

Tennessee CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2024 CUSTOMER FOCUSED COMMUNITY DRIVEN

Spring Into Action

Erwin Utilities values community partners

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ALSO INSIDE
Young Unicoi County students learn electrical safety from Louie the Lightning Bug.
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Lineworker Appreciation Day



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Tennessee CONNECTIONS

Spring 2024 • Volume 3, No. 3

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Published quarterly to keep you informed of noteworthy events and important issues at your utility, **Tennessee Connections** is produced with the assistance of Pioneer Utility Resources Inc. Formed in 1954, the not-for-profit Oregon-based cooperative corporation serves the communication needs of consumer-owned electric utilities across the country.

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Subscription services:
 Noncustomer subscriptions \$10 U.S. a year,
 \$12 foreign a year. Prepayment required. Allow
 4-8 weeks for first issue. Identify local edition
 desired. Send orders to 5625 NE Elam Young
 Pkwy, Ste. 100, Hillsboro, OR 97124-6422.
 Have a problem receiving your magazine?
 Utility customers should contact their utility
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 Call before you dig.**

Safe digging is no accident. One easy call to 811 gets utility lines in your yard marked and helps protect you from injury and expenses.



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Spring Into Action With Community Partnerships

When you think of a utility company, what do you think of? Perhaps electric and water services? Maybe internet service? While all these are absolutely correct, have you ever wondered what else your utility company may be doing for your community?

For nearly 80 years, Erwin Utilities has served as a cornerstone in the community, providing electric, water, wastewater, and—most recently—fiber optic broadband and voice services. In addition to those core services, Erwin Utilities has actively worked to promote the overall growth, advancement and well-being of the community.

“Community and economic growth are essential for our community’s continued success,” said Lee Brown, President and CEO of Erwin Utilities. “Our employees come to work each day to make a difference through safe, reliable and efficient service and are committed to building a brighter future for our community.”

Erwin Utilities has worked to establish various community partnerships, including working alongside Unicoi County Schools. For decades, EU has partnered with the school system to educate students on everything from energy and water conservation to electrical safety and power generation.

Pre-K through first grade students learn electrical safety tips from Louie the Lightning Bug. Erwin Utilities has presented the program in Unicoi County Schools since the early 1990s. Jo Cole, Director of Office Services at Erwin Utilities, was one of the first employees to share Louie the Lightning Bug in Unicoi County classrooms.

“It’s an experience I look back on fondly,” said Cole. “I loved seeing the children’s faces light up when they would see Louie. He has made an impact that’s stretched across generations. Many adults today recall the Louie videos, songs and classroom visits from their elementary school days. This program has stood the test of time and will be one that Erwin Utilities will continue to use as a reminder for children to ‘Play It Safe Around Electricity!’”

Fourth graders are able to witness the jolting dangers of electricity through the company’s safety demonstration, Voltage Valley. Joseph Wigington, an engineer at EU, assembled Voltage Valley 10 years ago. The demonstration uses a real electrical charge and depicts dangerous scenarios, like going near substations or downed power lines. Wigington says teaching students about electrical safety is imperative to the community.

“These kids are so smart,” said Wigington. “They pick up on complex subjects quickly. We just need them to learn electrical safety at a young age so they can lead this community’s safety culture.”

Erwin Utilities has offered educational opportunities to the general public for years as well. Team members participate in the Tennessee Trails & Tunes (formerly Erwin Outdoor Festival) annually, holding their ‘Let’s Dig Table’ where children can look for treasures and learn about electrical, water and fiber optic lines buried underground. Additionally, team members have provided assistance to individuals



EU team members Brittnee Bryant and Tammy Patterson pose with Louie the Lightning Bug.



EU engineer Joseph Wigington teaches fourth grade students the jolting dangers of electricity through the safety demonstration, Voltage Valley.

at the Senior Center through workshops on home energy evaluations. The utility's most recent endeavors include hosting community outreach events. Customer Service Representative Katie Green has taken the lead on organizing these events.

"The purpose of the Community Outreach events is to reach our customers and our community in a different, more personal way," said Green. "We have several methods of communication with our customers, but I think these in-person events help give a better understanding of what Erwin Utilities stands for: service. We strive to be a helper and leader in our community. Providing these in-person education events about services and programs we are affiliated with gives a better opportunity for our customers to have a voice and ask questions."

Erwin Utilities has held three community outreach events in the past year. The first focused on financial assistance, the second on energy efficiency and the most recent on fiber internet. Plans are in the works to hold additional outreach events.

Erwin Utilities has sought to continue outreach efforts in other ways besides education. It partners with TVA to aid customers with their energy bills for a number of years through both funding and assistance programs. Through TVA's Home Uplift Program, an income-eligible customer can receive an average of \$10,000 in funds for home energy upgrades. EU works alongside TVA to ensure customers have access to this program. The Erwin Utilities Good Samaritan Fund provides energy bill assistance to customers as well. The program uses money from Erwin Utilities' Round-Up program. Through this program, customers' bills are rounded to the nearest dollar; this extra change then goes to the Neighborhood Service Center to be administered. More than 370 households have

been served, and more than \$145,000 in funds have been distributed since 2020.

To help enrich the community as a whole, Erwin Utilities partners with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Relay for Life, United Way, Second Harvest Food Bank, Keeping the Valley Beautiful and Marsh Regional Blood Center to facilitate volunteer opportunities.

In partnership with KVB, employees from all five of EU's departments have helped collect thousands of pounds of trash during the "No Trash November" campaign. In 2023, 2,500 pounds of trash was collected in the county.

In partnership with Marsh, EU hosts several blood drives each year. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one blood donation can save up to three lives. Since 2019, more than 330 pints of blood have been collected at blood drives hosted by EU; that's more than 1,000 lives potentially saved.

"We are so appreciative of Erwin Utilities' commitment to save lives locally through Marsh Regional Blood Center," said Maci Andrews, manager, Marketing Communications at Ballad Health. "The Erwin community always steps up, and we are so thankful for our community partners like EU."

Marsh will hold four blood drives at Erwin Utilities in 2024, the first on March 26. For an appointment, call 423-743-1820 or email blooddrive@e-u.cc.

Erwin Utilities has served the residents in Erwin and Unicoi County since 1945 and continues to volunteer, educate and contribute to the community through more than just its essential services. Next time you think of your utility, perhaps you might ponder what else they do for you and your community. ■



EU's Fiber Department participates in No Trash November. From left are Connor Simpson, Sam McInturff, Logan Morrow, Craig Buchanan, John Folsom, Dan Steuber, Jonathan Blackley, Howard Morris and Steven Smith.



EU employees volunteer for a project with Habitat for Humanity.

