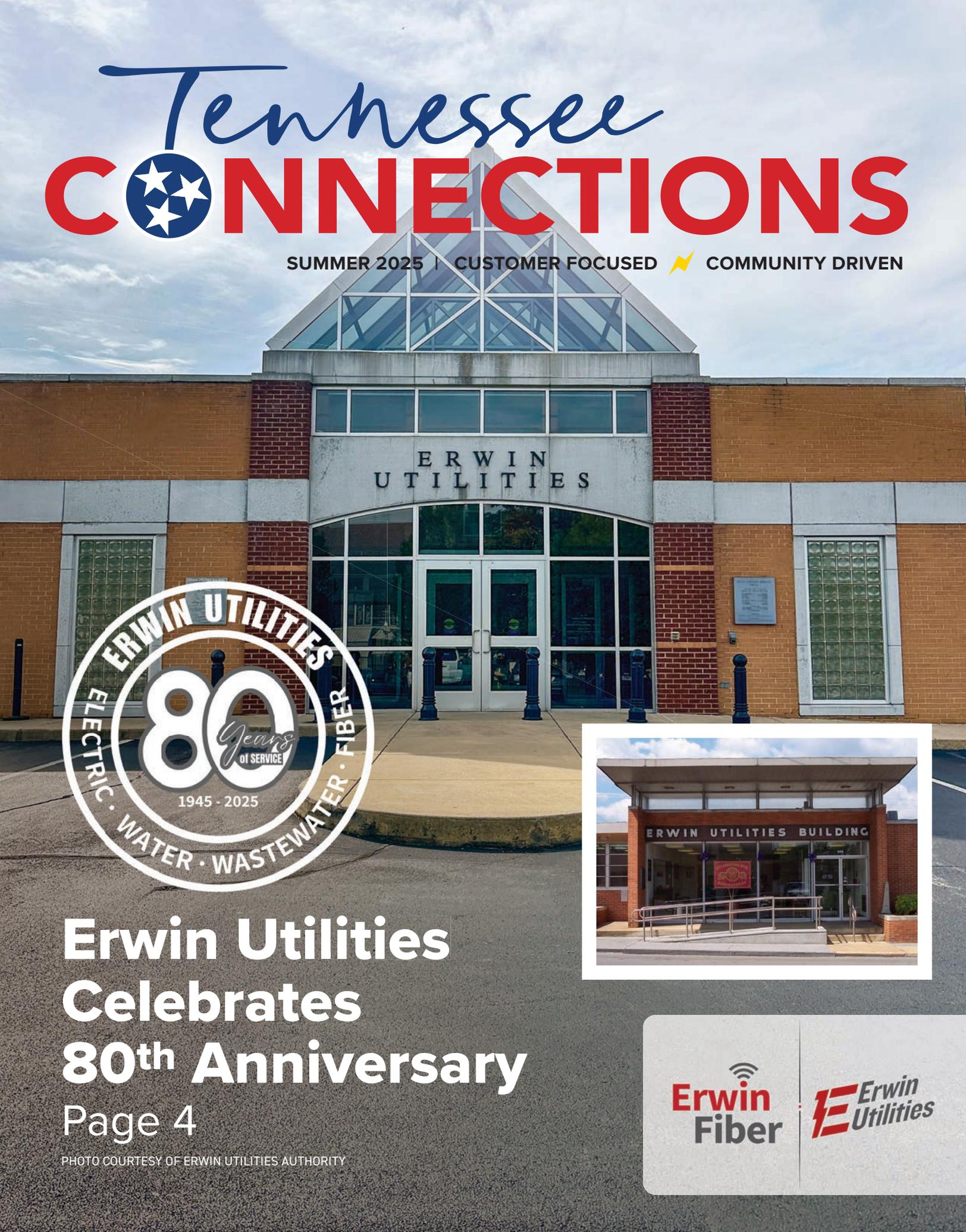


Tennessee CONNECTIONS

SUMMER 2025 | CUSTOMER FOCUSED ⚡ COMMUNITY DRIVEN



Erwin Utilities Celebrates 80th Anniversary

Page 4

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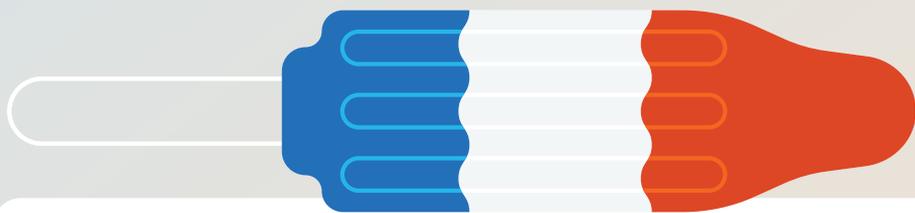
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CELEBRATING

80 years of SERVICE

Erwin Utilities (EU) will celebrate its 80th anniversary on June 29, 2025. From humble beginnings to now providing five essential services, EU has grown alongside the ever-changing needs of its customers. While infrastructure and technology have changed over the decades, one thing remains the same—Erwin Utilities is dedicated to serving the community.

“Service is at the heart of what we do,” says Lee Brown, President and CEO of Erwin Utilities. “As a part of this community, we are dedicated to helping it thrive. We have for the past 80 years, and we will for many years to come.”

As we take a look back at the past 80 years, it’s not just a story of expansion—it’s a journey of passion, dedication, and unwavering commitment to the people who call this community home.

How It All Began

The electrification of East Tennessee began with small power companies, including Erwin’s first electric plant in the early 1900s. In 1909, the Unaka Traction Company received a charter for an electric line through Unicoi, Carter, and Washington counties.

Efforts for improved service led to the formation of the Erwin Electric Light and Power Company in 1913, which was acquired

by Unaka Traction Company that December. Operations continued from January 1, 1914 to January 1, 1926. Meanwhile, two hydroelectric projects—the Tennessee Eastern Electric Company on the Nolichucky River and the Watauga Power Company on the Watauga River—led to extended transmission lines to supply power to cities like Greeneville, Johnson City, Elizabethton, and Bristol.

Over time, acquisitions and consolidations streamlined regional power operations and, eventually, led to the formation of East Tennessee Light and Power Company in 1929. By the late 1930s, the company served more than 22,000 customers across nine counties, including Unicoi, providing electricity to homes, businesses, and municipalities. The company was acquired by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in 1944.

