

Coot & Holler Gazette

Vol. 25, No. 1, Thursday, September 3, 2026

Submit material to cootnholler@otr.org by 4 p.m. daily.
Or drop a written blurb in the envelope at Cooters.



OTR Schedule THURSDAY

12 noon	OTR opens
12–11 PM	Registration Open
12 PM–2 AM	Cooters Pub Open
12 PM–4 AM	Sauna Area Open
12–4 PM	Museum Open
12–4 PM	Merch Sales Open (Merch Tent)
5:15 PM	Memorial Plaque Reading (Lutz Rock Memorial Garden)
6–7:30 PM	Opening Ceremony / Memorial Tribute (Lutz Rock Memorial Garden)
8:15 PM	Virgin Welcome (Bonfire)
8:30 PM	Bonfire Lighting
8:30 PM	Virgin Procession
8:45 PM	Virgin & Sponsor Reception (Event Tent)
Dusk (±8:30)	Movie (Crawl–In Theater)
9 PM–12 AM	Live music: ♪ Grateful Gary ♪ (Pavilion)

Chair’s Welcome Message

By Sarah Richards
Welcome, everyone, to the milestone 75th annual Old Timers Reunion, where we are celebrating the legacy of OTR, all the way back to its humble beginning in 1950! The OTR staff has been working for the last 2 years to prepare an unforgettable 75th reunion celebration for you all, and we are thrilled that you are here! From the Gate to the Pavilion to the River, and everywhere in between, you'll find that OTR is peppered with blasts from the past! Check out the Event Schedule in the *Guidebook*, and keep an eye on the *Coot & Holler* each day for the latest updates! Finally, if you're a virgin, be sure to pick up a *Virgin Guide* to help you explore everything that OTR has to offer! We hope that you have a fantastic weekend!

Not-alcoholic beer is available at Cooters! Ask the Cooters staff about the available options!

MERCH Announcement: We are very sorry, but the patches are delayed. We'll update in the *Coot & Holler* daily.

Lutz Rock Memorial Service and Memorial Plaque Reading—TODAY!!!

Thursday, 5:15 PM

Come to the Lutz Rock Memorial Garden before the Memorial Service to observe a solemn reading of the names of our dearly departed members displayed on the Memorial Plaques.

Thursday, 6 PM

Join us as we kick off OTR with a solemn remembrance of all of our OTR loved ones who have gone before us. The mic will be open for any attendee who would like to step up and pay a brief tribute to their dearly departed friends and family members.

OTR 2026 Virgin Welcome & Reception! Also TODAY!!!

Thursday, starting at dusk

Newcomers are special to the OTR community, and we welcome you with a few annual traditions!

Step 1: Come to the Bonfire Lighting, where we will hold a brief Welcome Ceremony to introduce you to the wonders of OTR and present you with your very own *Virgin Guide*, which is a little booklet to help you make the most of your first OTR!

Step 2: Follow the shooting Star in a short Virgin Procession down Vendors Row from the Bonfire to the Event Tent.

Step 3: Bring your sponsor and join us at the Event Tent for a Virgin Reception to further welcome you into the fold. You'll meet the OTR chair and vice chair, the TRA president and officers, other TRA trustees, and the Membership sSecretary, who will have everything you need to join The Robertson Association (TRA).

Step 4: Apply to join TRA at the low introductory rate of \$5, and become part of TRA's future!

Happy 75th Birthday OTR and huzzas to the birthday cake, bonfire krewe listed below.

Krewe Chief Maria Gibbs, Tom Brookover, Jody Brookover, Mathew Brookover, Ross Cosburn, Elizabeth Dakin, Brad Obrecht, Carol-Ann Ricketts, Connor Ricketts-Kotsopoulos, Chuck Schoppert , Mike Snyder

Operation Team Ride (OTR): Serving Our Ol’ Timers (S.O.O.T.s)

For our attendees who arrive with mobility issues, a small group of kind souls has organized a campground transit service. New in 2026, watch for a golf cart named “Laney” to assist in ferrying individuals upon request within the campground perimeter. You may also flag down any staff member on a golf cart to request a ride, and if it's on their way to where

they're going, they will likely oblige. For more details, including a phone number to call for assistance, check the Amenities section of the *Guidebook* and watch for signs around the campground and posts in the daily *Coot & Holler*.

Trash: Please do NOT use the garbage cans along Vendor Row for your campsite trash.

Breaking News! OTR Documentary To Be Filmed at the 75th Old Timers Reunion!

For the first time ever, the wonders of OTR will be documented on film for all of posterity. We have a documentary filmmaker in our midst who grew up right here among us, attending this most wonderful weekend of every year. Dylan and the film crew will have official "Film Crew" badges to identify them as serving in a TRA-sanctioned capacity. More details can be found at otr.org/.

Come by CaveSim at the pavilion between 10 AM and 6 PM to explore 150 feet of multilevel artificial cave with AC. Test your caving skills to see how carefully you can move through the passage without touching the formations. CaveSim also has a vertical caving tower where you can try your SRT gear or learn about haul systems.