Ripple Effect

Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful group protects river watershed

By Sara Diamond Patterson

Do you know what the most prevalent plastic pollution in our waterways is?

Disposable water bottles? Good guess, but no.

Grocery bags? They're annoyingly everywhere but are not the most common.

Give up? It's cigarette butts. Each year, Americans toss 9.7 billion tightly wound, single-use plastic-filled filters, according to the latest Keep America Beautiful figures. Studies have found that once in the water, a discarded butt contains enough toxins to kill aquatic life within two surrounding gallons.

It's estimated that 75% of cigarettes purchased end up on the ground, but the effort of a local conservation group is starting to make inroads before they wash into our precious waterways. The Tennessee Recycling Coalition recognized Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful as the

2023 Nonprofit Recycler of the Year for its cigarette litter prevention collaboration with Dollywood. Since the program's launch in 2021, educational and attractive cigarette receptacles set up by KTNRB at the theme park have led to the recycling of more than 350,000 cigarette butts.

"We're so proud of this honor, more than anything, because of the commitment from Dollywood and the other supporting partners who worked to ensure that this trailblazing collaboration would protect the Tennessee River watershed from the harmful effects of cigarette litter," KTNRB Executive Director Kathleen Gibi says..

Protecting the watershed from trash is the primary function of KTNRB, the nation's only water-focused Keep America Beautiful affiliate. Since 2016, approximately 4,000 volunteers have helped remove 620,696 pounds of trash along the 652-mile Tennessee River and its tributaries during group-sponsored cleanup events.

KTNRB has overseen the adoption of more than 200 river miles, with adoptees removing more than 100,000 pounds of garbage on their own.

"Our mission is to educate and inspire people to take action to create a healthy, beautiful Tennessee River for generations to come," Kathleen says.

She sees her group filling a transitional and educational role as more people become aware of the harmful effects of aquatic pollution. Her focus is to eradicate legacy litter—the long-term piles upon piles of trash accumulated over the years by everything from dumping to careless butt-tossing.

A Shared Vision

Thanks to partners such as Tennessee Valley Authority, the group bought two 26-foot work boats and a truck for hauling the seemingly endless bags of trash volunteers gather.



Volunteers celebrate a successful day cleaning up the Tennessee River watershed. PHOTOS BY KEEP THE TENNESSEE RIVER BEAUTIFUL



Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful Executive Director Kathleen Gibi brings in another boatful of trash gathered along the banks of the river.

“We wouldn’t exist if not for TVA,” Kathleen says. “They helped us to start up and are the main reason we have been able to buy our two boats.”

Helping out groups such as KTNRB is a win-win for TVA, says Melinda A. Watson, partnerships and strategic integration manager for the utility.

“Creating partnerships and involving others in the care of the Valley’s natural resources is a goal for TVA,” she says. “TVA is proud to have been an important part of helping KTNRB get on their feet, and we see ourselves continuing to be involved at some level into the future. We are aligned in our goals of a clean and beautiful Tennessee River system.”

Kathleen was heartened this past October during a Keep the Tennessee River Watershed Beautiful Month revisit to a boat ramp where the group held an extensive legacy-litter cleanup four years earlier. Because it is at a popular campground, Kathleen said she expected to see piles of litter upon their return.

“It was so exciting to see it was spotless in the area we had been before,” she says. “This means people are cleaning up litter as they’re seeing it.”

Reinforcing this mindset—clean up as you go along—is the ultimate goal of her group, which encourages the adoption and maintenance of mile-long sections of the river.

“That’s the end game,” she says. “We come into the major sites with our crews

and get rid of the legacy litter. Then the adopters take over monitoring their mile and reporting any issues to us.”

That’s where the education component of KTNRB flows. Changing habits takes time.

“Cigarette smoking is second nature to some cultures around the world, and some people don’t think of tossing a butt as littering,” Kathleen says. “We’re trying to help change that.”

Melinda agrees people can alter their habits.

“Bringing awareness to the results of one’s actions is the first step in changing behavior,” she says. “In addition to education, it is also important to make it easy to not litter.”

As Dollywood prepares for its opening season, the receptacles will be ready for another record-breaking round of recycling. And KTNRB will continue scheduling cleanups until the group finds itself obsolete.

“We’re not river custodians,” Kathleen says. “We’d love to see such a reduction in litter that we work ourselves out of the business of larger river cleanup efforts, and then we can focus on something like planting trees.” ■

To volunteer for one of KTNRB’s spring cleanup events, you only need a willing attitude and a good pair of shoes. For the schedule of upcoming cleanups, visit keepthriverbeautiful.org/upcomingcleanups.



Cleaning up decades’ worth of “legacy litter” remains the group’s focus.

Riverfront Property Adoption Available

Can't make it to one of the Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful cleanup events? They have made it possible to adopt and maintain individual portions of the 652 miles of shoreline on your own time.

Families, organizations and individuals can claim 1 mile or more—on one or both sides of the river—and oversee its ongoing preservation. Any shoreline you adopt is yours to maintain. The Adopt-a-River Mile program provides free supplies to keep your area clean, incentives—such as T-shirts and water bottles—and recognition.

Visit www.keepthriverbeautiful.org/adopt for a list of available miles.

KTNRB by the Numbers

Since 2016, volunteers have removed 600,000 pounds of trash from the Tennessee River system.

Multiple records were broken in 2023:

- ▶ Most trash removed in one year: 218,719 pounds.
- ▶ Most volunteers in one year: 994.
- ▶ Most trash removed in one hour: 31,115 pounds, achieved by 172 employees of Clayton Homes.

Other 2023 milestones:

- ▶ Received state award for cigarette butt recycling partnership with Dollywood.
- ▶ Surpassed 210 river-mile adoptions.
- ▶ River-mile adopters removed 107,317 pounds of trash.
- ▶ Placed 1,000 cigarette receptacles in a seven-state watershed.
- ▶ Won four state awards from the Tennessee Recycling Coalition and three state awards from the Tennessee Department of Transportation.
- ▶ Established first permanent headquarters at the Duncan Boat Dock in Knoxville.
- ▶ Expanded fleet to two boats and one truck.



Celebrating the enormous bottom-dwelling river monsters

By Sara Diamond Patterson

Once a year, along the banks of the French Broad River, a window to prehistoric times opens.

Enter the mighty sturgeon—giant fish that can stretch up to 9 feet long and tip the scales at a whopping 300 pounds—that have made their home along Tennessee’s river bottoms for 120 million years. They have changed little since they shared the Earth with the dinosaurs, but in the 1960s,

their numbers began dwindling as dam construction, commercial fishing for their caviar and pollution took a toll.

