PASSION FOR PIGEONS

SAMUEL COLMAP

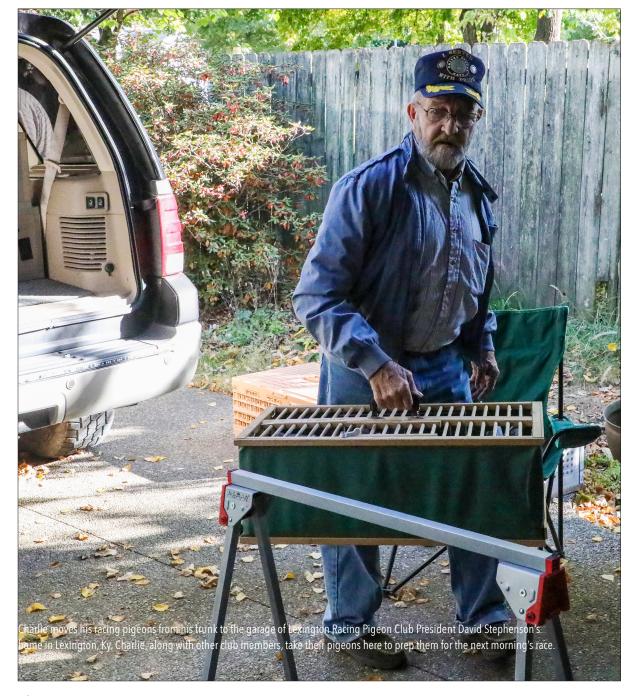


Charlies pigeons, along with the pigeons of other Lexington Racing Pigeon Club members, look onwards as they are released by Louisville Racing Pigeon Club member Aaron Jefferson and are about to take flight to begin their race back to their lofts outside of a Holiday Inn in Franklin, Kentucky.

As a boy in high school, now retired Vietnam veteran and Frankin County resident Charlie Thornton was gifted a pair of racing Homers—a breed of pigeon that specializes in long-distance flight and it's homing ability; While he didn't race them at the time, Thornton was fascinated by the birds, though he was forced to abandon them when he received a notice that he was being drafted, just a month after turning 19. A little under 50 years later, Thornton's passion for pigeons was reignited when he spotted pigeon shipping crates in a friend's garage and old times flooded back into memory.

That friend was Gary Potts, a pigeon racer with decades of experience, and with Pott's help, Thornton reentered the hobby. "I learned a whole lot from Gary ... I told him I used to have pigeons an' went and seen the loft he built an' he gave me some pigeons an' I started back in it," Thornton recalled.





Eight years later, Thornton, 75, has built his own loft, owns over 50 pigeons, and is the Vice President of the Lexington Racing Pigeon Club. Thornton's loft, dubbed "Tuttle Lane Loft," sports a University of Kentucky themed paint job and is where Thornton spends much of his day working with his birds.

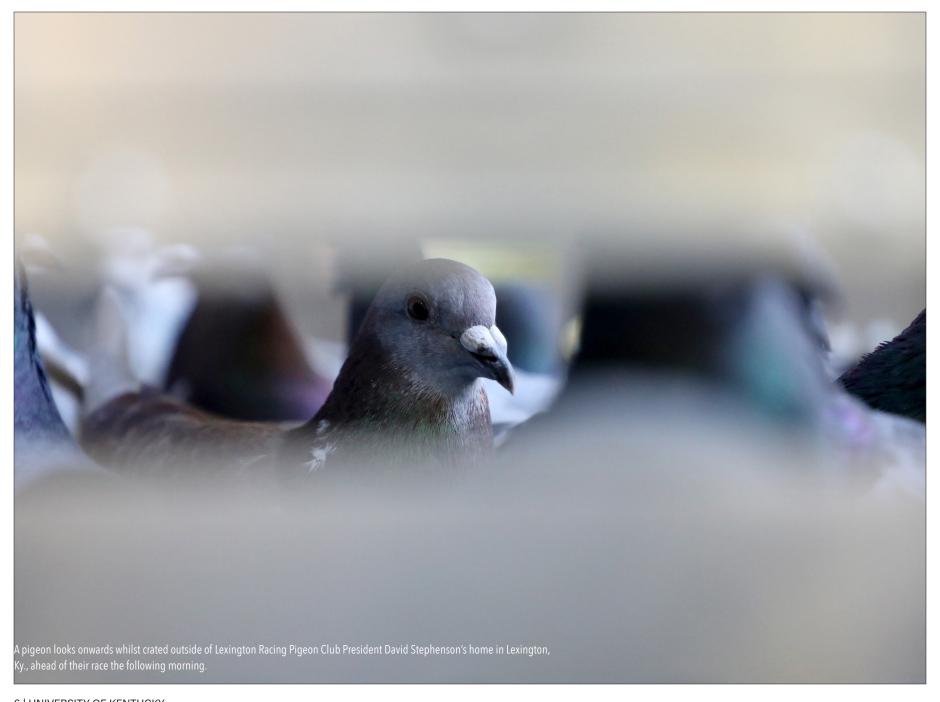
Most of the pigeons Thornton owns now were bred by himself, with the hopes of training and racing them, as well as "gettin' some with different colors."

"It's fun to watch 'em start to get their color because you never know how they gon' turn out," Thornton said.

Thornton said he plans to continue breeding and racing pigeons until he no longer is able. "I'll be workin' with the birds as long as I can, as long as my old body will let me," he said.



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Fellow Lexington Racing Pigeon Club member Tony Horn helps log the birds before their race the following day in the garage of Lexington Racing Pigeon Club President David Stephenson's Lexington, Ky., home.





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