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**Knoxville Attorney Suspended Five Years  
for Misleading Federal Courts and Filing Frivolous Motions**




Knoxville lawyer **Van R. Irion** has been suspended from practicing in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee for five years, followed by two years of probation, after judges found he repeatedly misled courts, filed frivolous pleadings, and showed a “lack of respect and trustworthiness” in his dealings with the judiciary. The 80-page ruling, issued August 4 by Chief U.S. District Judge **Travis R. McDonough**, stems from Irion’s conduct in two Athens-area lawsuits — *Whiting v. Trew* and *Whiting v. City of Athens* — as well as his actions during the court’s disciplinary investigation.

The court found that Irion made false statements about his client’s ownership interest in disputed property, resisted lawful discovery orders, and ghostwrote substantive legal documents for a client who claimed to be representing himself. Judges said he compounded his misconduct during the disciplinary process by making additional misrepresentations to the court, demanding discovery directly from the presiding judge, ignoring court rules, violating multiple orders, filing a motion to sanction the judge, accusing the judge of “adulterating the trial court record” in another case, asking the Sixth Circuit to halt the discipline case and investigate court procedures, and suing the Sixth Circuit Clerk of Court and staff while alleging improper conduct including the use of “burner phones.” The opinion stated that Irion “spent the pendency of this proceeding digging even deeper” rather than addressing his original misconduct.

While Irion later admitted some of his statements in the *Trew* case were inaccurate and “possibly negligent,” the court found little genuine remorse. Judges noted he has practiced solo without the guidance of a professional mentor, which “might provide a partial explanation” but “cannot excuse” his conduct. *As part of the sanctions, Irion received a five-year suspension with a two-year probationary period, during which he may only practice under court-approved supervision. He may apply for reinstatement after three years, subject to court approval. He must also send letters of apology to more than a dozen defendants and attorneys in the two cases, complete 12 hours of continuing legal education on ethics, and pay the court’s costs for the disciplinary proceedings. The court also ordered the case unsealed, citing “the public’s strong interest in knowing of attorney misconduct.” Copies of the order will be sent to the Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.* Quoting Justice Cardozo, the court wrote: “Membership in the bar is a privilege burdened with conditions... [An attorney] becomes an officer of the court, and, like the court itself, an instrument or agency to advance the ends of justice.” In Irion’s case, the judges concluded, that trust “has been broken beyond repair.” *Source: US District Court, Eastern District of Tennessee, Case No. 1:24-dm-7*

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**Athens, Tennessee**

## Monroe Co. Sheriff's Office Assists U.S. Marshals in Fugitive Capture in Sweetwater



On Wednesday, August 6, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office played a key role in the apprehension of wanted fugitive Michael Blackwell, who was found hiding beneath a residence on Old Highway 68 in Sweetwater.

The operation was a coordinated effort involving the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, Deputy United States Marshals, Sweetwater Police Department, Blount

County Sheriff's Office, and the 10th Judicial Drug Task Force.

Working closely with federal partners, Monroe County deputies provided essential support in locating and safely taking Blackwell into custody. The collaborative effort underscores the strong partnerships between local and federal law enforcement agencies and their joint commitment to maintaining safety within the community.

Source: [Sheriff Tommy Jones](#)

## Friendly City Festivals Presents Mendingwall and Nate Vile on Saturday, August 16

Friendly City Festivals announces the sixth and last concert in the 13th annual Sounds of Summer series will feature local talent Mendingwall with opening act Nate the Rapper. The Concert will be held at Market Pavilion on 106 S. Jackson Street in downtown Athens, Tennessee starting at 7:00 p.m.

Concertgoers are encouraged to bring their lawn chairs, blankets, family and friends for a toe tapping hand clapping night of entertainment. Food truck for the evening will be Kona Ice. Opening act Nate the Rapper will set the stage with his own twist on Christian rap. His music is based on life experiences and heartfelt expression and provides positive, uplifting and melodic themed music.

Headliner Mendingwall provides a fun musical experience with roots in American, rock, jam, reggae and folk music. Their lyrics are positively influenced, and their sound will make you want to get up and dance. With roots in West Virginia and now calling East Tennessee home, Mendingwall's last album *Famous* can be found on YouTube, Tidal, Spotify and Apple Music.

This free to the public series is produced by Friendly City Festivals, a 501(C)3 subsidiary of Willsonthropic, Inc. and is made possible by the financial support of: The City of Athens Tourism Fund, McMinn County Tourism Board, Madison Avenue Pharmacy Tennessee Overhill Association, Tennessee Arts Commission, Mayfield Dairy Farm, DENSO, Tonya Phenix Senior Advisor Insurance, VEC Customer Shares, Citizens National Bank of Sevier County, Valley Oil, Starr Regional Medical Center, Kona Ice, Simmons Bank, Pendleton's Playground, Simmons Wealth Management Group, WarrenJackson CPAs Athens Kiwanis Club, Athens Insurance and The Retirement Guys.

Written by Meredith Willson, Willsonthropic, Inc. DBA Friendly City Festivals

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## The Morning Fax



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Athens, Tennessee

### Southern Grace Creative Art Studio Holds Ribbon Cutting in Downtown Athens



Southern Grace Creative Art Studio, located at 205 E. Washington Avenue, recently celebrated a ribbon cutting as they have officially joined the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce.