Governmental and private groups rallied, initiating one of the country’s most extensive conservation projects. Since 2000, more than 250,000 young sturgeons have been stocked in the Holston, French Broad and upper Tennessee rivers.

With help from the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Administration launched

Sturgeonfest in 2014 to celebrate the next generation of sturgeons. The most recent version brought out hundreds to Seven Islands State Birding Park in Kodak for the opportunity to scoop up a squirming baby fish and gently release it into the sparkling French Broad River.

“From the get-go, this event has been so beloved,” says Park Manager Justine Cucchiara. “It just has such a light touch and the best vibe. Maybe it’s because the baby sturgeons are just so dang cute, but it always

feels more like a neighborhood party.”

Attendees were fascinated with and respectful of their tiny charges, and the day flowed naturally. Justine says the secret is to keep the event manageable.

“We put out a limited word through the Facebook page and other social media,” she says. “We offered time-designated 1,000 sign-up slots to release a baby fish, and they all went in just a few days.”

The beauty of the surrounding area and the cleanliness of the French Broad makes Seven Islands an ideal location to interact with such a unique species, Justine says. Vendors, food trucks and demonstrations by raptors visiting from the nearby American Eagle Foundation contributed to the block party atmosphere.

Even though there was no fee to release a baby, fin fans supplied more than \$800 in donations toward next year’s Sturgeonfest

and ongoing conservation efforts.

As a protected species, sturgeon must be released and reported if caught. TWRA agents use the information gathered and an extensive tagging program to keep tabs on the population in Tennessee’s rivers.

Knoxville’s Kristin Majni, attending Sturgeonfest with her husband and 2-year-old son, eagerly anticipated meeting a much smaller version of a fish she encountered a few years ago.

“I was fortunate enough to join a TWRA-tagging trip one time, and I caught a 5-foot sturgeon,” she says. “I’m so excited to see what a 5-inch one looks like.”

The females begin breeding at 24 to 26 years of age, so the sturgeon released in 2000 might be having their own babies soon. With a 150-year lifespan, it’s possible these babies will help hold their numbers for another several million years. ■



Seven Islands State Birding Park Manager Justine Cucchiara enjoys Sturgeonfest as a ranger and as a mom with her son, Luca.



This tiny sturgeon could grow to be 9 feet long and weigh up to 300 pounds. PHOTOS BY SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON



Crowds remained steady all day for the opportunity to release a baby sturgeon into the French Broad River.

Electrical Safety

During and After Storms

Severe storms and natural disasters can cause a variety of electrical safety hazards in and around our homes. Lightning, downed power lines and floods are just a few of the serious safety concerns associated with storms. Many of these electrical safety hazards remain long after the storm has passed.

To help protect you from storm-related electrical hazards, the Electrical Safety Foundation International and your electric utility, provide answers to frequently asked safety questions.

Lightning

What should I do if I am caught outside during a lightning storm?

Move to a low point. Lightning hits the tallest available object, so get down low in a crouched position if you are in an exposed area. Stay away from trees.

Avoid metal. Don't hold onto metal items like bats, golf clubs, fishing rods, tennis rackets or tools. Stay away from metal sheds, clotheslines, poles and fences.

Stay away from water, including pools, lakes, puddles and anything damp—like grass.

Don't stand close to other people. Spread out.

What should I do if I encounter a lightning storm while driving in my car?

Slow down and use extra caution. If possible, pull off the road into a safe area.

Do not leave your vehicle during a thunderstorm. A

vehicle is considered safe during a thunderstorm if it is fully enclosed with a metal top such as a hard-topped car, minivan, bus, truck, etc. While inside a safe vehicle do not use electronic devices.

Are we safe from lightning if we stay inside the house?

Follow these indoor lightning safety tips to help keep your family safe inside while it's storming outside:

- Stay away from windows and doors.
- If possible, unplug electronic equipment before the storm arrives. Avoid contact with electrical equipment and cords during storms.
- Avoid contact with water and plumbing, including sinks, baths and faucets.

Power Lines

What should I do if I spot a downed power line?

If you see a downed power line, move at least 10 feet away from the line and anything touching it. The human body is a ready conductor of electricity.

The proper way to move away from the line is to shuffle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times. This will minimize the potential for a strong electric shock.

Electricity wants to move from a high voltage zone to a low voltage zone—and it could do that through your body.

What can I do to help someone who has come in contact with a downed power line?

If you see someone who is in direct or indirect contact with a downed line, do not touch the person. You could become the next victim.

Call 911 instead.

Can I use something that is not metal to try to move a downed power line myself?

Do not attempt to move a downed power line or anything in contact with the line by using another object such as a broom or stick. Even non-conductive materials like wood or cloth, if slightly wet, can conduct electricity and then electrocute you.

What should I do if I see a downed power line in the street while driving my car?

Do not drive over downed power lines. If you are in your car and it is in contact with the downed line, stay in your car. Tell others to stay away from your vehicle.

If you must leave your car because it's on fire, jump out of the vehicle with both feet together. Avoid contact with the live car and the ground at the same time. This way you avoid being the path of electricity from the car to the earth. Shuffle away from the car.

Is a downed power line still dangerous if it has come down in water?

Water is a good conductor of electricity. Any amount of water—even a puddle—could become energized. Be careful not to touch water—or anything in contact with the water—near where there is a downed power line.

Wet Electrical Equipment

My home wasn't flooded, but some electrical appliances have gotten wet. What safety rules apply to my situation?

Do not use electrical appliances that have been wet until they have been examined by a qualified service repair dealer. Water can damage the motors in electrical appliances, such as furnaces, freezers, refrigerators, washing machines and dryers.

Portable Generators

Is there anything special I should know about installing a new generator?

ESFI strongly recommends a licensed electrician install home generators to ensure they meet all local electrical codes.

Also, make sure your generator is properly grounded in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Can't I just plug my generator directly into one of my home's outlets?

Do not connect generators directly to the household wiring unless an appropriate transfer switch has been installed by a licensed, qualified electrician.

Without the proper transfer switch, power provided by the generator can "backfeed" along the power lines, creating a significant electrocution hazard for anyone coming in contact with the lines, including lineworkers making repairs.

I've heard generators should be kept dry. Can I run it in my garage to protect it from the rain?

Never operate a generator inside your home or in any other enclosed—or even partially enclosed—area. Generators produce carbon monoxide, which can quickly

and easily enter your home. Opening windows or doors or using fans does not provide adequate ventilation to prevent the buildup of carbon monoxide.

Place the generator on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure. Do not operate the generator in wet conditions or where there is standing water.

Remember your neighbors, too. Keep your generator a safe distance away from their homes as well.

Preliminary research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Standards and Technology indicates even 15 feet from the home is too close to operate a generator safely.

