



Boxes of fresh tomatoes from Joe McNeil's farm are ready for market.

Fourth generation tomato farmer honored at festival

The past year's COVID-19 pandemic turned out to have a positive effect on Joe McNeil's West Tennessee tomato business.

More people stayed at home to eat and then wanted to cook using farm fresh ingredients like his tomatoes, said McNeil.

McNeil, a fourth generation tomato farmer, is the 2021 Lauderdale County Tomato Festival Farmer of the Year. His family business is the Red, Ripe and Rotten Tomato Farm.

McNeil is an entrepreneur who also owns a car repair and towing

business. He had not been involved in the family's tomato-growing business since 2004 when the pandemic drew him back to his roots to work on the tomato farm.

The Red, Ripe and Rotten Tomato farm produces 260,000 pounds of tomatoes every year with about 13 pounds coming from each plant. The farm offers two varieties, Mountain Spring and Mountain Fresh Plus.

You can buy McNeil's tomatoes at farmers' markets, local grocery stores and even at his auto business. He'll also be headed to the Tomato Festival to showcase his crop.

Mark your calendars. This year's Lauderdale County Fair will be a four-day event, September 29 to October 2.



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Summer 2021

A citizen 'asking for help' forms group to support Lauderdale Co. Animal Shelter

The Lauderdale County Animal Shelter can always use more donations, volunteers and resources.

That's why Patricia Moore started the group, Friends of Lauderdale County Animal Shelter, last July. The goal is "to bridge the gap between the shelter's purpose and what's best for the animals," Moore said.

"I love animals, but I had no idea how to rescue them. I considered myself a citizen asking for help."

When she first formed the group, the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing; potential pet owners had to make an appointment at the animal shelter to see the animals. Adoptions were down, but the number of dogs and cats living at the shelter kept the place full and busy, Moore said.



Terry Kissell Sr.
Director, Lauderdale County Animal Shelter

"It takes a village," she said. "Animal shelter employees stay so busy — feeding, watering and keeping up with the number of animals they have. Space and resources are always an issue."

With space for 60 dogs, the animal shelter often finds itself close to being at capacity.

For example, in the first four months of 2021, about 300 dogs arrived at the animal shelter, said Terry Kissell Sr., the shelter's director.

Both Kissell, who started in his job as director October 1, and Moore say they are learning as they go and have discovered the advantage of working with animal rescue groups, many of which are out of state.

Kissell and his staff are working to change the negative image some have of the animal shelter, which is now basically a "no-kill" shelter. His goal for the shelter is to have more animals rescued, to keep the shelter population down,



Patricia Moore, who formed Friends of Lauderdale County Animal Shelter last July, pays a visit to Rory, an animal shelter resident.

to have the resources to spay and neuter animals, and to develop a vetting process of potential new owners before they can adopt.

"I changed my focus from getting the dogs adopted to working with rescue groups," Kissell said. "Most of our animals are taken up north where states have stricter laws. When you adopt a pet, you have to take care of it. Tennessee law requires that pets adopted from a shelter must be spayed or neutered, but at this time, we have no way to follow up. Once we can do that, we'll push adoptions more."

Donations to the Friends of the animal shelter help pay for vaccinations, worming, medications and cleaning

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Did you know?

- Female cats can breed three times a year and have an average of four kittens per litter.
- Dogs can breed twice a year with litters of 6-10 puppies.
- In seven years, one female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 kittens; one female dog and her offspring can produce 97,000 puppies.

Source: American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Lauderdale County Animal Shelter

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supplies, Moore said. Volunteers help keep the shelter clean, work with the animals and network with the rescue groups. Moore often spends hours on the phone each day to connect with rescue groups. She uses the group's Facebook page to raise funds when the shelter has a need. She



Patricia Moore holds kittens that are available for adoption.

also posts pictures of animals who need homes.

"They are a lot of help," Kissell said of the group. He appreciates the help he gets from Moore's group, and Moore admires the hard work of the shelter's staff. "They're great," she said, "their hearts are in it."

One big challenge for both the Friends and the animal shelter is educating the public about the need to spay and neuter their pets and take other measures to

keep their pets healthy and safe.

"It's cool to watch the animal rescue volunteer movement grow in Lauderdale County, neighboring counties and other states," said Moore, who grew up in Ripley and has two children.

The number of pets needing homes is sad, Moore said. But, she added, "we have more happy days than sad days. A happy day is when a large group of animals leave with a rescue group for new homes. Or, it's just a day when a lot of volunteers show up."



