

JONESBOROUGH

July 2026

Living



Celebrating 250 Years
TENNESSEE'S OLDEST TOWN

POWERED BY



BEST VERSION MEDIA

Photo by Cameo Waters



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In an era where the world seems to move at a relentless and unpredictable pace, the historic streets of Jonesborough, Tennessee, offer a steadfast reminder of what remains true: tradition, stability, and an unwavering love for country. Walk down Main Street in Tennessee's oldest town, and your heart will inevitably swell with pride. Lining the thoroughfare are 146 American flags, flying high against the East Tennessee sky—a star-spangled testament to a community deeply rooted in patriotic values.

IT ALL STARTS WITH A WAVE

PRESERVING PATRIOTISM ON THE STREETS OF JONESBOROUGH

Story & Photos By Jen Richman

But these flags do not fly perfectly on their own. They require stewardship, devotion, and a deep sense of civic duty. Enter Dana Helvey.

The Custodian of "The Ladies"

Dana Helvey is the face and the feet of the Jonesborough Flag Committee. Five years ago, Helvey and his family relocated to Jonesborough from Durango, Colorado, where he had spent over 30 years residing and serving his community as a volunteer firefighter. For Helvey, moving to this corner of East Tennessee meant discovering an authentic sense of belonging.

"This place is very unique—it's very different than most towns," Helvey observes. "The only way it's going to stay this way is if you get involved."

Three years ago, Helvey found his calling on the town's volunteer Flag Committee, eventually stepping into the role of Chairman. Today, he treats the 146 flags—or "the ladies," as he affectionately calls them—with the utmost reverence and respect. Every single day, Helvey walks the historic district with a flag unfurling tool in

one hand, meticulously untangling any flag caught in the wind to ensure Old Glory remains perfectly visible.

His other hand is kept entirely free for a simple, powerful act of community connection: waving at every passing car.

When he first started his flag walks, a wave back was a rarity. But patriotism and small-town warmth are contagious. Today, Helvey is a beloved fixture of Main Street. Drivers routinely lay on their horns, roll down their windows in the middle of traffic, and shout, "Hey flag man, appreciate what you're doing, man, you make me feel good!" To Helvey, caring for his community in this way means living in paradise.

A Tradition Built by the Community, For the Community

The flag program embodies the friendly, resilient personality of Jonesborough. It is a wholesome operation funded by the community itself. Through the **Adopt-a-Flag Program**, residents and visitors can sponsor a flag for \$75 for the first year and \$50 annually to renew. Each of the street poles features a custom 3x5 plaque recognizing the donor—often dedicated in honor of,



in memory of, or sponsored by someone looking to celebrate a veteran family member or loved one.

When committee member and Army veteran Rick Gibson installs these plaques, he stands at attention and salutes. It is a quiet, powerful display of the profound obligation the committee feels toward the symbols of our freedom and the people who protect them.

In 2024, the committee took their commitment to American tradition a step further. To ensure their values aligned from farm to fabric, they partnered with **Grace Alley Flags**, a veteran-owned, faith-based company that provides verified, FMAA-certified Made in America flags. As an enthusiastic supporter of the program, Grace Alley even offers local residents a 10% discount on their own flags with the code: **Jonesborough10**.

Leading the State in Honor

The committee's responsibility does not end when a flag weathers after a year of faithful service. True to the principles of stable, traditional values, the Town of Jonesborough handles flag retirement with unparalleled dignity.

The Flag Committee sponsors three clearly marked collection containers—repurposed freestanding mailboxes painted red with a U.S. Flag emblem—conveniently located at the Jonesborough Post Office parking lot, David Crockett High School, and the Food City parking lot in Gray. Through these boxes, the community gathers over 2,400 worn and tattered flags every year.

On the last Sunday in October, the town holds its annual Flag Retirement Ceremony. Working alongside the Daniel Boone High School Marine Corps Junior ROTC unit, the committee follows strict U.S. Flag Code disposal procedures. The town constructed specialized burn units where hickory wood is fired down to hot coals. The flags are respectfully retired in the heat, and the ashes are properly buried. By a star-spangled mile, **Jonesborough is number one in the state of Tennessee for retiring flags with honor**—a monumental distinction for a small town.

Help the Glory Grow

The Flag Committee is driven by a deep desire to show the rest of the country that America should be a little more like Tennessee's oldest town. Neighborly, respectful, and unashamedly patriotic, the program is poised for a major expansion.

In the coming weeks, the committee will launch a phased expansion to add approximately 50 more flags to the landscape, moving into the courthouse parking lot, the local library and the McKinney Center. With 129 of the current 146 flags already adopted, the committee is looking for patriotic citizens to step forward and adopt these new flags to ensure every single one flies high under a watchful eye.

As Dana Helvey often reminds the newcomers he meets on his daily flag walks: "You are part of a community, and you have to make the effort no matter how small."

How You Can Support the Jonesborough Flag Program

- **Adopt a Flag:** Affix a custom plaque (up to 65 characters) to a street pole downtown. Go Online to Adopt a Flag.
- **Consider Supporting:** Directly support the hardware, maintenance, and retirement fund.
- **Get in Touch:** For more information, visit the Official Town Flag Committee Page or email the team at flag@jonesboroughtn.org.

