



## Jim "Chopper" Phillips

July 20, 1950 - February 17, 2026

Jim "Chopper" Phillips, age 75, of Newport, passed away Tuesday, February 17, 2026.

James "Chopper" Phillips passed from this life with a legacy of faith, family, friendship, and a voice that many will never forget. Chopper began his broadcasting career in 1970 with WLIK as an announcer. In 1983, he joined 92.3 WNPC as a morning host, where his voice became a familiar and trusted part of the community's daily routine. For many years, Chop was a proud member of L.D. Ottinger's pit crew, looking up to L.D. as an accomplished racer and mentor. From him, Chopper learned the ins and outs of the racing industry—knowledge that led him in 1988 to apply for a broadcasting position with the Motor Racing Network. His career with MRN spanned more than 30 years, where he served as a lead pit reporter and host of the national radio show NASCAR USA. He built lasting friendships all across the NASCAR circuit. During his time with MRN, he also had the opportunity to be part of the ground floor of Rusty Wallace Automotive Group, participating in early meetings between Ray Huffaker and Rusty Wallace. Yet beyond the racetrack and the radio booth, Chopper's greatest joy was his family and adopted family. His love for children and family is evident in those gathered today. He was a big supporter of Michael, Sissy, Ashley, Jandi, Rodney, and Ike. He looked forward to visits from Paula, Chesni, Aubrey, Ethan, and later Tara and Elijah—loving to spoil them, cheer them on, and hear their good reports. At just 19 years old, he coached a local little league baseball team. Though

not much older than the players, he earned their respect and led them from last place to winning the pennant.

Whatever Chop did, he did with pride. Whether building fence on the farm, riding his horse “Trigger,” or cooking for those he loved, he believed in doing things right. Fences were measured precisely, stretched tight, and leveled. In broadcasting, he often said, “Don’t open the mic unless you have something to say.” He delighted in training new broadcasters, who first had to pass the famous “How now brown cow” test. His pit reporting was built on careful notes and trusted insider stories from race teams. And when it came to cooking, it had to follow the recipe exactly—it had to look good, taste good, and it was always ALL ABOUT THE FLAVOR.

On December 31, 2002, Chopper married the love of his life, Johnnie Sue Wilds, who became known as “Chop's Sweetsie”. He chose that special date because Roy Rogers and Dale Evans were married on that day—a fitting tribute for a man who loved Westerns. He also faithfully cheered for the New York Yankees and the Tennessee Volunteers.

Chopper and Johnnie Sue built a life together farming, selling radio ads for WNPC, and spending treasured time with family and friends through the years. Paula, Ike, Chesni, Aubrey, and Ethan have enriched their lives through countless hours shared with them, from day to day visits and weekend sleepovers.

The greatest accomplishment of Chopper’s life was the day he met the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. He loved telling how the Lord came to him—how he went from watching television in his recliner to kneeling at his bedside, rising a new man. He loved his church, his church family, and his pastor, Tom Mooty.

To Chopper, there were no strangers—only friends he hadn’t met yet. One of his greatest desires in recent days was to be well enough to return to church. Today, we rejoice knowing God has answered that prayer, and he is worshipping with the heavenly choir. He will be deeply missed in this life. Thank you, Chopper, for the memories, the generosity, the laughter, and the

countless stories we will cherish forever.

He was preceded in death by his parents Robert and Mary Vean Phillips, grandparents, Jake and Nannie Phillips, James Hooper and Annis Gertrude Woody; and son-in-law, Jesse Mattio.

He is survived by his wife, Johnnie Sue Phillips; son, Michael Phillips and Rodney (Karen) Hartsell; daughters, Heather (Brandon) Webb, Ashley Mattio and Jandie Hartsell-Cummings; brother, Jerry (Diane) Phillips; sister, Sarah Faye Phillips; grandchildren, Ike Webb, Harper and Eli Mattio, Amyna and Calen Cummings; nieces, Paula Tucker and her children, Tara and Elijah Tucker; brother-in-law and sister-in-law Carol and Terry Green

The family will receive friends from 4:00 pm – 7:00 pm, Friday, February 20, 2026, with the funeral service following at 7:00 pm at West End Baptist Church, with Rev. Tom Mooty and Rev. Justin Williams officiating.

