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Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Page 1

Athens, Tennessee

TWU to Host Lecture on U.S.–Iran Conflict and Global Impact



Tennessee Wesleyan University will host a public lecture examining the evolving conflict between the United States and Iran on **Thursday, March 26 at 6:30 p.m.**, offering a timely look at one of the world's most significant geopolitical issues.

The lecture, titled *“Iran and the United States: The Current Conflict, Historical Continuities, and Global Implications,”* will be presented by **John B. Seitz** (pictured on left), assistant professor of history at TWU. The event will take place in the Glenn Lowe Room inside Sherman Hall and is open to both students and the community.

Seitz will place current tensions in a broader historical context, exploring how past relations continue to shape present-day developments. The discussion will also examine recent military actions and their potential ripple effects on global energy systems, agriculture, and U.S. alliances.

University officials say the lecture provides an opportunity for attendees to better understand the deeper roots and worldwide implications of the conflict, as well as how international events can influence economic and political stability closer to home. *Source: Chrisi Jackson, TWU*

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Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Morning Fax@...Today's News This Morning Page 2

Athens, Tennessee

Community News You Can Use

- Governor Bill Lee will be visiting in Meigs County today. He will be at the Meigs County Courthouse at 12 noon. He will also be in Athens at 1:30 pm at the Mayfield Visitors Center. The governor is visiting all 95 Tennessee Counties this year to help celebrate America's 250th Birthday.
- The City of Athens Board of Zoning Appeals meeting that was set for March 25 has been cancelled as they didn't have any agenda items for the month of March.
- The Tennessee Highway Safety Office and Tennessee Highway Patrol will partner with Tennessee Department of Transportation and local agencies on Wednesday, April 1, for "Operation Hands Free," a statewide effort to enforce Tennessee's Hands-Free Law during Distracted Driving Awareness Month. The campaign will include press events and enforcement efforts across the state, including in Knoxville. Officials remind drivers that it is illegal to hold a phone while driving, with violations resulting in fines and points on a driving record.

Riceville Fire Department Receives Grant for New Emergency Response Vehicle



The Riceville Volunteer Fire Department has received a \$34,098 grant from the Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation to enhance emergency response capabilities in the community.

The funding will be used to purchase a Polaris Ranger Crew XP 1000 NorthStar Edition utility all terrain vehicle and accessories, allowing first responders to reach off-road and hard-to-access areas more quickly. Officials say the vehicle will help transport personnel and equipment, assist in rescues, and improve fire suppression efforts in locations not accessible by traditional fire apparatus.

Fire Chief Brandon Ainsworth said the department is grateful for the support, noting the new equipment will strengthen their ability to protect lives and serve the community. The foundation has awarded more than \$105 million in grants to public safety organizations nationwide since 2005.

Source: Brandon Ainsworth, Riceville Volunteer FD

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Wednesday, March 25, 2026 Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 3 **Athens, Tennessee**

McMinn County Schools Receives Additional Utrust Grant, Bringing Total to \$39,300

McMinn County Schools recently received a \$19,700 mini-grant from Utrust, bringing the district's total funding from the organization this year to \$39,300.

The latest grant, awarded to Personnel Coordinator Kim Bivens, will support staff appreciation efforts across the district, reinforcing initiatives aimed at strengthening school culture and recognizing the role each employee plays in student success. Earlier in the year, Utrust awarded \$15,600 in grants to six schools participating in its Appreciation Program and Culture Initiative.

An additional \$4,000 grant, designated by school board member Donna Casteel, funded physical education equipment for Mountain View Elementary and iPads for E.K. Baker Elementary. Director of Schools Melasawn Knight said the funding helps ensure staff feel valued and recognized as an essential part of the district's success.

Utrust Administrator Dan Tollett said the grants are intended to support meaningful projects that might not otherwise be possible. McMinn County is among 51 school systems statewide receiving Utrust mini-grants this year, totaling more than \$1 million in funding.

