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**McMinn County Jury Convicts Man in Deadly Church Arson**



A McMinn County jury has found Kyle Jay Hickox guilty in connection with the August 15, 2024 murder of a woman and the arson of St. Mark AME Zion Church in Athens.

According to a police report, Hickox killed Linda Buchanan inside the church before setting the historic structure on fire. The church was later destroyed in the blaze, and Buchanan's body was recovered from the charred remains.



Investigators said surveillance footage placed Hickox near the scene multiple times on Aug. 15, 2024. Cameras captured him running across nearby properties, including the Athens YMCA and Tennessee Wesleyan University, and entering a maintenance building where he was confronted by a worker. The worker told authorities Hickox said he was "going to get God's water" before running toward the church and entering through a rear door.

Roughly 10 minutes later, cameras showed Hickox leaving the area, removing his shirt and wrapping it around his hand. Additional footage showed him using a hose at a nearby soccer field to wash himself off.

Authorities later executed a search warrant at Hickox's home, where they recovered clothing believed to have been worn during the incident. Evidence from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation crime lab revealed blood on Hickox's shoe that matched Buchanan.

Investigators determined Buchanan did not die in the fire but was killed prior to the blaze. Hickox was arrested and charged with second-degree murder and arson. A jury returned a guilty verdict on Friday, April 10, concluding the case surrounding the deadly fire that destroyed the longtime Athens church. Hickox was sentenced to life imprisonment with the possibility of parole, with a minimum of 51 years to serve in prison. *Source: WTVC News Channel 9*

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Monday, April 13, 2026

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

Athens, Tennessee

### Woman Injured in ATV Accident on Highway 68



A 46-year-old woman was seriously injured Friday evening after being thrown from an ATV along the 1500 block of Highway 68.

The accident occurred around 7:30 p.m. when the

woman, who was not wearing a helmet, lost control of the four-wheeler and was ejected from the vehicle. First responders arrived on the scene and provided initial stabilization.

The woman was transported by ambulance to the Lifestar base near Exit 60, where she was then airlifted to a trauma center in Knoxville.

North McMinn and Niota fire departments responded to the incident. The extent of the woman's injuries has not been released.

Photo courtesy of David Prater, Niota Rural FD

### Brush Fire Threatens Home on County Road 293



A brush fire Saturday afternoon in the 200 block of County Road 293 threatened a nearby home and surrounding property as dry conditions continue across the region.

The cause of the fire remains unknown, though officials noted that extremely dry weather and low humidity have increased fire risk. It is possible the blaze may have been sparked by a discarded cigarette. Much of East Tennessee is currently under burn restrictions.

Fire crews from North McMinn, Clearwater, and Niota fire departments responded to the scene along with the Tennessee Forestry Division and were able to contain the fire. No injuries were reported. Residents are urged to follow current burn restrictions and obtain permits when required. More information is available at [tn.firesponse.com](http://tn.firesponse.com).

Fire crews from North McMinn, Clearwater, and Niota fire departments responded to the scene along with the Tennessee Forestry Division and were able to contain the fire. No injuries were reported. Residents are urged to follow current burn restrictions and obtain permits when required. More information is available at [tn.firesponse.com](http://tn.firesponse.com).

Photo courtesy of David Prater, Niota Rural FD

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**Monday, April 13, 2026      Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 3      Athens, Tennessee**

## Athens City Council to Hold Work Session Today, April 13



The Athens City Council will meet for a work session today, Monday, April 13, at 5 p.m. in the City Hall conference room to discuss a wide range of city business and upcoming initiatives.

Among the items on the agenda is a presentation from the Statewide Organization for Community eMpowerment (SOCM), along with discussion of a proposed drive-thru Christmas light show at Regional Park and the relocation of Parks and Recreation offices to the Southeast Tennessee Trade and Conference Center.

Council members will also consider amendments related to stormwater project services, zoning changes for property on Hicks Street and Eastanallee Avenue, and the creation of a historic overlay district. Additional ordinances up for discussion include updates to beer permit classifications, refuse collection fees, and zoning regulations for commercial uses, as well as a proposed budget amendment for the current fiscal year.

