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## Today's News...This Morning

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Thursday, December 26, 2024

Page 1

Athens, Tennessee

## Just In Case You Missed These Stories During Christmas

An investigation by the Tennessee Comptroller's Office revealed that officials with the City of Sweetwater made questionable credit card purchases totaling more than \$130,000 over the course of nearly a decade. According to the investigation, city officials made purchases totaling \$132,680.03 from December 2014 through June 2023, including at least \$2,615.99 the city paid in taxes and fees. According to the Comptroller's Office, the investigation revealed that officials failed to provide adequate oversight or separate financial duties, failed to establish an adequate prior approval system for purchases, failed to maintain adequate supporting documentation for purchases, failed to maintain adequate supporting documentation for city accounts, routinely paid sales taxes on city purchases and failed to establish adequate written policies governing city purchases. Investigators said city officials "indicated that they have corrected or intend to correct these deficiencies." **Source:** [WVLT.com](http://WVLT.com)

Clarksville Police charged 19-year-old Labron Gibson with four counts of Aggravated Assault following an argument they said lead to a shooting inside a Walmart in Clarksville on Christmas Eve. Investigators said Gibson was the primary aggressor in the incident, where he displayed a firearm. The second individual involved acted in defense of his family. Gibson was shot multiple times and police say he walked out of the Walmart and drove himself to a hospital 15 minutes away with non life-threatening injuries. **Source:** [Newschannel5.com](http://Newschannel5.com)

K-VA-T Food Stores Inc., operating as Food City, has agreed to pay \$8.49 million to settle allegations under the False Claims Act related to dispensing opioids and other controlled substances without ensuring medical necessity. The settlement includes \$78,621 paid to the states of Virginia and Kentucky for state Medicaid claims. The government alleged that, from 2011 to 2018, 24 Food City pharmacies dispensed medically unnecessary controlled substances, resulting in false claims to federal healthcare programs. These actions, according to officials, contributed to the opioid epidemic and jeopardized patient safety. The claims resolved by the settlement are allegations only. There has been no determination of liability. **Source:** [US Dept of Justice](http://US Dept of Justice)

Beloved singer Brenda Lee was honored recently for her classic Christmas song, "Rockin Around the Christmas Tree." The song, which Lee recorded in Nashville when she was just 13 years old, is now the official holiday song of Tennessee. Representative Jason Powell, who wrote the legislation, and Governor Bill Lee honored the emotional 79-year-old singer inside the Capitol's assembly chambers. Last December, "Rockin Around the Christmas Tree" made it to No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100, making Lee the oldest artist to ever top the chart. **Source:** [WKRN.com](http://WKRN.com)

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Thursday, December 26, 2024 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 2 Athens, Tennessee

## Obituaries

**Wanda Starr Patterson**, 89 of Athens, passed away on Monday, Dec. 23rd surrounded by her family at her home. She was a charter member of Fairview Baptist Church, and an avid sports fan. She was employed by Alfred's, A&P and Earl's supermarket. Funeral services will be 7 pm on Thursday, December 26 at Fairview Baptist Church. The graveside service will be at 11 am on Friday at McMinn Memory Gardens. The family will receive friends from 5-7 pm Thursday before the service at the church. Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home will be in charge of the arrangements.

**Mary Ellen McLeroy Cash**, 62, passed away peacefully at her home in Benton on December 20th. The family will have a graveside service on Friday, December 27, at Campground Cemetery (158 Campground Road, Reliance, TN) at 1:00 pm. Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

**Joy Thomason Mullinax**, 78 of Tellico Plains, and formerly of Athens, passed away on Monday, December 23 at a local health facility. Arrangements are pending and will be announced by Smith Funeral & Cremation Services of Athens.

**Billy Gene Hood**, 92 of Delano, went to be with his Lord on Saturday, December 21. He was a member of Faith Baptist Tabernacle in Athens. He enjoyed camping and rides in the mountains where he was raised. Billy was involved in prison ministries, playing and singing for his church, and worshipping the Lord. A celebration of life service will be held at 2:00pm on Friday, December 27, 2024 at Faith Baptist Tabernacle in Athens, with visitation prior to the service from 1pm until 2pm. Billy will be laid to rest following the service at Earl's Cemetery. Companion Funeral Home and the Cody family are honored to assist his family with these arrangements.

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## Eastern Hellbender Nears Extinction



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed listing the eastern hellbender, a giant salamander found in Tennessee and nearby states, as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Once abundant, only 59% of the eastern hellbender's historical 626 populations remain, with nearly 60% of those in decline. Only 12% of populations are considered stable. The eastern hellbender, North America's largest salamander, can grow up to 29 inches, live up to 30 years, and primarily resides in perennial streams,

hiding under rocks.

Key threats include habitat loss, water pollution, stream sedimentation, disease, and collection for the pet trade. The species, often called "snot otters," is considered vital for maintaining freshwater ecosystem health.

If listed as endangered, protections will prohibit harming, removing, or harassing the species, and federal agencies will need to coordinate with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure its conservation.

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Thursday, December 26, 2024 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 4 Athens, Tennessee

## Dont'e Thornton Jr. Declares for 2025 NFL Draft



After leading the Tennessee Volunteers in receiving during the 2024 season, wide receiver Dont'e Thornton Jr. announced his decision to enter the 2025 NFL Draft. Thornton capped his college career with a productive year, recording 661 receiving yards, six touchdowns, and averaging an impressive 25.4 yards per catch.

Thornton, a transfer from Oregon, overcame injuries and adjustments in his first year at Tennessee in 2023 to emerge as a key big-play threat in 2024. He led the FBS with six catches of 50+ yards and was responsible for five of Tennessee's six longest plays of the season, including an 86-yard touchdown against Vanderbilt and a 73-yard score versus Mississippi State. Despite battling a knee issue throughout the season,

Thornton recorded three 100-yard games and multiple highlight-reel performances.

Over his collegiate career, Thornton amassed 1,412 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns across stints at Oregon and Tennessee. The 6-foot-5, 214-pound wideout, a former four-star recruit from Baltimore, Maryland, completed his degree in communication studies this month and now turns his focus to the next chapter as he prepares for the NFL Draft.

Thornton thanked the Vols and their fans for their support, reflecting on his journey of resilience and growth during his time in Knoxville.

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