Forming Erwin Utilities

On March 30, 1945, the Town of Erwin purchased the Erwin Electric System from TVA, officially beginning operations as a publicly owned power distributor on June 29. Shortly thereafter, the Board of Public Utilities of the Town of Erwin, Tennessee was formed. The newly established utility



Howard C. Brown served as General Manager from 1976 until 2006.



continues on page 20



Erwin Utilities dedicated employees have proudly served our customers for more than 80 years



Henry L. Reeves Sr. served as Erwin Utilities' General Manager from 1945 to 1975.



The East Tennessee Light and Power Company was acquired by TVA in 1944. This would ultimately become the Erwin Electric System when purchased by the Town of Erwin the following year.



Erwin Utilities relocated from its original office to a newly constructed facility in 1956.



Fairways and Flight

Disc golf is
a fun and
affordable sport

By Trish Milburn

Christine Jennings
lets her disc fly
during the
Tennessee State
Disc Golf
Championship in
Morristown.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
MORRISTOWN AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

When Chris Dickerson started playing disc golf with a couple of high school friends in 2011, he had no idea how the sport would transform his life. What began as a fun outing led to competing in amateur tournaments and turning pro just three years later.

“I made the decision to play professionally in late 2014,” says Chris, who is from Washington County. “I had been playing a good amount of amateur tournaments up to that point and placing pretty well. Around that same time, I started thinking that this could be a good source of income, so that is when I started thinking about making a career out of it.”

Chris’ career change paid off. His accomplishments include more than 160 career wins and several Tennessee state championships. In 2020, he became the U.S. champion when he won the Professional Disc Golf Association’s Disc Golf World Championship.

“To win the United States championship was like putting so much time and effort into something and it finally paid off,” Chris says.

Chris claimed the national title during the pandemic, and therefore the experience was different from how it would have been if he’d won the crown before 2020.

“The players and camera crews were basically the only ones allowed at the course,” he says. “At the end of the final round there were no crowds or anything, the round was just over. While it didn’t

but also having to make choices midround and changing strategies about how to play certain holes.”

Birth and Growth

Though the exact origins of the disc-throwing game aren’t clear, disc golf was formalized as a sport in the 1970s. The man who got the disc flying was “Steady” Ed Headrick, who invented both the modern

“I didn’t know much at all about disc golf until I was invited to play for the first time, and I’ve loved it ever since.”

—Chris Dickerson, professional disc golfer

really bother me, it was different than what we are used to.”

This year Chris will compete in his 10th world championship, in Nokia, Finland, from July 30 through Aug. 3. His best finish at the world tournament came in 2019, when he placed fourth.

“I was drawn to disc golf for its mental and physical challenge,” Chris says. “Not only being able to throw the disc physically

Frisbee and the Disc Golf Pole Hole, the basis of today’s disc golf targets. Soon after, he founded the Professional Disc Golf Association. In the mid-1980s, the PDGA became a player-run organization.

Disc golf shares many similarities with traditional golf, including the first throw being made from a tee, players moving through a fairway and trying to get the disc into the target in the fewest number



Chris Dickerson prepares to make a throw during the Professional Disc Golf Association Championship. PHOTO COURTESY OF PROFESSIONAL DISC GOLF ASSOCIATION



A player tees off from the twelfth hole at Panther Creek State Park's disc golf course. PHOTO COURTESY OF MORRISTOWN AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

of throws. Instead of a hole in the ground, however, the disc golf target is typically a metal pole with a wire basket on it. Above the basket is a hanging deflection assembly made of chains. The goal is to get the disc into the basket. Traditional and disc golf share many common terms, including putt, par, birdie and bogey.

Instead of various clubs for different types of shots, disc golfers use four types of flying discs. The first one used off the tee is a distance driver, which is useful for maximizing distance on a throw. As play progresses toward the target, players use fairway drivers, midrange discs and putt-and-approach discs. Just like in traditional golf, there are trees, shrubbery and changes in the terrain throughout the course.

Chris is far from the only person enjoying this sport on courses across Tennessee. The PDGA's 2023 year-end demographics report showed slightly more than 3,000 members from Tennessee. That does not count all the people who play simply for fun or as amateurs.

The sport is experiencing explosive growth and popularity. The Disc Golf Network streaming service has more than 50,000 subscribers from around the world. Tournament coverage often garners more than 50 million views.

Affordable and Accessible

Disc golf is significantly less expensive to play than traditional golf. A beginner can try it out with a single disc, but a full set of starter discs only costs between \$20 and \$50. As a player's skills progress, higher-end discs cost around \$15 to \$25 each.

Traditional golf hits the wallet harder. A beginner set of new clubs, including a driver, irons and putter, costs \$200-\$500. Premium clubs can run well into the thousands. Golf balls cost between \$10 and \$50 per dozen.

Green fees for traditional golf range from \$20 to \$50 for municipal courses and \$100 or more at premium courses. Membership at private clubs can cost thousands per year.

It's free to play on many of Tennessee's nearly 200 disc golf courses, including eight Tennessee State Parks: Cedars of Lebanon, Henry Horton, Indian Mountain, Meeman-Shelby Forest, Nathan Bedford Forrest, Panther Creek, Pickwick Landing and Warriors' Path. They range from a simple three holes for campground guests at Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park to the professionally designed 18-hole championship course at Panther Creek State Park in Morristown.

"Disc golf is an extremely popular

activity at Panther Creek, and the course has steadily grown in popularity since it was constructed in 2017," Park Manager Jason Chadwell says. "During the warm months, the course receives moderate use during weekdays and heavy use on the weekends. The course is even used during the winter when it's not snowing, raining or bitterly cold."

The course at Panther Creek hosts the Tennessee State Disc Golf Championship, held annually since its construction. The championship this year will take place from May 30 to June 1.

According to Anne Ross, director of tourism for the Morristown Area Chamber of Commerce, the tournament brings more than 500 disc golfers for three days of competition. In addition to Panther Creek's course, the city offers three other courses for people to enjoy.

"The Kiwanis Course at Wayne Hansard Park and the Rotary Course at Frank Lorino Park were sponsored by those respective service organizations at two of our largest city parks," she says. "The Cherokee Course is at Cherokee Park, which is a Hamblen County facility."

