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# The Morning Fax®

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**Monday, December 22, 2025****Page 1****Athens, Tennessee**

## Crash Into Gas Line Forces Road Closure on W. Willson Street in Niot



Authorities temporarily shut down a section of West Willson Street Friday afternoon after a vehicle struck a major gas line in the 800 block of the roadway near the Sugar Shack.

The incident occurred around 4 p.m. when a 2008 Nissan Altima, driven by a 40-year-old male, was traveling southbound and left the roadway, entering a culvert before returning to the road and striking a six-inch gas line. First responders from Niot Fire, Athens Fire, Clearwater Fire, and the McMinn County Sheriff's Office responded and immediately closed the highway as a safety precaution. Crews from the Athens Utility Board worked quickly to shut off the gas and secure the scene after a significant leak was reported. AMR evaluated the driver at the scene, and no injuries were reported. The driver was later transported to the Justice Center by the Tennessee Highway Patrol. Athens Fire Chief Chuck Burris was in command of the scene, and THP Trooper Chandler Lamar is leading the investigation.

*Photo by David Prater Niot Rural Fire.*

## Community News You Can Use

- Trinity United Methodist Church will host the 3rd Annual *Live Walk Through Bethlehem* on **Tuesday, Dec. 23, from 6–7:30 p.m.** at 100 E. College St., Athens. This free community event invites families to experience the story of Jesus' birth through live characters, concluding with a live nativity in the sanctuary. Groups will be paced to allow time at each scene. Everyone is welcome.
- The Tennessee Highway Patrol will be conducting a sobriety checkpoint on January 14, 2026 at 8:00pm at the intersection of Highway 11 and Highway 309. The scheduled checkpoint is contingent upon manpower and weather conditions.

We encourage you to e-mail community events, church news, or other items of interest for possible use in the Morning Fax. If you take a newsworthy photograph, send it to: [wyradio@gmail.com](mailto:wyradio@gmail.com)

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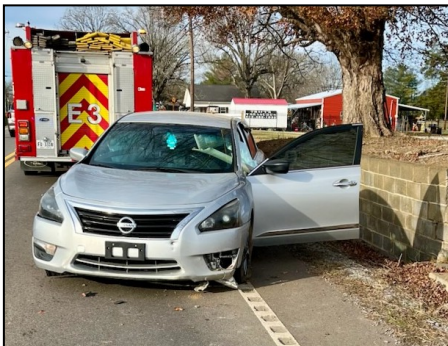
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**Monday, Dec. 22, 2025**

**Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 2**

**Athens, Tennessee**

## Driver Falls Asleep, Crashes into Wall on Highway 39E



A driver was involved in a single-vehicle crash Wednesday morning on Highway 39E in Englewood after reportedly falling asleep at the wheel.

The accident occurred around 9:30 a.m. and involved a 2015 Nissan Altima, which struck a block wall. Englewood Rural Fire and AMR responded to the scene to assist.

The driver declined medical transport. Englewood Police Patrolman Shawn Emery investigated the crash.

*Photo credit: Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural FD*

## Single-Vehicle Crash Reported on County Road 326



A single-vehicle crash was reported Thursday night around 8:30 p.m. on County Road 326 involving a 2018 Ford F-150.

Authorities say the truck veered off the roadway, entered a ditch, and struck a tree. The 30-year-old female driver, who was the sole occupant, was evaluated at the scene by AMR and reported no injuries.

Niota Rural Fire, North McMinn Fire, AMR, and the McMinn County Sheriff's Office responded to the incident. Chad Gates was in command of the scene, and no fire was reported. Tennessee Highway Patrol Trooper Scott Freeman investigated the crash.

*Photo provided by David Prater, Niota Rural FD*

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Athens, Tennessee

## Athens City Council Approves Expanded Fourth of July Celebration for 2026



The Athens City Council approved plans during its Dec. 16, 2025 meeting to expand the city's annual Independence Day celebration in recognition of America's 250th anniversary.

The July 4, 2026 event at Athens Regional Park will feature traditional fireworks alongside a new 600-unit synchronized drone show, marking a significant enhancement to the city's longstanding Fourth of July festivities. The celebration will also include live music, food concessions, splash pad access, and other family-friendly activities.

The evening will conclude with a 20-minute combined fireworks and drone display, designed to honor the nation's semiquincentennial while continuing Athens' tradition of hosting a community-centered holiday event.

