

# TOWNSEND TRAVELER

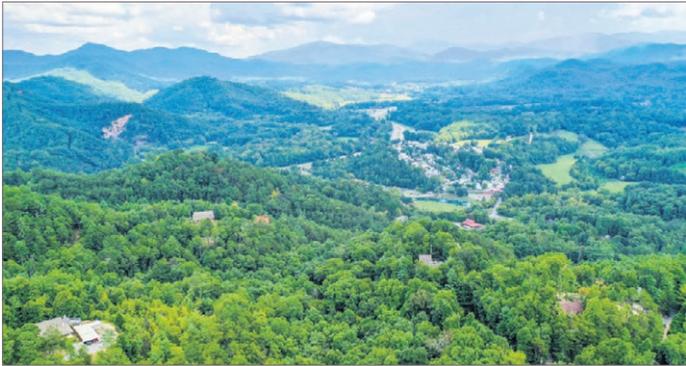
*Your Guide  
to the  
Relaxing Side  
of the Smokies*

2025



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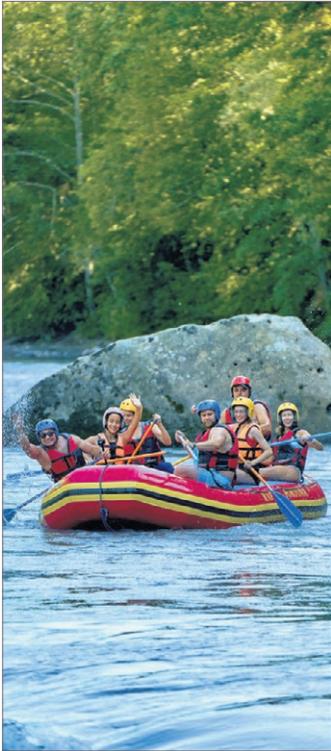
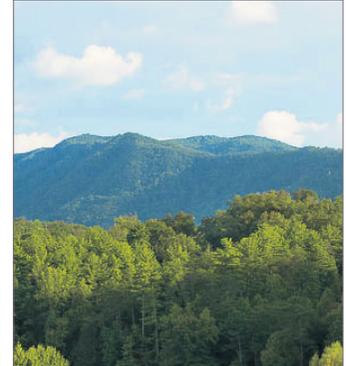
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# Thirty years, three generations

## Big Meadow Family Campground Celebrates in the Heart of Townsend

Staff Reports

Big Meadow Family Campground, in the charming town of Townsend, Tennessee, is preparing to celebrate an impressive 30th anniversary milestone. The journey from just a dream to a realized destination has been three decades in the making and isn't slowing, just growing. The story of Big Meadow is also the story of the family behind it, whose dedication has shaped its success and reputation.

For the owners Barbara and Malcolm Johnson, the idea of creating Big Meadow began with a simple spark of inspiration. "It started as a pipe dream," they shared. "We camped with another couple for four or five years and found ourselves critiquing every campground we visited, imagining how much fun it would be to own one." After two years of searching, they discovered a vacant piece of land and began transforming it into the campground that would become Big Meadow.

The development process was no small feat. "We bought the property in August of 1994 and worked all winter to open in May of 1995," they recalled. "It took about six or seven months. It was just the two of us, some outside help, and our son, Greg, who joined us to get things started." From the beginning, Big Meadow was a family effort.

When Big Meadow opened, it offered 96 campsites, only 42 of which were suited for RVs, along with a few primitive tent sites. Over the years, the park evolved with a firm focus on



COURTESY OF BIG MEADOW CAMPGROUND

Malcolm Johnson, Greg Johnson and twin brothers Mason and Matthew Johnson represent three generations of excellence at Big Meadow Campground.

providing high-quality experiences rather than expanding site numbers. "We always strive for quality over quantity," they said. Today, every campsite boasts a full-service setup, water, electric, sewer, cable, Wi-Fi, a concrete pad, and a patio, a testament to their dedication to comfort and convenience.

Big Meadow also pioneered several offerings in Townsend. The first campground in the area to accommodate big rigs up to 45 feet and the first to stay open year-round. And their success story has been recognized many times over. For the past six years, Big Meadow has been selected by TripAdvisor as a Top Choice Park. It's also been rated among the top 300 campgrounds in North America for the last 15 years. Twice, it's been honored as Small Park of the Year through OHI's Awards of Excellence Program. Additionally, the Tennessee State Senate has recognized Big Meadow twice as an "Exemplary Family Business," crediting it as a significant asset to the state.

One of the most rewarding aspects of running Big Meadow has been the relationships built over the years. "We

have campers who have been with us for 25 years or longer," they noted. "They've become family to us, and we're dedicated to them." The campground's close-knit community has even embraced the owners' twin grandsons, who grew up there and are blossoming into the third generation to take part in the family business. "Our boys were adopted by our guests, becoming honorary grandchildren to many. They've been treated to special experiences, like a trip to Texas for a Dallas Cowboys game and a NASCAR booth experience."

The Johnsons are also proud of the park's community involvement. "Big Meadow has been very blessed through the years," they said. "As a member of a small community, we do our best to always give back by helping to support community activities."

Reflecting on three decades in business, the owners shared what has worked for them. "The biggest lesson we've learned is that you can't make everyone happy. We always try our best, but you have to learn to let the little things go," they said. "Every day brings bumps in the road, some big, some small, but you just have to deal

with them. Our philosophy is to give 100%, even if it's not always perfect."

Their advice to new business owners: "Focus on the big picture. Don't let the small stuff weigh you down. If you know you've done your best, that's what matters."

The 30th anniversary celebration at Big Meadow will be filled with the kind of spirit that has made the park feel like a second home to so many. While the highlight is a Memorial Day weekend event featuring a pancake breakfast hosted with the local Kiwanis Club and family-friendly games organized by CHARM, a ministry group, the festivities won't end there. "We want to stretch the celebration all year long," they said. "We're adding campfires and other special activities, thanks to help from a retired schoolteacher in our park. It's going to be a memorable year for us and our guests."

As Big Meadow Family Campground turns 30, it stands to show where a whole lot of family heart can lead. The story of this home away from home is still being written, with new chapters unfolding every day in the Smoky Mountains.

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- RV Storage
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- Groups Welcome

## Local Attractions

- Hiking
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8215 Cedar Creek Road | Townsend, TN 37882 | 865.448.0625

[www.bigmeadowcampground.com](http://www.bigmeadowcampground.com)

[information@bigmeadowcampground.com](mailto:information@bigmeadowcampground.com)

Follow us on Facebook for event information and special deals.

## VISITORS CALENDAR

## MAY

- 3 — SMOKY MOUNTAIN BIGFOOT FESTIVAL + 5K:** Features Bigfoot competitions, guest speakers, live music, vendors, food trucks and other great surprises. At Townsend Event Center.
- 6-8 — AUTHOR REBA RHYNE:** Book signing and sales At Townsend Visitor Center.
- 9-11 — EXHIBITOR RICK KRATZ:** Photography At Townsend Visitor Center.
- 10 — BRITISH CAR SHOW:** Vintage British cars and motorcycles At Talley Ho Inn, Townsend.
- 10 — KIDS TAKE OVER THE MUSEUM DAY:** Fun day of children's activities. At GSM Heritage Center.
- 17 — GO TOPLESS IN THE SMOKIES:** Tradition for the Jeep® community to celebrate the start of Spring and raise money for charity by taking off their Jeep® tops. At Cades Cove Jeep Outpost.
- 17-18 — SCOTTISH FESTIVAL AND GAMES:** East Tennessee's premier celebration of Scottish culture and history At Townsend Event Center.
- 17-23 — VIETNAM 1ST & 8TH INFANTRY RENEWAL AND REMEMBRANCE:** Time of renewal and remembrance for a group of Vietnam veterans At Talley Ho Inn.
- 20-22 — EXHIBITOR LYDA PLEMONS:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.
- 23 — SUNSET CONCERT SERIES:** Acoustic Eidolon: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.
- 23-24 — EXHIBITORS BEVERLY CALLOWAY & THERESA GODFREY:** Pebble Art, Jewelry, Knit, and Crochet At Townsend Visitor Center.
- 25 — SMOKY MOUNTAIN STORYTELLERS:** These tellers weave tales that range from traditional Appalachian narratives to contemporary fiction At GSM Heritage Center.
- 27-29 — EXHIBITOR RANDY THORNTON:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.
- 29-31 — SMOKY MOUNTAIN NATIONALS:** An annual gathering of all trucks from 1950s At Talley Ho Inn.
- 30 — LEGENDS CONCERT SERIES:** Smooth Sailor: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.
- 30-J3 — AUTHOR REBA RHYNE:** Book signing and sales At Townsend Visitor Center.

## JUNE

- 4-8 — EXHIBITOR TOM SCIPLE:**



BRIANNA BIVENS | THE DAILY TIMES

The Great Smoky Mountains Hot Air Balloon Festival will be held Aug. 19 and 20 at the Townsend Visitors Center.

Woodturning At Townsend Visitor Center.

**6 — SUNSET CONCERT SERIES:** Jasper Hollow: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

**13-15 — SALTY DOG SEAFOOD FESTIVAL:** Food festival At Townsend Event Center.

**13 — LEGENDS CONCERT SERIES:** Dirty Cello: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

**14 — WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA VETERANS CEREMONY:** Honoring veterans At GSM Heritage Center.

**20 — SUNSET CONCERT SERIES:** The Jeff Jopling Band: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

**20-21 — BIG BBQ BASH BENEFITING MCNABB CENTER:** McNabb Center fundraiser At Townsend Event Center.

**21 — BARBIE JEEP RACES:** Jeep adventures At Camp Wild Flowers.

**24-J1 — EXHIBITOR ELAINE DAY:** Forest Frames, Log Art, and Painted Signs At Townsend Visitor Center.

**27 — SUNSET CONCERT SERIES:** Jeff Barbra & Sarah Pirkle: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

## JULY

**2-3 — EXHIBITORS BEVERLY CALLOWAY & THERESA GODFREY:** Pebble Art, Jewelry, Knit, and Crochet At Townsend Visitor Center.

**4 — 4TH OF JULY CELEBRATION & FIREWORKS:** Independence Day

celebration At Highland Manor.

**4 — INDEPENDENCE DAY BRASS BAND CONCERT:** Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

**6 — SMOKY MOUNTAIN STORYTELLERS:** These tellers weave tales that range from traditional Appalachian narratives to contemporary fiction At GSM Heritage Center.

**8-12 — EXHIBITOR LYDA PLEMONS:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**14-16 — EXHIBITOR RANDY THORNTON:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**17-21 — EXHIBITOR CORI COLEY:** Jewelry At Townsend Visitor Center.

**18-20 — VOLKSWAGEN GROUP:** Volkswagens from all eras represented At Talley Ho Inn.

**19 — AUTOS THROUGH THE AGES CAR SHOW:** Fans of vintage automobiles can view a special collection of classic cars At GSM Heritage Center.

**22-31 — EXHIBITOR FRED WEISER:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**25 — LEGENDS CONCERT SERIES:** On the Border — The Ultimate Eagles Tribute: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

## AUGUST

**1-3 — EXHIBITOR CORI COLEY:** Jewelry At Townsend Visitor Center.

**4-7 — AUTHOR REBA RHYNE:** Book signing and sales At Townsend Visitor Center.

**8-10 — EXHIBITOR RICK KRATZ:** Photography At Townsend Visitor Center.

**11-14 — EXHIBITOR CORI COLEY:**

Jewelry At Townsend Visitor Center.

**16 — GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS HOT AIR BALLOON FESTIVAL:** Spectacular evening of hot air balloons and family fun At Townsend Event Center.

**21-23 — JEEP TAKEOVER:** Jeep outing in Townsend At Cades Cove Jeep Outpost.

**26-30 — EXHIBITOR ELAINE DAY:** Forest Frames, Log Art, and Painted Signs At Townsend Visitor Center.

**31 — SMOKY MOUNTAIN STORYTELLERS:** These tellers weave tales that range from traditional Appalachian narratives to contemporary fiction At GSM Heritage Center.

**31-S2 — EXHIBITOR RICK KRATZ:** Photography At Townsend Visitor Center.

## SEPTEMBER

**3-8 — EXHIBITOR CORI COLEY:** Jewelry At Townsend Visitor Center.

**5-6 — GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS HALF & 5K:** Escape to the "Peaceful Side of the Smokies" with a gorgeous course through the woods. At Townsend Visitor Center.

**9-11 — EXHIBITOR LYDA PLEMONS:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**10-14 — HUDSON-ESSEX-TERRA-PLANE CAR SHOW:** Vintage cars on display At Talley Ho Inn.

**12 — LEGENDS CONCERT SERIES:** Landslide — A Tribute to Fleetwood Mac: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

**13-14 — HOMESTEADERS FESTIVAL:** Celebration of sustainable living, community resilience, and the rich heritage of homesteading At Townsend Event Center.

**16-19 — EXHIBITOR CATHY COULTER:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**20 — DANCING BEAR BIKE BASH:** Three rides of 27, 38, and 60 miles with full support. At Dancing Bear Lodge.

