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Friday, September 26, 2025

Page 1

Athens, Tennessee

Family Files Amended Complaint in Meigs County Wrongful Death Case



An amended complaint has been filed on behalf of the family of Tabitha Smith, the woman who died while handcuffed in the back of a Meigs County deputy's patrol vehicle after it plunged into the Tennessee River in February 2024.

Smith and Deputy R.J. Leonard went missing late on Feb. 14, 2024, after Leonard arrested her. The following day, authorities recovered Leonard's vehicle from the river with Smith's body still inside, restrained in the back seat. Leonard's body was recovered separately.

The Smith family initially filed a \$100 million wrongful death lawsuit against Meigs County, alleging Leonard had not been properly trained and was unfamiliar with his patrol area. District Attorney General Russell Johnson later reported that inexperience, poor road conditions, and outdated equipment contributed to the crash. A separate lawsuit was also filed against navigation company Garmin, claiming its GPS system erroneously showed a bridge crossing the river where none existed.

Meigs County previously sought to dismiss the family's complaint, but the new amended filing makes that motion moot. The updated complaint adds newly discovered details, alleging Leonard sped toward the Blythe Ferry boat ramp, ignored warning signs and rumble strips, and failed to distinguish between a rural lane and the elevated Hiwassee Highway bridge. It also claims the county failed to properly train or vet Leonard and that problems with his patrol vehicle and GPS contributed to Smith's death. The family is seeking a jury trial. Defendants have until Oct. 13 to withdraw their earlier dismissal request and file a new response. *Source: [NewsChannel9.com](https://www.newschannel9.com)*

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Friday, Sept. 26, 2025 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 2 Athens, Tennessee

4-H Chick Chain Show and Sale Set For TOMORROW



The McMinn County 4-H Chick Chain Show and Sale will take place Saturday, Sept. 27, at AgCentral Co-op in Athens. The event begins at 10 a.m. with an auction of Rhode Island Red, Black Sex Link, and Ameraucana laying hens raised by local 4-H members.

The annual program gives 4-H'ers hands-on experience in caring for and raising poultry. Community members are invited to support the participants by attending the auction, enjoying the event, and taking home hens for fresh eggs.

For more information, call the UT Extension office in McMinn County at 423-745-2852.

Community News You Can Use

- The McMinn County Board of Education will meet in Regular Session on Thursday, October 2, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. at the McMinn County Center for Educational Excellence.
- The McMinn County Highway Dept. would like to announce that McMinn County Road 608, Blair Branch Rd, will be closed Monday, September 29th, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for road construction.
- The City of Athens Public Works Department announces the following street closure: Jackson Street in Athens, from Green Street to Madison Avenue, will be closed to thru traffic from Tuesday, Sept. 30, at 7 a.m. until Thursday, Oct. 2, at 5 p.m. The closure is for utility repairs and asphalt patching. Detours will be posted, and motorists are advised to allow extra time for travel. For more information, please contact the Office of the Public Works Department at 423-744-2745.



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THIS WEEK
NEXT WEEK
EVERY WEEK

