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Wednesday, September 23, 2026

Page 1

Athens, Tennessee

Three Charged After Recovery of Multiple Stolen Vehicles, Equipment



A weekend-long investigation by the McMinn County Sheriff's Office led to the recovery of multiple stolen vehicles and pieces of equipment from McMinn and surrounding counties and resulted in three people being charged, according to Sheriff Joe Guy.

The investigation began Thursday when Detective Jeremy Moore was following up on a theft case and spotted a vehicle reported stolen at a residence on County Road 713. While conducting surveillance, Moore observed a motorcycle leaving the property and followed it to a local store. There, he determined the motorcycle was stolen and identified the driver as Justin Bivens. Moore and

other deputies returned to the County Road 713 residence, where they located a stolen truck. Sheriff Guy said that discovery opened the door to a much larger investigation. (Photo L-R: Josh King, Amanda Stocklin, Justin Bivens)

"That really got the ball rolling," Guy said. "As more information developed, our detectives identified additional suspects as well as other locations where stolen property was located."

As detectives continued to pursue leads throughout the weekend, investigators recovered a 2026 Honda CBR motorcycle and a 2025 Suzuki motorcycle that had both been stolen in Cleveland, along with a 2023 Honda dirt bike also reported stolen in Cleveland. Authorities also recovered a 1999 Ford F-250 Super Duty stolen in McMinn County, a Polaris Ranger and a four-wheeler stolen in McMinn County, a Polaris RZR stolen in Monroe County, and a CAT skid steer that had been stolen in Hamilton County.

As a result of the investigation, Bivens was charged with theft of property valued between \$2,500 and \$10,000 and theft of property valued between \$10,000 and \$60,000. His bond was set at \$38,000. Investigators also charged Josh King with theft of property valued between \$2,500 and \$10,000 and theft of property valued between \$10,000 and \$60,000. His bond was set at \$76,000. A third suspect, Amanda Stocklin, was taken into custody and is currently being held in Monroe County. The investigation remains ongoing as detectives continue working to determine the full scope of the theft operation and identify any additional individuals involved. **Sources: Sheriff Joe Guy / WTVC**

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Wednesday, September 23, 2026 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 2 **Athens, Tennessee**

Cherochala Skyway History Program Set for Gem Theater

The Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association will continue its *Gems of the Past* lecture series with a presentation on the history of the Cherochala Skyway on Oct. 1 at the Gem Theater in Etowah.

Pam Hall Mathews, president and volunteer curator of the Charles Hall Museum & Heritage Center in Tellico Plains, will share stories and historical insights drawn from archives collected by her father, Charles Hall, a longtime Tellico Plains mayor and leading advocate for construction of the Cherochala Skyway.

Hall helped launch the Tellico Plains Wagon Train in 1958 to promote the need for a highway connecting East Tennessee and western North Carolina. The Cherochala Skyway opened in 1996 and was later designated a National Scenic Byway. In 1997, the Tennessee General Assembly honored Hall's decades of work on the project by naming the Skyway bridge over Laurel Branch the Charles Hall Bridge. The program will be held at the historic Gem Theater, 700 Tennessee Ave., with doors opening at 6:30 p.m. and the presentation beginning at 7 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

MEDIC Urges O-Negative Donors to Help Rebuild Critically Low Blood Supply

MEDIC Regional Blood Center is urging people with O-negative blood type to donate after recent trauma cases reduced the organization's inventory to less than a two-day supply.

Officials said O-negative blood is in critical demand and donors are needed to help rebuild supplies ahead of the weekend. Because O-negative blood can be used in emergency situations for patients of any blood type, maintaining an adequate supply is especially important.

To encourage donations, MEDIC is offering several incentives this week, including drawings for Dollywood tickets and floor seats to an upcoming Ella Langley concert. Donors who give on Sept. 25 will also receive a special-edition Dolly Parton-themed T-shirt while supplies last.

Donations can be made at the Athens MEDIC donor center located at 927 Decatur Pike in the Ingles Shopping Center and mobile blood drives throughout the region. Call the Athens Center at 423-453-5846. More information and other locations are available at medicblood.org.

