

Turning Up the Heat: Owensboro man turns love of peppers Into business

BY MICHELE LOHMAN
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Owensboro’s Caleb Chapman fell in love with hot peppers after being introduced to them by a Vietnamese friend.

“He introduced me to Thai food. ...So, I tried it on the spiciest level you can get, and I kind of fell in love with the hot peppers,” Chapman said.

Peppers, he explained, are rated using the Scoville scale, which measures the amount of capsaicin in a pepper. Capsaicin is what makes peppers hot. For example, a bell pepper measures zero Scoville heat units, while a jalapeño measures 2,500 to 8,000 Scoville heat units.

His love of spicy food and, subsequently, hot peppers led Chapman to start his own crop of peppers, which, he said, often range from 500,000 to 1 million Scoville heat units. For comparison, a habanero measures between 100,000 and 350,000 Scoville heat units, and the Carolina Reaper, one of the world’s hottest peppers, can reach between 1.2 million and 2.2 million Scoville heat units.

“There’s some rare varieties that you can’t find in stores. You have to buy seeds from somebody, a seed dealer, who sells them...and that’s why I think my peppers are unique because you can’t buy them in stores,” he said.

He starts the pepper plants inside his home sometime in late January or early February.

“I start them in small cups, and once they get a couple inches tall, I move them to like a four inch cup...and then in May, after the first frost, that’s when I get them outside, about the same time that other crops are planted,” said Chapman. “Hot peppers have a long growing season. ...It’s almost like the hotter they are, the longer they take.”

In past growing seasons, he said, he has planted upward of 60 pepper plants for the season.

“My whole backyard was



Photos by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer | geans@messenger-inquirer.com

Caleb Chapman with his fire in the hole pepper Co. Pineapple Hot Pepper Jelly, left, and Hot Pepper Jelly hot sauces at Niko’s Bakery.

basically planted. And it was like it was almost too much...It was a lot. I went overboard,” he laughed. “I was basically giving them away at that point, and it’s hard to give away hot peppers.”

Each plant, he said, can produce upward of 200 peppers in a season.

“Next year, I’m probably going to go eight — four sweet peppers, four hot peppers. I used to have...like 12 different varieties of the hot peppers, and I would see those in different bowls at the market for people to have different choices, and it’s kind of interesting for people to find (new) peppers because there’s literally thousands of varieties of hot peppers,” he said.

And it was that abundance of peppers that led Chapman to think about what he could do with the leftovers, other than drying them and using them in recipes.

“I wondered what it would be like to get into canning and making some jellies and stuff like that,” he said.

He started working on his recipe, taste-testing batches of hot pepper jelly until he settled on several varieties: original, pineapple and blueberry, along with canned candied jalapeños. He does all of the canning in small batches out of his house, which, he admitted, is a time-

consuming process and also a “labor of love.”

He said Kentucky requires a Home-Based Microprocessor (HBM) certification for this type of food-making venture.

“It’s a very long process, and it takes a lot of work,” he said. “You gotta get your microprocessors license...so you can do like just general home goods and stuff like that. ...You basically have your recipe and you put your ingredients together on the stove.”

He said he can usually get around six jars for each batch of jelly.

“To do like 40 or 50 jellies, it’s like nine to 10 hours of work, and you’re standing up. And to do canning, you’re on a timer — every process of the way is timed, and you have to be pretty consistent with it,” said Chapman.

His first customers were friends and family, but the canned pepper jellies went over so well that he decided to start selling some through a business named Fire in the Hole Pepper Co. He currently sells the jellies and candied jalapeños at Niko’s Bakery & Cafe, located at 601 Emery Drive in Wesleyan Park Plaza, and through social media, including the business’s Facebook page of the same name.

“Whenever I first heard about pepper jelly, I was like...it sounds kind of nasty. But it’s super good. It’s really great for holidays or get togethers,” he said.

He suggests eating the jelly as a dip combined with cream cheese.

“You just take a block of cream cheese and you pour it on there, and everybody loves it. You can smash an entire jar in a day,” Chapman said.

He said the jellies also work well in sauces and as a glaze, adding that he had used one of the jellies as a glaze on a smoked ham.

As far as the future goes, Chapman said he would like to get a commercial license so he can get the pepper jelly into stores one day.

“To be able to maybe sell them at stores...I think that would be pretty cool. Maybe sell them online...I never did this to make money — I started doing it because I love peppers. It’s not like I could quit my 9-to-5 to do it, but I just love that people love it because I never meant for it to be a business. It literally just started by me just enjoying hot peppers and growing hot peppers, and it was just kind of like a whim,” Chapman said.

