



## Broadband Technology Helps Rural East Tennessee Business Attract High-End Customer Base

**Name:** Benton's Smoky Mountain Hams

**Location:** Madisonville/Monroe County

**Products/Services:** High-quality meat products

**Leadership:** Allan Benton, Owner and Operator

**Founded:** 1947

**Reach:** Nationwide

**Innovative Insight:** *"I ship as much stuff online as I do any other way."*

**Importance of Broadband:** *"I think eventually I won't even be able to do my banking without high-speed Internet. I truly believe that day is coming."*

**Madisonville, TN** – When Allan Benton left his job as a high school guidance counselor in 1973 to take over a country ham business, armed with little more than a dream and a hunch that he might have found his calling, he never imagined 30 years later, his meats would be featured in five-star restaurants and food publications throughout the country. Today, Benton's Smoky Mountain Hams are making a name for themselves across the U.S., thanks to a little help from broadband technology.

The business was originally started in 1947 by a dairy farmer named Albert Hicks, who started off curing and selling country hams out of a building in his backyard. When Albert decided to close up shop in 1973, Allan Benton seized the opportunity to step in and take over the business. Allan had been working as a high school counselor and had recently come to realize he had made the wrong career choice. So he wrote to every university in the south to find out everything he could about curing meat. In 1978, he became USDA inspected and built a new building for the business, and Benton's Smoky Mountain Hams was officially born. "We want to make something that's as good as anything you can get in this county or in Europe," says Allan.

The business first went online three years ago, when Allan's son created the company website "in about three minutes from his dorm room," Allan recalls. His children and wife had been encouraging him to go online for some time, something Allan originally resisted, as someone who is admittedly not technology-driven. "I'm talking to you right now on a rotary telephone!" he laughs. But today: "I ship as much stuff online as I do any other way," he says. Much to his astonishment, word about his business has spread rapidly throughout the U.S., allowing him to build a customer base of high-end customers and restaurants all over the country. In Nashville alone, Allan services top-notch restaurants like Cabana, Sunset Grille and F. Scott's. And no one is more surprised about that than him!

"If you told me twenty or thirty years ago that my ham and bacon would be served in high-end restaurants across the United States, I'd have had a hard time believing you," he says.

At the end of the day, Allan credits broadband technology with the present – and future – success of his company. "I think eventually I won't even be able to do my banking without high-speed Internet," he says. "I truly believe that day is coming."

### **About TN 95:**

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