

## A Jonesborough Days first: Marching Farmers

› Annual festival begins today; Farmers to march Independence Day.

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Though things like fireworks, barbecues and American flags can often be associated with Independence Day, other things, like line-dancing farmers and 8-foot chickens, may not be as much.

After Friday's Fourth of July parade in Jonesborough, however, those two things and Independence Day may not seem so far removed.

On Friday at 10 a.m., during the town's annual Jonesborough Days Festival, those in attendance will witness the first performance of the Marching Farmers, a dance troupe comprised of members and supporters of the town's Farmers Market.

While this year's festival, which begins today at noon, marks the 44th of its kind, this will be the first year to feature the Marching Farmers. The choreography was handled by Heidi Ehle, one of the market's Saturday managers who also has a background in professional dance.

"I actually thought I would be a professional dancer up until about the age of 30 when I injured my knee," she said. "I work with the Greeneville Ballet some, (and) I've done some work with Mountain Movers, which is a little company hosted by East Tennessee State University. I also have some training of the Dalcroze method, which is the method of teaching music concepts through movement."

Despite her experience, Ehle said Friday would be her first time choreographing a dance for a parade. Unlike a stage performance, she said, parades can present challenges that she has not encountered throughout her career.

"Parades can stall, and they can go forward, and then they can stop for periods of time and you never know exactly what's holding things up," Ehle said. "But I've got a few things in my back pocket in case for instance the parade stops for a while."

While parades can present their own challenges, Ehle added that there are some aspects of parades that will prove beneficial to her troupe.

"The audience changes constantly," she said. "You can do the same pattern over and over again, and it will be new to the people you're in front of, unlike a stage performance."

As for the troupe itself, though it is mostly comprised of people with little to no dance experience, Ehle said the group's output had impressed her.

"We turned out to have a surprisingly talented and disciplined group who are really into this," Ehle said. "People have been very respectful of me and very cooperative, and I think they're also having a really good time. We've not only had a great time, but I think the results are going to be pretty impressive."

The troupe will be outfitted in their farmer's work attire, Ehle said, and will use long-handled tools as props. Though some may find it difficult to look away from

the sight of dancing farmers, the routine isn't the only thing the Farmers Market has planned for the parade.

"The Marching Farmers is only one part of an extravagant float," Ehle said. "The float has also been a huge community effort, and another real sign of the kind of support the Farmers Market has."

The float — which was designed by Ehle, her husband, Charles Jones, and her fellow market manager Debbie Kruse — is comprised of four parts, three of which will be displayed on a flatbed trailer that will be pulled along in the parade by a pickup truck. In the bed of that pickup, Ehle said, will be the first part of the float that people will see.

"In the bed of the pickup truck, will be a nest of hay, and in that nest of hay is an 8-foot chicken," she said. "It's built out of chicken wire. It's stuffed with plastic bags and trimmed."

Behind the pickup, on the flatbed, Ehle said they created three sections to represent the three main events or locations that are part of Jonesborough Locally Grown, a nonprofit aimed at increasing access to locally grown foods and supporting local farmers.

As such, from front to back, the float will feature representations of: Boone Street Market — the upcoming farmer's market store that is being built at 101 Boone St.

— in the form of a crate overflowing with vegetables; the Farm to Table Dinner — which serves as the main fundraiser for JLG

— represented in the form of a long elegantly dressed dinner table with "market VIPs" sitting at it; and a representation of the Saturday Farmers Market in the form of hay bales and a live performance from the Blue Ridge Entertainers. The band will provide the music for the Marching Farmers, who will perform behind the float.

While she said she's looking forward to seeing all the work come together on Friday, Ehle said the best part for her was watching the process take shape.

"What's been so fun and rewarding about this is to see how the community will pull together and the level of cooperation people have when they just really focus on something they think is worthwhile," she said.

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Reader contributed/Deb Kruse The Marching Farmers prepare their parade float.