**26-27 — TOWNSEND FALL HERITAGE FESTIVAL:** The foothills of the Smoky Mountains come to life with Bluegrass music, arts and crafts, time honored traditions At Townsend Event Center.

**27 — BLUE RIBBON COUNTRY FAIR:** In the tradition of old-time county fairs there are plenty of outdoor activities At GSM Heritage Center.

**27-28 — FALL RAILROAD AND HERITAGE EVENT:** Celebration of Townsend's railroad history At Little River Railroad Museum.

See CALENDAR, 7

## Calendar From 6

**28 — SMOKY MOUNTAIN STORYTELLERS:** These tellers weave tales that range from traditional Appalachian narratives to contemporary fiction At GSM Heritage Center.

**30-02 — EXHIBITOR RANDY THORNTON:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

### OCTOBER

**2-5 — BRITISH V8 CAR GATHERING:** British cars on display At Talley Ho Inn.

**3 — SUNSET CONCERT SERIES:** Steve Kaufman: Musical concert At GSM Heritage Center.

**3-4 — EXHIBITORS BEVERLY CALLOWAY & THERESA GODFREY:** Pebble Art, Jewelry, Knit, and Crochet At Townsend Visitor Center.

**6-10 — EXHIBITOR TOM SCIPLE:** Woodturning At Townsend Visitor Center.

**11 — CAMP WILD FLOWERS JEEP DOG SHOW:** Jeep outings in Townsend At Cades Cove Jeep Outpost.

**11 — TWISTED PISTON CAR CLUB:** Vintage car show At Talley Ho Inn.

**11-16 — EXHIBITOR FRED WEISER:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**12 — TASTES OF THE SMOKIES:** Heritage Center fundraiser At GSM Heritage Center.

**17 — VERY SCARY 5K AT THE ABBEY:** Charity fun run At Cades Cove Jeep Outpost.

**17-19 — EXHIBITOR TOWNSEND ARTISAN GUILD:** Local art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**19 — SMOKY MOUNTAIN STORYTELLERS:** These tellers weave tales that range from traditional Appalachian narratives to contemporary fiction At GSM Heritage Center.

**20-22 — EXHIBITOR TERRI ZIMMER:** Painted Seashells and Paperbead Jewelry At Townsend Visitor Center.

**23-26 — EXHIBITOR LARRY BURTON:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

**25 — FALL RIDE & BONFIRE:** Jeep outings in Townsend At Cades Cove Jeep Outpost.

**27-29 — EXHIBITOR RANDY THORNTON:** Art At Townsend Visitor Center.

### NOVEMBER

**1 — GRAINS AND GRITS SPIRITS FESTIVAL:** Tennessee Distillers Guild annual event At Townsend Event Center.

**3-8 — SMOKEY MOUNTAIN MODEL TS:** Car show At Talley Ho Inn.

**4-5 — EXHIBITOR ELAINE DAY:** Forest Frames, Log Art, and Painted Signs At Townsend Visitor Center.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Members of the Atlanta Pipe Band make some last minute checks before Saturday's bagpipe competition at the 2024 Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games in Townsend.

**6-8 — EXHIBITOR DEEDE EDELE:** Black Bear Mountain Arts & Crafts At Townsend Visitor Center.

**9-13 — EXHIBITOR TOM SCIPLE:** Woodturning At Townsend Visitor Center.

**9 — CADES COVE LOOP LOPE:** Runners event At Cades Cove.

**14-16 — EXHIBITOR RICK KRATZ:** Photography At Townsend Visitor Center.

**15 — HOLIDAY HANDCRAFTERS FESTIVAL & HEIRLOOM GARDEN SEED SWAP:** Shop for handmade items At GSM Heritage Center.

**17-26 — AUTHOR REBA RHYNE:** Book signing and sales At Townsend Visitor Center.

**28-29 — EXHIBITORS BEVERLY CALLOWAY & THERESA GODFREY:** Pebble Art, Jewelry, Knit, and Crochet At Townsend Visitor Center.

### DECEMBER

**1-7 — EXHIBITOR TOM SCIPLE:** Woodturning At Townsend Visitor Center.

**5-6 — CHRISTMAS IN THE VILLAGE:** Celebrate Christmas Appalachian style At GSM Heritage Center.

**7 — TOWNSEND CHRISTMAS PARADE:** Santa Claus and holiday traditions At Townsend.

**8-22 — AUTHOR REBA RHYNE:** Book signing and sales At Townsend Visitor Center.

**12-13 — CHRISTMAS IN THE VILLAGE:** Celebrate Christmas Appalachian style At GSM Heritage Center.

**13 — CHRISTMAS AT THE LITTLE RIVER RAILROAD MUSEUM:** Christmas celebration at the museum At Little River RR Museum.

**19-20 — CHRISTMAS IN THE VILLAGE:** Celebrate Christmas Appalachian style At GSM Heritage Center.

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

# Dogwood Mall

*They often say...this is the type of place I've always wanted to find in the smokies!*

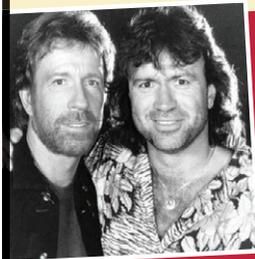
Granted Townsend doesn't exactly sound like a place for celebrity sightings. Nevertheless Roy Holmes and his wife Sherry - owners of the Dogwood Mall - have seen their Mall become a mecca for those looking for local Art, Crafts and Quality Gifts that represent the Smoky Mountains.

Holmes celebrity connections began in the 70's when he began training with Chuck Norris and his brother Aaron which began a 50 plus year involvement in the martial arts.



Meanwhile Holmes enjoyed a successful career running 70 jewelry stores. However, flying around the country didn't leave much family time and he happened to see Townsend from the air in the company plane on the way to Chicago. He thought with his retail background and the fact that his wife was the President of an Art / Craft guild, the Lord had opened the right door for the change they needed.

Holmes said his wife deserves much of the credit because she was able to fill the Dogwood Mall with some of the best artists and crafters in the Smokies and to set up the format so the artist rent the spaces and allows the customers to buy directly from the artist. This of course makes the prices so very reasonable. At first, before they were so busy, Sherry made much of what they sold because she was so talented Holmes said.



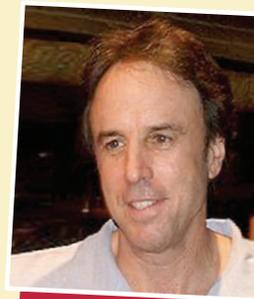
These days the Dogwood Mall is home to some of the most accredited artists in the Smoky Mountains...including artists, photographers, woodworkers, potters, knife makers and much more. The work has garnered the attention of many collectors, actors, singers and politicians. They include Kid Rock, David Keith, the James Bond girl from Goldfinger, Miles O'Keefe who played Tarzan, Tess Harper, Golden Globe award winner Dale Dickey, Jo Don from Rascal Flatts, Andy Stahl from the movie Blind Side, a member of the British Parliament, famous authors and many more.

Dogwood mall also has quality t-shirts, sourwood honey, preserves, caps and fine gifts that represent the Smokies.

Dogwood Mall was chosen as one of the top places to visit. Go see why for yourself!

**8455 Hwy. 73, Townsend, TN 37882**  
**865-448-2281**

One mile south of Townsend traffic light @321 towards Cades Cove



# Museums give visitors a glimpse of the past

LINDA BRADEN ALBERT

Correspondent

Learning about the history and heritage of Townsend and Blount County as a whole can be fun and rewarding. Townsend is home to Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center and Little River Railroad and Lumber Company Museum, plus three others are a short drive away in Maryville — the Cades Cove Museum operated by the Cades Cove Preservation Association, the Blount County Historical Museum and Historic Sam Houston Schoolhouse.



COURTESY OF GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS HERITAGE CENTER

Guests enjoy a previous year's Tastes of the Smokies event at Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center, a fundraiser for GSMHC. This year's Tastes of the Smokies will be held June 1.

## GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS HERITAGE CENTER

123 Cromwell Drive, Townsend

**Admission:** \$12 adults (13 and older) \$10 seniors/\$8 children ages 5-12 Free for children 4 and under

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; noon-5 p.m. Sunday  
865-448-0044

[www.gsmheritagecenter.org](http://www.gsmheritagecenter.org)

[www.facebook.com/GSMHC](http://www.facebook.com/GSMHC)

Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center's mission is to "preserve, interpret and share the history and culture of the diverse peoples and Native Americans who have inhabited the Southern Appalachians and offer exhibitions and programs for educational and cultural enrichment."

The Heritage Center houses permanent exhibits showcasing Native Americans of East Tennessee and East Tennessee mountain culture as well as an Appalachian village with 17 historic buildings furnished accordingly. In the Main Gallery, the Native American Collection displays artifacts discovered by archaeologists on prehistoric life in Townsend, also known as Tuckaleechee Cove, on one of the largest archaeological dig projects in Tennessee history. Pottery, stone tools and other artifacts in the display are over 10,000 years old.

The main gallery also features more recent mountain culture exhibits on Appalachian music and education. Vintage cars, trucks, fire engines, cannons and more have been donated to the Heritage Center and are on display throughout the facility.

Not only is the Heritage Center

a learning experience, it's fun for all ages. On weekends, visitors may find demonstrations of what their pioneer ancestors would have done on a daily basis by re-enactors in period dress in the Appalachian village. Festivals, such as the Fiber Fair held in April with vendors, classes and demonstrations, including sheep shearing, are hosted throughout the year as well as concerts in the outdoor amphitheater. The center offers a myriad of special activities for visitors in addition to being immersed in the history of the area.

## LITTLE RIVER RAILROAD AND LUMBER COMPANY MUSEUM

7747 E Lamar Alexander Parkway, Townsend

**Admission:** Free; donations welcome

**Hours:** May-October, open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays and Saturdays, 1-5 p.m. Sunday; November, open weekends, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Sunday; closed December-March, groups by appointment; grounds and outdoor exhibits always available

Telephone: 865-661-0170

Website: [LittleRiverRailroad.org](http://LittleRiverRailroad.org)

The Little River Railroad and Lumber Company is a non-profit corporation founded in 1982 to preserve the heritage of the Little River Lumber Company and the Little River Railroad. The museum collects, preserves and displays the history of these

two companies, which were originally founded in 1901 by W.B. Townsend, for whom Townsend is named, and a group of investors who purchased nearly 100,000 acres of timberland along the Little River and its tributaries.

The lumber company eventually grew to become one of the largest commercial logging operations in Southern Appalachia. In its 38 years of operation, the company encompassed 150 miles of railroads and gathered 560 million feet of timber. Townsend itself was founded as a result of the company's expansion and soon after, the tourism industry began to flourish. In 1982, the Little River Railroad and Lumber Company Museum was established as a nonprofit organization, incorporating a Shay engine that had been used in the logging operation and an original train depot that was relocated to Townsend and subsequently furnished with memorabilia dating back to the days of the railroad and lumber operations.

## CADES COVE MUSEUM

1004 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway, Maryville, at the Historic Thompson-Brown House

**Admission:** Free; donations welcome

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday

865-982-0705

[www.cadescovepreservation.com](http://www.cadescovepreservation.com)

The Cades Cove Museum, located

in Maryville, is operated by the Cades Cove Preservation Association as part of its mission to preserve the heritage and human history of the Cades Cove community, located in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Cades Cove Preservation Association formed on Jan. 6, 2001, with about 50 people present who were concerned about the future — and preservation of the past — of the small mountain community that had become the most visited area in the confines of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most visited national park in the United States. CCPA has since grown to around 500 members today. Volunteers have worked with GSMNP personnel to remediate the historic cemeteries, maintain the church buildings, repair pathways and share information with visitors.

The Cades Cove Museum in the historic Thompson-Brown House at 1004 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway in Maryville has an extensive collection of Cades Cove artifacts to tell the story of the Cove. Museum Director Gloria Motter estimated that the museum contains almost 1,000 artifacts once used in the Cove, telling the story from the viewpoint of the families who lived there. Holdings include photographs, documents and genealogical information, as well.

The museum draws visitors from

## Museums From 8

all over the United States and several foreign countries.

### BLOUNT COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

1006 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway, Maryville, just past the Cades Cove Museum

**Admission:** Free; donations welcome

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday  
865-454-4256

The Blount County Historical Museum in Maryville is located near the Cades Cove Museum. A parking lot between the two gives visitors an opportunity to visit both museums with only a short walk between.

George Lane, president of the Blount County Historical Museum, and other volunteer docents lead tours of the museum and share a wealth of information about the unique displays. The tour begins in the lobby area and then circles through the main exhibit hall and back to the lobby.

One of the most valuable pieces is a sculpture, "The Man and His Dog," by internationally famed Alcoa sculptor Bessie Harvey. Harvey's sculptures are made of found materials, predominantly wood branches and roots, which she then decorated with paint, glitter, jewelry, and other materials. Her works appear in the permanent collections of the Knoxville Museum of Art and the American Folk Art Museum in New York and has been featured in exhibitions in museums such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Turner Contemporary in England as part of exhibitions on African American artwork from the American South.