Friday, Sept. 26, 2025

Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 3

Athens, Tennessee

Church News and Events

- [Planted In Christ Outreach Fellowship](#) (317 Maple Street, Athens) holds Outreach Deliverance Classes every Thursday at 7:00pm.
- SRBC Kids is held on Sunday from 5:30 pm - 6:45 pm. Children of all ages are invited to enjoy music, food and fun, while rejoicing in God at Solid Rock Baptist Church (4975 Hwy 11, Calhoun).
- Cane Creek Baptist Church, 136 Co Rd 498, Etowah, will be having Homecoming on Sunday, September 28th. Service begins at 10:30 AM. Whosoever Ministries and Bro. Sam Blankenship will be with us.
- [St. Mary's Legacy Clinic](#) offers free mobile medical care for the uninsured. The clinic is run by a small staff and many volunteer physicians. Their goal is to extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ to rural East Tennessee. Anyone who is medically uninsured is eligible to receive care. *St. Mary's Catholic Church (1291 E Madison Ave, Athens) is the McMinn County location and accepts patients every 3rd Thursday of the month.*
- [Celebrate Recovery](#) meets every [Tuesday](#) at 6:00pm at Woodward Ave. Church of God in Athens They also meet every [Thursday](#) at 6:00pm at Watts Bar Community Church in Decatur.
- Clearwater Baptist Church will host the 2026 Upward Basketball and Cheerleading program for children in PreK4 through 6th grade. **Online registration begins October 1st, with mandatory basketball evaluations scheduled for Friday, November 7th from 6 to 8 PM or Saturday, November 8th from 9 AM to 12 PM.** This is a great opportunity for kids to learn, grow, and have fun in a positive environment. For more information, call 423-507-2568
- Solid Rock Baptist Church (4975 Highway 11, Calhoun) will host singer Bob Sellers for their homecoming service on October 5 during their 10:30 a.m. service.
- The next Christian Men's Prayer Breakfast sponsored by New Hope Methodist Church will occur on Thursday, October 2 at 8 a.m. at Maddi Mae's Cafe in downtown Athens. This ecumenical prayer breakfast is open to all men of Christian faith plus those who want to establish a relationship with Jesus. Please contact Marcus Guinn (marcusguinn@gmail.com) or 423-507-7769 for more information.
- Conasauga Baptist Church will be hosting a Tent Revival Series beginning September 28 through October 3. There will be special singing nightly. The church is located at 649 County Road 475, in Etowah. *Daily hours and more information is available in their ad on Page 4.*

HEALING HEARTS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Join us for a day of healing and hope

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4TH
10 AM - 3 PM

This is a free kid's camp providing support and connection for children and teens who have experienced the loss of a loved one.

To register: Scan the QR Code or go to
clearwaterbc.org/upcoming-events

Location: 964 Co Rd 180, Athens, TN 37303
Lunch will be provided



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TN WESLEYAN SUNDAY LUNCH IS BACK



Start your Sunday off right with our delicious and decadent Sunday Lunch on the TN Wesleyan Campus! Join us for a wide variety of lunch classics and new favorites to satisfy your cravings. Served all you care to eat style!

Date: Every Sunday
"When school is in session."

Time: 11am-1:30pm

Location: Sherman Dining Hall
204 E College Street, Athens TN 37303

Scan and select the upcoming Sunday from the lunch meal period.



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OCT. 4th
10:30am -12:30pm
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Friday, Sept. 26, 2025

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

Athens, Tennessee

Tennessee Wesleyan Earns Top Rankings in U.S. News & World Report



TWU President Tyler Forrest

Tennessee Wesleyan University has been ranked No. 9 among "Best Regional Colleges – South" by *U.S. News & World Report* for 2026, moving up from No. 10 last year.

The university was also recognized as the top institution in Tennessee for Social Mobility and ranked No. 13 nationally for "Best Value Schools," making it the highest-ranked best value school in the state.

"These rankings affirm what our students, alumni, and community already know—that Tennessee Wesleyan offers an education that is both high in quality and high in value," said TWU President Dr. Tyler Forrest.

University officials said TWU will continue to expand opportunities and programs while maintaining its commitment to student success and academic excellence.

No. 3/5 Lady Vols Host Texas A&M Tonight

The No. 3/5 Tennessee soccer team will put its unbeaten start on the line Friday when it hosts Texas A&M in an SEC matchup at Regal Soccer Stadium.

The Lady Vols (9-0-1, 2-0 SEC) are riding a two-game conference win streak, most recently defeating LSU 2-1 behind goals from Leah Klurman and Kate Runyon. Defensively, Tennessee has been dominant, posting eight shutouts through 10 matches with goalkeeper Cayden Norris and a steady back line leading the way. Offensively, UT has seen contributions from 10 different goal scorers, highlighted by Alivia Stott's program-record five goals in one half against ECU.

