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Friday, January 16, 2026

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Athens, Tennessee

Heil Trailer to Invest Nearly \$10 Million in Athens Expansion, Add Jobs Through New Army Contract



Heil Trailer International, one of McMinn County's largest and longest-standing manufacturers, will expand its Athens operations with a nearly \$10 million investment tied to a new U.S. Army contract, bringing new jobs and advanced production capabilities to the community. State and company officials announced this week that Heil Trailer will invest \$9.8 million and create 18 new jobs after securing a 10-year contract with the U.S. Department of the Army to manufacture its Tactical Fuel Distribution System. The expansion will include new warehouse space, automated paint and welding systems, a new testing area, and an expanded welding and training school at the Athens facility.

"Heil Trailer's continued investment in Athens and McMinn County is a testament to the strength of our community and the partnerships that drive economic growth," Athens Mayor Larry Eaton said. "Investments like this not only create jobs but also reaffirm that Athens is a place where businesses can thrive."

The project strengthens Heil's role in national defense manufacturing while modernizing its local operations. Company leaders said the upgrades will support production efficiency and create new opportunities for skilled and technical workers. "EnTrans proudly supports Heil Trailer's TFDS manufacturing program, a milestone initiative that underscores both the strength of our partnership with the U.S. Army and our long-standing commitment to Athens," said Ryan Rockafellow, CEO of EnTrans International, Heil's parent company. "This program represents a monumental win for Heil Trailer, EnTrans and the Athens community."

Founded in 1901, Heil Trailer has operated in Athens since 1977 and will mark its 50th anniversary in Tennessee next year. The company is widely known locally for its tanker and specialty trailer manufacturing and is part of the EnTrans International family of brands, serving customers worldwide. McMinn County Mayor John Gentry said the expansion highlights the quality of the local workforce. "Heil Trailer produces approximately 50 percent of all tankers in the U.S., which means McMinn County's excellence and craftsmanship are on display throughout the nation," Gentry said.

State officials also praised the project as an example of Tennessee's manufacturing strength and pro-business climate, noting the expansion's impact on Southeast Tennessee's economy and workforce. *Source: TN ECD*

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Athens, Tennessee

Human Remains Found Near Etowah; Investigation Underway



Human remains were discovered Tuesday morning in a wooded area near the Parkstown Community just south of Etowah, according to McMinn County Sheriff Joe Guy. The remains were found around 11:30 a.m.

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation is leading the investigation with assistance

from the McMinn County Sheriff's Office. Sheriff Guy said the discovery may be connected to a local man who recently left his home in the area and did not return, though officials emphasized that the remains must undergo testing before a positive identification can be made.

The investigation remains ongoing. "Anytime someone is found like this, we want to be conscious of the family members and friends who might be affected," Sheriff Guy said. "They are certainly in our prayers."

Source: [Sheriff Joe Guy - Facebook](#)

Community News You Can Use

- Tennessee Wesleyan University will host a community celebration honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Tuesday, Jan. 20 from 11 a.m. to noon in the Johnson Event Center at Colloms Campus Center. The free event is open to the public and will feature keynote speaker Remonia "Lisa" Arwine-Dotson, a longtime Athens resident and community leader. The program will reflect this year's MLK Day theme, *"Building Community: Uniting in a Nonviolent Way,"* and highlight Arwine-Dotson's decades of service, leadership, and commitment to unity and positive change.
- The Athens City Council will meet in regular session on Tuesday, Jan. 20 at 6 p.m. in the Burkett L. Witt Council Chambers at Athens City Hall. Council members will consider multiple resolutions, including *declaring Jan. 25–30 as Athens Flood Awareness Week* and *authorizing applications for state, federal, and foundation grant funding for historical, transportation, and public safety projects.* *Fee schedule changes for baseball and softball field rentals* are also up for approval. New business includes *bid awards related to renovations at Regional Park, the sale of city-owned property on Decatur Pike, appointments to advisory committees, and mayoral appointments to the Athens Municipal Regional Planning Commission and Athens Housing Authority.*



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THIS WEEK
NEXT WEEK
EVERY WEEK