Native Americans are also featured in six collections of artifacts. These are displayed in the main exhibit room at the beginning of the tour along with information about these earliest inhabitants of Blount County. The tour continues with information and displays about the forts and stations of Blount County. One of the displays is of a possible entry gate hinge believed to have been from Fort McTeer, the first fortification on the frontier of the Indian territory of the North Carolina Colony which is now Blount County.

Displays of life in Blount's history



COURTESY OF GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS HERITAGE CENTER

Members of the Tuckaleechee Garden club do leaf pressing with a young guest at Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center.

after white settlers came onto the scene are depicted in rooms showing spinning and weaving, cooking and sewing. A significant display on the Civil War takes visitors through that tumultuous time with information, photographs and weaponry.

Separate rooms contain exhibits of education in Blount County and a bedroom in an early 20th century home. Another room holds a model railroad display.

Veterans are well-represented in a separate exhibit hall where uniforms, letters and objects related to the veterans' military service are found. Visitors then return to the lobby and view additional exhibits and the gift shop area. The museum sponsors special programs and activities throughout the year.

### SAM HOUSTON HISTORIC SCHOOLHOUSE

3650 Old Sam Houston School Road, Maryville

**Admission:** Under 5, free; 6-12, \$3; 13 and up, \$5

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; closed on major holidays; closed for the season Dec. 20-first Tuesday in March

865-983-1550

[www.samhoustonhistoricschoolhouse.org](http://www.samhoustonhistoricschoolhouse.org)

The Sam Houston Schoolhouse State Historic Site in Maryville examines the historic role Sam Houston played in the early 19th century as a patriot, political figure and statesman. It is located on the original site of the single-room log cabin that was originally built in 1794 by Revolutionary War veteran Andrew Kennedy,

Henry McCulloch and their neighbors shortly after they relocated from Kentucky to Tennessee. Houston, who then lived in Blount County, taught school here for one year immediately prior to the War of 1812.

Houston's career included being first lieutenant in the U.S. Army, major general for the army of Texas during the future state's efforts to secede from Mexico, an honorary

member of the Cherokee Nation, the first and third president of the Republic of Texas, a member of the Texas House of Representatives, a member of the United States House of Representatives from Tennessee, a United States senator from Texas, governor of Tennessee, and later governor of Texas. He is the only person in history to serve as governor of two separate states.

In addition to the schoolhouse itself, the site includes a museum containing books, documents and other artifacts relating to Houston's life and the era he lived in. There is also a gift shop on the property featuring arts and crafts created by local artisans and books written by local authors about Houston and Blount County. The site also includes a pavilion that can be rented for weddings, events and private parties.

Designated a state historic site, the Sam Houston Schoolhouse operates under an agreement with the Tennessee Historic Commission and is funded under an agreement with the Tennessee Historical Commission. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

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# Bears and second chances

ABR readies itself for new season of cubs in need

**MELANIE TUCKER**  
melt@thedailytimes.com

Last year, Appalachian Bear Rescue in Townsend cared for 37 black bears — cubs of the year and yearlings who were injured in the wild, orphaned or both.

This nonprofit takes them in, gets them veterinary care at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine and sets them up with space to heal and grow. There's the Cub Nursery for the most fragile, Hartley House and the Recovery Center are two other indoor enclosures where these temporary tenants might end up for a few weeks.

ABR also has four outdoor enclosures where the playful can climb trees, take a dip in the pool and discover a bridge to navigate. The next leg of their journey is release back into the wild for a chance to start over.

Dana Dodd, ABR's Executive Director, said her agency is focused on being ready for the next houseguests. When that might happen isn't known.

Back in December 2024, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency made the difficult decision to put down 13 bears housed here, due to discovery of a bacterial infection. TWRA believed the bears

might pose a danger to the wild bear population once released. This same infection had previously killed three cubs at ABR in 2023.

Because the 13 bears were housed in or adjacent to the same enclosure as the initial sick three bears, they were all put down. Only two of the bears exhibited symptoms.

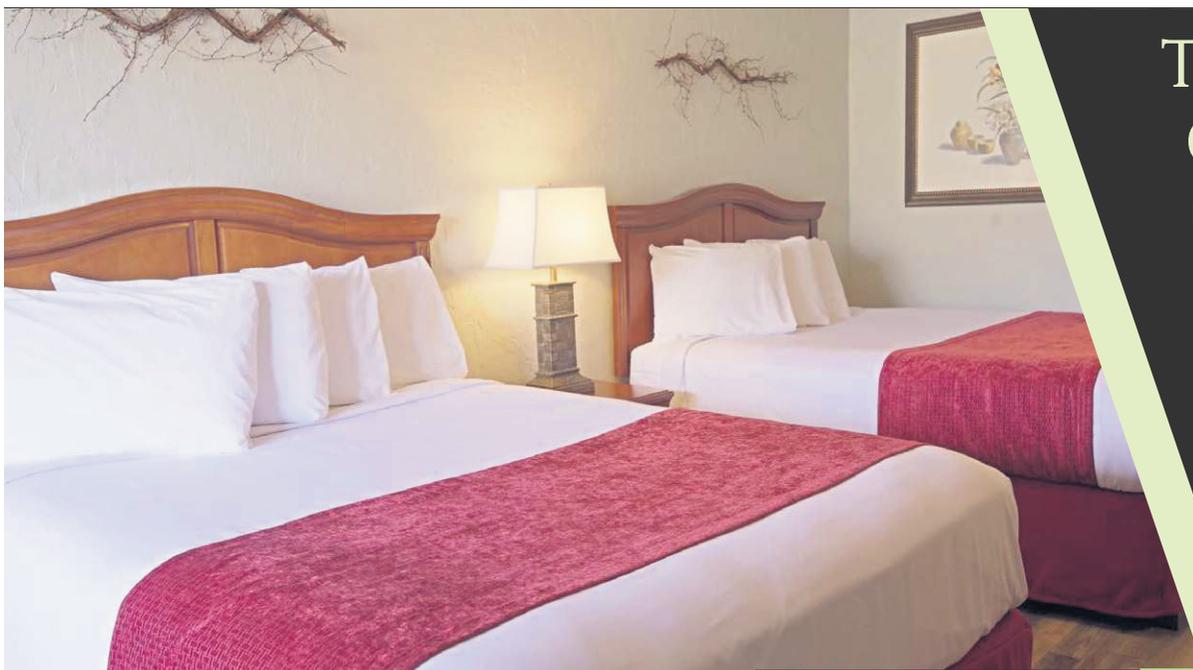
ABR did not agree with the drastic measure. They had wanted to keep the bears longer and monitor them. TWRA told the nonprofit it wasn't sure when it would be sending bears to ABR once again.



COURTESY OF DANA DODD

Appalachian Bear Rescue Curator Jamie Cales works on one of the platforms in a bear enclosure at the facility in Townsend.

See **BEARS, 11**



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## Bears From 10

But ABR isn't sitting back, waiting. The curators and others have been working nonstop to vigorously clean and sanitize both inside and out.

"We are moving ahead," Dodd said earlier this month. "We are doing the work we have to do. I know we are doping everything we need to do to be ready for bears."

That includes tripe disinfecting every building. Roger Newman installed UV filters to the HVAC system and also cleaned the ductwork. All of the buildings are now ready. Dodd said. Should a cub born this year need to be brought here, Dodd said the Cub Nursery is ready. So are Hartley House and the Recovery Center.

"We did the buildings first because that is who we would get first," the executive director said.

The next order of business became Enclosures 1 and 2 since no bears housed there were ever infected. It was Enclosures 3 and 4 that housed sick or exposed bears. Dodd said those two will be cleaned last and will not be used until the end of the year, giving them a year of bear-free activity.

"We are giving them a year, for the UV from sunlight to take care of some issues. We also have to do control burns in there. We are also tearing down platforms and all of that."

So work is mostly done in 1 and 2. Tire bridges were replaced along with pools. Platforms were removed and new enrichment tools installed.

"Did we have to do that for sanitary purposes? Technically no," Dodd said. "There have not been any sick bears in there."

The main reason for this refurbish has to do with



COURTESY OF DANA DODD

Greg Grieco busy getting Appalachian Bear Rescue ready to house bears once again.

heavy bear use. Dodd said Jan. 24 of this year was the first day in more than 1,000 that ABR didn't have a bear onsite. And while bears are there, there is no opportunity to repair or replace what the bears have torn up or worn out.

"When we went in to check on all of the infrastructure in 1 and 2 — in those platforms bolts were coming loose, there had been bee and woodpecker damage on support rails. There were all kinds of problems, but they were all normal wear and tear. We were going to have to do this no matter what."

The consensus of ABR curators was use time

wisely with no bears inhouse. "Because we don't know when the next 1,000 straight days will start," Dodd said.

At some point, ABR will have to add enclosures, Dodd said, due to the need to reduce the density of bears that are housed together. Bears will be moved from one enclosed area to another so cleaning and monitoring can be done every few weeks. This is the most significant change in how ABR operates.

This means expanding current enclosures and building additional ones, Dodd explained. Work has yet to begin. Getting



COURTESY OF DANA DODD

A group of volunteers with Appalachian Bear Rescue on trash pickup detail in Townsend.



COURTESY OF DANA DODD

Curators Seth Wyckoff and Jamie Cales get a new pool installed in one of the bear enclosures at Appalachian Bear Rescue in Townsend.

all existing areas ready to accept bears is priority. It is important for the bears that come here to receive as little human contact as possible so they can go back out as wild bears.

All of the work to clean, sanitize and redo the facility would have cost more had ABR not been able to use its own labor. Expenses will come when new fences and other equipment are needed for expansion.

Should ABR get a call today or tomorrow, they will be ready, Dodd said. And work will continue on getting Enclosures 3 and 4 ready for the end of the year.

Those 37 bears cared for

in 2024 were a record for this nonprofit. Twenty-nine were here all at one time. Dodd said ABR is grateful for its support right here in Blount County and across the globe, thanks to social media.

ABR has a visitors center in Trillium Cove in Townsend. The center recently gave tours of the bear facility minus any bears. The tours filled up fast. Dodd said people just want to do their part.

"We have the best supporters in our community and around the world," she said. "They want to help bear cubs. That's it. They want to know how they can help."

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# Highlanders return



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Visitors and vendors mingle in weather reminiscent of Scotland in Townsend on Saturday morning during the start of the 42nd Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games.

## Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games promises fun

**LEE ZIMMERMAN**

Correspondent for The Daily Times

East Tennessee's archival roots are never all that far from the surface, one reason why the Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games as one of the region's most highly anticipated events of the entire year.

It's also a reason why its organizers thrive to come up with new additives and elements each year in order to maintain the high bar set in year's past.

This year's event, taking place this weekend — Saturday May 17 and Sunday, May 18 — and hosted by the Townsend Event Center, will continue to offer something special for both the clans and the curious. Now in its 43rd year, the festival maintains its mission “to



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Chris Chafin competes in the pro athlete Hammer Throw event Saturday at 42nd Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games in Townsend.

preserve the heritage and culture of Scotland by fostering national

### IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games

**WHEN:** May 17-18, gates open on Saturday and Sunday at 8 a.m. Saturday's activities conclude at 9:30 p.m. and Sunday concludes at approximately 4:30 p.m.

**WHERE:** Townsend Event Center, 7930 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Townsend

**HOW MUCH:** Two day pass — \$30, Saturday only — \$20, Sunday only — \$15

**TICKETS:** Go to [tickets.smokymountaingames.org](https://tickets.smokymountaingames.org) (Tickets can also be purchased at the gate)

and international sporting, dancing and music competition, as well

as cultural performances of the Scottish clans, education, folklore, music, arts, piping, drumming, athletic events and other festivities in the area. The SMSFG shall remain a viable leader in family entertainment and good stewards of our assets, giving back to the community.”

Naturally, that includes all manner of uniquely Highland activities, including music, athletics, pipes and drums, dancing, whiskey tastings, an array of vendors and beer and food from the Scottish, Irish and British homelands.

“For 2025, we're bringing in an outstanding lineup of entertainment that is popular with our crowds,” said Keith Austin, Sponsor and Marketing Chair for the Festival

See **FESTIVAL**, 14

# Festival

From 13

and Games. "We'll welcome Eireann's Call, Ghosts of Ban-nockburn, and Raglan Road in addition to our regular cast of entertainers."

In fact, there will be three stages of music. "The Edinburgh stage will have more of the rock format," Austin said. "On the Glasgow stage, you'll find more of the folk type music as presented by longtime balladeer Colin Grant-Adams. The Saint Andrew stage will feature cultural talks and presentations on traditional Scottish craft."

So too, more than 55 clans will be represented, which is more or less the same number as last year. "The clans can trace their roots back centuries," Austin added. "Most of the clan attendees are living in this country and come to several different festivals like this throughout the year. The Friday night clan torch lighting is a great opportunity to learn more, as the clans come forward at sundown and announce their attendance.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Highland game competitors wait for their turn in the stone throw Saturday in Townsend during the 42nd Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games.

Of course, the event attracts more than the clans. Austin said they typically expect between eight and ten thousand visitors, and it should be the same this year as well.