Tennessee is 4-0 at home this season, outscoring opponents 14-1, and holds a 7-3 all-time series edge over Texas A&M. The Aggies (3-4-3, 0-2 SEC) enter after narrow losses to Auburn and No. 7 Arkansas, averaging 16 shots per game and led in scoring by junior Leah Diaz.

Kickoff is set for 7 p.m. Friday at Regal Soccer Stadium. Admission is free, and the game will stream live on SEC Network+.

Meigs Decatur Public Library


Friends of the Library Book Sale

October 2 – 4, 2025 (Thurs - Sat)

Times: 10 am to 2 pm each day

Books, movies, puzzles

AND YARD SALE



Book sale and yard sale together.

The public is invited to participate in the yard sale. To reserve a spot at the yard sale, please register and submit a \$25 payment in advance. Participants may choose to set up on one or multiple days. Participants are required to provide their own tables and chairs, and are responsible for removing any unsold items at the end of the event. Set up may begin as early as 8 AM. Your attendance at your table is required at all times.

To register, contact Mignonne Pendergrass (423-305-3192) or Linda Leichty (510-209-6368). Payment must be delivered to the library prior to the event to confirm your reservation. Please note that payments are non-refundable.

Will be held rain or shine

EVERYONE WELCOME



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Friday, Sept. 26, 2025

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

Athens, Tennessee

McMinn County Arrest Reports

Lavon McSpadden, 35, of Sweetwater, charged with aggravated burglary, Bond \$30,000

Joshua Webb, 45, of Athens, charged with state violation of probation for reckless threats of mass violence.

Annette McNabb, 42 of Athens, charged with domestic assault, Bond \$1,000

Heather Cogdill, 35, charged with manufacturing, selling, delivery, and possession.

Ashante Smith, 30 of Athens, charged with state violation of probation and two counts of child support, Bond \$10,000

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

Obituaries

James R. Curtis, 93 of Bradley County, passed away on Wednesday September 24 at Signature Healthcare in Cleveland. James attended Charleston Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Graveside services will be at 2:00 P.M. CST, Saturday, September 27 at Fredonia Cemetery in Crossville. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with the care of James R. Curtis..

Robert "Junior" McCowan 98, passed Thursday September 25, 2025. Survivors and funeral arrangements to be announced by M.D. Dotson and Sons Funeral Home.

Gene S. Sliger, 90 of Athens, passed away Tuesday, September 23rd after a brief illness with family by his side. He attended Tennessee Tech University, and served 4 years in the United States Air Force. He was a member of First Baptist Church of Athens. A graveside service will be conducted, 11:00 am, Monday, September 29 at Cedar Grove Cemetery. Smith Funeral & Cremation Services of Athens is honored to serve the family of Gene S. Sliger.

Easton Dash Steven Lee Reed, passed away on Thursday, September 25. Funeral arrangements will be announced at a later time. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with the care of Easton Dash Steven Lee Reed.

Ima Jean Hughes, 89 of Etowah, passed away on Wednesday, September 24. Jean was a long-time member of St. Paul's United Methodist Church and was also a member of the Eastern Star. Jean retired from the McMinn County Health Department where she was the office manager. Family and friends will assemble at Green Hill Cemetery on Saturday, September 27 for a 12:00 p.m. graveside service. Bordwine Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Larrylee Anthony Holtzclaw, 43, passed away unexpectedly in Sweetwater on Wednesday, September 17. He was a gifted musician who could fill any room with melody, playing anything from classic rock to blues and was a constant source of laughter, love, and compassion. The family will receive guests at Companion Funeral Home in Athens located at 400 S. White St, Athens, TN on Saturday, September 27 from 2-4 PM followed by a service beginning at 4 PM. There will be a burial at Cedar Grove Cemetery immediately following. Companion Funeral & Cremation Service of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

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