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF BOND RELEASE

In accordance with KRS 350.093, notice is hereby given that Pollard Management Group of Kentucky, LLC, 483 Lamb Road, Madisonville, Kentucky 42431 has applied for Phases II and III bond release on Increment 2 and Phase III release on Increment 3 of Permit No. 875-8003, which was last issued on 7 January 2026 (Permit No. 875-8003 MI-11). The application covers a total area of 136.3 acres located approximately three miles north of Sacramento in McLean County. The permit area and these two increments are located at the junction of KY 2385 and Whobry Road, and west of Pond Drain.

The bond now in effect for Increment 2 is Bond #SUR0067562 in the amount of \$93,600. Its entire remaining amount (100%) is included in the application for release. The bond now in effect for Increment 3 is Bond #SUR0067561 in the amount of \$269,800. Likewise, its entire remaining amount (100%) is included in the application for release.

For the Phases II and III release on Increment 2, the following steps have been completed: (1) Revegetation has been established in accordance with the approved reclamation plan and the standards for success of revegetation have been met. (2) The lands are not contributing suspended solids to stream flow or runoff outside the permit area or increment in excess of regulatory requirements. (3) The provisions for sound future management of permanent impoundments have been implemented. (4) There has been successful completion of all surface coal mining and reclamation operations in accordance with the approved reclamation plan, such that the land is capable of supporting the approved postmining land use (industrial/commercial). (5) There has been achievement of compliance with the requirements of KRS Chapter 350, Title 405, Chapters 7 through 24, and the permit. (6) The expiration of the liability period occurred on 1 October 2026. For the Phase III release on Increment 3, the following steps have been completed: (1) There has been successful completion of all surface coal mining and reclamation operations in accordance with the approved reclamation plan, such that the land is capable of supporting the approved postmining land uses (cropland and pastureland). (2) There has been achievement of compliance with the requirements of KRS Chapter 350, Title 405, Chapters 7 through 24, and the permit. (3) The expiration of the five-year liability period will occur on 11 November 2026.

Written comments, objections, and requests for a public hearing or informal conference must be filed with the Director, Division of Mine Reclamation and Enforcement, 300 Sower Boulevard, Frankfort, Kentucky 40601, by Friday, 30 October 2026.

A public hearing on the application has been scheduled for Monday, 2 November 2026 at 9:00 A.M. at the Kentucky Department for Natural Resources (KDNR), Madisonville Regional Office, 625 Hospital Drive, Madisonville, Kentucky 42431-1683. The hearing will be cancelled if no request for a hearing or informal conference is received by Friday, 30 October 2026.



LEGAL NOTICE

SUMMARY AMENDMENT TO ORDINANCE NO. 26-920.1 SERIES 2026 RELATING TO ZONING REQUIREMENTS FOR SOLAR PANELS

The ordinance modifies Article 8 sections 8.01 (A); 8.02 (C); and 8.02 (G)(1) as follows:

Section 8.01 (A) is amended to allow ONE HUNDRED percent (100%) of the rooftop of a structure, not more than one (1) acre in size not taller than TWENTY -FIVE (25) feet located on real property to be utilized for a solar panel system instead of just FIFTY percent (50%).

Section 8.02 (C) is amended to require all Level 3 SES equipment to be changed from TWENTY-FIVE (25) feet to ONE HUNDRED (100) feet from the perimeter property lines and from ONE HUNDRED (100) feet to FIVE HUNDRED feet from any residential structure.

Section 8.02 (G) (1) is amended to increase the surety bond for any developer from ONE PERCENT (1%) to FIVE PERCENT (5%).

The Ordinance is to become effective after its second reading and publication.

The undersigned, Donna Dant, certifies that she has prepared the above summary which is a true and correct summary of the McLean County Ordinance Relating to the zoning of solar panels.

Donna Dant
McLean County Attorney

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY MCLEAN COUNTY FISCAL COURT ORDINANCE NO. 26-920-1, SERIES 2026 ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE MCLEAN COUNTY ZONING ORDINANCE ARTICLE 8 REGARDING SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS AS RECOMMENDED BY THE JOINT CITY-COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION OF MCLEAN COUNTY

WHEREAS, Chapter 100 of the Kentucky Revised Statutes provides for the adoption of zoning text and maps as well as providing for amendments; and

WHEREAS, the County of McLean and the Joint City-County Planning Commission of McLean County (hereinafter referred to as "Commission") having recognized the need for zoning regulations that promote the public health, safety, morals and general welfare of the community, and facilitate orderly and harmonious development and the visual character of the community, by enacting and amending the McLean County Zoning Ordinance 20-920-1; and