Naturally, the games offer a special attraction to those whose family lineage is connected to the British Isles. "According to the census bureau, one out of every five East Tennessee residents can trace their roots back to Scotts-Irish ancestry," Austin said. "Scotland has influenced culture over the world, in areas like art,

entertainment, sports, literature, and so much more. We encourage people to come and experience the traditions of that culture."

Austin himself has been involved with the festivities for nearly a decade. "Coming out of a communications and advertising background, I was able to help with getting the word out about this festival," he said. "I truly enjoy seeing all the different ways that the Scotts-Irish have influenced today's culture. For me, the Austin family was a part of the Keith clan, so it's just a natural fit."



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Knoxville's Jackson Roberts, 8, takes a turn at the kids Caber Toss on Saturday during the 42nd Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games in Townsend.

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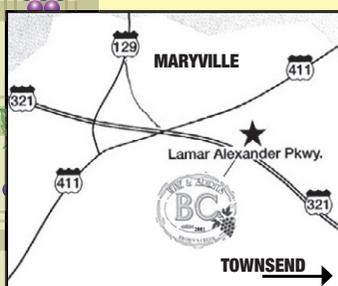


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# Looking for Sasquatch

## Bigfoot Festival celebrates a captivating creature

Staff Reports

The legendary half-man, half-ape, fully mythical creature popularly known as “Bigfoot” has fascinated folks for generations. There have been sightings, supposed sightings, rumors, and stories circulating for decades, but no one seems to know for sure the whereabouts of this mysterious inhabitant of the swamps and the backwoods.

It seems only natural then that some sort of celebration is due. Credit Brian Johnson, owner of Smoky Mountain Festivals and the founder and organizer of the annual event known as the Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival, for creating an event that pays homage to this elusive creature popularly known as the elusive Sasquatch.

The festival, which takes place at the Townsend Visitors Center on Saturday, May 3, offers what organizers call “an immersive experience like no other, combining captivating entertainment, live music, vendors, food trucks, and a sense of camaraderie that brings people from all walks of life together for this family-friendly event.”

Asked why the focus is on Bigfoot, Johnson came right to the point. “Because Bigfoot is awesome,” he replied. “Whether you are a believer or a skeptic, it’s a subject that is just plain fun to dig into. When you take the time and listen to the experts’ detailed evidence, experiences and some of the unexplained happenings in the forest, you can’t help but be gripped by the information.”

Indeed, the lure of Bigfoot clearly has its appeal. Johnson said they expect approximately 15,000 people to attend the festival this year. “Our guests visit from all over,” he added. “That includes representation from nearly all 50 states, including Alaska and Hawaii, as well as international visitors from Canada,



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Regulars at the annual festival came prepared for a day of fun.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Big Toeven, a hybrid of Bigfoot and Beethoven, plays classical selections for the crowd at Saturday’s Bigfoot Festival.

Europe, and Australia.”

Currently in its fifth year, the activities will kick off with a 5K and one-mile “fun run,” from Peaceful Side Social. Participants will wind their way through scenic trails where, rumor has it, Bigfoot might just make an appearance! With a course suitable for all levels, from seasoned runners to casual

See **BIGFOOT**, 16

### IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** Bigfoot Festival

**WHEN:** Saturday, May 3 — 5K race begins at 9 a.m., Festival takes place from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**WHERE:** Townsend Visitors Center, 7906 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Townsend,

**HOW MUCH:** \$15 for the festival itself (Free for kids under 10)

**5K RUN:** Begins at Peaceful Side Social, 7967 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Townsend

**INFO & TIX:** [www.bigfest.com](http://www.bigfest.com)

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SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

SlashSquatch plays a cover of Guns n' Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine" in the Townsend Visitor Center pavilion Saturday.

## Bigfoot

From 15

the Bigfoot 5K offers a perfect adventure for families, friends, and anyone drawn to the magic of the Smokies. Stick around after the race for awards, photo ops, and the Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival featuring live music, vendors, food trucks, Bigfoot competitions, special guests, family-fun zone and much more.

A number of special guests will also be on hand to elaborate, among them, Turtleman, host of Animal Planet's "Call of the Wildman"; Buck, Huckleberry, Wild Bill, and Willy from Travel Channel's "Mountain Monsters"; "Dogman Expert" Martin Groves; "Cryptic Expeditions" filmmaker Greg Ogles; "Expedition Bigfoot" explorer and primatologist Dr. Mireya Mayor; "Manbests" explorer

Adam Davies; "Visitors from Hidden Realms" author Brent Raynes and more

Johnson also encourages people to stick around for the Chainsaw Carving Invitational, which includes 14 world-class wood carvers from around the United States.

The event is billed as family-friendly and pet-friendly and features a kid zone, various vendors, and a number of food trucks that will be onsite. Taken in total, it allows guests to experience what Johnson describes as "a world where the mystery reigns supreme."

"As you walk onto the festival grounds, you're immediately enveloped in an atmosphere of excitement and intrigue," Johnson continues. "The air is filled with the aroma of delicious food vendors, including hearty fare inspired by the wilderness, from sizzling



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Festival visitors dealt with a little mud following early morning rain in Townsend, but it was no deterrent to fun. Entertainers and vendors kept the crowd happy throughout the festival.

barbecue to mouthwatering campfire classics."

Visitors will also find several rows of booths showcasing an eclectic array of Bigfoot-themed merchandise, from t-shirts and artwork to books and memorabilia. Various

Bigfoot competitions will also take place.

"Whether you're a seasoned enthusiast or a curious skeptic, there's something here to pique your interest and ignite your imagination," Johnson said.

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# Townsend wedding venues offer something for every taste

LINDA BRADEN ALBERT

Correspondent for The Daily Times

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## HARPER’S VINEYARD

338 Webb Road, Townsend  
Telephone: 865-806-2842  
Website: [harpersvineyard.com](http://harpersvineyard.com)  
Harper’s Vineyard is one of the newest wedding venues in Townsend. Owners Chuck and Sarah Brown purchased the property in 2017, and through the years, had friends ask to use the property for wedding ceremonies. Due to the success and popularity of these weddings, the idea and dream of Harper’s Vineyard, named for their young daughter, was sparked.

“Basically, we are family-owned, and primarily a farm,” Chuck Brown said. “We are a muscadine vineyard with seven different varieties of muscadine grapes, and we have wine made from our muscadines from a local winery.” In addition, the Browns grow and produce 11 other varieties of fruits and berries, from blueberries to apples, from plums to elderberries, all grown organically with no herbicides or pesticides.

“We do weddings on the side, so that is a second tier to our business,” Brown said. Couples who choose Harper’s Vineyard have “an amazing view” on the property. “We have a great building that’s glass all



COURTESY OF APRIL JOPLING

Country Manor Acres has expanded its party barn to include an enclosed pavilion, allowing weddings to be held comfortably in all seasons.

the way around and a family-like staff,” he said. “We’re not someplace with a lot of rules. We try to cater to everybody and help them make it their own.”

Harper’s Vineyard provides tables, chairs, linens, staff to work the wedding and the facilities themselves. For more information, visit the website.

## BARN EVENT CENTER OF THE SMOKIES

7264 E Lamar Alexander Parkway, Townsend

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Website: [barneventcenterofthesmokies.com](http://barneventcenterofthesmokies.com)

The Barn Event Center of the Smokies offers “a mountain wedding with an Appalachian touch,” where modern convenience and state of the art facilities blend with Appalachian heritage. The cantilever barn is surrounded by award-winning gardens, and the great room features exposed beams, vaulted ceiling and sparkling



COURTESY OF COUNTRY MANOR ACRES

A horse-drawn carriage is one of the services offered to couples who get married at Country Manor Acres in Townsend.

lights. The Bridal Suite offers a comfortable space for the wedding party to relax and prepare for the day’s events.

Andrea Mervin, manager at the Barn Event Center of the Smokies, said, “We offer a beautiful place, whether they want to get married inside or outside. We have a beautiful garden area that is maintained and fresh flowers added every year. We can do a Plan B if it’s raining outside and can do an inside ceremony with cocktail hour or social hour in between where the guests use the downstairs area. There’s a smaller dining room area and patio, and it’s under cover. We also have a day-of coordinator, and we have lots of decorations. We have delicious catering menus. We customize things for people.”

The Barn Event Center strives to give couples and their guests a pleasant experience.

“We like to make sure everybody is happy,” Mervin said. “We do a

lot for people. There’s a lot of decorations people can use that are included with the venue. There’s somebody that helps them set up and a day-of coordinator, so there’s a lot of help so it’s not so overwhelming for the bride. We can pretty much do everything like that and they do the fun things—like what kind of style they want or the colors they want to make it theirs. We do all the furniture moving and everything.”

Couples will provide their own photographer, cake vendor, deejay, officiant, etc. “We provide a beautiful place for them to have the ceremony and reception, the tables and chairs, and we have linens and catering,” Mervin said.

## COUNTRY MANOR ACRES

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Website: [www.countrymanoracres.com](http://www.countrymanoracres.com)

Country Manor Acres in Townsend has been owned by the Jopling Family for more than 30 years. The family is dedicated to providing weddings and receptions with a backdrop of more than 50 acres of beautiful scenery and mountain views, comfortable facilities, bridal party dressing areas, upscale bridal and guest lodging facilities with experienced professionals and staff members providing a full-service experience.

April Jopling, owner, said, “We offer everything, from photography, videography, officiant, catering, horse-drawn carriage ride—every

See WEDDING, 20

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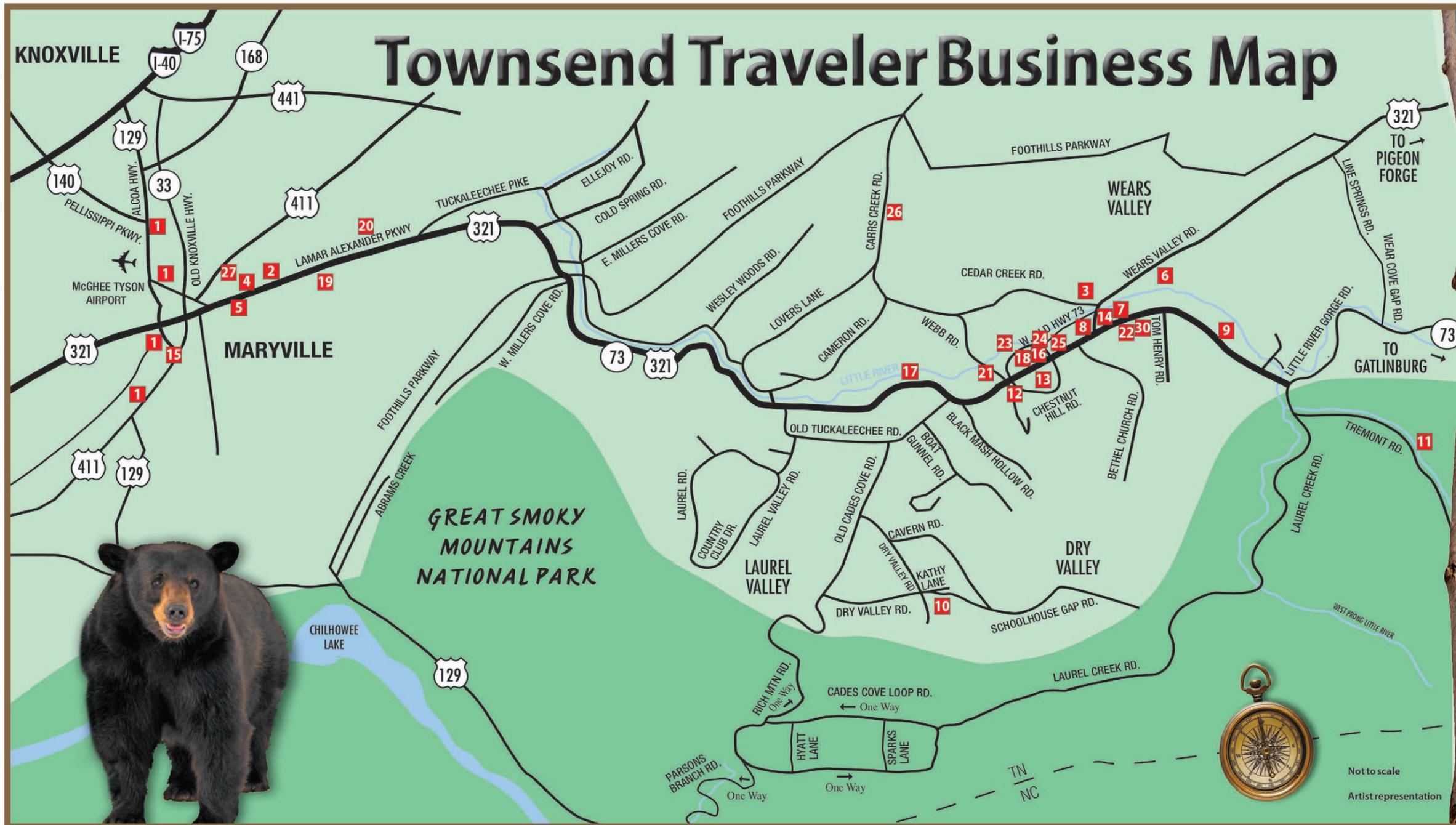
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## Wedding From 17

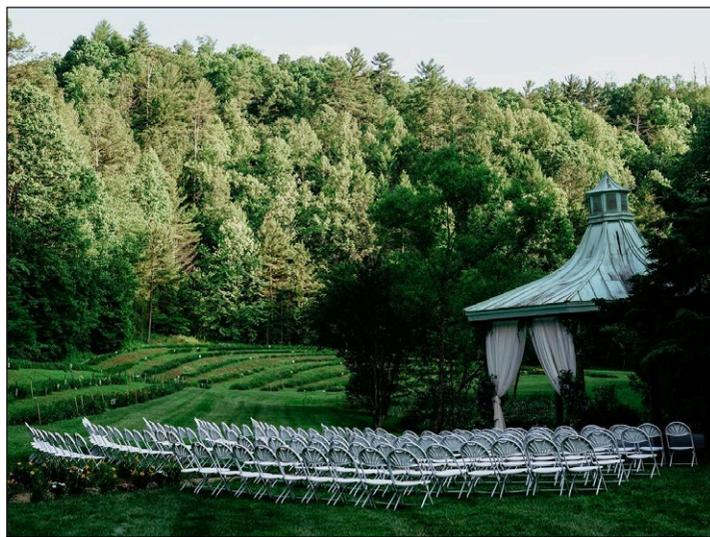
service you can imagine that fits into a wedding, we have. We even have our own in-house florist. We don't force the bride to use all our services, but when you do, all of the wedding planning services are free." Jopling said their price is ala carte so the couple can choose only the services they want, which works well for out-of-town brides. Country Manor Acres offers a free, private tour for couples considering the venue for their wedding. The tour takes about two hours to visit the lodging options, possible wedding and reception sites, etc.