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas created when common fuels such as natural gas, oil, wood or coal burn incompletely. This odorless, colorless, tasteless gas is called the “silent killer” because it is virtually undetectable without the use of detection technology like a CO alarm.

Extremely high levels of carbon monoxide can be fatal within minutes.

More than 80% of carbon monoxide deaths related to portable generators occur in the home, often resulting from operation of a portable generator within the living space of the home, including the basement, closets and doorways.

What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning may include fatigue, shortness of breath, drowsiness, headache, and nausea. Get to fresh air

right away if you feel dizzy or weak while running your generator.

Post-Evacuation

The storm is over. Can I go home now?

First and foremost, do not

return home until instructed by the appropriate local authorities. Once they give the go-ahead:

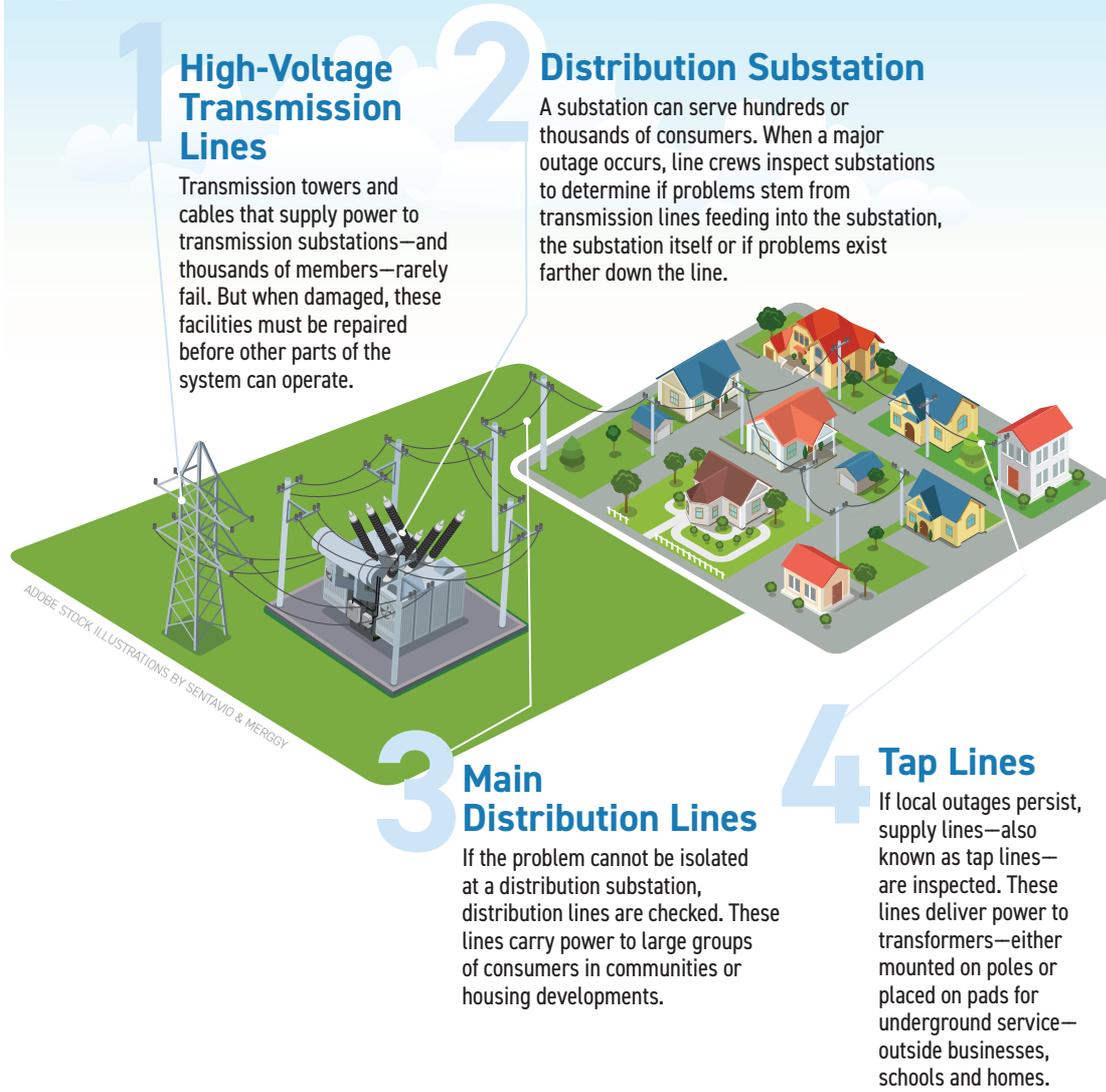
- Return home during daylight hours, especially if power has not been restored.
- If you smell gas, leave the

premises and notify emergency authorities immediately. Do not turn on lights, light matches, or engage in any activity that could create a spark.

Even if you have been authorized to return home, you should still take precautions. ■

How Power Is Restored

When the power goes out, we expect it to be restored within a few hours. But when a major storm or natural disaster causes widespread damage, extended outages may result. Line crews work long, hard hours to restore service safely to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible.



Eggstraordinary

By Anne Braly

There's no argument that decorated eggs and the accompanying hunt are among the first things that come to mind when we think of Easter. Also on the list are the traditions of gathering with family for a meal. Most Easter feasts feature ham or lamb, but the side dishes and desserts are often the stars of the meal.

What Easter buffet is complete without a plate of deviled eggs? And spring peas make a wonderful savory/sweet addition. Then

there's the corn pudding, a Southern favorite representing the coming season.

You may want to set an extra table to show off the bunny cake. This cake is simple to make but impressive. Let the children lend a hand with the decorations. They are sure to have fun coloring the coconut and using strings of colorful licorice and jellybeans to decorate the bunny's face.

BUTTER DEVILED EGGS

Butter gives these deviled eggs an ultra-creamy texture.

- 12 large, hard-boiled eggs
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon butter, softened to room temperature
- 2 teaspoons yellow mustard
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons sweet pickle juice
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- Hot sauce, optional
- Paprika or curry powder for sprinkling

Slice eggs in half lengthwise. Remove the yolks, and transfer them to a medium-sized bowl. Add mayonnaise, butter, mustards, pickle juice, sugar, salt, pepper and a small dash of hot sauce. Mash well with a fork. Spoon or pipe filling into each egg white. Sprinkle with paprika or curry powder. Place on a colorful plate for serving.