Present at the celebration were Stacey Hester, Chamber Diplomat from Citizens National Bank; Nathan Tullock of Hold Fast Barber Shop; and Jessica Downs, owner of Southern Grace Creative Art Studio. Joining them were Allen Downs, Maxine Thomas, and Rhonda Wilson from Peoples Bank of East Tennessee. Representatives from Ink Theory Tattoo & Body Piercing Studio also participated, including Crystal Tallent, Jasper Eells, Hannah Jo, and Tosha Baker. Sonya Hacko from Scott's Fab Shop, Scott Thomas, and Christine Randolph of Country Cove Venue were also in attendance. Rob Preston, President and CEO of the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce, was present to officially welcome the new business to the community. *Source: Julie Simbeck, Athens Chamber*

### McMinn County Arrest Reports

**Bobby Bailey** 41 of Etowah, charged with Child Support, Introduction of contraband into a penal facility, Schedule 2 fentanyl for resale, and possession of drug paraphernalia. No bond reported.

**Steven Hazelwood**, 49 of Athens, charged with Violation of Probation on theft charges, 2 counts of failure to appear for driving on suspended license. No bond reported.

**Sandra Elrod**, 73 of Etowah, charged with simple possession - casual exchange, and possession of drug paraphernalia. Bond set at \$2000.

**Jeffery Potts**, 45 of Etowah, charged with possession of schedule 2 fentanyl, and possession of drug paraphernalia. Bond is \$3000.

**Kevin Kent**, 29, charged with driving on a suspended license. Bond set at \$1,000.

**Devin McCormick**, 21 of Athens, charged with DUI, and violation of implied consent. Bond set at \$2000.

**The accused are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Information presented today, has been gathered from public sources.**

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Tuesday, August 12, 2025

Page 4

Athens, Tennessee

## McMinn Co. Verifiable Property Sales in June via TN Valley Appraisal Service

Close Date	Close Price	Street Name	City
6/2/2025	299000	County Road 38	Riceville
6/2/2025	240000	County Road 755	Riceville
6/2/2025	343000	Elmhurst Dr.	Athens
6/2/2025	610000	Breckenridge St.	Athens
6/5/2025	245000	Brown St.	Athens
6/6/2025	239900	Lynn Ave	Athens
6/9/2025	215000	Eastanallee Ave	Athens
6/10/2025	285000	County Road 213	Athens
6/11/2025	308000	Slack Rd	Athens
6/12/2025	225000	County Road 577	Englewood
6/13/2025	490000	County Road 7004	Athens
6/13/2025	334000	County Road 147	Riceville
6/13/2025	329500	Hill Top Dr	Niota
6/13/2025	395000	County Road 158	Riceville
6/16/2025	360000	County Road 560	Athens
6/16/2025	310000	County Road 155	Riceville
6/16/2025	223900	Henderson Street	Athens
6/20/2025	360000	Matlock Ave	Athens
6/20/2025	234900	Lawrence St	Etowah
6/20/2025	358500	Miami Street	Athens
6/20/2025	270000	Matlock Ave	Athens
6/23/2025	235000	9th St	Etowah
6/23/2025	469000	County Road 323	Sweetwater
6/25/2025	237000	County Road 899	Etowah
6/25/2025	167900	Pennsylvania	Etowah
6/26/2025	60000	Highway 11n-2084	Athens
6/26/2025	275000	County Road 605	Athens
6/26/2025	290000	Preece Ln	Niota
6/26/2025	319900	County Road 793	Etowah
6/26/2025	354000	Lynnwood Dr	Athens
6/26/2025	277000	Morning Pointe	Athens
6/27/2025	390000	County Road 536	Etowah
6/27/2025	250000	Miami St	Athens
6/27/2025	303000	County Road 213	Athens
6/27/2025	425000	County Road 734	Calhoun
6/27/2025	200000	County Road 861	Etowah
6/30/2025	410000	County Road 616	Athens
6/30/2025	239000	Niota Rd	Englewood
6/30/2025	210000	Hiwassee Ave	Calhoun
6/30/2025	875000	County Road 788	Etowah
6/30/2025	249000	County Road 322	Sweetwater

## Obituaries

**James Albert McGowan**, 57 of Riceville, died at his home on Sunday, August 10. He was a man of many jokes. His connection with God was inseparable. He loved God dearly. Visitation will be held at Ziegler Funeral Home from 12:00-2:00 PM on Friday, August 15. A funeral service will be held at 2:00 PM at the funeral home. Interment will follow funeral services at Riceville Cemetery. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with serving the family of James Albert McGowan.

**Matthew "Matt Matt" Devon Isaiah Rackley**, 17 of Athens, passed away on Wednesday, August 6. Matt had a special gift for making others smile. He had a deep love for basketball and video games and he enjoyed spending time outdoors, hiking and fishing. He was also incredibly driven and hardworking beyond his years. Through determination and grit, he saved up to buy his own car, taking great pride in learning how to fix it up himself. A Visitation will be held on Tuesday, August 12 from 11:00am - 1:00pm at Companion Funeral Home of Athens. A Memorial Service will be held at a later date. Companion Funeral & Cremation Service of Athens, TN, and the Cody family are honored to serve the Rackley family during this time.

**Rudolph "Rudy" Carl Miller**, 85 of Tellico Plains, passed away on Thursday, August 7. A masterful contractor and craftsman, Rudy's skill and dedication were unmatched, there was little he couldn't build or fix with his hands. Known for his strong work ethic and generous spirit, Rudy was always willing to lend a hand to those in need. The family will have a memorial service at a later date at Notchey Creek Baptist Church in Madisonville. Companion Funeral & Cremation Service of Athens, TN, and the Cody family are honored to serve the Miller family during this time.