With nearly 200 courses spread out across Tennessee, you're likely not far from

one. PDGA.com features a searchable database of courses across the state, country and even worldwide.

Give It a Try

You don't have to be an expert in disc golf to try it. Purchase a cheap starter disc, find the course nearest to you, and see if you enjoy playing.

"I didn't know much at all about disc golf until I was invited to play for the first time," Chris says. "I've loved it ever since."

For those interested in competitive disc golf, there are tournaments specifically for amateur players, often featuring multiple divisions. They are often held with professional tournaments. A few of the

many options in Tennessee are the Motown Showdown in Morristown, the Fish Fry Fling in Paris, the Music City Open in Nashville and the Dogwood Classic in Memphis/Millington.

To find up-to-date amateur tournaments, visit the PDGA Advanced Event Search at pdga.com/tour and filter by "Amateur."

Taking It Up a Notch

Just like any other professional sport, it takes hard work and dedication to make the disc golf leaderboards. To stay at the top of his game, Chris practices and stays in shape year-round. Travel and tournaments can be both physically taxing and costly.

"The past few years, I would say that I average about 25 to 30 tournaments a year," Chris says. "But from 2017 to 2019, I played over 40 events a year with the most being in 2018 with 48 events. The travel is the hardest thing. I do get to travel with my wife, and I am very grateful for that. But being on the road so much takes time away from the rest of your family."

So, like any professional athlete, there are sacrifices. However, those sacrifices can lead to significant rewards.

"The most satisfying thing in disc golf is just like any other sport," Chris says. "When you've been chasing a win and finally get it." ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEX STINER PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEX STINER PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO COURTESY OF PROFESSIONAL DISC GOLF ASSOCIATION

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A player takes aim at the fifth hole at Panther Creek State Park. Disc golfers Chris Dickerson and Paige Pierce are all smiles at the 2020 U.S. Disc Golf Championship, which Dickerson won. A practice tee at Panther Creek allows players to work on their skills.

Keep

Give your home a safety checkup to stay a step ahead of electrical fires

By David Herder

As the season shifts to summer, it's the perfect time to prioritize safety, especially electrical safety, in your home.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, electrical failures and malfunctions contributed to 30,000 fires, 430 deaths, 1,070 injuries and \$1.3 billion in property damage every year between 2015 and 2019.

Give your home an electrical safety checkup to keep it how you like it—safe and free of electrical fire hazards.

Cords

Cords and plugs are responsible for about 7% of deaths in home fires, despite only being involved in 1% of home fires, according to the NFPA. Extension cords are the most common cause of plug- or cord-related fires. Take these precautions with your cords:

- Check all cords for damage or fraying. These issues are fire and shock hazards.
- Don't put weight on cords. Placing chairs or other heavy objects on cords can damage them.



Your Cool

- Only use extension cords temporarily. If you need electrical access in a different spot, consider contacting a licensed electrician to install new outlets.
- Plug large appliances directly into outlets, never into extension cords.
- Wires inside of walls can be dangerous as well. Check for loose wall receptacles, wires or lighting fixtures, and listen for popping or sizzling sounds behind walls.

Outlets

Many electrical hazards are caused by faults—abnormal electric currents. Left untreated, these can cause shock and fire hazards. Using arc-fault and ground-fault circuit interrupter outlets can save lives.



Ground faults are where electricity has an abnormal path, creating a shock hazard. Make sure you have GFCI outlets anywhere that could become wet—including the bathroom, kitchen and outdoor outlets.

Arcing faults often cause overheating in wires and electric equipment. Common culprits are pinched, damaged or overloaded wires. AFCIs shut off when they detect unwanted arcing. AFCIs are useful in all living areas.

Heating Equipment

Looking ahead to winter, electrical fire deaths occur in December and January, according to the United States Fire Administration. It is also the time of year when we use space heaters, wood stoves and other heating devices.



Heating devices can become dangerous when used improperly.

Keep these tips in mind when using heating devices:

- Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from heating equipment, such as furnaces, space heaters, fireplaces or wood stoves.
- Only use products as intended. Space heaters are not for drying clothes, and the cooking stove is not a heater.
- Ensure all fuel-burning heating equipment is vented to the outdoors, and keep all intake and output vents clean and clear of debris.
- Always use a fireplace screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room.
- Never plug a space heater into an extension cord.
- Keep space heaters on level ground, away from areas where you may trip over it.

Generators

Many people use portable generators during outages. To properly use one:

- Let the generator run for a couple of minutes before plugging things in to prevent catastrophic surges. Similarly, plug things in one at a time, as each device requires a small surge to start up.
- Only plug generators into your home's transfer switch or into a heavy duty extension cord rated for the weather conditions. Never plug generators into wall outlets—this can endanger lineworkers by backfeeding electricity onto distribution lines.
- Keep generators at least 20 feet from your home to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. ■



New Batteries, New Fire Hazards

Many new devices enter our homes throughout the year, and that means new batteries to charge. Lithium-ion batteries are efficient and effective at powering phones, toys, e-bikes and more, but they can be fire hazards.

Damaged lithium-ion batteries can rapidly overheat and ignite. Whatever you're plugging in, safe charging can prolong your battery life and prevent fire danger.

- ▶ Stop using a battery if you notice any smell, change in color or shape, too much heat, leaking or odd noises.
- ▶ Plug battery chargers directly into a wall outlet.
- ▶ Don't overload circuits. Batteries take in a lot of energy while charging. Make sure you don't overload your home's circuits by having too many items plugged in at once.
- ▶ Charge in a flat, dry area, away from sunlight and doorways. Heat and water can create fire risks, and keeping batteries away from exits keeps emergency paths clear should a fire start.
- ▶ Always buy batteries from known, quality sellers.
- ▶ Stay near your batteries while they are charging, and consider unplugging them when they've reached 80% charge. Leaving batteries plugged in past full charge creates fire hazards. Also, lithium-ion batteries have the longest, most effective lifespan when they are 30% - 80% charged.

Mindful Mixology

The ultimate guide to summer mocktails

By Anne Braly

Alcohol-free beverages don't have to be boring. They can be so flavorful you may have to rethink your idea of the afternoon cocktail—you may not even catch that the alcohol is a no-show.

Whether it's due to the rise of the mindfulness movements like Dry January and Sober September, not to mention alcohol-free happy hours, consumers are demanding more thoughtful

beverages year-round.