SOUTHERN CORN PUDDING

- 2 eggs
- ½ to ¾ cup sugar (depending on the sweetness of your corn)
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 4 cups fresh or frozen corn
- ½ to ¾ cup milk or half-and-half
- 1 stick butter, melted

Heat oven to 325 F. Beat the eggs, sugar and flour in a large bowl. Stir in the corn. Transfer the mixture to a casserole dish. Add enough milk or half-and-half to cover the corn. Stir in the melted butter. Bake until the pudding is set. Makes six to eight servings.

Spring Eats

SPRING PEA SALAD

- 16 ounces frozen peas
- 6 ounces smoke-flavored almonds, finely chopped
- ½ sweet onion or more, to taste, finely chopped
- ½ cup mayonnaise (reduced fat is OK)
- ½ cup sour cream (light is OK)
- Ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese

Place frozen peas in a strainer. Rinse them under cold water until thawed. Drain the peas, then transfer them to a large bowl. Add the almonds and onions. Mix well. Fold mayonnaise, sour cream and black pepper into the pea mixture until evenly coated. Transfer to a serving container, and top with shredded cheese. Cover and refrigerate until serving. Before serving, blend cheese into the mixture or leave it on top for a prettier presentation. Makes about eight servings.



CUTE EASTER BUNNY CAKE

- 15.25-ounce box vanilla cake mix
- Pink, purple and yellow food colorings, optional
- Milk, optional
- ½ cup sour cream, optional
- 1 egg, optional

FROSTING AND DECORATIONS:

- 2 containers white frosting (or homemade buttercream or cream cheese frosting)
- 3 cups flaked coconut
- Red licorice rope
- Jellybeans
- Pink colored sugar

Heat oven to 350 F (325 F for dark or nonstick pans).

Spray or grease the bottoms only of two 9-inch round cake pans. Line them with parchment paper to ensure the cake doesn't stick.

Make cake batter as directed on the box. For a doctored cake mix that's even more moist and tender, add ½ cup sour cream, replace the water with milk, and add one more egg than what's called for on the package.

If coloring the batter: Divide cake batter evenly among three bowls, about 1 cup for each bowl. Dye each bowl a different color with pink, purple or yellow food color. Pour half of the purple batter into each of the 9-inch round pans. Pour half of the yellow batter over top of the purple layer in each pan. Pour half of the pink batter over the yellow batter in each pan. Do not mix.

If using white batter, simply divide evenly between the two 9-inch cake pans.

Bake the cake as directed on the box for two 9-inch round cakes. Cool for 10 minutes. Remove from pans to cooling racks. Cool completely, about one hour.

Place one of the cooled cake rounds on a large serving tray. It serves as the bunny face. Cut the other round cake into three pieces: a semi-circle from the top of the cake round and another from the bottom. Those are the bunny ears. The center that remains is his bow tie.

Place the ears and bow tie of the bunny in appropriate places around the cake layer on the tray. Carefully frost the top of the entire cake with frosting. Sprinkle coconut over the cake. Use licorice and jellybeans to decorate the bow tie and to make the face on the bunny. Use pink sprinkles to fill in the pink of the ears. Decorate the tray with some extra coconut or with Easter grass, if desired. Store covered at room temperature.





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE PAGE: Protect your vision while viewing a solar eclipse by using specially made glasses, a pinhole projector or other specialized equipment.

Discovery Park of America in Union City plans a full day of family-friendly activities April 8. PHOTO COURTESY OF DISCOVERY PARK

Story and photos by Robin Conover

Experiencing a total solar eclipse is a rare occurrence that can inspire awe and wonder in all ages.

On April 8, scientists and the general public alike look skyward to view the moon passing in front of the sun, thus blocking the sunlight, casting a swath of deep blue shadow and darkness across several states, including Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Kentucky and Illinois.

“A solar eclipse is simply where the moon comes between the Earth and the sun, and we happen to be in the shadow of the moon,” says William Teets, director of Vanderbilt Dyer Observatory in Nashville. “If you’re in that shadow, you’re going to see at least part of the sun blocked out. If you’re directly in the center of that shadow, or close to it, then you’re going to see the entire sun blocked out.”

One might think viewing eclipses would be somewhat consistent with a regular schedule, like a full moon, but that isn’t the case.

“We have an eclipse roughly every six months somewhere on the planet,” William says. “There’s not a very regular pattern to how we see eclipses in the United States. In April, we are going to have another partial here in Tennessee. The average for seeing a total solar eclipse in any one given geographic location is once about every 500 years.”

The most northwestern parts of Tennessee are on the very eastern edge of the path of April’s total eclipse. In Little Rock, Arkansas, the eclipse begins at 12:33 p.m. and ends at 3:11 p.m., with the maximum coverage—or total eclipse—at 1:52 p.m., lasting about four minutes.

In Nashville, people will see a partial but nearly complete eclipse. It begins at 12:44 p.m. and ends at 3:20 p.m., with the maximum eclipse at 2:03 p.m., when 99.2% of the sun is covered.



the Sun

Location, Location, Location—and Weather

Finding the perfect spot to view the eclipse depends on the cloud cover and how far you are willing to travel. The closer to the center of the path of totality, the longer and more complete the eclipse. Plan ahead for crowds and traffic to be larger and slower than normal, especially in the path of totality. Many experts recommend choosing a location and traveling there the day before.

Weather is the wildcard in choosing your best location for viewing. Be prepared to relocate quickly if your chosen destination is predicted to have significant cloud cover. ■

For More Information

For general information, maps and more specific eclipse information: greatamericaneclipse.com

To find the times for a specific city: eclipse2024.org/eclipse_cities

Discovery Park: discoveryparkofamerica.com/event/the-2024-eclipse

Reelfoot Lake State Park:

tnstateparks.com/parks/event_details/reelfoot-lake/#/?event=solar-eclipse-pontoon-tour-2024



Viewing Safely

Planning ahead with safety in mind is a must. Looking directly into the sun with improper eye protection can permanently damage your vision, even causing blindness. Please follow these safety precautions to view an eclipse:

Eclipse glasses. Use special-purpose solar filters like eclipse glasses or hand-held solar viewers. They must meet the worldwide ISO 12312-2 standard to protect your vision fully.

Pinhole projector. This is a simple DIY method. Make a tiny hole in a card and let the sun shine through the hole onto a second card to see a projection of the eclipsed sun.

Projection with binoculars or telescope. Point the binoculars or telescope toward the sun and let the sun's image fall on a white card. This is a projection method. Never look through the binoculars or telescope when they are pointed toward the sun.

Welding glass. Number 14 welder's glass provides effective protection to view a solar eclipse.

Solar filter for telescopes and camera lenses. If you have a telescope or camera, use a proper solar filter on the front of the lens. Never attach a solar filter to the eyepiece, as the concentrated sunlight can damage it and your eyes.

