

Tennessee CONNECTIONS

FALL 2026 | CUSTOMER FOCUSED ⚡ COMMUNITY DRIVEN

Road to Recovery Continues Two Years After Hurricane Helene

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ALSO
INSIDE

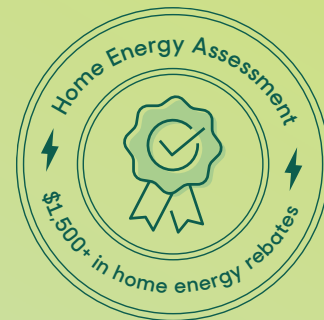
Finding an
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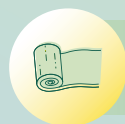
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Fall Harvest Safety Tips

For Sharing Roads With Farm Equipment

Agriculture represents one of Tennessee's largest industries, accounting for roughly \$103 billion in economic activity and supporting more than 250,000 jobs. Farms across the state provide food products to the globe, feeding millions of people each year. But farming and food production continue to be among the most dangerous industries in the world.

During the fall harvest season, remember the dangers associated with these careers and pay extra attention while sharing the road with equipment. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Slow down immediately** when you see farm equipment ahead of you. Most equipment isn't fast—think 15-20 miles per hour on average. If you are driving 55 mph, you are covering around 80 feet per second. It won't take long to be right on top of a slow-moving vehicle.

- **Be patient, and wait to pass farm equipment safely.** Unsafe passing is one of the primary factors contributing to motor-vehicle accidents each year.

- **Be careful when approaching equipment.** Oncoming vehicles may not be as patient as you are and may pull out suddenly to pass—putting them right in your path.

- **Farm equipment often has to make wide turns,** so be aware of your surroundings and give the driver ample space to make a safe turn.



ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY CARRIE

- **Hug the shoulder,** if needed. Since some equipment is fairly wide, you may have to hug the side of the road more than normal even though operators are good at getting over to let traffic by.

- **Watch for wildlife.** Harvest time can change the movement patterns of wildlife, day and night. Watch your speed and scan surroundings for deer that are used to feeding in fields that may now be harvested.

Situational awareness and attentiveness while driving will help reduce risk of injury for you and workers. Be mindful this fall so we can keep our farm workers and each other safe. ■



Powering Your Home Safely

Simple habits make a big difference

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The living expression of America's most enduring symbols

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Powering Your

Simple habits make a big difference

Electricity powers nearly every part of our daily lives, from flipping on the lights in the morning to charging our devices at night. While it's easy to take for granted, electricity deserves our respect. The good news? Keeping your home safe doesn't require complicated changes. Just a few mindful habits can make a lasting impact.

Start With the Basics: Know Your Home's Electrical System

Your home's electrical panel is the heart of your system. Take time to know where it's located and ensure each breaker is clearly labeled. In the event of an outage or emergency, this can save valuable time.

If you notice breakers frequently tripping, lights flickering or outlets that feel warm to the touch, these are signs of potential electrical issues. Don't ignore them. These small issues can turn into larger hazards if left unaddressed. When in doubt, call a qualified electrician to take a closer look.

Outlets and Cords: Small Items, Big Responsibility

Extension cords and power strips are convenient, but they're meant for temporary use, not long-term solutions. Avoid running cords under rugs or furniture where heat can build up, wires can become damaged and a fire hazard can arise.

When plugging in appliances, make sure cords are in good condition. Frayed or cracked wires should be replaced immediately. It's also important not to overload outlets. If you rely on multiple power strips in one area, it may be time to consider adding more outlets to safely meet your needs.

For families with young children, outlet safety is especially important. Install

tamper-resistant outlets or use safety covers to prevent curious fingers from contacting an electrical current.

Water and Electricity Don't Mix

It's a simple rule, but one worth repeating: Keep electrical devices away from water. Kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor areas are especially high-risk zones. Always use appliances with dry hands and ensure outlets near water sources are equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters. These devices are designed to shut off power quickly if a fault is detected, helping prevent serious injury.

Lighting the Way Safely

Lighting is another area where safety matters. Always use the correct wattage for light fixtures and lamps. Using bulbs with a higher wattage than recommended can lead to overheating and increase the risk of fire.

LED bulbs are a great option. They are energy efficient and produce less heat than traditional incandescent bulbs. If you notice a flickering light, it may be more than just a loose bulb. It could indicate a wiring issue that should be checked.

Be Mindful With Appliances

Large appliances, including refrigerators, washers and dryers, should be plugged directly into wall outlets—never into extension cords or power strips. These appliances require a significant amount of power, and improper connections can overheat.

Regularly inspect appliance cords and connections, and clean lint traps in dryers after every use. Built-up lint is a common fire hazard and is easy to prevent with routine maintenance.

Outdoor Safety Matters, Too

Electrical safety doesn't stop at your front door. When using outdoor tools or extension cords, make sure they are rated for outdoor use. Keep cords away from standing water and avoid using electrical equipment during wet conditions.

Before starting any digging projects in your yard, remember to call 811 to have underground utilities marked. This simple step helps prevent accidental contact with buried power lines and keeps you and your community safe.

