly obligations, much less pay for a new Post Home, still under construction. He thought that maybe a gun show, being new to the area, might bring in some extra money. Chief Pack offered his assistance for security and traffic control, so they approached the Post membership with the idea and it was approved. Jackson agreed to do the planning and promotion for the first show although he had never attended anything like this before.

Jackson advised the kitchen committee to prepare for at least 2,000 visitors that he expected to attend. They were overwhelmed when twice that many showed up. Members had to scrounge around the county and adjoining towns to find enough food and drink to satisfy the hungry crowd.

After the second year, the show outgrew the space inside the VFW hall and the outdoor flea market was added to accommodate the overflow. The rest is history. During



The Grover King VFW Post 1115 marquee reminds Flea Market-goers to Thank a Vet Today!!

the last decade, the outdoor flea market space was increased nearly 50 percent with the addition of the upper lot at the top of the hill way behind the VFW hall.

The VFW Labor Day show, now the largest single event in Carroll and surrounding counties, did not just happen. A lot of people worked long hours in bringing it to the current point. And they continue working long hours before, during and after the event. But the men of Post 1115 and the Ladies of the Auxiliary enjoy this culmination of coming together with hard work. Money realized from the show keeps the Post in operation for the entire year, and a lot of the

money that is taken in is returned to the community in the form of donations to many civic groups and individuals in need.

Andy Bowman, a U.S. Navy Veteran, had been the VFW's Memorial Day Festival manager for several years as full-time flea market manager. He passed away March 17, 2017. Sandra Terry, a U.S. Army veteran then assumed his flea market duties. This year, Katie Horton of the Post 1115 Auxiliary took over as the Flea Market Manager. Grover King VFW Post 1115 Commander Alec Horton bids welcome to all our vendors and visitors during this special weekend.



Shoppers at the gun show.



Flea Market Crowds



Beautiful and unique hand-crafted items are usually in abundance at The Annual VFW Labor Day Gun Show & Flea Market in Hillsville.



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