So go ahead, take the plunge and have a mocktail party this summer. Here are some recipes that offer a cooling change for alcohol-free summer sipping.

TIKI COOLER

- Ice cubes
- 6-ounce can pineapple juice
- 6 ounces coconut milk
- 3 limes, juiced
- 2 tablespoons almond-flavored syrup
- 1 cup club soda, or as needed
- 4 pinches ground nutmeg
- 4 lime wheels
- 4 sprigs fresh mint

Place a few ice cubes in a pitcher. Add pineapple juice, coconut milk, lime juice and almond-flavored syrup. Stir until chilled.

Strain mixture and pour it into four glasses. Top each glass with club soda.

Dust each mocktail with nutmeg. Garnish with a lime wheel and a sprig of mint.

STRAWBERRY REFRESHER

- 4 cups strawberries, sliced
- 1 cup white sugar
- 8 cups cold water, divided
- 5 cups ice for serving, or as needed
- 1 lime, cut into 8 wedges
- 8 fresh mint sprigs

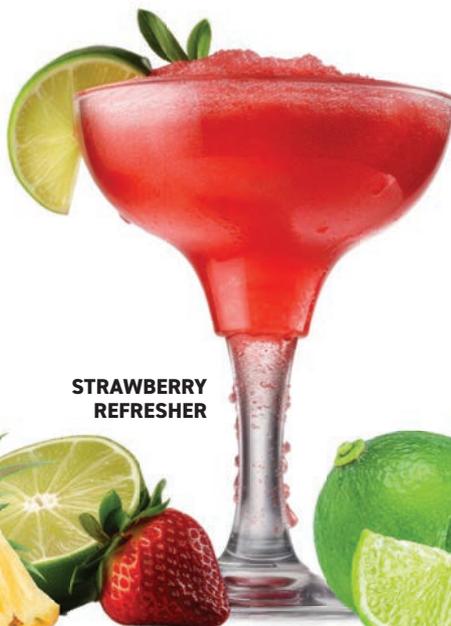
Mix strawberries, sugar and one cup cold water in a medium bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and place in the refrigerator for 4 hours.

Pour chilled strawberry mixture into a blender. Blend on high until smooth. Pour through a wire mesh strainer set over a large bowl; discard pulp and seeds. Stir remaining 7 cups cold water into strawberry juice until it is well combined.

Fill eight glasses with ice. Pour strawberry mixture over ice. Garnish each serving with lime wedges and mint leaves.



TIKI COOLER



STRAWBERRY REFRESHER



GINGER CHAMPAGNE

GINGER CHAMPAGNE

- 2 2-liter bottles ginger ale or cranberry ginger ale, chilled, divided
- 46-ounce can pineapple juice, chilled
- 64-ounce bottle white grape juice, chilled

To make ice ring: Fill a ring-shaped cake pan halfway with ginger ale. Freeze until partially frozen.

At this stage, you can place edible flowers or pieces of fruit around the ring. Fill pan to top with ginger ale and freeze until solid. Place in punch bowl just before serving.

In a large punch bowl, combine one bottle ginger ale, pineapple juice and white grape juice, add ice ring to punch bowl, and let guests serve themselves.

ALCOHOL-FREE MINT JULEP

- ½ cup water
- ½ cup white sugar
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint leaves
- 2 cups crushed ice
- ½ cup prepared lemonade
- Fresh mint sprigs, for garnish

Combine water, sugar and one tablespoon of chopped mint in a small saucepan. Cook and

stir until the mixture boils and sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat. Set aside to cool for about an hour, then strain out mint leaves. Fill two cold cups or frozen goblets with crushed ice. Pour half of the lemonade into each glass, and top with a splash of cooled sugar syrup. Garnish each with a mint sprig, and add a straw for sipping.

VIRGIN MARGARITA

- ¼ cup lime juice
- ¼ cup orange juice
- ¼ cup simple syrup (equal parts sugar and water, cooked on the stovetop until the sugar dissolves)
- 1 tablespoon agave syrup, optional
- Ice cubes
- Salt, for rimming the glass, preferably kosher or sea salt
- Lime wedges, for garnish
- Club soda or lemon-lime soda, to top off the drink

Begin by rimming the glass. Take a lime wedge and rub it

around the rim of the glass. Dip the rim into a plate of salt to coat it. Add ice.

Fill a shaker or mixing glass with ice cubes. Add the lime juice, orange juice, simple syrup and agave syrup to the shaker. Shake well to combine the ingredients.

Strain the mixture into the salt-rimmed glass filled with ice cubes. Top off the drink with club soda or lemon-lime soda to add a bit of fizz. Give the drink a gentle stir to mix everything. Garnish the glass with a lime wedge.

ISLAND ICED TEA

- 3 black tea bags
- ¼ cup pure maple syrup
- 1 medium red apple, thinly sliced
- 2 cups apple cider
- Mint sprigs, for garnish

In a small pot over high heat, bring 4 cups of water to a boil. Pour boiling water into a large heatproof pitcher or jar.

Add tea bags and maple syrup, and stir to combine. Let steep for 3 to 5 minutes,

depending on how strong you like your tea.

Remove and discard tea bags. Let tea cool to room temperature, then refrigerate until cold for 4 hours or up to 12.

When ready to serve, add apple slices and cider to pitcher, and stir to combine. Pour into individual tea glasses, making sure at least one apple slice gets into each glass. Garnish with a sprig of mint.



ALCOHOL-FREE MINT JULEP

ISLAND ICED TEA

VIRGIN MARGARITA

Heritage Breeds

Ambassadors preserve the living history of agriculture

By Les O'Dell

It was all because of some barbed wire. That's how Tim Montague finally saw the red poll cattle he read about for years. A small-animal veterinarian practicing in Memphis, Tim was fascinated by the dual-purpose breed, even going so far as to tell his wife, Sandra, that someday he'd like to have a herd of them.

He was intrigued by red polls' maternal capacities, their true dual-purpose status—raised for both milk and beef—and their reputation as a docile breed. Despite growing up on a farm and raising other breeds of commercial cattle—and even though he'd never even seen a single red poll in the flesh—Tim knew he wanted some.

