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Decatur Man Indicted in July Homicide Following Multi-Agency Investigation



A months-long investigation into a July shooting in Meigs County has led to the indictment of a Decatur man in connection with the death of 45-year-old Jason Paul Burnette.

On July 6, at the request of the 9th Judicial District Attorney General's Office, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation joined Meigs County Sheriff's Office detectives to investigate a fatal shooting at a residence in the 700 block of Peakland Road in Decatur. Through the course of the investigation, authorities identified Chad Mitchell Lankford, 44, as the individual believed to be responsible for Burnette's death.

On November 24, the Meigs County Grand Jury returned an indictment charging Lankford with one count of First Degree Murder. He was arrested shortly afterward and booked into the Meigs County Jail on a \$1 million bond.

Officials emphasize that the charge is an allegation, not evidence of guilt. Lankford is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

Source: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation

Community News You Can Use

- The Athens Municipal-Regional Planning Commission will be meeting on Monday, December 1 at 12:00pm in the Conference Room at the Athens City Hall.
- Athens Area Council for the Arts (AACA) is pleased to announce a special holiday concert, *A Soulful Christmas*, Friday-Sunday, December 5, 6, 7, 2025. A Soulful Christmas is a festive holiday concert with the heart of Gospel and the groove of R&B; this is a celebration of love, community, and the soulful sounds of the season. All House Blend Concert Series shows are in the Sue E. Trotter Black Box Theater at The Arts Center. Friday and Saturday, December 5 & 6 shows start at 7:00 PM. Sunday matinee, December 7, starts at 2:00 PM. Tickets for this catered event are \$25.

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Athens, Tennessee

Woods Fire Burns Three Acres on County Road 651



A woods fire on County Road 651 near Athens burned roughly three acres Monday evening after spreading from one property to a neighboring area, according to fire officials. The property owner told responders they did not know how the blaze began.

The fire was reported around 6:30 p.m. and drew multiple agencies to the scene, including Riceville Fire, Claxton Fire, Etowah Rural Fire, and Calhoun Fire. Riceville Assistant Fire Chief David Wright served as incident commander.

Crews worked to contain the fire and prevent further spread. No injuries were reported.

Photo by Lt. Shamarie Ruebush, Etowah Rural FD

Head-On Collision on Highway 11 Sends Two to Hospital



A head-on collision Tuesday afternoon in the 2600 block of Highway 11 near Browder's Pond left a woman and a child injured, according to authorities.

Officials say a 32-year-old woman driving a 2006 Pontiac Vibe was traveling south with a 4-year-old passenger when a 38-year-old man driving a 2001 Dodge van, headed north, collided with her vehicle. The impact

occurred around mid-afternoon.

The woman and the child were transported by ambulance to Athens Hospital for treatment. The driver of the van was evaluated at the scene by EMS but declined further medical care.

Responding agencies included Niota Fire, North McMinn Fire, Athens Rural Fire, AMR, and the McMinn County Sheriff's Department. Tennessee Highway Patrol Trooper Preston Meadows is leading the investigation.

Photos by David Prater, Niota Rural FD

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Athens, Tennessee

Church News and Events

- West End Baptist Church, located on Clark Street, in Athens will be having their annual Hanging of the Greens on Sunday, November 30 at 6:00 pm. All are welcome.
- Union McMinn Baptist Church (314 Co Rd 316, Niota) will be having a Live Nativity Scene on Friday, Dec. 5 & Saturday, Dec. 6 from 6pm - 8pm each night.
- [Celebrate Recovery](#) meets every [Tuesday](#) at 6:00pm at Woodward Ave. Church of God in Athens They also meet every [Thursday](#) at 6:00pm at Watts Bar Community Church in Decatur.
- Conasauga Missionary Baptist Church (3115 Upper Concord Road, Ten Mile) will be showing their Christmas Play on Sunday, December 7 at 7:00 pm.
- Athens Lutheran Church (710 Forrest Ave., Athens) is hosting Advent Midweek Services on Wednesdays starting on December 3, 10, and 17 at 7 pm nightly. There will be a Pot Luck Meal at 6pm before the service.
- The Bondservants Quartet will be singing at Lakeview Baptist Church on Sunday, November 30th at 10:45am. There will be a soup and sandwich lunch to follow service. The church is located 183 County Road 126 in Athens.
- [St. Mary's Legacy Clinic](#) offers free mobile medical care for the uninsured. Anyone who is medically uninsured is eligible to receive care. *St. Mary's Catholic Church (1291 E Madison Ave, Athens) is the McMinn County location and accepts patients every 3rd Thursday of the month.*

