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Tuesday, January 27, 2026

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Athens, Tennessee

Three Killed in Fiery Head-On Crash on Highway 68



A fatal head-on crash involving a stolen vehicle claimed three lives Friday morning on Highway 68 in McMinn County.

Authorities say a white Ford truck reported stolen out of Georgia was traveling northbound around 9:00 a.m. when it collided head-on with a minivan carrying two occupants. One person was inside the Ford truck. Both vehicles caught fire following the impact.

Law enforcement officers arrived within minutes and attempted to extinguish the flames using fire extinguishers. One occupant was pulled from the minivan, and life-saving measures were immediately attempted. Fire crews from North McMinn Rural Fire arrived shortly thereafter and fully extinguished the fire. Despite the efforts of first responders, the individual removed from the vehicle later succumbed to injuries. All three individuals involved in the crash were pronounced dead. Highway 68 remained closed for approximately six hours while emergency crews responded and investigators worked the scene.

Incident command was led by Stephen Capua of North McMinn Rural Fire, alongside Chad Gates of Niota Rural Fire and Chuck Burris of Athens Rural Fire. Numerous agencies assisted, including Clearwater Rural Fire, AMR, Tennessee Highway Patrol, McMinn County Sheriff's Office, Sweetwater Fire Department, Sweetwater Police Department, and McMinn County Hazardous Materials Operations. The incident remains under investigation.

Photo provided by the Niota Rural FD



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Athens, Tennessee

The Diary of Anne Frank Table Read TODAY

Athens Community Theatre will continue its 2025–2026 Table Read season with a public reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, **TODAY, Tuesday, Jan. 27**, at 6 p.m. at The Arts Center in Athens.

The table read, led by ACT Director Colby Pilkey, will feature the award-winning stage adaptation by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, which received both the Tony Award for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The play is based on Anne Frank's diary and portrays her family's life in hiding during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam in World War II. The reading is being held in observance of Holocaust Remembrance Month.

ACT's Table Read series offers a casual, welcoming environment where participants may read roles or attend as listeners. The events are free and open to the public and are designed to introduce community members to theatre productions under consideration while encouraging broader involvement in local arts. Those interested in receiving updates about future table reads may contact Athens Community Theatre by email at operations@athensartscouncil.org.

Community News You Can Use

- The Good Faith Clinic, in partnership with the Lions Club of Athens, will host a Remote Area Medical (RAM) medical, vision, and limited dental clinic on Saturday, February 21. The clinic is by appointment only and is open to the public. Services include medical care (including women's health), vision services, and limited dental care (extractions only). In-person sign-ups will be held on Thursday, January 29, from 3:00 to 4:15 p.m., with phone registration available afterward by calling 423-745-4541.
- Registrations for the 2026 McMinn County Little League and T-Ball programs are now open for the following age groups: 3/4 Tee Ball, 4/5/6 Coach Pitch, 6/7/8 Coach Pitch, 8/9/10 Baseball, 10/11/12 Baseball. Register by calling the Athens Parks and Recreation Office at 423-744-2704 or in person at Athens City Hall (815 N Jackson St, Athens TN 37303). Phone and in-person registration will not be available on holidays or weekends. Registration continues through March 1st, 2026.



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Athens, Tennessee

McMinn County Arrest Reports

January 25, 2026

Brian Presley, 39 of Vonore, charged with violation of probation for criminal impersonation, Bond \$700

Jimmy Jack, 63 of Englewood, charged with domestic assault, Bond \$1,000.

Grady Ratledge, 61 of Athens, charged with escape, state violation of probation for attempted aggravated assault, Bond \$10,000.

Melinda Burris, 44 of Madisonville, charged with violation of probation for theft, Bond \$2,500.

Travis Kuhn, 46 of Athens, charged with domestic assault, Bond \$2,000.

Robert Gregory, 27 of Athens, charged with felony aggravated domestic assault, Bond \$15,000.