WHEREAS, the Joint City-County Planning Commission of McLean County (hereinafter referred to as "Commission") having received a written application from its Chairperson, to amend Article 8 of the McLean County Zoning Ordinance; and WHEREAS, pursuant to the provisions of the McLean County Zoning Ordinance a public hearing was conducted on May 12, 2026 and the Commission provided its findings of fact and recommendation to the McLean Fiscal Court thereafter; and WHEREAS, the McLean Fiscal Court voted at its regular meeting on August 13th, 2026 to accept the recommendations of the Commission and to incorporate said recommendations into its McLean County Zoning Ordinance pursuant to the language provided therein; and NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED AND ENACTED by the McLean County Fiscal Court of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, as follows:

Article 8 Section 8.01(A) is amended to read as follows: Section 8.01(A): Level 1 Solar Energy System. A roof mounted system on any code compliant structure, an area up to ONE-HUNDRED (100) percent of the footprint of the primary structure on the parcel but not more than one (1) acre and not more than twenty-five (25) feet tall or any building integrated system (i.e. shingle, hanging solar, canopy, etc.)

Article 8 Section 8.02 (C) is amended to read as follows: Section 8.02 (C): Setback requirement for Level 3 SES shall be as follows: (1) All equipment shall be at least ONE-HUNDRED (100) feet from the perimeter property lines of the project area; (2) No interior property line setbacks shall be required if the project spans multiple contiguous properties; (3) All equipment shall be located at least FIVE-HUNDRED (500) feet from any residential structure and; the maximum height of any individual component will be 25 feet measured from the local ground level of the component.

Article 8 Section 8.02 (G) (1) is amended to read as follows: Section 8.02 (G) (1): The developer shall post a Surety Bond, or other form of Security acceptable to the County, for the abandonment of the site in the event the Commission must remove the facility. Abandonment shall be when the SES ceases to transfer energy on a continuous basis for twelve (12) months. The surety bond or other form of security, shall be five (5) percent of the total project cost recalculated every 5 years during the project life.

This Ordinance shall be effective upon final passage and publication.

Approved this 13th day of August, 2026.

/s/ Curtis Dame
Curtis Dame, McLean County
Judge Executive

Attest:
/s/ Wendy Troutman
Wendy Clark, Court Clerk

Passed by a vote of 4 to 0 on the first reading on 7/30/26.
Passed by a vote of 4 to 0 on the second reading on 8/13/26.

FINDINGS OF FACT APPLICATION FOR ZONING CHANGES:

The McLean County Planning Commission (the "Planning Commission") hereby adopts these Findings of Fact (Findings) following its May 12, 2026 public hearing:

Finding No. 1. The proposed zoning changes would permit ONE HUNDRED PERCENT (100%) of the rooftop of a structure, not more than one (1) acre in size nor taller than TWENTY-FIVE (25) feet to be utilized by a solar panel system instead of the current FIFTY PERCENT (50%) now allowed; would require Level 3 SES equipment to be ONE HUNDRED FEET from the perimeter lines instead of FIFTY (50) feet and be FIVE HUNDRED (500) FEET from any residential structure instead of ONE HUNDRED (100) FEET; and increase a developer's bond from ONE PERCENT (1%) to FIVE PERCENT (5%).

Finding No. 2. Goal 1 does not apply to this Proposal because it addresses commerce and industry.

Finding No. 3. The Proposal conforms to Goal 2 (To improve McLean County as a place of residence) because it restricts Level 3 equipment from encroaching on property lines and residences.

Finding No. 4. The Proposal conforms to Goal 3 (to encourage development to be sensitive to specific environmental constraints and the general surrounding natural conditions) because it further restricts the environmental impact to McLean County's environmental constraints and natural conditions

Finding No. 5. Goal 4 does not apply to this Proposal because it addresses recreation facilities.

Finding No. 6. Goal 5 does not apply to this Proposal because it addresses public service and community facilities.

Finding No. 7. The Proposal conforms with Goal 6 (To encourage the location and development of different land uses in the most appropriate manner) because it will provide sufficient land area to house the various types of land uses to meet current as well as future needs. It promotes a planned development so as to ensure the best possible utilization of land within the county, it ensures that the land use is developed in a manner compatible with surrounding land uses and it also facilitates a good transition between land uses of varying types and density.

Finding No. 8. Goal 7 does not apply to this Proposal because it addresses the recognition and restoration of historically important sites.

