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AUGUST 6, 2026



PHOTO BY THE COURTESY  
OF BILLY BARNHART/STAFF RECORD

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

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Athens, Tennessee

### Sixth Circuit Upholds Dismissal of Lawsuits Against City of Athens, Sanctions Attorneys



The United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit has upheld the dismissal of multiple lawsuits filed against the City of Athens, Tennessee and several city officials, while also imposing sanctions on the plaintiff's attorneys.

The cases stemmed from litigation brought by Glenn Whiting following the city's 2022 Independence Day fireworks event. In a ruling issued March 13, the appellate court affirmed earlier decisions by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, which had dismissed the claims.

In addition to upholding the dismissals, the court found significant misconduct in the appellate filings. Judges said the plaintiff's attorneys included misrepresentations of the record and cited legal authorities that did not exist or did not support their arguments.

As a result, the court ordered attorneys Van Irion and Russ Egli to pay the city's legal fees related to the appeals, cover double court costs, and pay \$15,000 each in additional sanctions. The matter was also referred for possible disciplinary review. The court said the penalties were necessary to protect the integrity of the judicial process, noting a pattern of repeated litigation misconduct.

Athens Mayor Larry Eaton said the ruling reinforces confidence in the city's position and allows the community to move forward. The Sixth Circuit indicated it will retain jurisdiction as needed to enforce the terms of its decision.

Source: [City of Athens - Facebook](#)

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Athens, Tennessee

## Athens Middle School Students Publish, Donate Local Ghost Story Collection



Students in Michelle Hall's 6th, 7th and 8th grade classes at Athens City Middle School have achieved a unique milestone with the creation and donation of their book, "Our Town, Our Tales," a collection of Tennessee ghost stories highlighting local folklore.

The students recently presented copies of the book to the Athens City Council, the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum and the McMinn County Historical Society to support historical preservation and celebrate community heritage.

According to Hall, each student participated in the full creative process, including research, drafting, revisions and creating original illustrations.

The project not only strengthened academic skills but also emphasized meeting deadlines, craftsmanship and perseverance.

Vice Mayor Jordan Curtis praised the students and their teacher, calling the project an example of what can be accomplished through teamwork and strong leadership.

A group photo commemorating the presentation included Hall and her students alongside Principal Mike Simmons, council members Perry McCowan and John Duggan, and Brett King, director of the Living Heritage Museum.

Officials say the project not only preserves local storytelling traditions but also highlights the role education plays in building confidence, resilience and community pride.

*Source: Brett King, Exec. Dir., McMinn County Living Heritage Museum*

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Athens, Tennessee

## Former McMinn Star Ronnie McMahan to Receive Kidney Donation from Fellow Coach



Former McMinn County High School standout and Vanderbilt University basketball player **Ronnie McMahan** is preparing for a life-saving kidney transplant after being diagnosed with a serious genetic disorder.

McMahan, a 1991 graduate of McMinn County High School and former All-State player, went on to earn All-SEC honors at Vanderbilt and remains among the school's top all-time scorers. He later had a brief stint in the NBA with the Chicago Bulls. He currently serves as Dean of Students and an assistant basketball coach at Montgomery Bell Academy in Nashville.

Recently, McMahan was diagnosed with **focal segmental glomerulosclerosis**, a potentially fatal kidney disease. After publicly seeking a donor, a match was found in **Jeremy Cook**, a soccer coach at Station Camp High School. The two, who became friends over time, are scheduled for transplant surgery in June.

McMahan, a member of the McMinn County High School Hall of Fame who also recently was inducted into the Vanderbilt Athletics Hall of Fame, is now asking for public support through a GoFundMe campaign to help cover expenses during the donation process.

His GoFundMe can be found here: <https://gofund.me/70178e86e>

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## McMinn County Arrest Reports

## UT Extension Classes

### March 16, 2026

- David Barkley**, 46 of Sweetwater charged with driving on a revoked license third offense, Bond \$3,000.
  - Alexander Pace**, 31 of Calhoun, charged with aggravated rape, Bond \$300,000.
  - Ricky Nation**, 41 of Oliver Springs, charged with domestic assault, Bond \$2,000.
  - Cody Richardson**, 35 of Chattanooga, charged with disorderly conduct, Bond \$1,000.
  - Malcolm Robinson**, 25 of Decatur, charged with simple possession casual exchange of fentanyl, drug paraphernalia, prescription fraud, and identity theft, Bond \$40,000.
  - David Estes**, 33 of Eugene, Oregon, charged with shoplifting, criminal trespassing, theft of property, and Public intoxication, Bond \$6,000.
- Those accused are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Information gathered using public sources.