A Toast to OTR Fellow Nigel Willis: Friday, 7:30–8:30 PM at Cooter's Pub

Following Shanty Irish's send-off on Friday, please join the Willis Family and Red Fox Den at Cooters Pub from 7:30–8:30 PM as we gather to remember and celebrate the life of Nigel Willis. Nigel loved OTR, became an OTR Fellow, and was certainly known to enjoy a pint or two at Cooter's Pub. It feels only fitting to raise a glass together in a place that held so many good memories for him. Come share a story, a laugh, a memory, and a toast to the life Nigel lived and the legacy he left behind. Throughout the memorial, we will be collecting cash and online donations for the Kiddie Korral, a place Nigel spent so many hours helping to build and improve for future generations of Caver Kids. We can think of no better way to honor his memory than by supporting something that meant so much to him and will continue to serve the OTR community for years to come. First round is on the family; after that, use your own Cooters card. Here's to Nigel: January 28, 1958–October 16, 2025.

Welcome back to OTR, my Little Miss. Can't wait to just relax and think about nothing but us for 5 days. Love, your Hansome.

BEFORE YOU GO CAVING: We strongly recommend that you fill out a CAVER ALERT INFORMATION SHEET (CAIS) found in the RED BOXES on campground Bulletin Boards, Registration, First Aid, and the Gate. Leave it with your Emergency Contact (someone who is not going on your trip). DO NOT LEAVE IT AT THE GATE OR AT REGISTRATION. The CAIS tells your Emergency Contact where you are going and when you are due back. **Be sure to let your Emergency Contact know when you return.**

Reminder: Downstream entrance of Sinks of Gandy is closed!

Sign up with **Trevor Finn, the DooDah Dude**, to join in the fun that is the DooDah Parade. His edress is DooDahOTR@outlook.com.

TRA Elections by Susan Nettles

Are you interested in running for a TRA Trustee 2-year term? Please email a clean headshot & a short bio, to TRAelections@otr.org, to be displayed during voting. Then find me to get your signature on candidate form. I will be at/ near Cooters during these times: Friday 4–5 pm and Saturday 10:30–11:30 am. I will be able to take your picture if necessary.

Crawl-In Theater (@ Dusk, Weather Permitting)

This year's film festival will feature: **Thursday:** Shrek; **Friday:** The Lion King; **Saturday:** The Goonies; and **Sunday:** Over the Hedge

The Fourth Annual OTR Bullock Distillery Free Bourbon Tasting by Nick@Nite aka Nick Schaeer
Friday September 5th 6:30 PM in the OTR Party Section along the back road.

Come sample the wooden barrel-aged Greenbrier County Karst Groundwater Bourbons of the Bullock Distillery. These fine West Virginia-distilled bourbons are finished with Bullock Spring water, which is part of the Bone-Norman Cave System. Look for the Bourbon and Bone-Norman Cave Map posters.

What's Up? (9/3/2026) by Joel Jacobs

Full moons occur about every 29.5 days. The full Sturgeon Moon was on August 28 at 12:18 a.m. It was named by the native people for the proliferation of these giant fish in the Great Lakes at this time of year. Every culture named the full moons for what was important to them. Some other names for the August full moon are the Green Corn Moon, the Barley Moon, the Lightning Moon, and the Red Moon. Our moon will be waning, getting smaller, during OTR. The new moon will be on September 11th. The full Corn Moon, the Harvest Moon, the one closest to the Autumnal Equinox (9/22/26) will be on September 26 at 12:49 p.m.

A Diamond Story by Joel Jacobs

Chapter 1: The Box

The entrance was immense; a 60-foot, flat oval, a cavernous maw in the middle of the jungle. You had to be within a stone's throw of it to see it. A stream, more like a river, flowed out of the gaping orifice that required trudging through the relentless, knee-deep current. Once inside, the twilight zone disappeared about a hundred feet from the opening as the huge passageway doglegged around towering stalagmites and porcelain white columns.

That's when the rushing noise became perceivable—a steady, intensifying purr that escalated to a roar so loud that lip reading and body language became the means of communication. This 8-foot-high waterfall blocked the entire width of the corridor. There was a jumble of rocks to the right side that allowed cavers to climb up on the edge of the torrent to penetrate deeper into the tunnel.

Upstream, the river vanished, but it could still be heard coursing its way beneath our lug soles. There were many leads and we entered some of them that were shown on the map. One hole into a side passage was not on the map. That was curious since every other feature including stalactites, breakdown, flowstone, odd speleothems, and pools with cave pearls were on it. That had to be intentional, an effort by the mappers to avoid notice of it, which could be easily done as it was from a shelf 10 feet above the floor.

We entered the unmapped shaft. It bent left, then right, narrowed, and ended at a pile of limestone boulders. Cavers often hide tiny entrance holes to protect passages they want to keep private and since we felt there was a mystery in the making we moved all of the rocks. At the bottom was a burlap sack within which was a polished wooden box.

To be continued . . .