Adopt a pet

Those wanting to adopt a pet from the animal shelter should call the shelter at 731-836-7387 to make an appointment. The shelter, located at 3265 Curve Nankipoo Road, is open 8 a.m. to noon Tuesday through Saturday.

The current adoption fee is \$35 for adult dogs, \$25 for puppies and \$10 for cats. The new pet owner also receives a half-off voucher to get the animal spayed or neutered at vet clinics in Ripley and Alamo.



Become involved

Volunteers should contact Moore by email at friendsofcas1@gmail.com or through the Friends of Lauderdale County Animal Shelter Facebook page. Donations can be sent to Friends of the Lauderdale County Animal Shelter at the Bank of Ripley where the group has an account. Moore is in the process of making the Friends group a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation.

Pam Drumwright works part-time at the Lauderdale County Animal Shelter. The animal she is holding is already on the way to a new home.

Tomatoes, Tomatoes

The Lauderdale County Tomato Festival is back! After it was cancelled last summer because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two-day annual event will be celebrated this year July 9-10 in Ripley City Park.

The festival, which honors local tomato farmers, is sponsored by the Lauderdale County Chamber and Economic and Community Development.

Now in its 37th year, the festival has activities for the whole family. Events include a baby crawling contest, a kid's parade, a 5k run/walk, arts and crafts vendors, food vendors, entertainment, and, of course, plenty of fresh tomatoes.



It's hard to stay awake in the festival's kid's parade.

A concert in the downtown Ripley amphitheater kicks off the festival the night before when Dr. Zarr & the Funk Monsters perform at 7 p.m.

Opening ceremonies begin at 10 a.m. July 9;

the festival ends at 10 p.m. the next day.

Event highlights include ...

- The Tomato Contest, 1 p.m. Friday at Lauderdale County Bank in Ripley.
- Saturday Salad & Methodist Market, 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at the church activity building.

For a complete schedule, visit the festival's Facebook page: facebook.com/Ripleytomatoes or contact the Chamber at 635-9541.

Cook and taste these tomato recipes on your own

The popular Tomato Tasting, hosted by the UT Extension FCE clubs, will not be held this year because it would be too hard to hold it under the current CDC guidelines for serving food to the public, said Rachel Erwin with UT Extension. "I feel certain we will be back to holding the Tasting in 2022."

She shared some of the tomato tasting's favorites ...

Garlic Creamies

- 3 small ripe tomatoes
 - 1 minced garlic clove
 - Ritz crackers
 - 3/4 C. mayonnaise
 - Chopped chives
 - 5-6 slices crisp bacon, crumbled
- Peel and slice tomatoes. Cut as many tomato rounds as Ritz crackers. Put a slice of tomato on each cracker. Mix mayonnaise with garlic. Spread on tomatoes. Broil 3 minutes until brown. Sprinkle with chives and bacon.

Tomato Breakfast Casserole

- 8 frozen hash brown patties
 - 1 cup fresh baby spinach leaves, torn (more if you like)
 - 1 lb. breakfast sausage (no casings) crumbled and browned
 - 2 1/2 C. shredded sharp cheddar cheese
 - 12 large eggs
 - 3/4 C. whole milk
 - 2 large tomatoes, sliced thin or chopped
 - 1 tsp. table salt and freshly ground black pepper
 - 1/4 C. shredded parmesan
 - Freshly chopped parsley for garnish, optional
1. Preheat oven to 350° with rack on lower middle position. Butter a 9x13 baking dish.
 2. Layer the hash brown patties into bottom of dish. Layer the spinach evenly over potatoes, followed by the browned sausage. Layer 2 cups of cheddar cheese evenly over the top.
 3. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, salt, and pepper. Pour over

casserole mix and pat down the mixture to even it all out and ensure even soaking of the egg mixture.

4. Top evenly with tomatoes, followed by remaining cheddar cheese and parmesan cheese. Top with parsley flakes, if desired.
5. Bake 50-60 minutes or until knife inserted in center shows no uncooked egg mixture on it. Let cool 10 minutes and serve.

BLT Dip

- 1/2 C. mayonnaise
 - 1 1/2 C. sour cream
 - 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
 - 1/2 tsp. onion powder
 - 1 lb. bacon crumbled
 - 4 tomatoes diced fine
 - Crackers
- Combine mayonnaise, sour cream, garlic and onion powders in a medium bowl. Cover. Chill at least 5 to 24 hours. Remove from fridge one hour before serving. Stir in tomatoes and bacon. Serve on crackers.