Then, after picking up some rolls of barbed wire he won in an auction, Tim finally saw them. There, in the pasture, were red poll cattle. Following a phone call and some negotiations, he was the proud owner of a few red polls—and they are all he imagined they would be. In fact, a

decade later, Tim owns more than four dozen head of red polls and serves as president of the American Red Poll Association, working to promote the rare breed.

Living, Breathing History

Tim's herd is one of a variety of heirloom breeds of agricultural livestock—animals once common across the United States but now considered endangered.

Known as heritage breeds, these traditional livestock breeds are a throwback to a time before industrial agriculture became a mainstream practice. According to The Livestock Conservancy, a North Carolina-based not-for-profit organization working to promote and protect these animals, these species were carefully selected and bred over time to develop traits that make them well-adapted to the local environment. They thrive under farming practices and cultural conditions that are different from some found in modern agriculture.

Because of unique characteristics such as

slower rates of weight gain, for example, these breeds fell out of favor with commercial producers, pushing some to the brink of extinction. Today, The Livestock Conservancy lists more than 180 agricultural breeds across 11 species—ranging from rabbits, ducks and geese to cattle, horses and pigs—on its Conservation Priority List. The annual report ranks the danger of disappearance of each breed from critical—the most serious—to threatened, watch and recovering.

Based on these rankings, conservationists work to preserve these breeds, and the organization counts on the efforts of farmers, ranchers, homesteaders and shepherds like Tim.

“There's something to be said for raising a breed you can make a difference with,” Tim says. “I can be part of improving and conserving this very deserving breed that should be saved and expanded.”

Conservation

Across the country, more than 4,000 volunteer breeders and 150-plus breed



Emily Hayes is a research associate at the University of Tennessee at Martin. After learning about heritage breeds in college, she has become an advocate for endangered livestock and is a board member for The Livestock Conservancy.



Amy and Daniel Balog, of Pikeville, raise several heritage breeds including, Sebastopol geese.

associations work diligently to ensure endangered breeds like red poll—classified by CPL as threatened—don't disappear. Many homesteaders and farmers choose heritage breeds for a variety of reasons. Some, including Pikeville's Amy and Daniel Balog, simply are attracted to the uncommon breeds.

The Balogs raise a variety of heritage breed poultry on their farm near Pikeville, including Sebastopol geese, Saxony ducks and Faverolles chickens. The couple have experience with other rare breeds, too, including Ossabaw Island pigs. The animals are a perfect fit for the farm, which includes other nonheritage poultry and sheep breeds, because Amy and Daniel are conservation minded. They've been raising rare animals for more than two decades. Amy, who has a degree in conservation, says conserving rare breeds is essential.

"There are so many reasons why," she says. "It's not only keeping the genetics going, it's the history and the provenance of the breeds."

The Balogs see themselves as ambassadors for conservation practices and heritage breeds.

"We just need to be out there showing others how wonderful these animals are, and let them see for themselves how good

the product is," Amy says. "Sometimes, it's just bringing a couple of chicks to a farmers market to pique somebody's interest and to get new breeders on board."

'It's a matter of biosecurity'

Emily Hayes is a research associate in the animal science department at the University of Tennessee at Martin, where she was first introduced to heritage breeds. Today, she serves as secretary on The Livestock Conservancy's board of directors. She says the group's work is vital.

"Many of these animals are threatened with extinction because they're either being crossbred or people prefer commercial and well-known breeds over them," she says. "But if we lose these specific genetics, we lose them forever. There's no getting them back. It's a matter of biosecurity."

Protecting biodiversity and genetic resources is an important reason for protecting these breeds, says Allison Kincaid, executive director of The Livestock Conservancy and a resident of Cosby in East Tennessee. But many producers choose heritage animals because they want to make a difference.

"None of us can predict what the future of agriculture will look like. This is about keeping these breeds around as a genetic

reservoir," Allison says, adding these animals are key to food security. "If we didn't have this diversity, eventually, we would narrow our food system down to where it wasn't sustainable. There would be no backup."

Efforts seem to be paying off. Since first establishing the Conservation Priority List 37 years ago, The Livestock Conservancy has not lost a breed to extinction. In fact, in the past dozen years, 12 breeds have graduated off the CPL, meaning animal populations are large enough that the breed no longer needs continual monitoring. In 2024, two breeds—Southdown sheep and Hereford pigs—were removed from the list, and 15 breeds were reclassified in the CPL's four tiers, most in a positive direction.

For farmers, educators and conservationists like Amy, Daniel, Emily, Tim and others, the work of raising and promoting heritage breeds and their products is a labor of love, not about boosting revenue.

"It's more about quality over quantity, and quality is what keeps these lines going," Amy says. "If we don't do it, I'm afraid they'll all get lost." ■

Find more information about these animals and the Conservation Priority List at livestockconservancy.org.



Tim and Sandra Montague raise red poll cattle on their farm near Memphis. The breed is one of more than 180 heritage agricultural breeds facing extinction.



Myotonic goats, known as Tennessee Fainting Goats, like this one pictured with Emily, are classified as a recovering breed.

PLANNER

From lively dairy festivals and soothing lavender celebrations to quirky MoonPie traditions and thrilling monster truck shows, summertime in Tennessee offers something special for everyone. Use this guide to explore some of the state's most unique and cherished events this season.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BELL BUCKLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BELL BUCKLE

June 21

RC Cola-MoonPie Festival

Join this quirky and beloved tradition that celebrates the iconic Southern pairing of RC Cola and MoonPies. The event runs 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and features live music, clogging performances, fun contests, a colorful parade and the ceremonial cutting of the World's Largest MoonPie. Kick off the day with the morning's 5K and 10-mile races.

bellbucklechamber.com

ATHENS

June 7

National MooFest

Celebrate all things dairy from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in historic downtown Athens. MooFest offers live music, craft and food vendors, family-friendly games, a milking contest, petting zoo and educational activities highlighting the importance of the dairy industry to McMinn County. With more than 6,000 attendees, the event creates a lively, community-focused atmosphere everyone can enjoy. friendlycityfestivals.com/moofest

SPARTA

June 20, July 18, Aug. 15, Sept. 19, Oct. 17

Bluegrass Under the Stars

Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy free live bluegrass performances every third Friday through October at Liberty Square Amphitheatre. Featuring a different local band each month, the concerts start at 7 p.m. If it rains, the event moves indoors to Sparta Civic Center.