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Athens, Tennessee

\$100,000 Grant Awarded to Support Renovations at Etowah's Historic Gem Theater

Etowah's historic Gem Theater is set to receive significant updates following the announcement of a \$100,000 grant awarded to the city through the Tourism Enhancement Grant program administered by the Tennessee Department of Tourism Development (TDTD).

State Representative Mark Cochran and State Senator J. Adam Lowe shared the news this week, noting that the funding will help advance ongoing efforts to preserve and modernize one of Etowah's most recognizable landmarks. The grant supports projects such as stage improvements, updated signage, historic preservation work, ADA accessibility upgrades, and enhancements to local attractions.

The Gem Theater, built in 1906 and converted into a show house in 1918, has long served as a cultural centerpiece for the community and a regional draw for family-friendly entertainment. Today, it remains active as the home of the Gem Players, who continue to bring theater productions and concerts to the area.

City officials say the investment will help protect the theater's historic value while boosting tourism and strengthening the local economy. Renovation plans and timelines are expected to be announced as the project moves forward.

McMinn County Arrest Reports

11-25-25

Brett Powers, 32 of Athens, charged with violation of an order of protection.

Aubrey King, 27 of Ten Mile, charged with disorderly conduct. Bond \$1,500.

Dylan Grooms, 27 of Decatur, charged with resisting stop. Bond \$1,000.

Jessica Flannigan, 29 of Niota, charged with failure to appear for misuse of 911.

Hunter Hansen, 32 of Dalton, Georgia, charged with being a fugitive from justice. Bond \$15,000.

Dustin Rogers, 38 of Cleveland, charged with resisting stop, leaving the scene of an accident, and reckless endangerment.

Those accused are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Information gathered using Public Sources.

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Athens, Tennessee

Obituaries

Helen Loretta Bowerman, 89 of Cleveland, passed away on Tuesday, November 25. She spent many years caring for other children as a teacher in head start and as a private nanny. She also worked as a certified nursing assistant at Life Care Centers of America for many years. She enjoyed riding around and being mesmerized by how much Cleveland has changed over the years. She loved visiting and frolicking around at the Mennonite community farmer's market and Apple Valley Orchard. Funeral services will be held Saturday, November 29, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Cleveland. The family will receive friends one hour before the service at the Church from 12:00 noon until 1:00 p.m. Interment will follow the service at Fort Hill Cemetery in Cleveland. M.D. Dotson & Sons in charge of funeral arrangements.

Joseph Lee Jirles, 77 of Philadelphia, TN passed away on Saturday, November 22 at his residence. Services of loving memory entrusted to M.D. Dotson and Sons Funeral Home - Athens, TN.

David Ross (Likins) Reese, 82, passed away on Friday, November 14, surrounded by his family. David spent his childhood in Springfield, MO, later moving across the U.S. as an Air Force BRAT. He earned a Master's Degree in Public Health and directed health departments in Idaho and Kansas. The family will receive friends from 11 a.m. to noon on Saturday, December 6 at Keith Memorial United Methodist Church in Athens, TN. A Service of Death and Resurrection will follow at noon.

Ronald "Heath" Patterson, 51 of Englewood, passed away on Monday, November 24. Heath was a free spirit who lived life with passion and creativity. A gifted musician, he could play any instrument he picked up. He found peace and inspiration in nature, enjoyed working with his hands, and never refused a big cup of coffee. A Celebration of Heath's life will be held on Saturday, November 29 at Companion Funeral Home of Athens at 2:00 p.m. The family will receive guests prior to the service from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Companion Funeral & Cremation Service of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the Patterson family with these arrangements.



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