Other topics include surplus equipment, board and committee vacancies, and a councilmember request regarding additional parking at Cook Park. The meeting will also address routine new business before adjournment. No votes will be taken.

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**MCMINN COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT CLERK**

Monday, April 13, 2026

Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 4

Athens, Tennessee

# McMinn County Arrest Reports

## April 09, 2026

**Mandy McDonald**, 50 of Niota, charged with possession of schedule II meth, violation of probation for possession of paraphernalia, Bond \$2,076.45

**Heath Wilcox**, 51 of Athens, charged with aggravated burglary; is being held for Polk County.

**James Vess**, 24 of Athens, charged with DUI, and violation of the open container law, Bond \$1,000.

**Phillip Lambert**, 68 of Madisonville, charged with 2 counts of DUI, simple possession of schedule II fentanyl, Bond \$24,000.

**Darius Moss**, 47 of Etowah, charged with felony aggravated assault, Bond \$15,000.

**Michael Ogle**, 46 of Cleveland, charged with violation of probation for possession of marijuana, Bond \$3,675.

## April 10, 2026

**Stephen Hubbard**, 42 of Athens, charged with violation of probation for driving on a revoked license.

**Shannon Huff**, 55 of Englewood, charged with public intoxication and drug paraphernalia.

**Christopher McClure**, 52 of Niota, charged with state violation of probation for possession of meth for resale, child support, financial exploitation of a vulnerable or elderly person, theft of property from \$2,500 to \$10,000, Bond \$51,902.40

**Chad Smith**, 42 of Athens, charged with state violation of probation for evading arrest with risk of death, and resisting stop, Bond \$1,000.

**Ashley Green**, 40 of Athens, charged with state violation of probation for possession of schedule II fentanyl for resale.

**Sean Hicks**, 51 of Athens, charged with failure to appear for DUI, and schedule II meth.

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

**Information gathered using public sources.**

**McMinn County FFA**



## Spring Plant Sale

**Opening Day:** April 14 8:30-5:00

April 15-17: 8:30-3:15

**Location:** McMinn County High School Greenhouse  
(entrance off Dennis Street)

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Monday, April 13, 2026

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

Athens, Tennessee

## Obituaries

**Robert Boyd Brinkley**, 63 of Tellico Plains, passed away on Wednesday, April 8. Robert was self-employed and owned a painting business. Visitation was held at Ziegler Funeral Home on Sunday, April 12, from 4:00-6:00 PM. Funeral services followed at 6:00 PM at the funeral home. Interment will be held at Green Hill Cemetery on Monday, April 13 at 11:00 AM. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with the care of Robert Boyd Brinkley.

**Charline Sergent Butler**, 86, of Englewood, passed away on Thursday, April 9. Visitation will be held at Ziegler Funeral Home on Thursday, April 16 from 12:00-2:00 PM. Funeral services will be held at 2:00 PM at the funeral home. Interment will follow at Clearwater Cemetery. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with the care of Charline Sergent Butler.

**Beverly Sue Debuty**, 78 of Athens, passed away on Monday, April 6. She worked for seven years as a housekeeper at Days Inn and Super 8 Motel in Athens. A visitation will be held on Tuesday, April 14 at Companion Funeral Home of Athens from 9:30 am-11:30 am with the funeral service starting at 11:30 am. Directly after the funeral, a graveside service will be held at Sunset Memorial Gardens in Cleveland. Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

**Danny Scott Buckner**, 78, of McMinn County, passed away on Wednesday, April 8. A graveside service was held Sunday, April 12 at Chestuee Baptist Church Cemetery (1414 Athens Rd., Calhoun). Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody Family were honored to assist his family with these arrangements.

**Bintan Naetochukwu Nwankwo**, born April 30, 2025, passed away on Sunday, April 5, 2026. He is survived by his loving parents, Samuel and Eunice Nwankwo and sister Tiara Nwankwo of Cleveland, Tennessee. Funeral Services were held on Friday, April 10. Burial was at Hiwassee Memory Gardens. Services of loving memory entrusted to M.D. Dotson and Sons Funeral Home of Cleveland, Tennessee.

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