MEET & GREET



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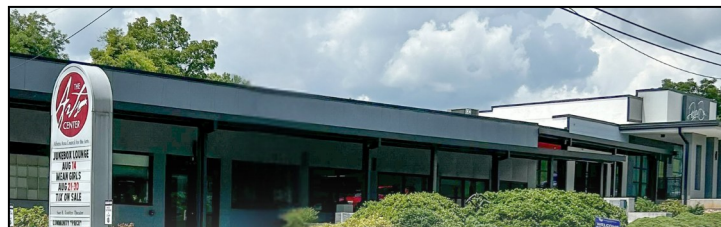


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Wednesday, September 23, 2026 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 4 **Athens, Tennessee**

McMinn County Arrest Reports

September 21, 2026

Shelly Pike, 48, of Madisonville, charged with criminal trespassing and felony vandalism. Bond \$4,500.

Casey Helton, 34, of Athens, charged with joy-riding. Bond \$2,000.

Tyler Viette, 29, of Venton, Virginia, charged with possession of legend drugs, and disorderly conduct.

Rhonda Pilkey, 44 of Athens charged with state violation of probation for burglary.

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

American Patchwork Quartet to Perform in Athens

The Athens Area Council for the Arts will bring back its Big Time Small Town performance series with a concert by the Grammy-nominated American Patchwork Quartet on Friday, September 25 at 7 p.m. in The Arts Center's Sue E. Trotter Black Box Theater.

Led by two-time Grammy Award-winning guitarist and vocalist Clay Ross, American Patchwork Quartet blends traditional American folk music with influences from jazz, country, West African and East Asian musical traditions. The group's debut album earned a nomination for Best Folk Album at the 67th Grammy Awards.

The quartet features Grammy-winning vocalist Falu Shah, bassist Moto Fukushima and drummer Rudy Royston, each bringing diverse cultural and musical backgrounds to the ensemble's distinctive sound.

Tickets are on sale now and range from \$20 to \$25. Event organizers encourage patrons to purchase tickets in advance. Purchase tickets at the following link: [HERE](#)

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Wednesday, September 23, 2026 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 5 **Athens, Tennessee**

Obituaries

Denise Hope, 77, of Etowah, formerly of Atlanta, GA, passed away on Sunday, September 20. Denise worked as a property manager at Southern Heritage in Atlanta, Georgia, where she was known for her dedication and care. Outside of work, she loved flowers and enjoyed the simple beauty they brought to her life. She was also an avid reader and treasured quiet moments spent with a good book. A memorial service will be held at a later date. [Bordwine Funeral Home](#) is in charge of arrangements.

Ronald Charles Eken, 79, passed away on Sunday, September 13. He was born in Seoul, Korea where his father served in the Army's Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) alongside his mother. Though Ron was born overseas, his formative years were spent growing up in Lincoln, Missouri. Ron's business path became one of real estate, becoming a broker for the United Farm Agency. Ron continued to grow as a businessman, building the BullEk Corporation that managed real estate properties throughout the Southeast. A celebration of life for Ron with a date to be determined and location is pending. [Good Samaritan Funeral Home](#) is in charge of arrangements.

John Vernon Womac, 76, of Riceville, passed away Saturday, September 19. He was a longtime member of Eastanallee Baptist Church, was a member of the Teamster's Union, and was a member of the Claxton Fire Dept. for many years. He served in the

United States Army during the Korean War where he obtained the rank of Staff Sgt. A funeral service will be conducted, 7:00 pm, Thursday, September 24, 2026 in the chapel of Smith Funeral Home. The family will receive friends from 5:00-7:00 pm, Thursday, at the funeral home prior to the service. Interment will be 11:00 am, Friday, September 25, 2026 at Womac Cemetery in Calhoun with military honors provided by the US Army. [Smith Funeral & Cremation Services](#) of Athens is honored to serve the family of John Vernon Womac.

Reva Willie Hampton Shultz, age 94 of Ten Mile, Tenn. and former resident of Clearwater, passed away Monday, Sept. 21, 2026, at her residence. She was a native and longtime resident of McMinn County. She retired from Decatur Health Care and was a former nurse at Sweetwater Hospital, Epperson and Foree Hospitals. She was the oldest member of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church and former member of Clearwater Baptist Church. She enjoyed swimming, boating and fishing. Funeral services will be 7:00 P.M. Thursday in the Chapel of Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home with Rev. Mike Couch and Wayne Evans officiating. Grave-side services will be 11:00 A.M. Friday in Clearwater Cemetery. The family will receive friends from 5-7 Thursday in the funeral home [Laycock Hobbs Funeral Home](#) of Athens in charge of arrangements.



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