Below is a list of The McMinn County UT Extension of-  
fice classes for April:

**Only 4 Spots Left! Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) Certification Training** (April 1<sup>st</sup>) @ UT Extension Office, 2345 Denso Drive, Athens (9:00am – 3:00pm), The class is free.  
Register: <https://mcminn.tennessee.edu/>

**Co-Parenting Apart: Effective Co-Parenting** (April 8<sup>th</sup>) @ UT Extension Office, 2345 Denso Dr., Athens (8:30am -12:30pm).  
Register: <https://mcminn.tennessee.edu/> Cost: \$45

**Matter of Balance** (April 7<sup>th</sup> – April 30<sup>th</sup>) Meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays @ First Baptist Church, 305 Ingle side Ave., Athens, (10am – noon) *Free* workshop series. Register by calling our office, 423-745-2852. Class limit: 12 participants

Do you have a flower, fruit tree or garden question? Our **Master Gardeners** are in the office beginning Monday April 6 for a visit or phone call Mondays from 9-11 a.m. You can call ahead with your question and they will call you back during this time, or you can email your questions to [askamcminn gardeners@yahoo.com](mailto:askamcminn gardeners@yahoo.com)

Melissa Coffey is coordinating the McMinn Co. Master Gardener program. Her contact: 423-745-2852.

Source: Sarah Kite, Extension Agent III FCS



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# Never Miss an Update!



## Investigation Underway After Contraband Found at Sequoyah High School

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office is investigating after contraband was discovered on the campus of Sequoyah High School earlier this month.

A school resource officer was alerted March 9 after a staff member found items hidden under a shed, later identified as tobacco, marijuana and prescription medications.

Surveillance footage showed Mitchell Craig Cook and Sierra Nicole Boggess placing items at the location on multiple dates. Investigators also identified inmate Elijah John Pressley retrieving the items after arriving on campus for a welding class.

The class, operated by Cleveland State Community College through a partnership with Monroe County Schools, has been postponed and will not return to the school.

Cook and Boggess were later located in Gatlinburg, Tennessee with help from the Gatlinburg Police Department and transported to the Monroe County Jail.

The investigation remains ongoing, and officials urge the public to rely on verified information from law enforcement. Full List of charges available on the [Monroe Co. Sheriff Tommy Jones' original post on Facebook.](#)

## Ten Mile Residents Push for Action on Chronic Flooding Along State Route 304



Residents in Ten Mile, Tennessee are again calling for action to address ongoing flooding issues along Tennessee State Route 304 near Watts Bar Dam.

Standing water continues to collect along the roadway days after rainfall, particularly near Driftwood Diner, raising concerns among residents and business owners. Some say the issue has worsened over the past several years and now persists even during dry conditions.

In response, community members recently gathered to sign a petition urging the Tennessee Department of Transportation to address the drainage problem. The situation has remained unresolved since at least 2023, when questions first arose over whether the issue falls under state or private responsibility.

TDOT has previously said the flooding is tied to a failed private drainage connection and noted it does not have authority to repair private systems. However, residents argue the state should intervene, citing its responsibility for maintaining the highway. Locals say the standing water poses a safety risk for drivers and could lead to hydroplaning, while also impacting nearby businesses in one of the area's few commercial corridors.

The petition is expected to be sent to TDOT and Dan Howell as residents continue to seek a long-term solution. *Source: [WDEF.com](#)*

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## Obituaries

**Philip W. Culpepper**, a devoted husband, loving grandfather, and respected community member, passed away peacefully at his residence on Monday, March 16, 2026, at the age of 77. He was born in Delano, Tennessee. A proud graduate of Polk County High School in the Class of 1966, Philip went on to serve his country with honor as a Vietnam Veteran, proudly dedicating four years of service in the United States Army. Following his military service, he embarked on a distinguished career as an engineer with CSX Railroad, where he worked diligently for 32 years before retiring. A memorial service will be held at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, March 19, 2026, in the chapel of Bordwine Funeral Home. The family will receive friends from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Thursday prior to the service. Bordwine Funeral Home of Etowah is in charge of arrangements.