Events in Tennessee

If you plan to stay home in Tennessee, several events and viewing locations are planned at local and state parks. Two of note include a pontoon boat cruise at Reelfoot Lake State Park and a full day of activities for all ages at Discovery Park in Union City. Visit their respective websites for more information and preregistration.

Remember: Do not use sunglasses, smoked glass, unfiltered cameras, telescopes or binoculars or look at the sun's reflection in water or mirrors. These methods do not offer sufficient protection against eye damage.

TENNESSEE CONNECTIONS

PLANNER



As new buds form on trees and flowers bloom, Tennessee has lots to offer this spring. Kid-friendly excursions, unique road trips and outdoor fun await you.



KNOXVILLE

April 6

Chalk Walk

Thousands of art lovers head downtown each year to experience this live art competition in Market Square. Chalk Walk features more than 300 artists and collaborative teams working on-site from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to complete their artwork. Cash prizes and ribbons are awarded to select artists who have created imaginative and inspiring artworks in their age division.

www.dogwoodarts.com/chalkwalk

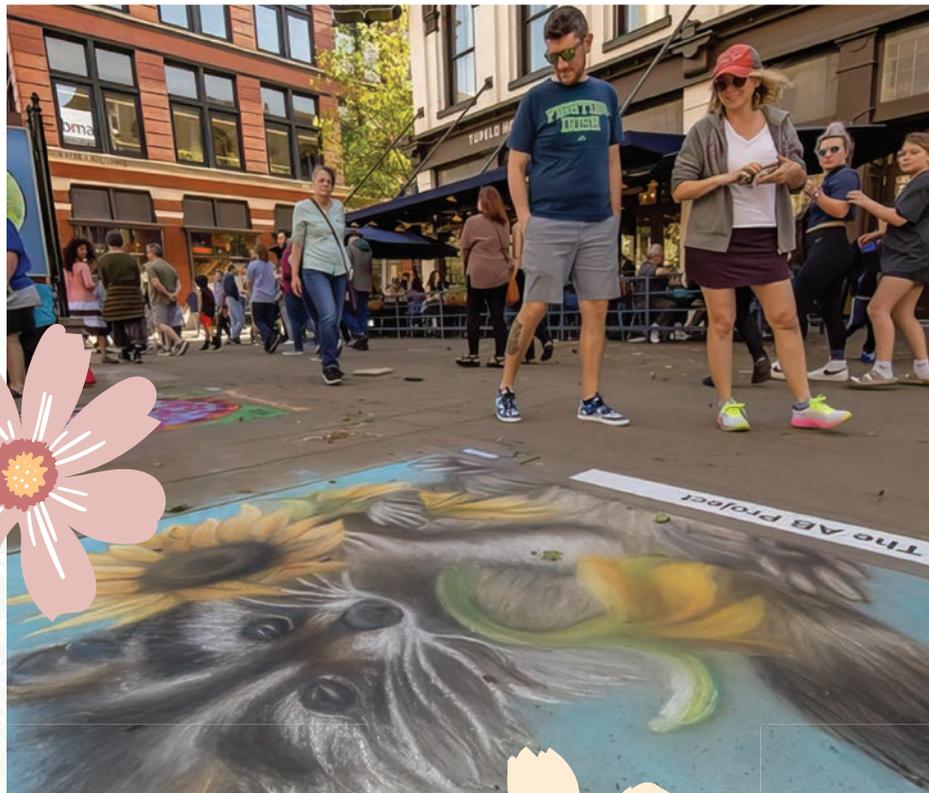


PHOTO COURTESY OF DOGWOOD ARTS

LENOIR CITY

March 15-17

Harmony in the Hollow

This Deep Well Farms event offers a unique opportunity to escape the ordinary and step into a world of mythical wonder. This festival celebrates the beauty of Appalachian music, the enchantment of Celtic traditions and the boundless creativity of the fantasy genre. It's a chance to connect with like-minded individuals, discover amazing artistry, and immerse yourself in a fantastical atmosphere.

whimsywitchevents.com/harmony-in-the-hollow

FRIENDSVILLE

April 6

Sip TN Foothills

Tennessee wines are showcased at the Blount County campus of Pellissippi State Community College. Nestled at the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, the festival offers more than 100 wines produced in Tennessee, using some

of the freshest fruit in the South. Shop with artisans, enjoy delicious food and sip Tennessee wine, mead and hard cider. The proceeds from the event stay local, benefiting Tennessee agriculture, small businesses and education.

tnvacation.com/events/friendsville-sip-tn-foothills

SPRINGFIELD

April 8

Solar Eclipse Viewing Party

Experience the 2024 solar eclipse in Springfield. While Springfield isn't in the path of totality, it is in the deep partial zone—with magnitude 95.9%. On event day, free educational stations offer more info about the eclipse from local experts trained by Gateway STEM Center. All attendees receive a free pair of eclipse-viewing glasses. A variety of other eclipse viewers are also available. Photographers are invited to capture the moment and have a designated space for optimal visualization through their lens. A variety of food trucks vendors are on-site with food available for purchase.

Leading up to the big event, Gateway STEM Center hosts educational sessions at Stokes Brown Public Library, Willow Oak

Center for Arts & Learning and Volunteer State Community College.

realspringfieldtn.com/events

COOKEVILLE

April 14

Second Annual Firefly Festival

Celebrate Cookeville's local musical and cultural heritage. Dogwood Park, nestled in the heart of Cookeville's Historic WestSide, hosts artists from across the region, transforming the park into a hive of creativity and community spirit starting at 10 a.m. Find one-of-a-kind artwork and sample delicious food while listening to live music. In a world where mass production takes center stage, this event celebrates the creativity and craftsmanship of the individual.

hipcookeville.com/fireflyfestival



PIGEON FORGE

April 18-20

Spring Rod Run

The annual Spring Rod Run in Pigeon Forge is a spectacular three-day event for any car enthusiast. The area's largest automotive event includes a huge cash giveaway, top 25 awards, ultimate five awards and King of the Hill. There is a huge swap meet with hundreds of show cars. The rod run returns to its original location at LeConte Center. The newly renovated location allows for even more show cars, vendors and entertainment.

pigeonforgerodruns.com

DRESDEN

April 27-May 4

44th Annual Tennessee Iris Festival

First begun by the Dresden Business Association in 1980 as an annual community Easter Parade, the festival has grown into an event with a year-round influence in the heart of Weakley County. Whether showcasing the brightest talents in local art and music, hosting well-known public figures or featuring the best of area businesses, the Tennessee Iris Festival has built a tradition of excellence spanning four decades.

www.tennesseeirisfestival.net

SOUTH PITTSBURG

April 27-28

National Cornbread Festival

Join in the 27th annual celebration of all things cornbread, often considered the cornerstone of Southern cuisine. From Cornbread Alley to Cornbread Fondo, you can find something for every member of your family to enjoy.