"We also offer horseback ride wedding tours," Jopling said. "It's really unique and fun. We do charge the bride for those, but if they book with us, we give them credit back for it." Country Manor Acres is also pet-friendly. Jopling said couples have included dogs, cats, even a turtle in their weddings.

Several changes have taken place since last year. Jopling said, "We had a beautiful little party barn and a big patio just outside it. We have put an entire pavilion attached to the side of the party barn now, and we can do large events for 300 or more. We also have side walls for it all so we can do winter events, which we couldn't do before."

A veranda at the bed and breakfast has been enlarged and will give another option for a small wedding, Jopling said. "It will be the most spectacular place for small weddings. It's the highest elevation on our property and has the most exquisite views."

More lodging is available, as well. "Now we're renting all the cabins next door to us," Jopling said. The owners have contracted with Jeffrey and Nicole Jopling to manage the cabins. Guests have the use of both properties, about 64 acres total.



COURTESY OF LILY BARN

An open-air entertainment pavilion at the Lily Barn offers space for wedding receptions.

Another new feature called "a cozy farm experience" has been added. "When we don't have weddings, we are featuring Wagon Wheels and Acoustic Meals," Jopling said. "We only do them on certain days because the weddings have to take priority." Special, intimate dinners are served by appointment only in the party barn with live piano music in the background. After dinner, guests will take a carriage ride to a fire ring, roast marshmallows and enjoy live guitar music and singing. Jopling emphasized that this is a private event requiring reservations.

"This would be something for an anniversary or if a guy wanted to propose to a girl. You want it to be special, to be private," Jopling said. "I'm seeing it as a special event for couples but it can also be for families. There will be only one menu per night since it will be small and intimate."

Country Manor Acres is a family-run business. Jopling oversees the weddings, while her son Jeffrey is in charge of lodging, daughter-in-law Nicole manages the horse riding and carriage business, and her two grandchildren, Perry, 5, and Reid, 2 ½, are enjoying all aspects of the farm and businesses. Jopling

said Perry, already an accomplished horseback rider, goes on the tours with her. "She has gone on so many tours with me that I have a feeling in a few years she is going to turn into a wedding planner," Jopling said. "She knows how to plan things and bark orders!"

### THE LILY BARN

1116 Carrs Creek Road,  
Townsend

Telephone: 865-448-9895

Website: [www.lilybarn.com](http://www.lilybarn.com)

The Lily Barn, a 100-acre farm in Townsend, features a 130-year-old cantilever barn sitting among a 3-acre perennial garden as well as a pond, day lilies and native plants. Ceremonies are held at a tin-roofed outdoor gazebo, which sits just in front of a large pond filled with water plants. An enclosed, temperature-controlled entertainment pavilion with full catering services as well as many wedding amenities, such as photography, flowers and catering, are offered.

Janice Fillmore, owner, said, "We offer a full-service venue, in that we have the venue, the tables, the chairs. We typically rent our tablecloths, and it's their choice of colors. We also provide the catering. We have been running packages

for 50, 75, 100, 125, generally up to 150 people. Our ideal wedding would be somewhere between 100 and 125 guests.

"What we like to do is have guest come into the barn and park and then go to the gazebo, which is where the couple gets married down in the lily fields," she said. "After the ceremony, we ask guests to come back up underneath the barn and we have a cocktail hour so the guests can roam the three acres of gardens. They can mingle, chat, drink and eat while the bride and groom are getting their pictures made. Then they rejoin the bride and groom at the pavilion, where the reception is held."

A bridal suite is provided where the bride and bridesmaids can get dressed, and a cabin is provided for the groom and groomsmen. Lodging is available in cabins and more at Little River Campground, another of Fillmore's properties. "If you have a big party coming in from out of town and they all want to stay at the same place, 53 people can be accommodated on the property plus the river house, which holds eight, so 61 people on the property." More accommodations are available at another farm the family owns, which is about a mile and a half away.

"They can rent our cabins either at the campground or our houses," Fillmore said. "We have six houses we rent out, and we partner with hotels here in Townsend if they need blocks of rooms."

Services are also offered for elopements at the farm and at another of Fillmore's businesses, The Townsend Abbey, 7765 River Road, Townsend, which was at one time Heartland Little River Wedding Chapel. The Abbey now is a restaurant serving food and craft beer and hosts music and other special events. "We are now a restaurant but we kept the chapel," Fillmore said. "There's also a nice patio

overlooking the river. In the off-season, we'll do a small wedding on the patio there, the off-season being November through April. We really don't rent it out between May and October."

For more information about the Lily Barn or Townsend Abbey, visit the website. Learn about accommodations at Little River Campground by visiting [littlerivercampground.com](http://littlerivercampground.com).

### DANCING BEAR LODGE AND APPALACHIAN BISTRO

7140 E. Lamar Alexander  
Parkway

Telephone: 865-448-6000

Website: [dancingbearlodge.com](http://dancingbearlodge.com)

Dancing Bear Lodge and Appalachian Bistro may be rented for the evening, day or entire weekend with wedding professionals available to help with wedding planning. According to the website, [dancingbearlodge.com](http://dancingbearlodge.com), "from intimate elopements to elaborate wedding weekends filled with Smoky Mountain adventure, our spaces can be arranged to accommodate a variety of seating and service options to personalize your big day. Let us handle the details while you sit back, relax, and enjoy the adventure ahead."

Venues include The Landing, an open-air pavilion that seats up to 75 for dining or 125 for the ceremony; the Event Center, a private room attached to the Bistro which seats up to 60 for dining or up to 80 for a ceremony; the Event Lawn and Gazebo, an outdoor ceremony space featuring a gabled entrance and gazebo with seating for up to 200; the dining room and bar featuring a seasonal wood-burning fireplace and seating for up to 70; and a covered patio featuring large windows and open-air atmosphere for more intimate occasions, with seating for up to 20.

To learn more, visit the website.

# Dogwood Mall

Offering unique art cultivated through Appalachian authenticity

LEE ZIMMERMAN

Correspondent for The Daily Times

Dogwood Mall offers unique art cultivated through Appalachian authenticity

By Lee Zimmerman

When speaking with Roy Holmes, owner of Townsend's landmark art outlet Dogwood Mall, there's no mistaking the enthusiasm he has for his wares, his clientele and the business he's built over the course of over 40 years at the same locale. It's hardly surprising. The sprawling retail space he owns and operates at 8455 State Highway 73 in Townsend has become a major showcase for local craftsmen, Native American artists and an array of internationally-known artisans.

"When we started, we wanted Dogwood Mall to become a destination place," Holmes said. "Our dream has been to have a place that exactly reflects what people would imagine for their dream store in the Smokies. One that reflects the local culture and heritage, and not something made in China as most shops do."

In that regard, Holmes credits his customers with making his shop so special. "People often ask why we haven't retired, but we would miss all the special customers that have visited us for decades," he said. "It's like a family reunion almost every day."

That personal connection has been a motivating factor since the very beginning. "We moved here because I had been out of town and away from my family 26 weeks of the year," Holmes continued. "That was back in 1984. I had been in the jewelry business — at one point, I ran 70 jewelry stores — but I didn't want to do anything like that here. I knew I wouldn't see my kids grow up."

So too, the choice of locale came about by chance. "We prayed about it," Holmes said. "I happened to be on the company plane flying from Fort Lauderdale to Chicago while checking on the stores, and we happened to refuel in Knoxville. As I looked down from up above, it



Pieces by Kicking Bird Pottery, such as this bear, are among the most popular items sold at Dogwood Mall, according to owner Roy Holmes.

occurred to me that it would be a great place to retire. I told my wife I had found the perfect place. She asked me where, but I said I didn't know exactly. I had to search on a map. I said, 'I think it's a place called Townsend.' We then decided to visit on vacation. When my wife asked me what I had in mind. I said, 'Well, you're the president of a craft guild and I know retail. We'll have a craft store!' The Lord then guided us, and

opened all the doors. It's been over 40 years now since I 'retired.'"

In the years since, Dogwood Mall has acquired a wide array of craftspeople who choose the locale to display their wares. "We have added about ten new artists in the last year, and that adds to the excitement," Holmes said.

He pointed out several artists specifically.

"Kicking Bird makes Native

American Pottery," he continued. "He is 100% Cherokee and is so famous, a film production company came in and bought several pieces for a movie. His art is sold in the Sequoyah Indian museum, but it sells for five times the price there because many artists can sell their items wholesale at Dogwood mall"

One of the first artists to be represented at the site was Robert Mize, who had a reputation for building the best dulcimers in the world. "His instruments are in the Smithsonian," Holmes said. "When they made the film *Deliverance*, Jon Voight and Warren Beatty each bought one. He was so famous that when the sheikh from the United Arab Emirates came to the U.S., he bought one as well. Those dulcimers that we used to sell for \$200 or \$300 are worth \$2,000 or \$3,000 now."

Robert Bench, a craftsman who operates under the name "Potter's Bench," specializes in pottery that's functional and distinctive. Woodworker Tom Staddler, who hails from Sevierville, is known for crafting distinctive decor, as well as tables, mirrors and other home furnishings.

Artisan woodworkers Rod & Dawn Molina, popularly known as "Mountain Makers," are based in Townsend. Rod blends traditional tools & techniques with cutting edge technology for his unique creative process, while drawing inspiration from artists such as George Nakashima, Sam Maloof and Wharton Esherick, as well as a "wabi-sabi" aesthetic philosophy best defined as finding the natural beauty of imperfect things. Dawn Molina's artisan work includes handcrafted wooden utensils and unique serving boards, with a focus on detail and finishing touches.

Holmes also singles out the work of Jeremy Doss, an artist known for his paintings on linen. Over the years, he's become one of the mall's most popular attractions.

"We've had people spend their



ASHLEY YATES | THE DAILY TIMES

Many visitors walk to the John Oliver Cabin in Cades Cove.

# 48 hours in Townsend

## Options include art, adventure and rest

Staff Reports

Forty-eight hours in Townsend are enough to leave a visitor with a picture of the more relaxing side of the Smokies that's outlined in the broad strokes, with some of the details filled in.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park — consistently among the most visited of all U.S. national parks — is a major center of tourism in the area. Sitting just a few miles outside the city limits, the Park drew more than 12 million visitors in 2024, and 11.5 million, on average, over the past ten years.

What it offers its visitors: scenic views, some of the oldest mountains on the planet and the chance to get active. With two days to spend, the Park is widely considered a

must-visit for tourists in the Townsend area.

But two days in Townsend give visitors the chance to hit more than the highlights. Though it's a quiet city, Townsend offers travelers the chance to investigate an array of food options, peruse Appalachian arts and crafts and connect to both the ground beneath their feet and the peaks rising above.

### WHERE TO STAY

With a core destination in mind, lining up a place to stay overnight can help visitors set the rest of their itinerary. Ruth Crocker, the owner of Habakkuk House, a bed-and-breakfast on Country Club Drive, said that the Park is also a major attraction for many of her guests. Crocker, an East Tennessee native, told *The Daily Times* that she'll suggest trails

for her guests based on what they're hoping to get from a particular hike. Spruce Flats Falls and the Laurel Valley trailhead are frequent recommendations, she said.

A few miles southwest of Townsend, the Cades Cove valley inside the Park is also an iconic stopping place for travelers, offering walking, cycling and driving paths.