More details found on table to the right. ➡

Source: Kim Bivens, MCS

School	Grant	Principal	School Coordinator
Central High School	\$2,300	Jacob Slack	Katrina Kilby
E.K. Baker Elementary	\$1,500	Cody Casteel	Amy Howell
Englewood Elementary	\$2,300	Kristi McDonald	Kristi McDonald
McMinn County High	\$4,600	Joe Young	Jennifer Miller
Mountain View Elementary	\$2,300	Mindy Casteel	Lisa Rule
Riceville Elementary	\$2,600	Glen Puryear	Hailey Rayburn

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McMinn County Arrest Reports

March 23, 2026

Devin Plemons, 28 of Sweetwater, charged with schedule 2 meth, state violation of probation from Monroe County, and drug paraphernalia, Bond \$14,000.

Gavin Cochran, 18 of Decatur, charged with domestic assault, Bond \$2,000.

Luke Hawley, 32 of Etowah, charged with DUI.

Michael Culberson, 72 of Englewood, charged with conspiracy to commit attempted burglary, assault and resisting stop, Bond \$11,500.

Ashley Clover, 40 of Wiggins, Missouri, charged with simple possession casual exchange of schedule 2 fentanyl, and drug paraphernalia, Bond \$21,000.

Buford Hackler, 55 of Englewood, charged with aggravated assault, criminal impersonation, public intoxication and criminal attempt, Bond \$27,000.

Jeffrey Cross, 62 of Athens, Charged with violation of probation for criminal simulation, Bond \$866.45.

Donna Hawkins, 63 of Calhoun, charged with schedule 2 meth, schedule 4 xanax, schedule 6 marijuana, and drug paraphernalia, Bond \$18,500.

Harley Fisher, 25 of Englewood, charged with schedule 2 meth for resale, driving while in possession of meth, and drug paraphernalia, Bond \$14,000.

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

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Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 5

Athens, Tennessee

Obituaries

Judith Faye Davis Biddle, 89, of Athens, passed away on Sunday, March 22nd. She attended the new Ingleside Elementary School and McMinn County High School. After high school she graduated Cum Laude from the University of Tennessee Knoxville with a B.S in Business Administration. She was an active member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Funeral services will be held Monday, March 30th at 2:00 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Athens. Smith Funeral and Cremation Services of Athens is handling arrangements.

Raymond J. Rappleye, 84, of Sweetwater, passed away on Sunday, March 22. He spent more than 50 years as a professional driver and owner/operator, finding purpose and pride in the trucking and transportation industry. He had a genuine love for the road, the work, and the community that came with it. Outside of his career, he enjoyed NASCAR racing and the camaraderie and excitement it brought him. A celebration of his life will be held on Saturday, April 11, from 2:00-4:00 PM, at his family home in Sweetwater, Tennessee. Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

Hannelore "Honey" Freeman, 82, of Etowah, passed away on Tuesday, March 17. She loved to garden, specifically her flower garden. She loved going to yard sales and flea markets. Honey loved to cook, especially for her family. Family was everything to Honey, she was their glue and caretaker. The family will hold a Celebration of Life Visitation on Saturday, March 28, 2026 from 10:00am-12:00pm at Companion Funeral Home of Athens. Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

Rita Packett, 71, passed away on Friday, March 13. She was born at Fort Benning Army Base in Georgia. She had a very outgoing personality that often seemed larger than life. Rita always loved the outdoors, animals, and being with friends. She was a graduate of McMinn Central High School and Cleveland State Community College. As per her final wishes, there will be no official services beyond cremation and a small gathering to remember her and spread her ashes at a later time. Companion Funeral Home of Athens and the Cody family are honored to assist the family with these arrangements.

Gennis Ray "Scoot" Belcher, 79, of Englewood, passed away on Monday, March 23. A 1964 graduate of Englewood High School, "Scoot" devoted much of his life to his profession, retiring after an impressive 42 years of dedicated service at Olin Chemical Corporation. He was a member of the Englewood First Baptist Church. Per his request no formal visitation will be held. Family and friends will assemble at McMinn Memory Gardens on Friday, March 27 for a 2:00 PM graveside service. Bordwine Funeral Home in charge of arrangements.

Zane Gibson, 55, passed away at his residence on Monday, March 23. He was a beloved member of the New Zion Baptist Church and held deeply to his Baptist faith throughout his life. Funeral services will be held at 2:00 p.m., Saturday, March 28 in the chapel of Bordwine Funeral Home. The family will receive friends from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m., Saturday prior to the service. Interment will follow the service in Goodsprings Cemetery. Bordwine Funeral Home of Etowah is in charge of arrangements.



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