Blake Armstrong, 32 of Spring City, charged with escape in Rhea County.

Gabrielle Owenby, 26 of Athens, charged with possession of meth, and drug paraphernalia, Bond \$20,000.

Casey Stiles, 38 of Knoxville, charged with simple possession of Schedule II, and child support, Bond \$11,500.

Christopher Nichols, 44 of Athens, charged with failure to appear for criminal trespassing, Bond \$62,000.

David Murphy, 30 of Etowah, charged with theft of property under \$1,000 in violation of probation for shoplifting, Bond \$2,730.35.

Tally Heartrent, 20 of Athens, charged with shoplifting, and theft of property, Bond \$1,000.

Wyatt Hoffner, 20 of Athens, charged with shoplifting, Bond \$1,000.

Nathan Linkus, 43 of Murphy, North Carolina, charged with DUI, and implied consent, Bond \$12,000.

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

Tennessee Wesleyan University invites qualified individuals to apply for the following positions:

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Click for full job descriptions and application information.



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Athens, Tennessee

Rising Gas Prices Across Tennessee During Winter Storm

Gas prices across Tennessee rose five cents ahead of the winter storm, bringing the statewide average to \$2.54 per gallon. That price is 10 cents higher than one month ago but remains 22 cents lower than this time last year. McMinn County mirrors the state average at \$2.54 per gallon.

Nationally, the average gas price stands at \$2.88, up six cents from last week. According to analysts, gasoline demand is typically lowest this time of year as winter weather keeps drivers off the roads, though demand is expected to increase by late February and early March with milder conditions and Spring Break travel.

Within Tennessee, the most expensive metro markets are Nashville at \$2.68, Cleveland at \$2.65, and Jackson at \$2.58. The least expensive markets include Morristown at \$2.40, Knoxville at \$2.41, and Kingsport-Bristol at \$2.43.

As winter weather continues to impact the region, motorists are reminded to take precautions when driving. Drivers should fully clear snow and ice from all parts of their vehicles, drive at slow and steady speeds while leaving extra following distance, and avoid using cruise control on slippery roads. Officials also recommend using low-beam headlights—and fog lights when available—to improve visibility during snow, rain, or fog.

Source: AAA Gas Prices

Obituaries

Robert "Bob" N. Kempf, Jr., 81, a resident of Athens and former resident of Atlanta, GA, passed away on Saturday, January 10. Bob was a born salesman, who was successful with a number of companies, including Gerber, Kimberly-Clark, Revlon, and Transus. His last job was as an associate of Crye-Leike Realty in Athens. Bob was a fun-loving guy who enjoyed sports cars (especially Corvettes), the Georgia Bulldogs and the Atlanta Falcons. Bob was a member of First Baptist Church in Athens for 14 years. A Celebration of Life will be held at First Baptist Church of Athens on Sunday, February 1 at 2:00 PM. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with serving the family of Robert "Bob" N. Kempf, Jr.

Larry Ford McKenzie, age 78, of Niota TN., entered his heavenly home Sunday, January 25, 2026 at Starr Regional Medical center of Athens. He was a native of McMinn. Larry was a loving and devoted Husband, Father, and Papa. He was retired from United States Soldiers and Airmans Home. He was an active member of McMahan Calvary Baptist Church for over 20 years where he also served as a deacon. He also loved to farm and spent time working at Athens Stockbarn. He was Co-Owner of Chocolate Delite of Athens where he was known as the Candy Man. Funeral services will be 6:00 PM Tuesday, January 27, 2026 in the chapel of Laycock-hobbs funeral home with Ricky Vaughn Greg Hutsell officiating. A graveside service will be Thursday, January 29, 2026 at 2:00 PM in McMinn Memory Gardens. The visitation will be 4-6PM prior the service on Tuesday. Laycock Hobbs Funeral Home Athens, TN in charge of arrangements.

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