Finding No. 9. The Proposal conforms with Goal 8 (To promote energy efficiency and conservation of a countywide basis) because it encourages development of vacant tracts of land.

Finding No. 10. Goal 9 does not apply to this proposal because it addresses the transportation system of McLean County.

Finding No. 11. The proposal conforms to Goal 10 (To develop, adopt and use growth management regulations and policies which will act to implement the Comprehensive Plan, whole ensuring fairness, standardization, and consistency in the growth management process) because it develops, adopts and uses zoning ordinances which act to achieve said goal.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE AND TESTIMONY OF PROPOSERS AND OPPONENTS

There was not any evidence nor testimony of any opponents of the Proposal.

Cammie Paul spoke and supported an increase in a developer's bond but would like it to be to 20% rather than the 5% proposed. Cathy McGrath also spoke about the Board being non compliant with respect to the comprehensive plan. She neither spoke for or against the current proposal.

Jared Vanover wanted clarification that the 100% rooftop systems were limited to rooftop installations, he neither spoke for or against the current proposal.

NOW THEREFORE, the McLean County Planning Commission hereby recommends to the McLean County Fiscal Court that the proposed zoning amendment be codified through an Ordinance amending Article 8 Sections: 8.02 (A); 8.02 (C); and 8.02 (G)(1).

DATED this the 21 day of July, 2026.

/s/ Mark Robertson
MARK ROBERTSON, Chairperson,
McLean County Joint Planning & Zoning Commission

SOFTBALL

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donors and businesses, which donate to the local Special Olympics chapter or to the state umbrella group.

“We started with one sport, track and field,” Johnson said. “Now in Owensboro and Daviess County, we offer 10 sports year-round.”

Jason Davis, who plays for the Terminators, an Owensboro softball team, said his team started out with a 0-3 season before rebounding and making the state tournament.

“I feel good,” Davis said about the tournament. “I can’t wait to be pumped up and win.”

Bryan Free, who coaches the Angels, said the team lost several members to a new division this year because the sport has grown.

“We had to completely rebuild our outfield,” Bryan Free said. “Our athletes stepped up, and we are back for state for the third year in a row.”

About 100 Special Olympics athletes play on Owensboro teams. Eli Ben-



Kim Johnson, local coordinator for Special Olympics Kentucky, speaks during an announcement about hosting the state tournament at Jack C. Fisher Park Complex, Sept. 11-13.

nett, who also coaches one of the state-bound teams, said people coming to watch the tournament next weekend can expect some serious play.

“They always come away surprised with how competitive the games are, and how seriously (the athletes) take the games and their teams,” Bennett said.

“They like the competition, but they stay friendly,” Bryan Free said.

“For many of these athletes, Special Olympics is like family to them,” he said.

Johnson, who has been active in Special Olympics for 37 years, said Owensboro

and Daviess County have long been supportive with donations and by volunteering. This year’s tournament will be staffed by volunteers from Independence Bank doing a day of service, Johnson said.

“I cannot say how good our community is in supporting our Special Olympics programs,” Johnson said.

Johnson also said the tournament will produce a lot of high-intensity softball.

“They will all be going for the gold,” Johnson said. “They demonstrate excellent sportsmanship most of the time, but they will all be going for the gold.”

LADY

FROM PAGE B1

behind two goals from Hope Lewis, but McLean County held the Lady Cougars’ opponents scoreless throughout the second half and worked its way back into the contest.

Miller scored McLean County’s lone goal, with Smith credited with an assist. The goal came during a scramble in front of the net following a corner kick, and McLean County continued to create opportunities from set pieces as it searched for the equalizer.

Estes finished with nine saves in goal, helping keep the Lady Cougars within

striking distance. McLean County also put nine shots on goal, forcing the Grayson County goalkeeper to make eight saves.

“This was a hard fought defensive effort by both teams. Grayson County had a 2-0 lead on two goals by Hope Lewis. We held them scoreless in the second half and scored on a scrum in front of the goal on a corner kick. We thought we had tied the game a couple of times on corner kicks. Overall, we are pleased with how we executed our chances and game plan,” Humphrey said.

Although McLean County was unable to find the tying goal, the perfor-

mance showed the Lady Cougars’ ability to stay disciplined and compete against a strong opponent. After falling behind by two goals, McLean County kept Grayson off the scoreboard in the second half and generated several chances to bring the game level.

LOOKING AHEAD

Tonight, McLean County will travel to Lyon County to face Lyon County High School as the Lady Cougars continue their regular-season schedule.

The matchup will give McLean County another opportunity to build on its recent defensive performances and continue developing its balanced attack as the season moves