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Wednesday, January 28, 2026

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Athens, Tennessee

All 14 Labor and Delivery Nurses Resign Following Sweetwater Hospital Unit Closure Announcement



All 14 nurses employed in the Sweetwater Hospital Association's (SHA) Labor and Delivery Department have submitted their two-week notices following the hospital's decision to close the unit.

SHA announced late last week that the Labor and Delivery Department will close on February 28, citing difficulties in maintaining specialty provider coverage along with financial challenges related to low reimbursement rates, rising operational costs, and declining patient volumes.

In a resignation letter obtained by 6 News, the nurses stated that a "significant breakdown in trust" led to their decision, adding that they no longer felt they could effectively function as employees of SHA.

Sarah Orteza, a nurse who has worked at SHA for 20 years, described the closure as devastating and deeply disappointing in a statement to 6 News. Orteza expressed concern for expectant mothers in the region, noting that many women may be unable to travel one to two hours to reach another hospital once labor begins. She warned that longer travel times could increase risks for both mothers and babies, potentially leading to more emergency deliveries at home, in vehicles, or in emergency rooms not equipped for childbirth.

The Sweetwater Hospital Labor and Delivery Department served patients from parts of Meigs, McMinn, Roane, and Loudon counties, as well as all of Monroe County.

Source: [WATE 6 News](#)

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Community News You Can Use

- The Athens Municipal Regional Planning Commission Work Session originally scheduled for Monday, January 26, 2026, has been rescheduled to Thursday, January 29, 2026, at 12:00 noon. The meeting will be held at Athens City Hall. No action will be taken.
- The Athens Area Chamber of Commerce will have a ribbon cutting this Thursday, January 29 at 4:30 p.m. for Elevate Men's Health & TRT. They are located at 200 North White Street in Athens.

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Registration Open for 2026 McMinn County Little League and T-Ball Season

Registration is underway for the 2026 McMinn County Little League and T-Ball season, giving children ages 3 to 12 the opportunity to participate in organized baseball programs this spring. Divisions offered include 3/4 Tee Ball, 4/5/6 Coach Pitch, 6/7/8 Coach Pitch, 8/9/10 Baseball, and 10/11/12 Baseball.

Registration opened December 1 and will continue through March 1, 2026. Online registration is available exclusively through January 12, with additional options to register online, by phone, or in person beginning January 13. Families may register online at www.mcminncountylittleleague.com, by calling the Athens Parks and Recreation Office at 423-744-2704, or in person at Athens City Hall, located at 815 N. Jackson St. Phone and in-person registration will not be available on holidays or weekends.

Financial assistance is available through the T-Mobile Little League Call Up Grant, which helps cover registration fees for families in need. The grant opens early on January 13, 2026, for eligible families in McMinn and Meigs counties.

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Two Structure Fires Reported Monday Morning in Madisonville Area



Firefighters from multiple agencies responded to two separate structure fires Monday morning in the Madisonville area, both requiring mutual aid.

The first fire was reported around 10 a.m.

on Cedar Lane. Mount Vernon Fire and Englewood Rural Fire arrived to find the structure heavily involved in flames. The homeowner reported the fire began inside a wall near a wood heater. Despite firefighting efforts, the structure was declared a total loss. Additional responding agencies included Notchey Creek Fire, Christianburg Fire, Athens Rural Fire, Etowah Rural Fire, Monroe County EMS, the McMinn County Sheriff's Department, Monroe County EMA, and Fort Loudoun Electric Cooperative. Mount Vernon Fire Chief Daniel Phillips was in command of the scene.

Photo provided by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural FD



Mutual aid was requested around 9:30 a.m. Monday for an incident on Hiwassee View Drive in Madisonville. Fire crews from Tri-Community Fire, Englewood Rural Fire, and Madisonville City Fire responded to the scene, along with Fort Loudoun Electric Cooperative, Monroe County EMS, the Monroe County Sheriff's Department, Madisonville Utilities, and Thompson Propane. Madisonville City Fire Chief Michael Smallen was in command.

Photo provided by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural FD



**Celebrating
School Board
Appreciation
Week**

January 25 - January 31



Front Row L to R: Bill Irvin, Vice Chairperson Donna Casteel, Chairman Jonathan Pierce, Tony Allman, Tony Campbell
Back Row L to R: Joe Malone, Dustin Prichard, Mike Cochran, Melasawn Knight, Interim Director of Schools, Taylor Cook, Kevin Goins



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

Athens, Tennessee

McMinn County Arrest Reports

January 26, 2026

David Sylvester, 39 of Athens, charged with schedule II meth, drug paraphernalia, implied consent, DUI, and possession of a handgun while under the influence.

Robert Deschamps, 41 of Niota, charged with state violation of probation for burglary.

Those accused are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Information gathered using Public Sources.

We encourage you to e-mail community events, church news, or other items of interest for possible use in The Morning Fax.

If you take a newsworthy photograph, send it to:
wyradio@gmail.com

Obituaries

Clarence Alvin Sweet, 86 originally of Clinton, TN, passed away on Tuesday, January 27. He graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1962, receiving a bachelor's degree in engineering. He worked for TVA, Y12, and K25 in Oak Ridge, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, Tennessee as a nuclear engineer for 40 plus years. A private, family service will be held to honor Alvin's life on Sunday, February 1. Announcement by Smith Funeral and Cremation Services of Athens.

Larry Ford McKenzie, 78 of Niota., passed away on Sunday, January 25. He was retired from United States Soldiers and Airmans Home. He was an active member of McMahan Calvary Baptist Church for over 20 years, and was co-owner of Chocolate Delite of Athens where he was known as the Candy Man. Funeral services and visitation was held on Tuesday, January 27 in the chapel of Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home. A graveside service will be Thursday, January 29 at 2:00 PM in McMinn Memory Gardens. Laycock Hobbs Funeral Home Athens in charge of arrangements.

Sam Shanahan, 56 of Madisonville, passed away on Monday, January 26. Funeral Services will be 7:00 PM Thursday, January 29 in the chapel of Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home. Graveside services will be 11:00 AM Friday, January 30 at Sweetwater Memorial Park. The family will receive friends from 5-7 PM Thursday prior to the service at the funeral home. Laycock-Hobbs Funeral Home in Athens is in charge of the arrangements.

Dorothy Lawwill, 98 born in Nippi, KY, passed away on Saturday, January 24. Funeral services will be held at 2:00 PM, Friday, January 30th in the chapel of Bordwine Funeral Home. A visitation will be held on Friday, January 30 from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM at Bordwine Funeral Home in Etowah. Interment will follow the funeral service in Etowah Cemetery. Bordwine Funeral Home of Etowah is in charge of arrangements.



Celebrating School Board Appreciation Week

January 25 - January 31



(Left to Right) Stan Harrison, Beth Jackson, Emily Forrest, Chris Adams (Chairman), Johnny Coffman (Vice Chairman), Joe Barnett (Director of Schools)