"I'll also recommend other things for guests to do based on their interests and our conversations," she said. Conversation between hosts and guests is something that makes her business distinct, she noted.

Guests at Habakkuk House start the day with a breakfast made by Crocker. "There aren't too many places

## Mall From 21

inheritance on his work," Holmes said. "He's the reason Stephen Baldwin came into the store as well as Miles O'Keefe, who played in the movie 'Tarzan' with Bo Derek. His work sold even before the paint was dry. I had one guy from California that has a half a million dollar art collection including Rembrandts, and he's bought 20 of them."

Consequently, it's little surprise that the mall's clientele has grown to include any number of notables from the worlds of show business, politics and finance, making it a preferred stomping ground for celebrities and collectors who are drawn to an array of items that can't be found anywhere else. Some may be filming in the area or vacationing at nearby Blackberry Farm. In the past, those visitors have included such such acclaimed actors as David Keith, Tess Harper, Bruce McKinnon, and Dale Dickey, comedian Kevin Nealon, musician Kid Rock,



COURTESY OF ROY HOLMES

Roy Holmes credits his wife, Sherry's efforts to find a wide variety of artists when Dogwood Mall was just starting out with the business' modern popularity.

members of the country band Rasca Flatts, the late Tennessee Governor Don Sunquist, former Congressman Jimmy Duncan, and even members of the British parliament.

Holmes added that his own artistic expertise was somewhat limited at first. "When we first started the business, I really didn't know anything about original fine art," he said. "I just knew that it was really special."

He goes on to say that was what interested the couple specifically continues to set Dogwood Mall apart from other area outlets.

"We wanted to

do something that would make us completely unique," Holmes said. "Arts and crafts are so prominent here, and the quality is so good, so we decided to take that route. My wife Sherry had been the president of the Chamber of Commerce in Townsend. Whenever they had a fundraiser craft show, she helped select the the crafters. And that's what we wanted to do with our business. There are so many shops that carry the same things, but we wanted to do something better than that. We wanted to have the best of the best."

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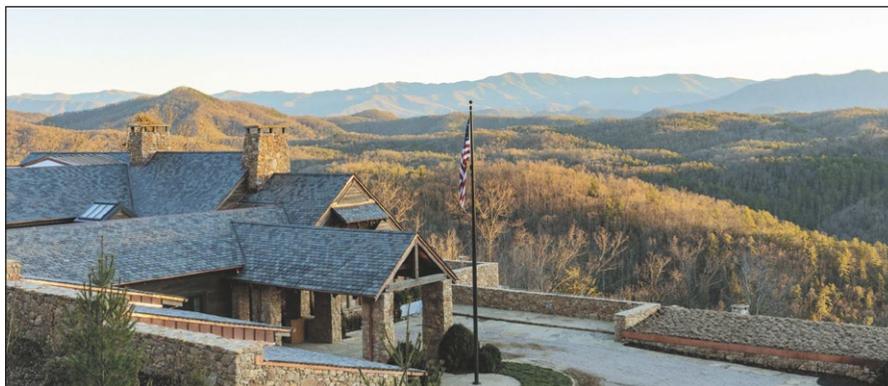
## Curious From 22

like it left," she noted. Her kitchen at the bed-and-breakfast is a place where guests can expect traditional Southern food, Crocker told the newspaper.

Rates are available on the bed-and-breakfast's website at [www.habakkuk-house.com](http://www.habakkuk-house.com). Crocker and her husband make the bed-and-breakfast available under the name Drake's Lodge during the summer months.

Other options for nearby places to stay include whole-cabin rentals, RVs and, for those hoping to spend their vacation entirely in nature, tents. Backcountry and frontcountry sites can accommodate individuals renting tents, as well as larger groups. The Park asks backcountry campers to acquire permits for overnight stays and those using group campsites will need to reserve a spot ahead of time.

Little River Campground lets travelers rest by the water. Campers can take in the Little River amid tree-stands and try their hands at fishing and tubing. WiFi's also available on the campground, for those hoping to keep up a connection to the outside world. A primitive tent on the grounds



COURTESY OF BLACKBERRY FARM

Blackberry Mountain in Walland, photographed in 2019, offers guests a view of the Smokies.

could cost a visitor as little as \$35 per day, according to information generated within the campground website.

Visitors looking for luxury in the mountains can also book rooms at the nearby Blackberry Farm and Blackberry Mountain resorts in Walland, where the minimum required stay is three nights.

### FOOD AND FUN

Though the Park looms large in Townsend tourism, there are other natural wonders to see. Tuckaleechee Caverns is a 1.25-mile subterranean

system that takes visitors beneath the Park, into deep history and the years that followed World War II.

About 100,000 visitors made their way into the caverns — which feature unique geology, as well as massive double-waterfall — in 2023.

W.E. "Bill" Vananda, opened the cavern to the public in the 1950s along with Harry Myers. The cavern site also has present-day purposes including a seismic station.

The caverns also hover around 60 degrees for most of the year.

Other potential activities including

swimming at the Townsend Wye and taking in the view at The Sinks, a waterfall created after a logging accident.

Finding places to eat can help break up visits to attractions like the caverns and the Park. The Riverstone Family Restaurant is popular with Townsend residents as well as with visitors.

Originally opened and owned by Terry & Belinda Haley in 2004, who gave it its name and a reputation of having the very best food anywhere around. The restaurant specializes in real southern food an.

Shopping for souvenirs and indulging in Appalachian art can be a nice way to cap the trip to Townsend. Those interested in art can explore the gallery at the Townsend Artisan Guild on East Lamar Alexander Parkway. The gallery is made up of work from guild members and includes photography, pottery, painting and jewelry, as well as other varieties of crafts and art forms.

Other shopping options in the area include Smoky Mountain Outdoor Center and Townsend Mercantile, a boutique.

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# Finding a real belly full

## Townsend touts a wide variety of dining destinations

**LEE ZIMMERMAN**

Correspondent for The Daily Times

Given the fact that it's a popular tourist destination and located at the gateway of the nation's most popular national park, it's hardly surprising that Townsend has a varied array of dining destinations. As one might expect, the choices vary, from the casual to the more refined, each reflected the inherent tastes of the region. Even the pickiest eater will find a menu that satisfies their palate and personality.

### COFFEE HOUSES

The Dancing Bean Coffee House offers an array of choice coffees roasted from its own green coffee beans. However, those that prefer a beverage other than coffee can also choose from an array of kombucha, craft sodas, smoothies and teas. There are other amenities as well, including counter service, fire-side seating, and outdoor deck and free wifi. Those that desire some sweet and savory accompaniment for their drinks will also find an array of pastries that are baked fresh daily. Location: 7142 East Lamar Alexander Parkway

Towns End Coffee Co. bills itself as a cozy mountain coffee house and gift shop serving espressos, cold brew coffee, tea, special syrups and lighter food fare. In addition, it offers various gift items that can complement any coffee-lover's desire for added accoutrements. Pick-up and curbside service is available. Location: 7249 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy

The Artistic Bean assures coffee connoisseurs they'll always enjoy their java, given its high quality coffee blends, as well as an assortment of snacks shared in an inviting and decidedly down-home environment. The coffee house is house in the



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

The Burger Master in Townsend offers open space for diners who can choose an isolated spot for the family or take the meal to the car.

same building as the roaster, ensuring the freshest coffee and the most natural ingredients. Location: 8027 East Lamar Alexander Parkway

### CASUAL DINING

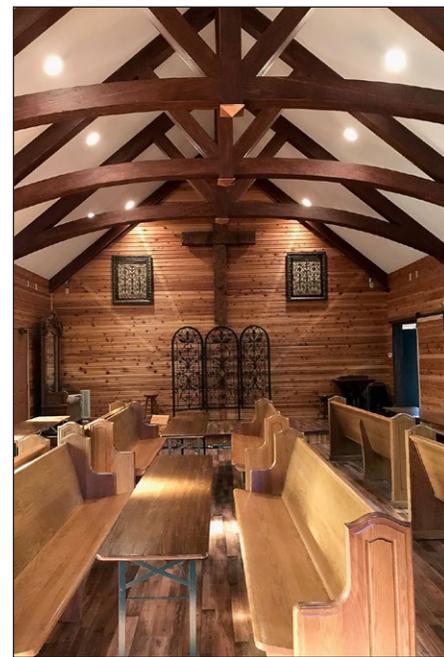
Guys with Eats, located at Little Arrow Outdoor Resort's Campfire Cafe, specializes in great takeout and casual dining. It's comfort food at its best, with pizza, chicken and Waffles, patty melts, and biscuits and gravy served just the way folks like them. It's hard to go wrong. Location: 118 Stables Dr.

East Cuisine Café celebrates the art of Japanese noodle cuisine in a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The carefully crafted dishes highlight authentic flavors, showcasing the depth and harmony of Japanese culinary traditions. It also embraces inclusivity, welcoming its diners' furry friends to join them. From the comforting embrace of savory ramen

to the delicate nuances of udon, each dish is a testament to a passion for quality and a genuine love for food. Location: 7621 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy

Burger Master Drive-In has been a Townsend tradition since 1967. It's family-friendly fare guarantees to satisfy any appetite courtesy of its all-American fare. Burgers and hot-dogs, along with sides, shakes and sundaes can keep the kids happy while equally satisfying the adults as well. A walk-up window offers the option of a quick takeaway for picnicking or dining at home. Asia their Long and lingering reputation wasn't enough, in 2022, Travelers' Choice ranked Burger Master among its Top 25 Quick Bites in the U.S. That's indeed a tasty choice. Location: 8439 State Highway 73A

Riverstone Family Restaurant offers a varied menu that provides both beef and vegan options,



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The interior of The Abbey reveals trappings of its wedding chapel origins.

as well as Southern-style specialties. As befitting a family-style eatery, it offers breakfast, lunch and dinner service seven days a week. The ambiance is ideal as well, given the rustic, wood-paneled dining room with its cozy fireplace and an Old West vibe. Location: 8503 State Highway 73

Apple Valley Cafe is an ideal spot to get a morning bite when before going on one's way. A hearty breakfast accompanied by a cup of fresh, locally-roasted coffee and a slice of their famous fried apple pie guarantees the day starts right. But it doesn't end there. Barbecue, burgers, granola, fresh biscuits, and a variety of homemade bakery items are all available when it comes to pleasing even the pickiest palette. Location: 7138 East Lamar Alexander Parkway

Townsend Pancake House is, as



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## Dining From 24

its name implies, the perfect place for pancakes and nothing less than a true breakfast bonanza. The friendly service and variety of pancakes makes it an obvious choice for starting the day right — or, for that matter, enjoying a morning meal any time of the day, whether it's pancakes, flapjacks, eggs or omelets. A Townsend landmark, it's fully deserving of its outstanding reputation. Location: 7767 East Lamar Alexander Parkway

Jim Bob's BBQ combines a perfect setting with smoking good southern barbecue sandwiches, plates, and classic side dishes such as coleslaw, potato salad, fries, and signature fried dill pickles. The smoker is always going, ensuring the pork ribs, beef brisket, and seasoned chicken are seasoned and served with perfection. A variety of homemade sauces — hot, mild, spicy, sweet and spicy and mustard — add a flavorful finesse. Family packs to go and package deals for tubing are available as well. Location: 7753 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway

Little River Pub and Deli, family-owned and operated, features local craft brews, homemade meals, and, as its name implies, a river-front location that offers a signature Townsend-type experience. The menu features sandwiches, savory bites, paninis, and a kid's menu, all for very reasonable price. In addition, a full bar serves a variety of craft cocktails and the comfortable seating features a back beer garden that overlooks the river. Location: 7503 W Old Highway 73

Wild Laurel Tavern offers some of the most spectacular views to be found anywhere in all of Blount County. The bar overlooks a golf course, while the restaurant itself is adjacent to a sparkling swimming pool. The magnificent stone fireplace is the perfect place to cozy up with a cocktail or strike up conversation. As for the food, an extensive menu of seasonal offerings adds to the allure. Location: 702 Country Club Drive

Peaceful Side Social Brewery + Craft Kitchen, Parkway: Townsend's newest gathering spot



TOM SHERLIN | THE DAILY TIMES

The "bearistas" at the Dancing Bean also "bear-tend." Guests 21 and older can choose from an assortment of liquors to create a coffee cocktail.

has proven itself popular for locals and visitors alike. It regularly hosts live music and a myriad of special events, and a play area for the kids makes it a festive family destination as well. The menu offers a variety of sandwiches, round breads and assorted entrees, while a selection of wines and specialty beers makes it more than merely a dining destination. That said, food is served both inside and out, and a taco bar offers other options as well. Location: 7967 East Lamar Alexander

The Abbey received well-deserved recognition when it was named the 2020 and 2021 recipient of Trip Advisor's Top Ten Percent of Restaurants in the World. That's no small accomplishment considering this former wedding chapel still manages to maintain its unassuming setting. Guests have a choice of dining outdoors overlooking the Little River or eating inside. A full bar also makes it an ideal weekend destination, while the recent expansion offers extra space for acoustic concerts on Fridays and Saturdays. It's little wonder folks consider The Abbey so awesome. Location: 7765 River Road

### UPSCALE DINING

Dancing Bear Appalachian Bistro is located in one of Blount County's most spectacular settings,

making it the perfect place for a genuine "staycation." The imaginative menu puts the spotlight on Appalachian entrees, home-grown produce and other seasonal

specialties. The superior service, a number of annual events and an outdoor fire pit underscore the elegance and the ambiance. In addition, a rolling lawn provides the perfect place to enjoy live music, while the both cabins and cuisine tempt the visitor to enjoy an extended stay. Location: 7140 East Lamar Alexander Parkway

### DESERT DESTINATION

The Chocolate B'ar is the ideal place to end the evening when in search of delightful desert. Rich and creamy caramels, a plentiful assortment of berry truffles, lavender laced chocolates, a plentiful assortment of handmade fillings, along with orange, hazelnut and vanilla cinnamon rank among the many sweet treats.

