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Tuesday, September 22, 2026**Page 1****Athens, Tennessee**

Athens Veteran Known for Tribute Fence Dies



Susan Ratliff, an Athens veteran whose artwork honoring military service members, veterans and first responders became a local landmark, has died.

A former Navy service member and Operation Desert Storm veteran, Ratliff retired from the military in 1999. In retirement, she openly shared her struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression, hoping to encourage others facing similar challenges.

Outside her Athens home, Ratliff created a one-of-a-kind painted fence featuring tributes to veterans and first responders. Each fence post told a story through artwork and symbols, including a Battlefield Cross, a Black Hawk helicopter and the number 22, representing the number of veterans lost to suicide each day at the time the project was creat-

ed.

The tribute fence drew visitors from across the region, many of whom asked permission to walk along the display and photograph the artwork. Ratliff often said the project provided comfort during difficult times.

"I don't sleep well at night like most veterans," she said during an earlier interview. "On really tough nights, I can come out and walk my fence, and it helps."

Friends and neighbors praised Ratliff's dedication to honoring those who served. Her work resonated with military families and others affected by the sacrifices of service members and first responders. In sharing her own experiences with mental health challenges, Ratliff encouraged others to take difficult moments one step at a time, offering a message of perseverance and hope.

Her painted fence remains a lasting tribute to the men and women who serve and a reflection of Ratliff's commitment to honoring their stories. *Source: [News Channel 9](#)*



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Tuesday, September 22, 2026 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 2 Athens, Tennessee

Good Faith Clinic Returns THIS Thursday



The Good Faith Clinic, a United Way agency, will be open **THIS Thursday**, September 24 at 3 p.m. for refills and doctor visits. Test Results will be provided beginning at 3:45 p.m.

The Good Faith Clinic is free primary health care for residents of McMinn and Meigs counties, ages of 18-64, who do not have any form of medical insurance, including TennCare. The clinic meets on the campus of Christ Community Church at 18 S Congress Parkway in Athens.

REMINDER: The Good Faith Clinic is open the 2nd, 4th, and 5th, Thursdays of each month.

Source: Norma Barham, Good Faith Clinic

Community News You Can Use

- The Athens Utilities Board will meet **TODAY**, Tuesday, September 22 at 5:00p.m. The agenda for the meeting mentions discussions about Financial Statements, their divisional report, funding for the McMinn County Economic Development Authority, a United Way Corporate Contribution, as well as allowing for public comment for pre-approved speakers.
- Athens Parks & Recreation invites residents to a public meeting on the city's Parks & Recreation Master Plan at 6 p.m. Thursday, October 8 at the Southeast Tennessee Trade & Conference Center, 122 Regional Park Drive. Community input will help shape the future development of Athens parks over the next 10 to 15 years. Officials encourage residents to attend and share their ideas.
- The Meigs County Historical Society will host local historian and McMinn County Sheriff Joe Guy at 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 27, at the Historical Society, 200 Smith Ave., Decatur. Guy will share fascinating stories and insights about the region. For more information, call 423-334-4424.

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Tuesday, September 22, 2026 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 3 Athens, Tennessee

Leadership McMinn Class Begins New Year with Community Service Project



The new Leadership McMinn class kicked off its year of leadership development with a day of community service in partnership with the City of Athens and the McMinn County Mayor's Office.

Class members began the day in downtown Athens, working alongside Mayor Larry Eaton and city public works employees to remove flags displayed around the courthouse square. Participants then enjoyed lunch provided by Chamber member Pie Hounds before continuing their service efforts at Bicentennial Park.

At the park, volunteers completed a variety of improvement projects, including mulching, painting and general cleanup work to help enhance the community space. Organizers praised the class for its enthusiasm and dedication, noting that participants worked through the summer heat while making a positive impact on the community.

The annual Leadership McMinn program brings together emerging and established leaders from across the county to learn about local government, business, education and community organizations while developing leadership skills through hands-on experiences and service projects. *Source:* [Athens Area Chamber of Commerce](https://www.athenschamber.com)



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Tuesday, September 22, 2026 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 4 Athens, Tennessee

McMinn County Arrest Reports

September 20, 2026

Kobe Wyatt, 25, of Athens, charged with evading arrest, criminal impersonation, violation of probation for possession of meth and paraphernalia, and failure to appear for simple possession casual exchange. Bond \$16,428.

Audrea Benton, 29, of Athens, charged with false reports. Bond \$50,000.

Daniel Watson, 50, of Athens, charged with state violation of probation for possession of meth with the intent to sell.

Eric Ratledge, 42, of Athens, charged with aggravated criminal trespassing, and vandalism. Bond \$4,000.

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

Information gathered using public sources.

Obituaries

James Louie "Jim" Gilliam, age 81, of Athens, Tennessee, passed away on Friday, September 18, 2026. Raised in Niota, Tennessee, Jim lived a life defined by faith, family, friendship, and laughter. He proudly served his country in the United States Air Force and went on to enjoy a successful career in sales, where his outgoing personality and genuine love for people allowed him to build lasting relationships and positively impact countless lives. Above all, Jim loved the Lord and his family. A longtime member of Genesis Baptist Church, his Christian faith was the foundation of his life and the legacy he leaves behind. He shared a beautiful love story with his wife, Glenna. After meeting in high school, they spent 64 years together, including 58 years of marriage. Their enduring love and devotion to one another were a blessing and example to their family. The family will receive friends on Tuesday, September 22, 2026, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Smith Funeral & Cremation Services of Athens, with a memorial service to follow. Burial will take place on Wednesday, September 23, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. in the Veterans Field of Honor at McMinn Memory Gardens. [Smith Funeral & Cremation Services](#) of Athens is honored to serve the family of James Louie "Jim" Gilliam.

William "Bill" Collins, 94, of Etowah, passed away on Saturday, September 19. Bill proudly served his country in the United States Air Force. He was a graduate of the University of Tennessee. Following his military service, he dedicated his career to education and was a retired teacher with Etowah City Schools, where he touched the lives of many students. He was also a faithful member of Woodward Avenue Church of God. Funeral services will be held at 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, September 23 in the chapel of Bordwine Funeral Home. Family will receive friends from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Wednesday prior to the service. There will be a private entombment at a later date. [Bordwine Funeral Home](#) in charge of arrangements.

James Loyal Patton, age 90, of Decatur TN., passed away peacefully surrounded by his family Monday, September 22, 2026 at his residence. He was born in Knoxville and a resident of Decatur most of his life. Funeral Services will be Wednesday, September 23, 2026 at 2:00 PM in the chapel of Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home with Pastor Ricky Ferguson Officiating. The graveside service will follow in Hammonds Cemetery. The visitation will be from 1-2PM prior to the funeral service. [Laycock Hobbs Funeral Home](#) of Athens in charge of arrangements.



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