Burial will be held at 1:00 pm, on Saturday, February 21, 2026, in Union Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers the family requests that donations be made to St Judes Children's Hospital in Memory of Jim "Chopper" Phillips.

Family and friends may sign the guest register online at: [www.manesfuneralhome.com](http://www.manesfuneralhome.com) .

Arrangements with Manes Funeral Home.

# Previous Events

## Receive Friends

FEB 20. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

West End Baptist Church  
116 West End St  
Newport, TN 37821  
(423) 623-9056

## Funeral service

FEB 20. 7:00 PM (ET)

West End Baptist Church  
116 West End St  
Newport, TN 37821  
(423) 623-9056

## Burial

FEB 21. 1:00 PM (ET)

Union Cemetery Inc  
420 Mineral St  
Newport, TN 37821-3900  
(423) 623-6918

# Tribute Wall



“ *Manes Funeral Home, Inc. created a Tribute Video in memory of Jim "Chopper" Phillips*



---

**Manes Funeral Home, Inc.** - February 20 at 12:42 PM

RW

“ *Chop,  
Was a great person and friend, from the days he coached me in little league baseball at the city, till the days he helped me out in my time working in NASCAR, you will be greatly missed, "RIP" my friend.  
Roddy Woods*



---

**Roddy Woods** - February 27 at 03:11 PM

AR

“ *Johnnie Sue and family, I am so very sorry to hear of Chopper's passing. I pray the Lord will wrap His loving arms around you and comfort you in the days ahead. I will keep your family in my thoughts and prayers. Such a precious tribute to your sweet husband!*

---

**Angela Ramsey** - February 25 at 08:48 AM

LH

“ Prayers!



Louise & Jimmy Hux - February 23 at 10:16 PM

MA

“ marian anderson lit a candle in memory of Jim Phillips



marian anderson - February 23 at 10:53 AM

JF

“ To all the family, we are sorry for your loss. We will be keeping you. all in our thoughts and prayers. May God be with you as you go through this difficult time. Love, James and Gail Frisbee

James and Gail Frisbee - February 22 at 03:59 PM

JF

“ James and Gail Frisbee lit a candle in memory of Jim Phillips



James and Gail Frisbee - February 21 at 05:47 PM

KL

“ Glad to have known and been a friend to Chopper. RIP friend.

Keith Large - February 21 at 10:02 AM

K.

“ My mom and dad always spoke highly of him. I know my dad really enjoyed his company . they can discuss racing now together again.

K.h. - February 21 at 04:08 AM

TB

“ Deepest Sympathy,

Todd and Tammy Binkley



Tammy Binkley - February 20 at 10:58 PM

BL

“ So sorry for your loss Our prayers are with you He left a legacy few can match



Barbara Lancaster William Lancasyer - February 20 at 10:25 PM

AB

“ So very sorry for the loss of Chopper. Praying for his family.

Amy Ball - February 20 at 09:41 PM

JE

“ *Johnnie sue my condolences to you love and prayers 🙏❤️ Justin lee ellison (Jimmy and Tracey son)*



---

**Justin ellison** - February 20 at 09:28 PM

RR

“ *So very saddened to hear about Chop. My heart goes out to all of you. Sissy, Johnnie Sue, and Michael. May God give y'all comfort during this very difficult time. So many continued prayers 🙏😭❤️*

---

**Rhonda Rice** - February 20 at 07:11 PM

JC

“ *Praying for the family DeeDee Compton*

---

**Jannet Compton** - February 20 at 04:34 PM

JR

“ *June Russell lit a candle in memory of Jim Phillips*



---

**June Russell** - February 20 at 04:04 PM

BC

“ *Johnnie Sue and family. We are so very sorry for your loss. Chopper was a great friend for many years. We always enjoyed seeing him when he was able to come to church. Love and prayers in the coming days.*

*Herbert and Barbara Cureton*

---

**Barbara J. Cureton** - February 20 at 03:26 PM

SF

“ *So sorry for your loss Johnnie Sue. Our prayers are with you and your family.*

*Sherry and Len Frisbee*

---

**Sherry Frisbee** - February 20 at 11:53 AM

TH

“ *So sorry for your loss! He was a wonderful person!*

---

**Tammy Hopkins** - February 20 at 09:56 AM

DS

“ *Dr. Smith lit a candle in memory of Jim Phillips*



---

**Dr. Smith** - February 20 at 07:28 AM

WW

“ *Sorry for your loss ,Chopper was a good man he will be missed*

---

**Wilma Webb** - February 20 at 02:06 AM

SS

“ My thoughts and prayers go out to his family, friends and fans. i m a fan of his wonderful Nascar radio work for MRN. A pro who painted a picture with his voice and a Pro s pro handling interviews.

