

# CHILHOWIE COMMUNITY APPLE FESTIVAL

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## DEAR PARTICIPANTS AND FESTIVAL VISITORS,

Welcome to the 2024 Chilhowie Community Apple Festival, Our Platinum Anniversary - 70th Annual Festival. We are happy to have you come celebrate with us. The following are highlights of the past 70 years of Chilhowie Community Apple Festival and Apple Festival Committee history.

The Chilhowie Community Apple Festival had its beginning on a dreary rainy night in March of 1953. A group of young men got together for the purpose of discussing the possibilities of improving the town of Chilhowie. During the evening, they decided to organize the Chilhowie Junior Chamber of Commerce. This organization received its Charter on April 21, 1953.

During the spring of the same year, some of these members visited the Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester, Virginia. They returned to Chilhowie and suggested that they stage a festival and pay tribute to the apple, rather than the blossom. This would be most appropriate since Chilhowie was the second largest apple producing center in Virginia for which Bonham Brothers and Duncan Orchards were the producers. Thus, plans and ideas developed for the beginning of the Chilhowie Apple Festival. The first festival was held on October 2, 1953 on the grounds of the Old Chilhowie High School. Crowds, far larger than anticipated, attended that year's events. It was estimated that 10,000 persons viewed the first parade!

The Festival continued to grow beyond what one club could manage. Therefore, in 1965, other civic clubs joined in, and the name was changed to the Chilhowie Community Apple Festival. The aspirations of the new board were the same as the original board to strive to have a Festival for which the town and surrounding communities could be proud. In the 1980s, weather-related crop losses and the deaths of the leaders of the Bonham family combined to cause a decline in the once booming Bonson's Apple business, dealing a blow to the apple industry in Chilhowie. The Duncan Orchard continued for several years more, but closed earlier this century.

The event was, and has continued to be, family and community oriented with activities for everyone. Over the years, various forms of entertainment have been a part of the Festival. The Entertainment has included: skydiving exhibitions, performances by professional square dancers, cloggers, and musical entertainers; a Model T car comedy, motorcycle rider show, hot air balloons, as well as pony and horse shows. Past public participation events were: tractor driving contests, talent shows, square dances, baby shows, sock hops, street dances, Kids Day activities, apple peeling contests, bike races, and barbecued chicken dinners. Regular events occurring during each Festival are: the beauty pageant, agricultural and crafts fair, pet show, parade, high school band competition, craft and commercial vendors, the food court, and a gospel sing.

The funds raised by the Apple Festival Committee have been used to pay for worthwhile projects which benefit the community. The Festival has made monetary contributions to the Town, schools, and community. Contributions have been made to band directors for band trips and uniforms, to Project Graduation, to schools for the purchase of equipment, to Chilhowie Elementary School for Williamsburg trips, to the Chilhowie Library for children's programs, to the Old High School Renovations Committee for many renovations, and to fire and rescue squads. The Festival Committee shared the cost with the Town for the stage at the community Park and for the street Christmas lights. Santa Claus, Christmas treats, and community lighted Christmas trees were a

Festival- sponsored tradition for over 20 years. Prior to each year's Festival, the committee purchases and decorates the town with Fall decorations such as corn, gourds, pumpkins, mums, and flags.

The band competition was the main source of revenue for the festival committee which enabled the committee to make those significant contributions back to the community. Over the years, many of the member civic clubs that supported the festival and supplied many of the numerous necessary volunteers disbanded as their memberships waned. The loss of the civic clubs greatly reduced the number of volunteers available to meet the festival's responsibilities. Due to the lack of festival committee volunteers, the Chilhowie High School Band Director, band students, and Band Boosters had assumed most of the responsibilities of the band competition. Once again, the festival committee had to adapt in order to ensure the continued survival of the festival. In 2013, because of the lack of volunteers and other circumstances, the decision was made to turn the Band Competition aspect of the festival over to the CHS Band Director and Boosters. (This has become their main fundraiser to pay for their bus fuel and drivers, uniforms, and music).