Teach Safety at Every Age

Electrical safety is something everyone in the household should understand. Teach children to stay away from power lines, avoid climbing trees near electrical equipment and never insert objects into outlets.

Education is one of the most

Home Safely

powerful tools for prevention. By reaching kids early and reinforcing those messages over time, you can help build a safer future for our community.

When in Doubt, Reach Out

If something doesn't seem right, trust your instincts. Whether it's a buzzing outlet, a persistent burning smell, or a damaged power line near your property, it's always better to err on the side of caution.

Electricity makes modern life possible, but safety makes it sustainable.

With just a few proactive steps, you can ensure your home remains a place of comfort, convenience and peace of mind for years to come. ■



If you notice breakers frequently tripping, lights flickering or outlets that feel warm to the touch, these are signs of potential electrical issues.

Don't ignore them.



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IMAGE BY
PPDESIGN

The Road to a Brighter Future



Lee H. Brown

By Lee H. Brown,
President and CEO of Erwin Utilities

September 27, 2026, marks two years since we witnessed an unprecedented devastation. It was the day our community changed forever.

When I look back, my first thoughts are always with the families. Those who lost loved ones, lost their homes, or watched the very land beneath them washed away. I remember the stories of pure horror—folks stranded in their homes or on high ground in pitch-black woods, or taking shelter in the homes of kind strangers. Our hospital was underwater. Critical power, water, wastewater, natural gas lines, roads, and bridges were destroyed.

Yet, from our darkest day, we witnessed the absolute best in humanity.

Neighbors, volunteers from across Tennessee, and strangers from across the nation dropped everything to help. It was a profound reminder that we live in a country where people still care. That is what truly defines America, our state, and this community: helping others in their hour of need.

Two years later, the progress is undeniable:

- **Interstate 26** is repaved.
- **Several local industries** are back to work and others continue rebuilding.
- **The Chestoa Bridge** construction will start by the end of the year.



New poles and distribution lines were installed in the Riverview Industrial Park following the extensive damage from Hurricane Helene.

- **The Nolichucky Riverbank** stabilization is complete.
- **Ground has been broken** for the new Unicoi County Hospital.
- **Many new homes** have been built.

We have achieved so much, but our work is far from finished. Erwin Utilities

and the Joint Economic Development Board of Unicoi County, TN, Inc. have worked tirelessly to secure our future. Erwin Utilities has applied for more than \$187 million in infrastructure grants. These funds will rebuild a stronger, harder grid and protect you from unrealistic rate increases.

To date, Erwin Utilities has secured major funding:

- **\$6 million (electric):** For grid resilience and Erwin Substation improvements.
- **\$13 million (water):** Temple Hill pump station relocation and main line replacements
- **\$17 million (wastewater):** Replacement of water and wastewater main lines in the Industrial Park; inspection and repair of wastewater (sewer) collection system helping to eliminate

water leaks throughout the collection system. Keeping unwanted water from entering a wastewater collection system that is 80 to 100 years old is no easy job and very expensive.

Supply chain delays remain our biggest hurdle to finish the repairs to our damaged

wastewater treatment plant and keep it operational until we can secure funding to build a new treatment plant. Over the next five years, our goal is to design and build a completely new wastewater treatment plant.

To fund this, we have additional active applications, including \$47 million for the new wastewater treatment plant and \$21 million for a new substation to power Nuclear Fuel Services and the industrial park. In addition, grant requests have been submitted for additional funding for grid hardening improvements at the Erwin Substation and hazard mitigation needs.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Austin Finch, the **Joint Economic Development Board (JEDB) of Unicoi County** is driving a powerful wave of economic revitalization, disaster recovery, and community growth. By aggressively pursuing over **\$250 million in grant funding**, the JEDB has already secured **\$17,419,500** to fortify local infrastructure, protect vital jobs, and drive recovery.

Here is a look at the impact and major milestones achieved through these efforts:

Disaster Recovery & Infrastructure Resilience

Following the devastation of Hurricane Helene, the JEDB acted swiftly to secure funding to stabilize the community and protect the local economy:

- **\$7 million (Tennessee Economic and Community Development Retention Grants):** Provided immediate, critical lifelines as the very first source of funding for disaster-impacted manufacturers.
- **\$6.8 million (Downtown Stormwater Project):** Funded vital inspections and repairs to the Town of Erwin's stormwater systems.
- **\$630,000 (Appalachian Regional Commission Disaster Recovery Assistance):** Provided critical engineering support and grant support.
- **Backed by the \$350,000 (Industrial Access funded by TNECD):** Built a

temporary access road in the industrial park for rebuilding and to resume operations.

- **\$250,000 (Transportation Planning Grant):** Funded via TDOT to assess county roads for damages and prioritize repairs.
- **\$100,000 (Study and Planning):** Appalachian Regional Commission funding for damaged multimodal infrastructure assessment.
- **\$20,000 (Urban Canopy):** Invested in planting trees along the flood path downtown and to aid natural restoration.