Cookies, pastries, smoothies, frozen frappaccinos, and specialty cakes are among the delicious delights, all of which can be enjoyed while nestled on the leather coaches by the large stone fireplace. Taken in tandem, it's a most serene setting. Location: 7807 East Lamar Alexander Parkway



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# Cycling back around

Vee Hollow biking a place to develop 'love for nature and a healthy lifestyle'

**JOSH LANE**

josh.lane@thedailytimes.com

Townsend was always a special place to the Claytons. Kevin Clayton visited Townsend often growing up, and he fell in love with the area. Though they live in Knoxville, Clayton and his wife Michelle have owned property in Walland for over 25 years, and they have even run several successful businesses in the area. When Clayton got another opportunity to give something back to the community, he didn't hesitate.

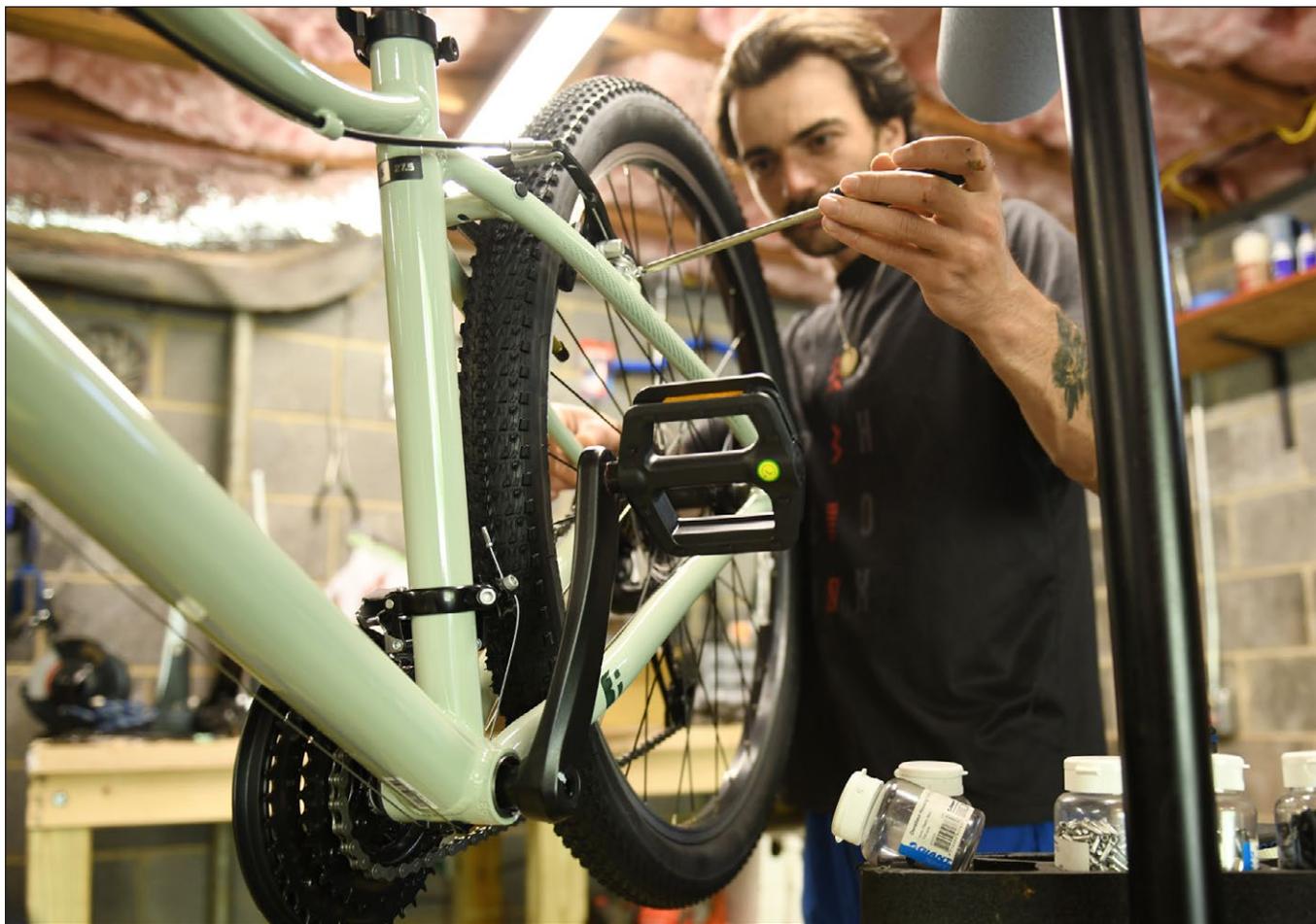
Clayton and his nephew, Corey Clayton, had recently gotten into mountain biking, so they were surprised to learn there wasn't much of a mountain biking scene in the Smoky Mountains. They decided it would be their responsibility to build that community from scratch, and that's exactly what happened since they opened Vee Hollow Bike Trails in Townsend over three years ago.

"It's a special place for us, and we wanted to see the right things happening there," Corey Clayton, who works for his uncle at Vee Hollow, told *The Daily Times*.

Kevin and Corey Clayton built Vee Hollow with the intention of complementing all the things people love best about the Smoky Mountains. They built 14 miles of mountain bike trails into the natural landscape, working with the ebbs and flows to create trails of four different levels of difficulty.

Vee Hollow has become a haven for the extreme mountain bikers — Corey Clayton said their most advanced trails, the Double Black, are some of their most beloved, and Vee Hollow has even hosted several Enduro southeast races with over 170 contestants participating.

But they also wanted their reputation to extend beyond the experienced riders; just as the Claytons were once beginners in the sport,



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Vee Hollow Bike Shop General Manager Scott Coffman makes an adjustment to a bike in the shops repair area.

they hoped Vee Hollow would be a place where riders of any experience level could fall in love with mountain biking as they did.

"We did what we could, building something that complimented the type of terrain we had out there," Corey Clayton said. "But we wanted to build something where there was something for everybody to ride. This would be a good place where people could get introduced into the sport and learn and grow with the sport."

In addition to their expert-level



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

See **BIKING, 29** Vee Hollow Bike Shop in Townsend offers a variety of bike rentals and sales.

# Just for the fun of it

Townsend offers a variety of festivals and festivities

LEE ZIMMERMAN

Correspondent for The Daily Times

While there are those that journey to Townsend simply to explore the Smoky Mountain National Park and explore the beauty of the scenery, any number of festivals add to the enticement as well. Given a variety of interests and attractions, they offer locals and visitors alike an opportunity to immerse themselves in the entertainment options the city has to offer. Here is a list of some of the more popular annual attractions ...

The 5th Anniversary Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival, taking place Saturday, May 3, celebrates the legendary Sasquatch with music, wrestling exhibitions, wood carving and several special guests, vendors, and food trucks, along with a 5K run. Go to [thebigfootfest.com](http://thebigfootfest.com) for all the details.

Townsend also offers several special events for automobile enthusiasts.

Smoky Mountain Nationals takes place at Talley Ho Inn, featuring circa 1947-1955 model Chevrolets and GMC trucks May 29 — May 31. A Friday evening Foothill's Parkway "Missing Link" Bridge cruise, followed by the Saturday show and "River Road" cruise, takes place after the show.

On June 21, Barbie Jeep Races, a benefit for Camp Wild Flowers, a home for "Wayward Jeep Girls," combines outdoor adventure with the world of women's Jeep apparel and accessories!

A rally for the Volkswagen Group takes place July 18 — 20 at Talley Ho Inn

On Aug. 21-23 Cades Cove Jeep Outpost hosts Jeep Takeover, an exciting experience for Jeep enthusiasts. The Outpost holds events for the Jeep Community several times a year, allowing the community to come together and make special memories.

In addition, Autos Through the Ages, taking place on July 19 at the Smoky Mountain Heritage Center, features dozens of vintage



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Kerry McCollum (left) and Hazel McCollum play inside of a hot air balloon at the Townsend Balloon Festival Saturday.

and classic cars that will be on display throughout the day.

The Scottish Festival & Games, scheduled for the weekend of May 17 and 18, is a more recent addition to Townsend's array of festivals and events, having relocated from his former home at Maryville College four years ago. One of the most expansive celebrations of Scottish heritage in the South and East, it hosts clans from throughout the country as well as Scottish ensembles, competitions, parades, foods and wares. It's easily one of the most popular gatherings in the entire area, and whether one is of Scottish ancestry or simply a highland enthusiast, the activities are open to all.

Music of the Mountains at the Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center takes place throughout the summer and fall in the center's expansive amphitheater. This year's schedule includes a varied roster of performers, including local favorite the Jeff Jopling Band and other acts like Acoustic Eidolon, Smooth Sailor, Jasper Hollow, Dirty Cello, Jeff Barbra & Sarah Pirkle, On the Border (a highly-rated Eagles tribute band), Blue Ridge Gathering, Landslide (a band that plays the music of Fleetwood Mac).

A complete schedule of concerts can be found at [www.gsmheritagecenter.org](http://www.gsmheritagecenter.org)

A Fireworks celebration

See **FESTIVALS, 30**

illuminates the field adjacent to the Highland Manor Inn every Independence Day. It's a wonderful family-style celebration with an old-fashioned flair.

One of the most anticipated annual events of the entire year is the Great Smoky Mountains Hot Air Balloon Festival taking place August 16 in the field behind the Townsend Event Center. Professional balloonists light up the evening sky with the glow from their beautiful balloon and offer opportunities for tethered rides as well. It's a spectacle like no other, one that illuminates the skies and adds its own glow to scenic sunsets. For more information, go to [gsmballoonfest.com](http://gsmballoonfest.com)

Dancing Bear Lodge & Appalachian Bistro will once again host their popular Appalachian Homecoming weekend Aug. 1-2.

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## Biking From 27

Double Black trails, Vee Hollow offers beginner trails, Green, intermediate Blue and advanced Black trails.

The venue also has a skills course where visitors can fine tune specific aspects of biking — like developing balance and maneuvering on “skin-nies,” thin wooden strips raised above the ground, or at the jumps trail, to practice jumps of all sizes.

Clayton said their Blue trails, and specifically the course “Rattler,” are their most popular options. Vee Hollow has Green trails at an easier difficulty, so even less experienced bikers can learn to ride.

“The trails and forest playground offer a full progression for every mountain biker from the never-ever to the very advanced,” the Vee Hollow website stated. “There are a range of trails and experiences from hand-cut singletrack and long enduro-style descents to a range of flow-based trails that allow for maximum progression.

“Visitors can enjoy short rides and sessions in the base area zone at the skills area, demo flow zone, and the jump forest or ride all day on the

multiple trails that cover the West and East Mountains.”

All the trails are free-to-ride, though visitors can rent or purchase mountain biking equipment at Vee Hollow’s full service bike shop. Vee Hollow offers rentals from everything from a standard mountain bike to an electric bike. According to their website, rentals last up to eight hours and range from \$40 to \$125, not including helmets or insurance.

Parking is located at 8439 State Hwy 73 in the gravel lots next to Burger Master. Walk across the pedestrian bridge, take a right, and continue past the pavilion and skills course to the cabin where the bike shop and check-in are located.

Daily hours vary by season, but the trails are generally open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day, seven days a week, weather permitting. That’s one of the other factors that has made biking at Vee Hollow so popular in Townsend — no matter the temperature, their courses are open as long as it’s dry.

Since opening Vee Hollow, the Claytons have noticed their business helping keep tourism in Townsend alive during the cold winter months.



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Vee Hollow Bike Shop is located near the entrance to their network of mountain bike trails and along the path of the town’s greenway.

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## Festivals From 28

This year's event features a genuine regional celebration featuring fest chefs, food demonstrations, authentic Appalachian gourmet dishes, and music by nationally-known entertainers. Lodging is available on the premises and the scenery is spectacular. Go to [dancingbearlodge.com](http://dancingbearlodge.com) for details.

September's Great Smoky Mountain Half Marathon and 5K involves a spectacular run through the woods that border Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The course begins near Heritage High School just outside Maryville and ends in Townsend, just under a mile from the National Park boundary. The finish line is at the Townsend Visitors Center. Go to [www.vacationraces.com/half-marathons/great-smoky-mountains](http://www.vacationraces.com/half-marathons/great-smoky-mountains) for further information.