nationalcornbread.com

GREENEVILLE

May 5

Cinco De BRAGco

Let's Ride in the Spring with our Cinco De BRAGco rides. Cycle the 23-, 40- or 68-mile ride. A kids' bike rodeo and a short family fun ride are also planned, while the major miler riders enjoy the scenic routes of Greene County. Expect a morning full of panoramic countryside views against the backdrop of the Appalachian Mountains, distinct historic buildings throughout downtown and sightings of the powerful Nolichucky River. These courses were designed to display all of Greene County's glory. The setup time is at 7 a.m., and the event starts at 7:30 a.m. in the Greeneville High School parking lot. After the ride, cool off with tacos, margaritas and music at the Greene County Partnership parking lot.

www.discovergreenevilletn.com/bragco-cycling-ride

PELHAM

May 24-26

CaveJam

Experience CaveJam, a three-day camping fest on Memorial Day weekend, at The Caverns in Grundy County. Headlined by The String Cheese Incident, CaveJam features 20 artists above and below ground.

www.thecaverns.com/featured/cavejam

LAWRENCEBURG

May 31-June 1

Rumble at the Crossroad Truck and Tractor Pull

Enjoy this two-day event at Lawrenceburg Rotary Park. It has been the Mid-South Pullers Association's best two-day event three years in a row.

lawrenceburgtnrotary.org/rumble.php

ATHENS

June 1

National MooFest

This daylong celebration of the community's rich dairy industry offers many things to see, do, buy, eat and experience in historic downtown Athens. Start the morning with the Kiwanis Club Pancake Breakfast and then enjoy 150-plus food and craft vendors, live ag activities, the Athens Soap Box Derby, special bovine guests, live entertainment and Mayfield Dairy contests for the young and old alike.

friendlycityfestivals.com/moofest



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRIENDLY CITY FESTIVALS

ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS BY SAVE JUNGLE, KIRSTY PARGETER



Include Your Upcoming Event

Want to share an event with the readers of Tennessee Connections? Please visit tinyurl.com/TennesseeEvents to submit the details. Thank you.



HUMBOLDT

May 5-11

West Tennessee Strawberry Festival

In its 86th year, this fun event serves as a classic West Tennessee homecoming, with people traveling from across the country to enjoy the events, food and fellowship of family and friends. Join 75,000 friends and neighbors across nine blocks, with more than 20 events to entertain the entire family. Celebrate and experience the best food, fun and entertainment West Tennessee has to offer.

strawberryfestivaltn.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF HUMBOLDT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ADVENTURE AWAITS

See a variety of natural sights at

Bays Mountain Park & Planetarium



PHOTO COURTESY OF
BAYS MOUNTAIN PARK
& PLANETARIUM

What Is It?

Near Kingsport, on the eastern edge of Tennessee, is Bays Mountain Park & Planetarium. The 3,750-acre park—the largest city-owned park in the state—offers miles of trails through animal habitats and around its 44-acre lake.

Storing Water

In the early 1900s, J. Fred Johnson bought roughly 1,200 acres of land that would become part of the park. He hoped to create a water source for local agriculture. He sold the land to Kingsport Waterworks Corp., which began building a dam in 1915. While the dam and the surrounding area provided water and timber to the town, local government in the late '60s began turning the area into a park. It was designated as a natural area by the state in 1973.

Land, Water and More

Barge rides take visitors into Bays Mountain Lake. On the 45-minute ride, the wildlife of the park can be seen, including deer, ducks, turtles, and sometimes beavers or black bears. Back on dry land, visitors can check out habitats for wolves, otters, foxes and more, or explore the park's more than 40 miles of trails.

Planetarium

Bays Mountain is also a good place to gaze into the skies. The observatory, home to a range of large telescopes, hosts sun and star viewing sessions. Be sure to check the park's website for a schedule. The park's planetarium also has a range of shows detailing the stars and space. The shows change throughout the year and are suitable for family audiences or age 6 and older.

More Info

Entrance fees are \$7 per vehicle, and some of the programs have fees as well. To start planning your trip, visit www.baysmountain.com or call 423-229-9447.

All About Mulching

Now that the colder weather is fading in Tennessee, many home gardeners are starting to clean their landscape beds and prepare them for the growing season. From weeding to fertilizing, the to-do list can be long, but it is all worth ensuring your plants are healthy and beautiful year after year.

Mulching is one of the tasks that might seem mundane but can have a huge impact on your landscape. Mulch is an organic or inorganic material added to the top of the soil to improve aesthetics and reduce landscaping maintenance. When properly applied, mulch increases the attractiveness of your landscaping and benefits plant and soil health.

Benefits of Mulching

While mulch can help make landscape beds visually appealing, its effects on your plants and soil are equally important to understand and appreciate.

First, mulch provides insulation for the surface of the soil. This insulation helps to retain moisture and buffer extreme temperatures in the soil, which is important for plant health in hotter and drier months. As the mulch breaks down over time, it also increases the soil's water-holding capacity, reduces compaction and improves the overall quality.

Lastly, mulch helps prevent weeds from germinating, reducing competition for water, nutrients, light and space with your landscape plants. It's important to remember that mulch will not prevent weeds sprouting from seeds or sprigs on top of it, so be sure to keep up with your weeding.

Types of Mulch

There are many types of mulch to choose from. They are typically categorized as organic and inorganic.

Organic mulches, like wood chips and pine straw, break down over time—some quickly and some slowly. As these mulches break down, they increase the soil's organic matter, improving the overall quality. In contrast, inorganic mulches, such as gravel or crushed stone, are purely aesthetic and do not benefit the plants.

Whichever you decide to use, be sure to select the best mulch for your garden. Organic mulches that break down quickly typically work better in vegetable gardens, as they can be tilled in at the end of the season to build the soil quality. Organic mulches that break down slower are a better choice for permanent landscape beds, as they will last longer and need fewer additions over time.