Steve Sowers - February 19 at 09:07 PM

MC

“ Prayers for Chopper's Family and friends.....now and in the days to come.  
He was one of a kind and will never be forgotten!

Mary Ann Hartsell-Chrisman & Jay Harold Chrisman

Mary Ann Chrisman - February 19 at 09:03 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Jim "Chopper" Phillips.



February 19 at 07:24 PM

TF

“ May God's loving presence comfort you, His perfect peace restore you, and His promise of eternal life sustain you during this difficult time.

With Heartfelt Deepest Sympathy,  
Jabo & Tammy Francis  
Smoky Mountain Home Health & Hospice

Tammy Francis - February 19 at 02:31 PM

JB

“ So sorry to of Chopper's passing. We will be praying for you all.

Jean Batson - February 19 at 02:17 PM

SM

“ Prayers to family for your loss. Chopper was an outstanding person plus knowing him for over 60 yrs. My Dad loved Chopper during the L. D. Years. Keeping everyone in my thoughts and prayers. May God bless!

Shelia Moss Massey - February 19 at 11:09 AM

DR

“ AMENNNNNNNN...loved that VIOCE...Precious Memories 🙏❤️

Donna and Ronnie - February 19 at 10:49 AM

GW

“ Johnnie Sue and family, my sincere condolences 🙏🙏🙏



Glenda Willis - February 19 at 10:06 AM

RF

“ Rhonda Fine lit a candle in memory of Jim Phillips



Rhonda Fine - February 19 at 09:44 AM

TS

“ Michael Sissy, I'm sorry about chopper.I always thought the world of him,praying for you and jonnie sue .

Terry stuart - February 19 at 08:59 AM

RF

“ Johnnie Sue we are so sorry for your loss . What a wonderful blessing you two were to each other . Please know that our thought and certainty our prayers are with you and your family We love you

Rita Ford & Family - February 19 at 05:20 AM

RF

“ Chopper and I were always connected through our families and our love Of baseball and the N Y Yankees...we watched many a summer day our mothers cook and can soaking in every moment. We actually played on the same team in the old county league baseball season. I was always so proud of him and all he accomplished. I only listened to NASCAR on the radio so I could hear the announcer say, "Let's go to Jim Phillips in the pits "...I am so glad Chopper and I had many baseball days to share. Johnnie Sue , Sissy Snarf, Sarah Faye and Jerry, the Fancher boys all mourn alongside you....they'll never be another smooth voiced announcer do it as well as Jim Phillips in the Pits.. We love each of you...We are family.

Ray Fancher - February 19 at 04:29 AM

CB

“ Our prayers & thoughts are with everyone. 🙏

Connie & Marsha Ball - February 18 at 08:06 PM

SE

“ So sorry, Johnnie Sue, and the entire family for your loss. You are in my prayers.



Sharon Etherton - February 18 at 07:30 PM



“ I'm so very sorry to hear the passing of Chopper Chopper was an excellent man with lots of laughter and knowledge ! 💔 My heart goes out to you and the family. Keeping everyone in my Prayers 🕊️💕



BobbyandGail Clevenger - February 18 at 06:49 PM

DB

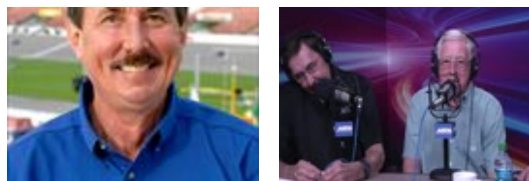
“ Johnnie Sue, words are totally insufficient to convey my thoughts and prayers to you in the passing of precious “chopper”. All the years of bringing him candy to station ( no, he said he couldn't share) all the many times he gave me info about meeting and being photographed with race car drivers ( mainly Dale Jarrett). I could probably write a book about all his connections. I certainly will keep you in my prayers— as you know “ Chopper” was very special to me all thru years 🙏🙏🙏



