



Of Auctions and Auctioneers

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**
Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**

Joe Friend, Jr., encourages everyone to have “the Grantsville experience” at least once. He’s talking about the Grantsville Auction, held every Saturday, with bidding on farm products and small animals starting at 10:00 a.m., and a larger livestock sale following at 1:00 p.m.

An old farmer once told Joe that there are three kinds of people at a sale: bidders, buyers, and bull-----s. Another way of looking at it is that people go to the sale to sell, to buy, and to be entertained.

The auction house is a ramshackle building along Route 669 between Grantsville, Maryland, and Springs, Pennsylvania. Unless you’re only there as an observer, be sure to pick up a card with a bidding number on it at the office before you take a seat on the steep bleachers of the small arena where the sale is held. If you need some refreshments, there is a cafe on the premises serving hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, fries, and desserts.

Helpers sort through a pile of goods, holding up each item for sale. The auctioneer sits in his booth facing the audience and calls for bids. On a recent winter Saturday, the sale begins with eggs and butter produced on local farms. Then other products are held up: pumpkin rolls, peanut butter fudge, apple pie, cherry pie, blueberry pie, black raspberry pie, cinnamon rolls, homemade white and whole wheat bread and rolls, doughnuts and doughnut holes, hot pepper cheese, black raspberry yogurt, a surprising variety of fresh apples, dried apples, potatoes, onions, wooden birdhouses, egg crates, quilts, afghans, fertile turkey eggs, chicks, roosters, hens, ducks, geese, and rabbits.

Even those who aren’t selling or buying enjoy their time at the auction. On this Saturday, one rooster escapes from his



Patrons gather on the bleachers of the sale arena at the Grantsville Auction.

box at the top of the auction house and flaps over the crowd, landing on the counter in front of the auctioneer, who explains that the rooster belongs to his neighbor and probably recognizes him. A woman seated near the renegade rooster brushes feathers away from her face; the auctioneer thinks she is bidding, and she has to explain that she isn’t. Two young boys, watching as their father works, are taken to the cafe by a generous office staffer and treated to lunch.

After all the buyers pay for and carry away their purchases from the morning sale, a crowd gathers for the second sale. Sheep, goats, and cattle move in and out of the ring. A sign flashes their weight, and the auctioneer begins. Many of the sales come with a story. On this day, six heifers are being sold because the farmer’s wife has become ill and he needs to take care of her instead of the cattle.

Auctions serve an important purpose in farm communities, but they rely on people willing to do the work to run them. In Grantsville, the people who keep auctions alive are the Friends.

Joe’s grandfather, Blaine H. Friend, and father, Joe Friend, Sr., started the family auction business. In 1964, they built a sale barn on their farm land near Keyser’s Ridge. This

original location still holds regular sales every Monday beginning at 2:00, with special spring and fall sales usually on Saturday nights.

The Friends expanded by buying an auction barn in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, in the 1970's, where sales take place on Thursdays at 1:00 p.m. A couple of decades later, they bought the Grantsville auction barn, saving it from being closed.

Joe Friend, Jr., started helping at the sales as a child. He decided he wanted to continue the family trade, so at age 20, he went to the Worldwide College of Auctioneering in Mason City, Iowa, the school his father had attended. It's a brief program of about two weeks where, according to Friend, the training largely consists of teaching you "how to teach yourself."

Joe's responsibilities have grown over the years. About twenty years ago, his father was injured by a bull. During his father's recovery, Joe took on a larger role in the auction business sooner than he probably would have otherwise.

The sale business involves both relatives and the staff members that Joe considers part of the family. Each auction location employs 10-16 part-time workers, and Dale Broadwater steps in to do auctioneering as needed. Joe notes that his younger brother John is an important part of the operation: "I couldn't do it without him." Joe's father remains the president of the corporation, and Joe's mother manages the office. In addition to running the sales, the Friends and their employees pick up and deliver livestock, manage the barns, and do mounds of paperwork.

Joe has no children, but his brother John has two sons, 13 and 16, who naturally are starting to get their feet wet working at the sale barn. Will they take over the reins someday? Joe says it is too early to predict if they will be interested.

Auctions operate on slim margins and this is not a path to wealth. Still, Joe finds great satisfaction in carrying on the family business and providing this vital service to the community.

Besides, it's fun to go to the sale. Some Saturday soon, if you find yourself in the northern end of Garrett County, take advantage of the opportunity to have your own "Grantsville experience."

1060 Springs Road, Grantsville, MD 21536 • 301-895-5268

**Photos top to bottom: Auctioneer, Joe Friend, Jr.
A curious duckling wants to see what's going on.
Office staff members (left to right): Susan Newton,
Tanner Friend, Ashton Carr and Snookie Friend.
Livestock bidding in the auction arena.
Kitchen crew, front row left to right: Cindy Miner,
Shelia Lewis, and Stephanie Merrill.
Back: Brittany Wilhelmna and Vickie Friend.**