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Athens, Tennessee

Church News & Events

- *The Hymns-men Quartet* will be singing at Cambria Baptist Church, 305 County Road 875, Etowah, on Sunday, Jan. 18 at 6:PM.
- Everlasting Life Christian Center of Etowah will be hosting a program dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, January 19 at 2pm. Pastor Kevin Harris invites the community to attend the service at the church located at 1710 Hwy 411 South in Etowah.
- Southern Gospel Music Promotions will host [An Evening of Gospel Music](#), a benefit concert for Mary Ann Casey and her family, on Saturday, January 24, 2026, from 2 to 6 p.m. The event will be held at the Athens City Middle School Auditorium, located at 200 Keith Lane in Athens. Featured groups include Psalms 51, Clear Vision (Grand Stage NQC), and Saved by Grace. Admission is \$5. If the event must be postponed, it will be rescheduled for February 21. For more information, contact Randy Key at 423-920-6044, Mark Greeno at 304-445-5396, or Sue Granger at 423-507-4631.
- The gospel singing group [The Lawsons](#) will be featured in concert on Sunday, February 8, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at Solid Rock Baptist Church, located at 4975 Highway 11 South in Calhoun. The event is open to the public, and everyone is welcome to attend.
- [St. Mary's Legacy Clinic](#) offers free mobile medical care for the uninsured. 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.



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Athens, Tennessee

Medical Emergency Leads to Interstate Crash in McMinn County



A medical emergency is believed to have caused a single-vehicle crash Wednesday afternoon on the interstate in McMinn County.

At approximately 4:30 p.m., a 2016 Nissan Rogue traveling southbound near the 59-mile marker left the roadway after the 70-year-old male driver experienced a medical issue. The vehicle ran off the right side of the interstate, struck trees along the embankment, and rolled over.

The driver, who was the sole occupant of the vehicle, sustained minor injuries and was transported to Sweetwater Hospital by AMR ambulance as a non-emergency.

North McMinn Fire, Niota Rural Fire, and AMR responded to the scene. The Tennessee Highway Patrol is investigating the crash, led by Trooper Andrew Metelits.

Photos courtesy of David Prater, Niota Rural FD

McMinn County Arrest Reports

January 14, 2026

Siddhartha Reddy, 36 of Niota, charged with theft of property, reckless driving, Meigs County, criminal impersonation, Meigs County, Evading Arrest, Meigs County. Bond \$15,000.

James Brock, 60 of Athens, charged with possession of meth, and meth conspiracy, Bond \$200,000.

Houston Joseph, 33 of Calhoun, charged with contempt of court, being held with no bond.

Jamie McDowell, 43 of Niota, charged with failure to appear for simple possession, casual exchange.

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

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Friday, Jan. 16, 2026

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Athens, Tennessee

Obituaries

William A "Billy" Cline, Jr., 73 of Athens, passed away Tuesday, January 3, 2026 at his residence. He was a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and was associated with Mayfield Dairy for 30 years in maintenance. The family will receive friends at Smith Funeral Home Saturday, January 17, from 11:00am-2:00 pm. There will be a memorial service at St. Paul's Episcopal Church Saturday, January 24. Smith Funeral & Cremation Services of Athens is honored to serve the family of William "Billy" A. Cline, Jr.

Kenneth M. Jackson Sr. "Fuz" 81 of Etowah, passed away peacefully Monday, January 12. He retired from the U.S. Army as an E5 Staff Sergeant. Funeral services will be held Saturday, January 17, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. in the chapel of M.D. Dotson and Sons Funeral Home – Athens, TN with minister Elder Chester Brown officiating. The family will receive friends one hour before the service at the funeral home from 2:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. Interment will follow the service at Green Hill Cemetery in Etowah, TN with military honors. Services of loving memory entrusted to M.D. Dotson and Sons Funeral Home – Athens.

Annette Ferdig, 64, passed away December 18, 2025. A memorial service will be held Saturday, January 17 at 12:00 PM at Ascension Life Church, located on Rocky Mount Road. Good Samaritan Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Sara Bell Cupp, 82 of Decatur, passed away on Thursday, January 15. She was a faithful member of Concord Missionary Baptist Church. A funeral service will be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday, January 24, in the chapel of Decatur Funeral Home & Cremation Services. Interment will follow in the Meigs County Memorial Gardens. The family will receive friends from 12 - 2 p.m., prior to the service. Decatur Funeral Home & Cremation Services is honored to serve the Cupp Family.

Thomas Franklin Brown, 82 of Bradley County, passed Monday, January 12. He was a member of the Second Street Church of Christ in Cleveland, TN, and worked over twenty-six years as a custodian for Bradley County Schools. Funeral services will be held Friday, January 16 at 1:00 p.m. in the chapel of M.D. Dotson and Sons Funeral Home – Cleveland. The family will receive friends one hour before the service from 12:00 noon until 1:00 p.m. at the funeral home. Interment will follow the service at Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Cleveland, TN. Services of loving memory entrusted to M.D. Dotson and Sons Funeral Home-Cleveland.

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