spartatn.gov/events

OAK RIDGE

June 21

Lavender Festival

Experience a fragrant day at historic Jackson Square from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., featuring more than 150 artisan vendors, live music, interactive workshops on lavender cultivation and uses, and fun children's activities, such as sidewalk chalk art and train rides. Special ticketed events include the Tour of Gardens (June 21-22) and Nine Lakes Wine Tasting (June 21).

jacksonsquarelavenderfestival.org

DICKSON

June 28

Robert Spicer Tennessee State Buck-Dance Championship

Honor Dickson County native Robert Spicer at the annual buck-dance championship at Grand Old Hatchery on Main Street. Registration begins at 10 a.m., followed by a dance workshop. Competitions start at 11 a.m. across various age divisions and dance categories, showcasing talented performers competing for state titles.

facebook.com/robertspicerdancecompetition

CLARKSVILLE

July 3, Aug. 7, Sept. 4

First Thursday Art Walk

Explore the creative works of local artists from 5-8 p.m. on a self-guided tour of downtown businesses. Customs House Museum & Cultural Center offers free admission with wine and appetizers. Each month features fresh exhibits and new artists, making every visit unique.

customhousemuseum.org

SPRINGFIELD

July 3-4

Freedom Fest

Celebrate Independence Day at Robertson County Fairgrounds beginning at 4:30 p.m. on July 3. Enjoy carnival rides, live music performances, inflatables, local food vendors and a spectacular fireworks finale around 9 p.m. on July 4. Admission is free, and parking is available at Legion Park. A clear-bag policy is enforced.

springfieldtn.gov

SPRINGFIELD

July 4, Aug. 1, Sept. 5

1st Fridays

On the first Friday of each month through October, downtown Springfield comes alive from 6-9 p.m. with free, family-friendly festivities. Enjoy live music, food trucks, a kids' zone, a specialty vehicle cruise-in and more than 80 local vendors offering produce, crafts and unique merchandise. Stroll the square, connect with friends and savor the small-town charm that makes Springfield special.

realspringfieldtn.com/main-street/1st-fridays

MORRISTOWN

Aug. 9

David Crockett's 239th Birthday Celebration

This birthday party for Tennessee's favorite son includes blacksmithing demonstrations, storytelling, reenactors, music, museum tours and birthday cake from 2-5 p.m. at the Crockett Tavern Museum. Admission is free.

crockettavernmuseum.org

NASHVILLE

Aug. 29-30

Hot Wheels Monster Trucks Live: Glow-N-Fire

Witness thrilling monster truck action at Bridgestone Arena, featuring fan favorites such as Mega Wrex and Bigfoot, alongside the fierce newcomer Skelesaurus. Shows start at 7:30 p.m. both nights, delivering a spectacular, high-energy event perfect for the entire family.

bridgestonearena.com



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEVIER COUNTY FAIR

OLD SEVIERVILLE

Aug. 26-Sept. 1

Sevier County Fair

Get ready for seven days of fun for the entire family by marking your calendar for the 90th anniversary of the Sevier County Fair. A true agricultural fair, this event has something for everyone, including livestock shows, exciting rides, games, free laser tag, and nightly contests.

seviercountyfair.org



Include Your Upcoming Event

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



PHOTO COURTESY OF DICKSON BEE CLUB

WHITE BLUFF

Aug. 16

World Honeybee Day Festival

Celebrate the importance of honeybees at the fifth annual festival hosted by Dickson Bee Club. The event includes live music, local beer and mead tastings, more than 60 vendors, abundant local honey and educational sessions for adults and children from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., all at Bibb White Bluff Civic Center. dicksonbeeclub.com





Navigate the rapids at **Rock Island State Park**

What Is It?

Rock Island State Park sprawls across more than 880 acres in Warren and White counties, where the Caney Fork, Collins and Rocky rivers converge. Visitors come to marvel at dramatic limestone gorges, scenic overlooks and impressive waterfalls such as Great Falls and Twin Falls. The park offers a well-maintained campground, picnic areas, boat ramps, fishing spots and seasonal interpretive programs for visitors of all ages.

History

The park's landscape owes much to the Tennessee Valley Authority's Great Falls Dam, built in the early 1900s to harness the Caney Fork's energy. By 1969, the state had officially designated Rock Island as a park. Ever since, anglers, hikers and thrill-seekers have been drawn to its rugged beauty.

On the Water

Kayakers and canoeists can expect everything from gentle currents to exhilarating whitewater runs. The Caney Fork is especially popular for fishing, with smallmouth bass and catfish frequently reeled in. Conditions on the water can shift with TVA's water releases, so checking daily schedules is wise.

On Land

Trails wind through shaded forests, leading to hidden swimming holes and prime wildlife-watching spots—keep an eye out for deer, turkeys and herons along the shore. After you've explored the park, nearby McMinnville and Sparta offer local restaurants, charming boutiques and seasonal festivals. Both towns boast historic squares and a warm slice of small-town Tennessee life.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
TENNESSEE STATE PARKS

More Info

Entry is free, and parking is free but limited—lots at the gorge often fill by late morning on warm-weather weekends. Gates open 7 a.m.–10 p.m. CT. Cell service is spotty; download maps in advance. Plan your outing, book a campsite or get more park details at tnstateparks.com/parks/rock-island or call 931-837-4770.



BEFORE YOU SPRAY

As you walk through the aisles of your favorite garden store, taking a slight reprieve from the summer heat, you will likely come across a seemingly endless section full of pesticide products.

You may be wondering what all these products are for. To put it simply, a pesticide is a product that is designed to prevent or control pests on your plants. In horticulture, fungal and bacterial pathogens, insects, and weeds are all considered pests—with all of them having products specifically designed for their control.

It can really be quite overwhelming, especially if you aren't exactly sure what product you need or if you even need to use a pesticide. Before you pull the trigger on buying a product, here are some tips and tricks to help you make a better-informed decision.

Pick the Right Product

One of the most important things to do before you apply a pesticide is to get identification of the pest. Proper identification is important because if you are using a pesticide, it may have active ingredients that are effective on certain pests, but not on others. For example, some leaf spots can be bacterial but look similar to a fungal leaf spot. In this circumstance, if you apply a fungicide, it will likely not resolve the problem since it's not fungal. Likewise, some herbicides will only control specific types of weeds, so if you apply the wrong product, you will not see much success.

