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**Landfill Fire in McMinn County Raises Concerns Amid Extreme Heat**



A fire at the McMinn County Landfill Tuesday evening sent smoke over nearby homes as fire crews worked in dangerous heat to contain the blaze. Witnesses reported multiple fire trucks on scene, though officials have not yet released details on the cause.

The fire comes as East Tennessee faces a severe heatwave, a condition known to increase landfill fire risk. In a 2025 Carter County landfill fire, [Assistant Chief Keith LaFleur told WJHL \(Johnson City\)](#) that compacted landfill material can “automatically set itself on fire from the heat, and it all builds up and eventually it shows itself.” This documented case supports the possibility of heat-driven ignition in McMinn County.

Landfill fires can burn for days and reduce air quality. During the Carter County incident, officials warned residents to limit outdoor activity due to smoke similar to that produced by a house fire. That same concern may apply locally until the blaze is fully contained.

Extreme heat also threatens first responders. In a major Tennessee industrial fire last year, multiple firefighters suffered heat exhaustion while battling flames in triple-digit temperatures, [according to regional emergency reports](#). With temperatures again surging, crews at the landfill are working under heightened physical strain.

As of publication time, no injuries have been reported, and fire crews remain on scene. More information is expected as the investigation develops.


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**McMinn County  
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Upcoming Summer Events

**HERITAGE SCHOOL:**

**THE HISTORY OF SQUIRRELS AS PETS & SQUIRREL REHAB WITH KATIE KINNEAR OF MARSHALL CREEK WILDLIFE REHAB**  
SATURDAY, JULY 11<sup>TH</sup> @ 11:00 AM



**SCOTCH DARNING WITH APRIL GREER**  
SATURDAY, JULY 18<sup>TH</sup> @ 11:00

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**THE HISTORY OF DRAGGING CANOE WITH JOE GUY**  
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Tuesday - Friday: 10 AM - 5 PM  
Saturday: 10 AM - 1 PM  
Sunday - Monday: Closed

Admission:  
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**More Information**  
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Thursday, July 02, 2026

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Athens, Tennessee

## Motorcyclist Airlifted After Collision With Semi on Highway 68



A 29-year-old motorcyclist was seriously injured Tuesday around 4 p.m. after his 2006 Harley-Davidson collided with the front driver-side of a 2007 International semi turning into the Circle K truck stop on Highway 68 in Sweetwater. The rider was airlifted to UT Medical Center in Knoxville, and his condition was unavailable at publication time.

A rapid response came from Sweetwater City Fire, North McMinn, Niota Fire, multiple THP units, AMR, and MCSO. Trooper Logan Ballew is leading the investigation.

*Source and photo: David Prater, Niota FD*

## AACA Opens Registration for 2026 Summer Arts Camps

Athens Area Council for the Arts has opened registration for its 2026 Summer Arts Camps, held at The Arts Center, 320 N. White St., Athens. Camps are open to all grade levels, based on the grade students completed in the 2025-26 school year.

AACA is introducing a new visual arts option, **Make Your Mark Camp** for grades 6-12, led by Nancy Kyzer. The camp runs July 27-31, 10 a.m.-noon, with students studying master artists and creating original work. A student exhibition will be held during the final 30 minutes of camp on Friday. Tuition is \$75, and the registration deadline is July 13. While scholarships are not offered for this camp, AACA encourages families to contact The Arts Center to discuss financial assistance or payment plans.

Staff are available for questions and registration in-person or over the phone on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and recommend early sign-ups as camp spots fill quickly.

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Athens, Tennessee

## McMinn County Arrest Reports

### June 29, 2026

**Justin Smolin**, 39 of Niota, charged with failure to appear for domestic assault.

**Oscar Anguino**, 39 of Athens, charged with violation of probation for driving on a suspended license, aggravated criminal trespassing, two counts vandalism, three counts aggravated stalking, two counts aggravated burglary, stalking, harassment, two counts violation of border protection, aggravated assault; \$161,274 bond.

**Joseph Castle**, 38 of Kingston, charged with DUI, open container law, and violation of implied consent; Bond \$2,000.

**Jimmy Jack**, 63 of Englewood, charged with aggravated assault; Bond \$15,000.

**Otis Ballew**, 46 of Athens, charged with failure to appear for driving on a suspended license; Bond \$4,000.

**Joshua Dixon**, 34 of Niota, charged with violation of probation for domestic assault, Bond \$1,081.

**Jonathan Sliger**, 41 of Riceville, charged with failure to appear for criminal trespassing.

**Bobby Driggers**, 54 of Athens, charged with aggravated assault, domestic assault, assault, and disorderly conduct, Bond \$20,000.

### June 30, 2026

**Jeremy Coy**, 46 of Chattanooga, charged with felony evading arrest.

**Chloe Calloway**, 21 of Cleveland, charged with violation of probation for shoplifting.

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

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Athens, Tennessee

## Drone Leads Deputies to Wanted Felon in Meigs County Woods



Hamilton County Sheriff's Office deputies used a drone to track down a wanted man hiding in a wooded area of Shahan Lane in Meigs County on Sunday, June 28. Deputies were searching for Thurman Massengale, who was

wanted on multiple felony warrants, when the drone pinpointed his location and guided officers on foot to his location. Massengale was taken into custody without incident.

During the search, deputies also arrested another man with active Meigs County warrants, whose identity has not yet been released. No further details have been provided.

Source: [Local 3 News](#)

## Obituaries

**Ola Nell Davidson**, 92, passed away on Sunday June 28, 2026 following a short stay in the hospital. She co-owned and operated a beauty salon in Homewood, Alabama for several years before moving to Athens in the 1960s. She retired from National HealthCare (NHC) in Athens where she had been Activities Director for 30 years. She was also a member of Allen Memorial United Methodist Church. A special thank you to Adoration Hospice and Willow Acres for such loving care and support. A celebration of Nell's life will be held on Sunday, July 12 from 3pm - 5pm at Allen Memorial United Methodist Church in the fellowship hall.

**Clara Joyce Carter Pritchett**, age 78, a native of Sweetwater and longtime resident of McMinn County, passed away on Wednesday, July 1, 2026. She was a member of Antioch Baptist Church in Athens. Visitation will be held on Friday, July 3, 2026, from 12:00-2:00 PM at Ziegler Funeral Home. Funeral services will take place at 2:00 PM. Interment will follow at Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with serving the family of Clara Joyce Carter Pritchett.

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