How to Mulch

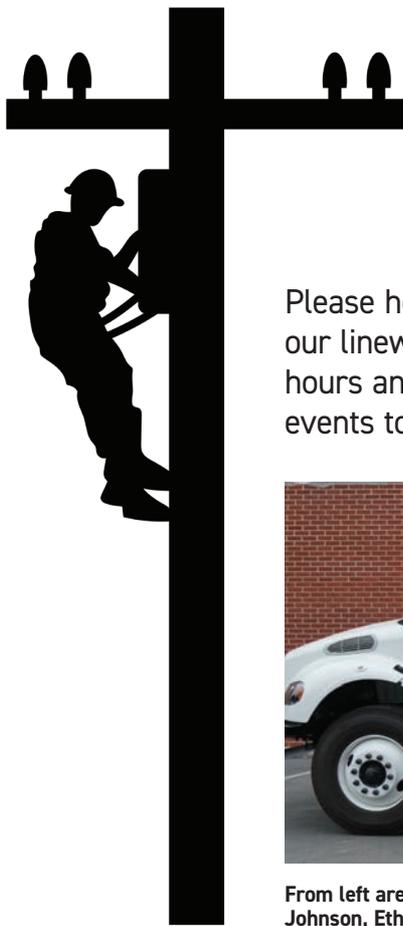
Finally, knowing how to apply mulch in your landscape properly is particularly important. If you add mulch to an existing bed, breaking up the previous layers is essential, as they can be compacted and prevent water from entering the soil.

Once you have broken up the old layers, add a 2- to 4-inch layer of fresh mulch to the surface, extending outward to the plant's drip line—the ring-like area around the plant where water runs off into the ground. It is essential to keep the mulch pulled away from the base of your plants, a common mistake home gardeners and landscapers make. Over time, mulch can cause the bark to decay on your landscape plants, so don't be tempted to “volcano” mulch. ■

For more information about mulch, visit extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6960.



Rylan Thompson is a Tennessee State University Agriculture and Natural Resources/4-H Extension agent in Knox County. He specializes in residential/consumer horticulture and 4-H and is the Knox County Master Gardener coordinator.



Lineman Appreciation Day APRIL 18

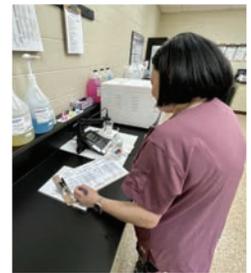
Please help Erwin Utilities celebrate our lineworkers. They brave late hours and all types of weather events to keep the lights on for you.



From left are Luke Blackmon, William McInturff, Shane Buchanan, Chris Tolley, Roby Lemmon, Seth Berry, Adam Johnson, Ethan Bailey and Dawson Gambrell.

Drinking Water Week MAY 5-11

EU celebrates the vital role clean water plays in our daily lives.



From left are Shawn Treadway, Josh Peterson, Curtis Edwards, Chuck Edney, Jason Foster, Gavin Casey, Tommy Howard and Dalton White.



Back row, from left, are Jason Byrd and Jason Foster. Middle row, from left, are Sharon Kidd and Jose Diaz. Front row, from left, are Doug Terry, Randy Arrowood and Clay Hepburn.



Employee Spotlight

Wes Millhorn

Job Title:
SCADA Specialist
Years at EU:
1½ years



Favorite part of job:

“My favorite part about my job is outdoor tasks. Our SCADA system reaches out into some very neat mountains that we provide services on from the bottom to the top.”

Dalton White

Job Title:
Utility Worker and Pipe
Fitter Apprentice
Years at EU:
1½ years



Favorite part of job:

“My favorite part about my job is laying the water lines.”

Dawson Gambrell

Job Title:
Apprentice Lineman
Years at EU:
3 years



Favorite part of job:

“My favorite part about my job is walking into work and seeing all the smiling faces.”

“Congratulations!”



The Tennessee Valley Public Power Association Inc. Board of Directors—and its education and training committee—officially recognize Kala Allen, Brittnee Bryant, Katie Green, Emily Johnson and Kayla Lynch for completion of the Certificate of Customer Service Program.

GET OUTSIDE

An angler prepares to release a rainbow trout. On the Elk River, anglers can fish from drift boats or wade in the landings. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN N. FELSHER

Drifting the Elk

Dam creates major trout fishery in a scenic setting

By John N. Felsher

Cold water flowing through Tims Ford Dam near Winchester created a prime trout fishery in a very scenic section of the Elk River. Tennessee regularly stocks brook, brown and rainbow trout in the frigid waters below the dam.

“The Elk River is a system where people can catch good numbers of trout with a chance of catching a really nice one,” says David Perry with Southeastern Fly in Murfreesboro. “We’ve caught some browns and rainbows in the 20- to 25-inch range. They would weigh about 2 to 4 pounds. We hear about some 10- to 12-pound trout caught from time to time.”

David took Angela Millet from Lenoir City and me on a daylong float trip. Just below Tims Ford Dam at Highway 50, we boarded David’s drift boat, a craft designed to accommodate a guide and two anglers.

We drifted gently with the current for 9 miles to Farris Creek, catching browns and rainbows along the way. As we fished, we spotted various birds and other wildlife, including a bald eagle. Twice, we saw mink, animals few people ever see.

“If one is ever inclined to see ‘God’s Country,’ take a drive to Tim Ford Dam and hook up with David Perry for a float trip on the beautiful Elk River,” Angela says. “Rain or shine, it’s beauty all-around and a day filled with magical laughs and memories of catching incredible brown and rainbow trout.”

Just beyond the trees lining the banks, watercress farms dominate the landscape. Farmers use river water to grow their crops. Several small waterfalls pouring from the fields cascade into the stream, making excellent places to catch trout. The rushing water creates oxygen and frequently carries bugs and other small creatures that trout eat.

Ideally, suspend a fly just off the bottom so it drifts at the

same speed as the current. People can also use various other feathered temptations.

“We fish with an indicator with a nymph under it,” David says. “People can also use various flies and midges. Dry flies are good from June through early September. Late summer to early fall is the best time to fish dry flies whenever the bugs start hatching and sitting on the surface to dry their wings. If trout are eating other fish, we like to throw streamers, which imitate a minnow or other small fish.”

Although we drifted, people can wade at the landing near the dam and at Farris Creek. Whether wading or drifting, always check the dam generation schedule at www.tva.com/Environment/Lake-Levels/Tims-Ford.

“The best time to fish the Elk River is when water comes through the dam at about 240 cubic feet per second to 400 cfs,” David says.

Before fishing the river, check with Tim and Rhonda Page at Tim’s Flies and Lies Outfitters in Normandy at 931-759-5058 or www.timsfliesandlies.com to learn the best enticements to fish that day.

David can be contacted at southeasternnfly.com or 615-796-5143.

Accommodations are available at Tims Ford State Park and Tims Ford Marina. For more information, visit tnstateparks.com/parks/tims-ford or www.timsfordmarina.com. ■



John N. Felsher is a professional freelance writer, broadcaster, photographer, editor and consultant. An avid sportsman, he’s written more than 3,600 articles for more than 170 different magazines on a wide variety of outdoors topics. He also hosts an outdoors tips show for WAVH-FM Talk 106.5 radio station in Mobile, Alabama. Contact him at j.felsher@hotmail.com or through Facebook.



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