In Tennessee, Cooperative Extension agents in every county can help you identify weeds and insects, along with fungal and bacterial problems, and recommend effective ways to control the issues. Additionally, the University of Tennessee Soil, Plant and Pest Center can test plant material to positively identify pathogens, so you know what products to purchase.

There are also some great smartphone apps, such as Google Photos or iNaturalist, among others. While these apps can be extremely helpful in identifying weeds and insects, they can also steer you off course, so lab confirmation is always beneficial. Regardless of how you confirm your pest's identity, be sure to select a product with an active ingredient that will control it.

Read the Labels

Once you have positively identified your pest and know what active ingredients you need, you are ready to look for a product.

What is really important here is not to associate brand names with active ingredients. Brands may change their ingredients over time but might not change the brand name to indicate it. That is where the label is helpful, as it will tell you all active ingredients contained in the product, so you know exactly what you are buying.

It is also essential to read the label on the back of products. It tells you critical information about the active ingredients, what personal protective equipment to wear, how and when to apply it, and what pests it works on. The label can sometimes feel like you are reading a scientific novel, but remember, it is the law to follow it. ■



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.

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started out with eight full-time employees and offered one service, electricity. Henry L. Reeves Sr. was named General Manager and served in the role for the next 30 years.

The Board of Public Utilities of the Town of Erwin, Tennessee officially became Erwin Utilities in September 1946 when the Erwin Water Company was purchased from Jesse B. Brown. As EU grew so did its infrastructure. In 1956, the utility relocated from its original office at 211 S. Main St. to a newly constructed facility at 244 Love St., where it continues to operate today. Wastewater joined the list of services in 1962 when the Town of Erwin transferred it to the utility. In 1975, Reeves retired as General Manager, and in 1976, Howard C. Brown was named as his successor.

Continued Expansions and Modernization

Erwin Utilities has updated processes as the world has changed for its customers. In 1980, the first computer system was installed for customer information and billing. In 2006, Howard C. Brown retired

after serving as General Manager for 30 years, and Lee H. Brown was named General Manager. In 1999, EU began to explore offering internet and cable TV service. A feasibility study was done to determine the options and cost to deliver this new service. The conclusion and recommendation: Don't install old technology with coax cable, fiber optic is not feasible at this time, wait for technology to improve, and for the price of technology/fiber to come down because fiber was the future and it would be worth the wait.

In April 2012, Erwin Utilities hired the first employee dedicated to building the fiber backbone and planning for a Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition (SCADA) upgrade after Fiber was determined to be the best communication platform for this new system. Later that year, a fiber backbone ring was constructed to connect 45 electric, water, and wastewater SCADA devices and each school in Unicoi County to a 1 Gig internet connection. The backbone was constructed for extra capacity in

anticipation of Fiber to the Home. After several years of planning, approvals, and construction, the first customer was connected to Erwin Fiber in March 2015.

Erwin Utilities Today

Erwin Utilities today offers five services to its customers—electricity, water, wastewater, broadband internet, and voice services. In 2019, EU completed its transition to become an Energy Authority. The utility now employs 58 full-time employees and is still led by President and CEO, Lee H. Brown.

Community at the Core

Throughout its 80 years of service, EU has focused on not only serving the community but also helping it thrive.

“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,” Brown says.

One of the biggest ways EU gives back to the community is through education.



Since the 1990s, the utility has presented programs featuring Louie the Lightning Bug to pre-K and first grade students at area elementary schools to teach lifesaving lessons about electrical safety. Meanwhile, for more than a decade, fourth grade students have witnessed the jolting dangers of electricity through the company's safety demonstration, Voltage Valley. The demonstration uses a real electrical charge and depicts dangerous scenarios, like going near substations or downed power lines. Additionally, EU has partnered with area schools on educational functions like STEM events, opportunities for hands-on-learning at our Wastewater Treatment Plant lab, and much more.

EU has been offering educational opportunities to the public for years as well. Team members participate in community events such as the Tennessee Trails & Tunes festival, Touch-A-Truck, various events at the Unicoi County Public Library, and EU's "Let's Dig Table" where children are taught to "call before you dig" around electrical, water, and fiber optic lines buried underground. Additionally,

team members have provided assistance to individuals at the Clinchfield Senior Adult Center through workshops on home energy evaluations. The utility's most recent endeavors include hosting community outreach events which span a variety of topics from Fiber to financial assistance and energy conservation.

EU's commitment goes beyond education. The utility helps many families reduce their energy costs and provides access to financial assistance through its Good Samaritan Program and by partnering with TVA on its Home Uplift Program. EU provides each employee with a public service holiday to give back to the community by participating in events like Keeping the Valley Beautiful, Habitat for Humanity, Relay for Life, and United Way. Since 2019, EU has hosted regular blood drives with Marsh Regional Blood Center which potentially saved more than 1,000 lives—just one of the many ways EU continues to power its community with heart.

Hurricane Helene

Helene's wrath left thousands of Erwin Utilities' customers without power, water, wastewater treatment, and broadband service as the storm tore through our community damaging and destroying our critical infrastructure. Braving the

storm's aftermath, without hesitation, EU's employees jumped into action to aid the community.

Fast forward to today, most of the restoration work is in progress or finished. The amount of work EU's team has completed over the past six months is nothing short of extraordinary. Notably, the completion of Temple Hill Road powerline, broadband and waterline repairs; establishing temporary water and sewer service along South Industrial Drive; a temporary road in South Industrial Drive; and the Highway 81 South/Bumpus Cove powerline and broadband replacement. Construction is underway for permanent replacement of power line and water line on South Industrial Drive, and construction is scheduled to start early June 2025 for the permanent water line and sewer line repairs across Nolichucky River on Jackson Love Bridge. Our efforts to clean, repair, and restart our Wastewater Treatment Plant were successful last fall, but the rebuild will take two to five years and cost millions of dollars.

The combination of lost revenue and recovery expenses exceeding \$6 million has significantly impacted EU's financial stability. Although FEMA will reimburse 75% of the costs, the timing of those funds will not arrive soon enough to relieve our immediate financial strain. In order to continue to support our community and meet short-term financial needs, EU will be making a small rate adjustment to help us maintain the quality and reliability our customers depend on.

