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Knoxville Homicide Victim Identified After Nearly 40 Years



Authorities have identified a homicide victim whose remains were discovered in Knoxville in 1988, bringing new answers to a case that remained unsolved for more than three decades.

Investigators with the Knoxville Police Department, the Knox County Regional Forensic Center, and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation announced that the victim has been identified as **James Robert Benson** (pictured on left), who was originally from the Knoxville area.

Benson's remains were discovered on Aug. 30, 1988, when railway workers found a body in the Coster Rail Yard area. Forensic experts determined the victim was a white male between the ages of 21 and 30, and his death was ruled a homicide. Despite extensive efforts at the time, investigators were unable to identify the victim and the case was classified as a John Doe.

Over the years, forensic teams continued efforts to identify the victim. A DNA profile developed by the University of Texas Center for Human Identification was entered into national databases, but no matches were found.

In 2023, as part of the TBI's Unidentified Human Remains Initiative, investigators submitted a sample for advanced forensic genealogy testing through Othram, a private DNA laboratory. Scientists were able to identify possible relatives and confirm Benson's identity through a familial DNA comparison.

Authorities say Benson, who was born Sept. 11, 1965, was last seen near the end of March 1988.

The homicide investigation remains active. Detectives are asking anyone with information about Benson or the circumstances surrounding his death to contact the Knoxville Police Department Homicide Unit at 865-215-7275. *Source: [TBI Newsroom.com](https://www.tbi.tn.gov/newsroom)*

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Thursday, March 12, 2026

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

Athens, Tennessee

Keep McMinn Beautiful to Host Community Spring Cleanup Saturday

Residents are invited to help tidy up the community during a spring cleanup event hosted by Keep McMinn Beautiful on Saturday, March 14. The cleanup will take place from 10 a.m. to noon. Organizers will provide volunteers with garbage bags, grabbers, gloves and safety vests to assist with collecting litter.

The event is open to the public, and community members of all ages are encouraged to participate. Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Sara Smith, Litter Grant Education Coordinator with the University of Tennessee Extension - McMinn County, said the event is a chance for residents to work together while helping improve the local environment.

Participants are encouraged to come out, enjoy the outdoors and contribute to keeping the community clean. For more information about the event, contact Smith at 423-745-2852 or by email at ssmith@utk.edu.

Community News You Can Use

- Alyssa Miller, a kindergarten teacher at Athens City Primary School, has been named a semi-finalist for the 2026-27 Tennessee Novice Teacher of the Year Program, recognizing her dedication and impact on young students in the Athens City School system.
- The Athens Parks and Recreation Department will hold public input meetings on extending the Eureka Trail to Prof Powers Park for the city's 2026 Local Parks and Recreation Fund Grant Program application on March 12 at 6 p.m. and March 17 at 5 p.m. at Athens City Hall; the public is invited to attend and share feedback.
- Old National Bank will host a community blood drive with MEDIC Regional Blood Center on Friday, April 10, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at its downtown Athens branch, 106 W. Washington Ave. The event is part of a companywide effort to honor employees lost in the 2023 Louisville bank shooting in Louisville, KY. Donors will receive a MEDIC gift, a GSM Rentals coupon and a Texas Roadhouse coupon.



McMinn County Living Heritage Museum

Upcoming Spring Events

HERITAGE SCHOOL:

RUSTIC FLAG ART

SATURDAY, MARCH 14TH @ 11:00 AM \$5 OR FREE WITH MEMBERSHIP
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History for Lunch:

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March 26th at Noon

SEE WEBSITE
FOR FULL
PROGRAM
INFORMATION

Museum Hours:
Tuesday - Friday: 10 AM - 5 PM
Saturday: 10 AM - 1 PM
Sunday - Monday: Closed

Admission:
Adults: \$5.00
Senior 60+: \$3.00
Students: \$3.00

More Information

522 W Madison Ave.
Athens, TN 37303
423-745-0329

www.livingheritagemuseum.org

Programs sponsored by C. Scott & Muriel S. Mayfield Family Foundation, Tennessee Arts Commission, Hugh M. Willson Family Foundation, and City of Athens

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Thursday, March 12, 2026

Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 3

Athens, Tennessee

Cleveland State Program Provides Skilled Trade Training to Local Inmates



Cleveland State Community College Workforce Development recently completed an Advanced HVAC Bootcamp at the McMinn County Justice Center (MCJC). Six inmates completed the 90 hours of training and earned NC3 Trane Refrigeration Diagnostics Global Credentials.

Pictured first row left to right: Chelsea Falana, CSCC Workforce Development Coordinator; Kayla Crowder, MCJC Grants & Programs Coordinator; and Tyler McDonald. Back row left to right: Michael Benson, Brandon Reece, Brandon Raper, Jasen Walk, MCJC Lieutenant Jason Bautsch; Ryan Baker, Jason Taylor, CSCC HVAC Instructor; and Dr. John Squires, CSCC Vice President of Academic Affairs.

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McMinn County Arrest Reports

Obituaries

March 10, 2026

Jody Cline, 32 of Riceville, charged with failure to appear for simple possession, casual exchange, and violation of probation for DUI, Bond \$13,671.95.

Paul King, 56 of Cleveland, charged with state violation of probation for transfer of a motor vehicle under \$20,000, and is held without bond.

Jordan Edmondson, 27, charged with violation of an order of protection restraining order.

Kaitlin Curtis, 27 of Athens, charged with violation of probation for shoplifting, Bond \$896.

Christina Brown, 39 of Athens, charged with DUI, current bond was revoked.

Nicholas Jackson, 26 of Bronx, New York, charged with theft of property, and criminal simulation, Bond \$9,000.

Those accused are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Information gathered using public sources.

Bernice Ella Sneed Shearman, 88, passed away on Tuesday, March 10. She was a member of Ten Mile Baptist Church. A graveside service will be held at 11:00 AM on Friday, March 13 at Edgemon Cemetery. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with the care of Bernice Ella Sneed Shearman.

Wilma Ruth Thornton, 82 of Englewood, passed away on Monday, March 9 at UT Medical Center. She was of the Baptist faith and was a former employee of Thomas and Betts having retired after 30 years of service. Funeral services will be 6:00 PM Sunday, March 15 in the chapel of Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home. Graveside services will be 1:00 PM Monday, March 16 at Pond Hill Cemetery. The family will receive friends from 3-6 PM Sunday prior to the service at the funeral home. Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home in Athens is in charge of the arrangements.

David Ray Weir, 62, of Athens passed away on Friday, March 6. He was a mechanic and worked at Ritchie Power Sports for many years. David enjoyed hunting in his pastime. A Celebration of Life will be held on Sunday, March 22 at 2:00pm at Piney Grove Cemetery in Athens. Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

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