McMinn County has recorded its first traffic death of the new year. It happened around 7:30 Wednesday night on Highway 411 north of Englewood. A motorcycle rider traveling the wrong direction slammed into an oncoming Chevy Suburban, and was dead on the scene. The Tennessee Highway Patrol identifies the victim as 69-year-old Mark Hart of Etowah. Trooper Eric Diaz says Hart was going southbound in the northbound lane near CR 410 when he hit the Suburban head on. The motorcycle burst into flames. Hart was ejected onto the shoulder of the road. The driver of the Suburban was not injured. The Englewood Rural Fire Department responded. (Photos by Lynn Ingram with the Englewood Rural Fire Dept)

House Destroyed in Decatur

Investigators are working to find out what caused a home to burn down Tuesday night in Decatur. Firefighters were called to Hutsell Drive on New Year’s Eve to put out the fire. Nobody was inside at the time. Decatur Fire Chief Eddie Jewell says he believes the fire was not an accident and that somebody set the fire from inside the home. When crews arrived, the doors were locked and the homeowners’ dogs were already outside. (Photo courtesy of: newschannel9.com/)
Obituaries

Delores Gail Inzer Baker, age 66, of Cleveland died Wednesday at her residence. She was a Special Ed Teacher for Athens City School System. Funeral services will be Saturday at 7 p.m. at Ziegler Funeral Home with visitation from 5 to 7 p.m. at the funeral home.

More of 2019’s Big Stories

- In 2019, Athens Federal Community Bank merged with CapStar Bank and changed its name to CapStar.
- The SplashPad opened at Athens Regional Park.
- Former President George W. Bush was in Athens in June to speak at the annual Athens Chamber of Commerce fundraising dinner.
- On August 1st, John McLain became the new CEO at Starr Regional Medical Centers of Athens and Etowah.
- In August, Athens voters said yes to raising the local sales tax by .75%. The vote was 871 for and 703 against. The major portion of the new revenue will go to the Athens City Schools for a proposed new “mega school” at City Park School.
- Governor Bill Lee and other dignitaries were in Athens in September to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony of the new McMinn Higher Education Center.
- Dean Foods, the parent company of Mayfield Dairy, reported it had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Dean Foods said it may sell its business to the Dairy Farmers of America.
- Dr. Melanie Miller, director of the Athens City Schools, announced plans to retire effective next June 30th.
- In November, Joseph Wielzen was found guilty of first-degree murder and rape in the death of Kelsey Burnette of Etowah in 2017. He was sentenced to life without parole.

Church News and Events

- Athens Lutheran Church will be sponsoring bingo on Wednesday, January 8th, at 10 a.m. at the McMinn County Senior Activity Center. Lunch will follow at 11 a.m. provided by the members of Athens Lutheran Church.
- Jones Chapel UMC will have their 15th annual ladies conference, “Seasons of Life,” on January 11th from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Registration is at 8:30 a.m. The cost is $10 per person. Lunch will be served, The guest speaker will be Stephanie Greene from Benton. For more information, call Tammy Barker at 920-1236.
- Celebrate Recovery meets each Sunday at 6 p.m. at the Englewood Church of God.

Church of Niota

Chatta Valley Boys will be singing Sunday Morning at 10:45 at First Baptist Church of Niota
6 Main St.,
Downtown Niota
Please come and be Blessed
Sunday School: 9:45 (classes for all ages)
Worship Service: 10:45
Life on Wednesdays @ 6:00
Please come and Worship the Lord with Us
Everyone is Welcome!
Pastor: Cullen Conner

TODAY IN HISTORY - JANUARY 3rd
1521 - Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church.
1892 - J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the fantasy novel "Lord of the Rings," was born.
1938 - The March of Dimes campaign to fight polio was started. It was founded by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. It financed the research that produced the Salk and Sabin vaccines, which helped to prevent polio.
1959 - Alaska became the 49th state. The U.S. bought Alaska from Russia in 1867 for $7.2 million which amounted to about 2-cents per acre.
1961 - The United States severed diplomatic relations with Cuba.
1967 - Jack Ruby, the man who fatally shot accused presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, died in a Dallas hospital.
1990 - Ousted Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega surrendered to U.S. forces, 10 days after taking refuge in the Vatican’s diplomatic mission in Panama City.