Looking Ahead

As Erwin Utilities reflects on the past 80 years of service, it does so with pride and a plan to continuously improve and meet the needs of our community. Rebuilding after Hurricane Helene brings into sharp focus that we must band together for the strength of Erwin and Unicoi County. EU is committed to the vision of not only helping our community rebuild but to build back a better and brighter future for our community.

"It's not just something we say, it's something we do every single day," Brown says. ■



Lee H. Brown has served as President and CEO of Erwin Utilities since 2006.



Renovations to Erwin Utilities' main office began in 2007 and were completed in 2009. This building is still in use today.

The Return

Magnificent animal long missing from Tennessee returns

By John N. Felsler

Four centuries ago, the eastern elk subspecies roamed most of North America east of the Mississippi River from southern Canada southward. Many European colonists hunted elk for meat. A bull elk could weigh up to 1,000 pounds, with most hitting the 700- to 800-pound range.

By 1850, only a small population remained in parts of the Allegheny Mountains. The last reported sighting of a Tennessee elk was in 1865 in Obion County. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially declared the subspecies extinct in 1880.

Today, elk once again roam parts of the Volunteer State. In the late 1990s, Kentucky began an elk restoration project, and Tennessee wildlife officials began to think about restoring a species that no longer existed here.

“The state started to get some money in partnerships with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and others,” says Garrett Clevinger, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency Elk Program coordinator. “The TWRA brought 50 elk from Elk Island National Park in Alberta, Canada, and released them in the 200,000-acre North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area near LaFollette in December 2000. We brought them to North Cumberland WMA because it’s the largest tract of public land managed by TWRA.”

Rebuilding the Herd

From 2000 through 2008, Tennessee brought in 201 elk in six releases, all at North Cumberland WMA. Although not the extinct eastern subspecies native to Tennessee, these cousins are similar. The TWRA chose these Canadian elk because the Elk Island National Park herd remains largely disease-free and has a history of producing healthy animals.

“Most came from Elk Island National Park, but two releases in 2003 and 2008 came from Land Between the Lakes in Kentucky,”

Garrett says. “Even those elk originally came from Elk Island National Park.”

The Tennessee herd now numbers 400 to 450 on the WMA. More wandered onto surrounding public and private lands. The state established a 670,000-acre elk restoration zone surrounding the tract in portions of Anderson, Campbell, Claiborne, Morgan and Scott counties.

The population is now large enough to allow a hunting season to trim surplus animals. In 2009, Tennessee held its first elk hunt in 150 years. Hunters can apply for 19 permits awarded in an annual drawing.

“About half of those permits are reserved for bow hunters and the rest for gun hunters,” Garrett says. “We also have one youth permit available, and we raffle off one gun permit.”

The public is welcome to visit the Sundquist Unit of North Cumberland WMA and see free-roaming wild elk up close. Climb the elk viewing tower at Hatfield Knob in Campbell County to get a better look at the huge animals.

“One of the big perks about our elk herd in Tennessee, it’s located on public land,” Garrett says. “A large portion of the elk herd still hangs out around there. That’s where a lot of the habitat management is occurring for elk restoration.”

Can’t visit the property in person? Don’t worry, visit tn.gov/twra/wildlife/mammals/large/elk.html to take a real-time look through the elk viewing camera. ■



John N. Felsler 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.felsler@hotmail.com or through Facebook.

The Art of the PICNIC

*Crafting memorable outdoor
dining experiences*



By Robin Howard

The word “picnic” combines two French words: *piquer* (to peck or pick) and *nique* (something small or nothing at all).

In the 18th century, picnics were a favorite pastime of the wealthy. Through the years, the working class adopted the tradition as a way to spend time in the countryside with friends.

Picnics eventually found their way into art and literature as backdrops of perfect contentment. In the children’s book “Wind in the Willows,” when Ratty tells Mole what’s in the picnic hamper for their lunch that afternoon, Mole becomes intoxicated with anticipation. He notices the sparkle of light on the river, trails his paw in the water and drifts into daydreams. What could be better?

Today, picnicking is an art form with specialized gear, outdoor games and plenty of lovely public locations. The first step in creating a picnic Mole would approve of is choosing the right spot.

Location, Location, Location

Whether planning a romantic rendezvous or a family gathering, the setting can significantly enhance your experience. Parks are a classic choice, offering open spaces, trees for shade, and, often, amenities like picnic tables and restrooms. Picnicking at a beach or lake also promises a magical experience, but don’t be afraid to be creative: Rooftops, woodland clearings and backyards will also do the trick.

Essential Picnic Gear

To excel in the art of the picnic, the right gear makes the experience more elegant.

You’ll want a picnic basket or hamper, a blanket, a cooler bag and reusable plates, cups, glasses, cutlery and napkins. A Swiss Army Knife always comes in handy, and don’t forget a trash bag.

Planning the Picnic Menu

The heart of any picnic is the food. Here are some ideas for a picnic-perfect menu:

Fresh salads. Prepare vibrant salads with fresh greens, colorful vegetables and dressings. Consider classics like Caesar salad, or create your own signature salad.

Sandwiches and wraps. Sandwiches are a picnic staple. Create an assortment of sandwiches with different fillings, from classic ham and cheese to vegetarian options such as caprese or roasted veggie wraps.

Charcuterie platter. A well-curated charcuterie platter is a picnic indulgence. Include an assortment of cheeses, cured meats, crackers and condiments.

Fruit platter or fruit salad. A platter of fresh, juicy fruits—such as watermelon, berries and grapes—is perfect for a summer picnic.

Quiches. Quiches are versatile, as they can be enjoyed hot or at room temperature. Fill them with ingredients such as spinach, mushrooms, ham and cheese.

Dips and chips. Create a variety of dips—hummus, guacamole, tzatziki—and serve them with an assortment of chips or fresh-cut vegetables.

Desserts. Finish your picnic on a sweet note with brownies, fruit tarts or cookies.

Beverages. Besides water, consider bringing sparkling water, lemonade, iced tea or another favorite drink.

Enhancing the Experience

The art of the picnic is not just about the food; it’s about creating an experience.

Consider bringing games, playing cards, a Frisbee to toss or a book for relaxed reading, depending on your location and group.

If you’re in a natural setting, explore the surroundings, whether hiking, birdwatching or simply taking a leisurely walk. ■



www.e-u.cc

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