Additional information is available through the Athens Parks and Recreation Department at 423-744-2704.

## Alex Foster Welcomed to Athens Chamber



A ribbon cutting was celebrated recently for new Chamber member, Alex Foster-Local 3 News Marketing Specialist, located in surrounding areas. Chamber friends joining the celebration and pictured here left to right are: Stephanie Devine (WYXI Radio), State Representative Mark Cochran, Paul Semenoff (Chamber Diplomat), Alex Foster (Local 3 News), Jessica Casteel, Traci White (Chamber Diplomat/Board), Stacey Hester (Chamber Diplomat), Back: Rob Preston (Chamber President/CEO), Garrett Frye, with Congressman Chuck Fleischmann's Office, Brett King (Chamber Diplomat), Hugh Willson (Chamber Diplomat) Michael Itson, Darren Casteel.

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Athens, Tennessee

## McMinn County Arrest Reports

### 12-18-25

**Aaron Wagner**, 38 of Etowah, charged with violation of probation for fentanyl, Bond \$3,035.90.

**Philip McIntyre**, 36 of Athens, charged with state violation of probation for burglary and theft.

**Melissa Johnson**, 40 of Etowah, charged with violation of probation for two counts of possession of fentanyl, Bond \$5,026.

**John Barnes**, 30 of Riceville, charged with aggravated burglary, aggravated assault, and armed and dangerous felonies, Bond \$50,000

**Daniel Velasquez**, 28 of Cleveland, charged with aggravated burglary, aggravated assault, and armed and dangerous felonies, Bond \$300,000.

### 12-19-25

**Andrew Williams**, 58 of Englewood, charged with state violation of probation for possession of meth for resale.

**John Kirkland**, 45 of Athens, charged with state violation of probation for theft, \$10,000 to \$60,000.

**Alexander Barnett**, 34 of Athens, charged with drug paraphernalia, reckless endangerment with a firearm, aggravated assault, possession and or carry of a weapon by a felon.

**Tyler Johnson**, 40 of Etowah, charged with DUI, and simple possession and casual exchange.

**Heath Langley**, 33 of Athens, charged with criminal trespassing, disorderly conduct, and public intoxication, Bond \$4,500.

**Gage Hayworth**, 35 of Niota, charged with violation of probation for possession of meth and Schedule 4, Bond \$3,802.

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

**Information gathered from Public Sources.**

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**Monday, Dec. 22, 2025**

**Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 5**

**Athens, Tennessee**

## Obituaries

**Ramon Sanchez Soto**, 84, has passed away. In his spare time, he worked with metal, creating and repairing things with his hands. He also had a special gift for training horses. he was a business owner of Mexi-Wing IV in Sweetwater, reflecting his entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to provide for his family. Visitation will be held Monday December 22, from 1:00 to 7:00 PM at Good Samaritan Funeral Home. Funeral Mass will be held at St. Mary Catholic Church, Tuesday December 23, at 1:00 PM. Grave side service will follow in Cedar Grove Cemetery. Following the burial, all are invited for food and drink at 1724 County Road 560 in Athens. Good Samaritan Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

**Janice Lynne Masingale**, 71 of Englewood, passed away on Thursday, December 18. Janice retired from the Athens Utility Board, where she served faithfully in customer service and was known for her kindness and dedication. A Funeral Service will be held on Monday, December 22 at 1:00pm at Liberty Hill Church of Christ in Englewood. A Visitation will be held prior from 11:00am - 1:00pm. Companion Funeral Home of Athens, TN and the Cody family are honored to assist the Masingale family during this time.

**Justin Wade Robinson**, 30, of Riceville, passed away on Monday, December 15. He worked in the mechanical industry, where his skill, dedication, and passion for building truly shined. Justin found joy in riding motorcycles, especially alongside his parents and friends, and also enjoyed landscaping and camping. Justin had a way of lighting up a room with his smile and presence. He was known for his generosity and kind spirit, always willing to help others and give whatever he could. With a heart of gold, Justin leaves behind a legacy of love, kindness, and devotion to family. He will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved him. A Visitation will be held at Companion Funeral Home of Athens on Monday, December 22 from 4:00 - 8:00. Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

**We encourage you to e-mail community events, church news, sports results or other items of interest for possible use in the Morning Fax. If you take a newsworthy photograph, send it to: [wyxiradio@gmail.com](mailto:wyxiradio@gmail.com)**

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