The Town of Chilhowie and the Apple Festival Committee have partnership in planning and executing the festival events. The Town of Chilhowie contributes public works, fire, and police personnel and services. They also provide other municipal services such as obtaining permits and coordination of services. The Apple Festival Committee volunteers plan and coordinate all of the festival activities: exhibits, craft and vendor booths, food court vendors, entertainment, parade and float judging, cruise in, pet show, and all related activities. These are then executed by committee and community volunteers.

Even with the Town's contributions, because the committee's sources of earned income are now limited to the sales in the committee's drink stand in the food court, vendor booth fees, and train ride tickets sales, the annual festival income is not sufficient to cover the costs of a single year's festival. Without our generous sponsors the festival could not continue. As we celebrate our Platinum Anniversary of 70 Years of the Chilhowie Apple Festival, we thank our sponsors for their sustained support. This unwavering support from the community will enable us to provide this extraordinary annual event for Chilhowie and the surrounding communities for years to come.

We hope that you are enjoying this year's festival. Please patronize our sponsors, and join us again next year for the 2025 Chilhowie Community Apple Festival, September 26-28, 2025. Safe travels.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca Wilkinson-Smith  
Vicki Wilson  
Chilhowie Community Apple Festival Committee Co-Presidents





## TOWN OF CHILHOWIE, VIRGINIA

Mayor: Gary L. Heninger

Council: Billy L. Clear  
Shannon Donnelly  
J. Brent Foster  
Bob Jeter  
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Town Manager: Brian Martin  
Clerk/Treasurer: Felicia C. Eller  
Police Chief: Andrew K. Moss  
Director Public Works: Daniel W. Combs  
Fire /EMS Chief: C. David Haynes  
Building Official: C. David Haynes  
Wastewater Operations: Luke A. Lowe  
Water Operations: Don Cole, II  
Special Events/Recreation: Stephen Fields  
Legal: Cassell & Crewe, P.C.

Greeting to Participants and Visitors of the 2024 Apple Festival:

On behalf of the Town Council, Employees and Citizens of the Town of Chilhowie, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2024 Chilhowie Community Apple Festival. Let the Festival begin!

The theme of the Festival this year is "Apple-Lachian Traditions". The Festival, which began in 1953, is a rich celebration of our heritage including arts and crafts, a beauty pageant, exhibits, grand parade, band competition, live music and many other activities.

We are very excited about what the Town has been able to accomplish, working together as a team, the last couple of years! Our Fire Department has achieved a Class 3 Public Protection Classification, the second highest of any department west of Salem. Our EMS provides professional, responsive service to the Town and the County. Our Police Department is among the best staffed, equipped and professional in the Commonwealth. Our Finance Department operates in a very efficient manner. Our Public Works Department maintains and operates a large multi-regional water and sewer utility system serving thousands of persons in not only the Town of Chilhowie but in Smyth and Washington Counties. Our recreation department provides a full venue of activities and offers a "Concerts in the Park" concert series at the Chilhowie Recreation Park.

We have completed our \$1.3 million Downtown Revitalization Project, and the results can be readily seen. Our \$3.5 million Regional Water Treatment Plant Project with Washington County is completed assuring safe, potable water for our and Washington County's customers. The \$500,000 East Lee Highway Pedestrian II Project has been completed by extending the sidewalk from Church Avenue to Walton Avenue, crossing Highway 11 and connecting to the Downtown area. Our beautiful Will Walker Farmers Market at Lucas Dowell Memorial Park hosts thousands of visitors each year. The construction of the Dog Park is complete as well as the Splash Pad Project. We are excited about what we have accomplished and look to the future with renewed optimism!

We are also fortunate to have all the dedicated and hardworking volunteers who make the 2024 Chilhowie Community Apple Festival possible again!

With Kind Regards,

Mayor Gary L. Heninger



PROVIDING SERVICE SINCE 1913 TO THE CITIZENS  
OF THE TOWN OF CHILHOWIE AND OF SMYTH AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES.