Dot Barnes - February 18 at 05:49 PM

DS

“ I worked with Jim at MRN for many years. I was his producer for two of the programs he hosted: "NASCAR USA" & "MRN Talespin". He was a great friend and we had many stories we used to reminisce about. His favorite one was from the 1989 The Winston when Rusty Wallace knocked Darrell Waltrip out of the way for the win. Jim was the first to talk to Darrell and Waltrip famously said, "I hope he chokes on that \$200,000!!" and Chop asked, "So he did hit you?!" to which Darrell replied "No... he knocked THE HELL out of me!" I loved hearing Chopper's stories and that was how we conceived of "MRN Talespin", where Jim, Barney Hall, Alex Hayden & a past driver would spin yarns on the program. The short video clip below was a special episode for Jim when we hosted his good friend L.D. Ottinger and he talked about Chop's famous "Trash Can Salad". Great Times... Love you, Jim!



---

Darrell Smith - February 18 at 05:11 PM

AH

“ Chop and I worked together on Motor Racing Network for years. He was always quick to praise and just as quick to correct. He never wanted the spotlight but always wanted the absolute best on the air. If it wasn't, he would let you know. He wasn't flowery. He was to the point. Once he you were "in" with Chop, you were "in" for life. Thank you, Jim, for teaching me the exceptionally high standards for MRN Radio. My very best to Johnnie and his family.

---

Alex Hayden - February 18 at 04:30 PM

RH

“ My friend Johnie Sue i am so sorry about Chopper. I could tell you were upset when we saw each other at the bank. I meant what i said. If you need me just call me . I am so sorry . I love you .

RHONDA - February 18 at 04:28 PM

JR

“ Chopper you will be so missed by many! You was a good friend to me for many years!! I will miss you! Prayers for the Family 🙏💔🙏



Jackie Raines - February 18 at 04:22 PM

JM

“ Chop and I worked together on Motor Racing Network for nearly twenty years. In that time, he was my running mate. Together, we caught and missed flights, shared a rental car every weekend, although he always claimed I kept getting him lost (he would never drive, just complain about my driving).

We shared everything with each other and ate real good food all over the country. I went to Newport and fished with him and he traveled to Norfolk and fished with me.

We all know that Chop is with Jesus now and not suffering anymore. That is the only good thing about this, but I will always miss my friend.

Joe Moore - February 18 at 03:54 PM

FV

“ Sarah, Jerry, and family, I was so sad to hear about Chopper’s passing. We grew up together and I loved you all. You are in my thoughts and prayers. Praying for God to give you comfort and peace. Much love and sympathy to all of you. Faye Valentine

Faye Valentine - February 18 at 03:27 PM

GW

“ My condolences to the entire family. Chopper was a great man that did more than people realize for our county. He was a honest man that had a big heart.

Gay Williamson - February 18 at 03:26 PM

MS

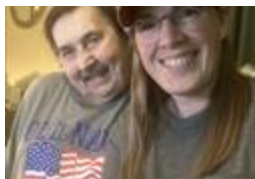
“ Marvin & Becky Seay lit a candle in memory of Jim Phillips



Marvin & Becky Seay - February 18 at 02:37 PM

AB

“ Johnnie Sue is my 2nd cousin and I made trips to come play in the cow field a few years ago. I affectionately called him “Choppy.” Loved watching Vols and the “Yanks” with him. I’m going to miss him and I know Johnnie is going to be lost without him. Thank you God for your ultimate healing and our rest in you. Suffering no more!



Allison Baker - February 18 at 02:20 PM

SO

“ *Johnnie Sue....and all the family; my heart is broken to hear about my precious life long forever friend passing away. We had so many fun memories of growing up together. Chopper was a kind man that loved the Lord and his family unconditionally. Chop has soooo many friends through MRN and NASCAR it's unbelievable. Everyone loved him and respected him. He was a very good man. I'm sure going to miss Chopper. Johnnie Sue, you were a wonderful wife and took excellent care of Chopper. God bless you always. I'm praying for all of you. I pray God will give you strength and comfort in the days ahead. Rest in peace my cherished forever friend. You will sure be missed and never forgotten. 💔*



---

**Susie O'Dell** - February 18 at 12:55 PM

PP

“ *Chop always called me old woman because I was three months older than him. I always called him a friend. Gonna miss him. Love you Johnnie and will continue to pray for you.*

---

**Patricia Norwood Purkey** - February 18 at 12:44 PM