The Townsend Fall Heritage Festival and Old Timers Day on Sept. 26-27 offers a celebration of mountain and Appalachian arts and crafts along with demonstrations, mountain music, an antique tractor and engine show, storytelling, children's activities, local artisans, local cuisine, beekeeping, and blacksmithing. The events take place at the Townsend Event Center.

Held at the Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center, the Blue Ribbon Country Fair

is — as its name implies — is an old-fashioned country fair featuring games, competitions, music, demonstrations, and all the other hometown embellishments that a traditional country fair has to offer. Go to [www.gsmheritagecenter.org](http://www.gsmheritagecenter.org) for further details.

The Townsend Grains and Grits Festival combines southern spirits and gourmet grub. Craft spirits by some of the region's legendary distillers and blenders along with purveyors of gourmet foods will share their wares at The Peaceful Side of the Smokies. In addition, there will be live entertainment along with samples from local restaurants and a vast selection of regional spirits. One of the event highlights features five chefs who encircle a large fire pit where a whole pig, lamb, chickens, and sausages will be roasted



A patriotic display on a jeep driving along the Foothills Parkway in 2024's Salute to Heroes.

SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

and served. Each chef will be paired with a distillery and will incorporate the distillery's spirit into their dish. Visit [www.grainsandgritsfest.com](http://www.grainsandgritsfest.com) for details and tickets.

Locals and visitors alike are invited to Christmas in the Village at the Great Smoky Mountain Heritage Center, a celebration of harvest, home, and the holidays, featuring live music, kids' crafts, basket weaving demonstrations, and, of course, Santa Claus himself. Visitors can also enjoy live music in the auditorium from local musicians.

The Townsend Christmas Parade on the Parkway in Townsend is always one of the highlights of the entire holiday season. This year's extravaganza is scheduled for Dec. 7.



Thump'N Heifer with decorations and wrist bands for visitors during the 2024 veteran jeep ride.

SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

# Here's how to stay safe while visiting the national park

Staff Reports

While taking in all the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has to offer, it can be easy to forget to keep safety at the forefront of the mind. Staying safe while visiting the national park, though, is paramount to a successful and enjoyable experience. Here are several ways to ensure safety while at the national park:

## KEEPING SAFE IN BEAR COUNTRY

One of the attractions of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the chance to be around nature and the animals that call it home. While this can certainly make a national park experience worthwhile, it's also important to remember how to keep yourself and the wildlife, particularly the black bears that roam the area, safe in the process.

"Visitors should be aware that high bear activity can occur in any area, and that your safety is not guaranteed," the national park's website states. "To increase your odds for a safe visit, please follow best practices for living and recreating in bear habitat. Stay alert and be prepared to react appropriately during possible encounters, and always report any unusual bear interactions as soon as possible."

If you see a bear, don't approach it and don't let it approach you. If the bear exhibits aggressive behavior toward you, try to back away and increase distance.

Do not feed bears or other wildlife in the national park. Also, make sure to dispose of food scraps and garbage in appropriate, approved containers.

If you plan on enjoying the national park with your dog, make sure to keep it on a leash, as not doing so is illegal. Don't let dogs bark at or otherwise harass bears, as "dogs are involved in the majority of all physical encounters involving people and black bears," according to the national park's website.

## ENSURING SAFETY WHILE HIKING

A pastime many enjoy in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is hiking. The area is full of adequate hiking trails and areas that



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

A black bear walks through a field in Cades Cove on Saturday morning and passes by some of the first visitors to the park upon its partial reopening.



COURTESY OF LINDA SPANGLER

Hikers cross Kephart Bridge as part of the Classic Hikes of the Smokies program.

allow visitors to explore all that the park has to offer.

This is another activity that requires proper action to ensure safety, though. There are multiple ways in which hikers can make sure they stay safe while enjoying the thrill of the trail.

"Your safety depends on your own good judgement, adequate preparation, and constant attention," the national park's website states. "Backcountry hikers should

be in good physical condition and be able to survive on their own. Proper equipment and the knowledge of how to use it are essential for a safe trip. Your safety is your responsibility."

Tips on keeping safe while hiking include making sure to hike with another person, carrying water, a first-aid kit and other essential items with you and staying aware of changing weather conditions.

Make sure that someone else

knows your plans. They can contact the national park at 865-436-1230 in case of emergency. Before you begin your hike, read up about the various details of the trails you will be going on. Distance of the trail and difficulty are necessary factors to know before embarking on any type of hike.

## STAYING AWARE OF RESOURCES

In case of emergency, it is paramount to know resources available, including aid from park staff or nearby hospitals.

The park's emergency line is 865-436-9171. Always dial 911 in case of life threatening emergencies.

Blount Memorial Hospital is located at 907 East Lamar Alexander Parkway. According to the park's website, other nearby hospitals include LeConte Medical Center (742 Middle Creek Road, Sevierville), Swain County Hospital (45 Plateau Street, Bryson City, North Carolina) and Haywood Regional Medical Center (262 Leroy George Drive, Clyde, North Carolina).

Check the Park's website as well for alerts regarding current conditions, trail closures and more.

# Let Tremont's experts guide your connection to nature

Staff Reports

While most people find the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont through word of mouth, it's hardly a secret.

The nonprofit located about 4 miles inside the Townsend entrance to the national park has been connecting people with nature for more than half a century, with everything from day programs to residential camps during which children and adults can learn while living inside the park.

Each year thousands of students from more than a dozen states visit through school programs, and Tremont offers special programs to train educators to engage students in their own schoolyards.

More than 6,000 individuals stop at the Visitor's Center each year, sometimes trying to find Spruce Flats Falls or the Middle Prong, or just stumbling across the center while in the area, according to Tremont Marketing Director Erin Rosolina.



COURTESY OF GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS INSTITUTE AT TREMONT

Peter and Ren Womack cool off in the water at the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, located inside the national park. The nonprofit experiential learning program offers activities for children, adults and families.

Those who might find the hike to Spruce Flats Falls a bit rocky and rooty on a hot day might enjoy simply sticking their feet in the Middle Prong next to the Visitor's Center. "There's a very wadeable spot where people sometimes set up folding

chairs and hang out," Rosolina said. "The Visitor's Center staff is knowledgeable and can recommend nearby hikes, and you can grab a Smokies souvenir there. We sometimes host special single-day events, so they can check out our calendar to see if

there's anything coming up."

For example, in the summer visitors can help band and release birds and in the fall tag monarch butterflies.

Tremont's residential programs often fill up fast, so it's best to register well in advance for summer camps and weekend workshops.

June and July are packed with summer programs for children from preschoolers to teens, some alone and some with their families.

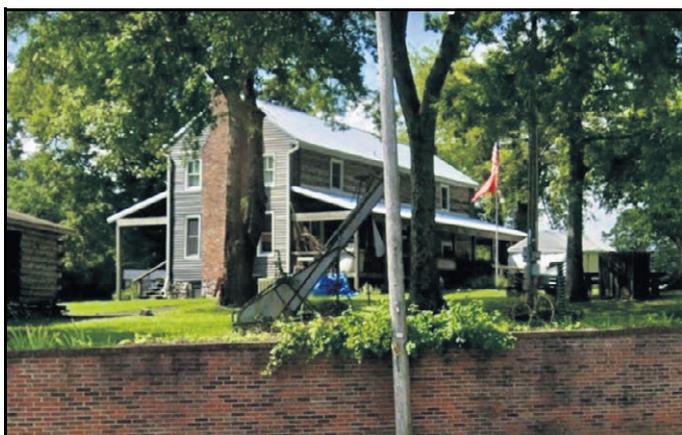
Adult naturalist classes are held throughout the year and cover topics from geology to birds.

Photography workshops are scheduled in the spring and fall.

Tremont hosts a weeklong Sierra Club hiking program and a weekend women's beginner backpacking adventure in the fall.

This marks the second year for a writer's conference at Tremont.

Some visitors form lasting connections and take part in long-term community science projects at Tremont, such as monitoring the salamander population.



## Cades Cove Museum-Home of the Cades Cove Preservation Assoc.

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MARCUS FITZSIMMONS | THE DAILY TIMES

Knoxville Pipes and Drums play the bagpipes in the parking lot of the Casual Pint in Maryville as part of the celebration of Tartan Day Eve marking six weeks until the opening of the Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

A junior highland dancer competes Saturday during the 42nd Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games at Townsend.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Jeff Bagley prepares to launch a stone throw during the Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games in Townsend.

# Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Knoxville's Jackson Roberts, 8, takes a turn at the kids Caber Toss on Saturday during the 42nd Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games in Townsend.



MARCUS FITZSIMMONS | THE DAILY TIMES

Breeana Hamilton (left) serves beer at the Casual Pint during the Tartan Day celebration in Maryville held by the Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and Games and Highland Brewing Company.

# Autos through the ages

Autos Through the Ages, taking place on July 19 at the Smoky Mountain Heritage Center, features dozens of vintage and classic cars that will be on display throughout the day.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Randy Shwerdt prepares his '29 Ford Model A for display at the 2024 Autos for the Ages show in Townsend.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Keith Sylvester cleans the rain from Anita Trent's Yellow Buick during the 2024 Autos Through the Ages show at the Townsend Heritage Center.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Tony and Jan Gardner's '34 Mercedes Benz 500K was on display during the 2024 show.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

John Riley's '74 Reliant Scimitar sitting in front of the Townsend Heritage Center for the 2024 show.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Bill Long's '57 Ford Thunderbird at Townsend's 2024 Autos Through the Ages.



Hikers and bicyclists spend the day going around Cades Cove in 2020.

TOM SHERLIN | THE DAILY TIMES



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

Participants work the handcart Saturday during Railroad Days held on the grounds of the Little River Railroad & Lumber Co. Museum in Townsend.



SCOTT KELLER | THE DAILY TIMES

This steam engine provided both entertainment and the power to run a home made ice cream operation at Railroad Days.

# Townsend bargain hunters

Staff Reports

Visiting Townsend doesn't have to be expensive. There are plenty of places to go around town for people looking to save some money while still experiencing the area.

The Little River Railroad and Lumber Company Museum tops the list of recommended stops.

Founded in 1982, the museum at 7747 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway seeks to educate people on the history of Townsend and the historical railroad and lumber industry that gave the city its roots. A collection of artifacts and exhibits tells the story of Townsend's origins and provides an easy way to spend some time, Satterfield said.

It's also free. Staff accept donations, but they don't charge for entry.

Much of the outdoors, as well, is free. For the more adventurous,

Satterfield recommended visiting any of the biking trails around Townsend. She said she's seeing more and more electric bikes around town, and businesses like Scotty Bike at 7321 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway will rent the vehicles out to visitors.

"You can rent a bike pretty cheap, and that's fun because you can stop at the picnic area across from Apple Valley," Satterfield said.

The popular Cades Cove Loop Road is also closed to motor traffic to make room for bicyclists on Wednesday and Saturday mornings in the summer.

If it's not picnicking weather, visitors can check out Burger Master Drive-In — a community staple which was ranked in the top 25 "Quick Bites" by Tripadvisor. The restaurant located at 8439 Highway 73 sells burgers and sweet

treats and is only open part of the year, making it "a destination as soon as it opens."

Visitors can also stop for a slaw dog at Parkway Grocery, 7665 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway, a business that has served thousands over the years.

The Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center is worth a visit.

Located at 123 Cromwell Drive, the museum offers an up-close look at historical buildings from around the Smokies and also offers a variety of festivals, events and concerts. General admission ranges from \$8-12, according to the center's website, and events often feature historical interpreters to help educate about the past.



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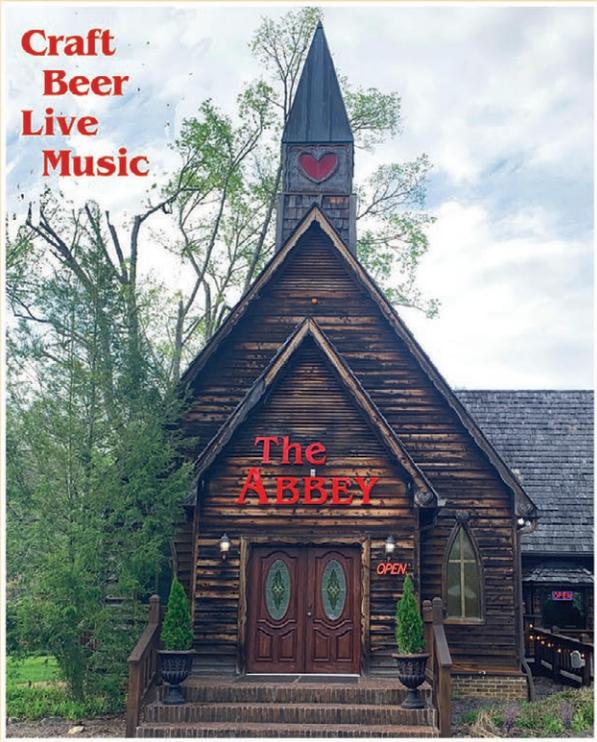
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