Job Creation & Economic Retention

The JEDB has been a fierce advocate for the local workforce, directly safeguarding and expanding the county's employment base:

- **268 manufacturing jobs** successfully retained.
- **198 additional jobs** expanded at existing local manufacturers.
- **40+ new jobs** recruited to the area through Conrad Industries.

Downtown Transformation: The Boutique Hotel Project

After years of persistent effort, the JEDB successfully secured the historic, former CSX General Office Building in downtown Erwin. The board has worked with a local developer to transform this landmark into a premier boutique hotel and secure funding for the project.

- **\$7 million** in private funding sources.
- **\$2 million** in state-backed loans.
- **\$700,000** in secured grants.
- **Timeline:** With the final piece of financing closing soon, construction is scheduled to begin by early spring 2027.

Future-Proofing the Workforce

To ensure Unicoi County thrives in the modern digital economy, the JEDB successfully recruited **CloudWise Academy** to downtown Erwin. This partnership is currently deploying **more than \$1.3 million in workforce development funds** to equip local

residents with high-demand digital and tech skills.

Turning Disaster into Opportunity

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, JEDB looked past the destruction to see a critical opportunity: a chance to completely redefine the riverfront and protect Interstate 26 from future disasters.

To answer the urgent question of how to rebuild, the JEDB commissioned the **Nolichucky Recovery Initiative**. This initiative evaluated the flood-damaged properties to identify their highest and best potential use.

The resulting master plan builds a safer, stronger future by achieving three key goals:

- **Securing local industry** against future flood events.
- **Enhancing outdoor recreation** and world-class fishing opportunities.
- **Creating a national model** for community and economic resiliency.

Secured Project Funding

- **\$220,000** locked in for immediate, comprehensive site planning.
- **\$1 million** anticipated funding for protection and improvement study of Interstate 26
- **\$2 million** in grant-matching funds provided by the TNECD to accelerate development.
- **\$16 million** in additional funding anticipated for outdoor recreation improvements.

To protect Interstate 26 from future flooding, the JEDB partnered with LDA Engineering to work with TDOT to study the interstate from Second Street to Poly Erwin Road. This project will identify potential improvements and provide cost estimates for the improvements. The outcome of this project will allow TDOT to apply to the Federal Highway Administration Protect Program for funding to construct the improvements.

We have come so far from that terrible day. Together, we will continue to rebuild a brighter, safer, and stronger future for our community. ■

Lights & Sounds

The living expression of America's most enduring symbols

By Drew Woolley

Every nation tells stories about itself. In the United States, those narratives are often woven into symbols we encounter every day just as much as they are spoken out loud. It might be a flag folded at a funeral, an eagle stamped onto an official seal or a song sung before a ballgame.

As we celebrate our country's 250th anniversary, historians, collectors and scholars are all taking a closer look at the symbols we adopted and the meanings they still carry today.

For the Love of Old Glory

The American flag has always had a special family connection for Chris Garza. Half of his family members can trace their lineage to Maryland's founders, and almost every

one of them has served in the military. But watching his grandfathers as a child had a particular impact on him.

"I kind of idolized them, and they both did their own daily routines of raising and lowering the flag," Chris says. "They were fun, outgoing guys. But every day, they became very serious when they handled the flag. That really showed me how important it was as a symbol."

When he was 8, Chris saw an old 13-star flag at a yard sale and had to have it. Looking back now, he suspects he was trying to impress his grandfathers. But it also proved to be the first step in a lifelong obsession. Now the executive director of Troutdale Historical Society in Oregon, Chris has overseen three museums and collected more than 300 American flags in the past 35 years.

The most precious to him is the flag with which one of his grandfathers was meant to be buried. At the last second, his grandmother pulled the flag from the casket and gave it to Chris, who has held it dear ever since. Another favorite is an early flag that represented the southern region of Texas, where much of Chris' Indigenous family comes from, before the state adopted the design it uses today.

While the American flag's design has evolved over time, Chris is particularly drawn to the idea that it has served as a unifying image throughout history.

"To me, it is the only thing capable of binding us all together," he says. "It's the one thing that is bigger than our differences of religion, politics or race."

As a historian, Chris also hopes the flag reminds everyone in the United



States why the country formed and what it took to get there. It will always be a symbol of freedom. But, for him, it is also a call to earn that freedom.

"It's a symbol of when oppression becomes so strong and rampant that it forces people to step back and reevaluate—to look at life, our government and our communities," he says. "Sometimes, those things need to change. That's what the flag means to me, working to change for the better."

A Living Symbol

While the nation celebrates its 250th birthday, many Americans may be surprised to learn this is only the second year that one of its most recognizable symbols has been official. In researching his 2019 book, "American Eagle: A Visual History of Our National Emblem," Preston Cook was shocked to learn the United States had never actually named a national bird.

"We had no national bird for 248 years," he says. "It seemed like I was the only person in the country who knew, because it was such a surprise to everyone I talked to."

It was an especially

upsetting revelation for someone who had dedicated much of his life to collecting depictions of the American icon, going back to 1966 when he was drafted into the Army.

"I was issued a uniform that had buttons with the Great Seal on my dress uniform," Preston says. "Two years later, when I exited the Army, I cut off those buttons with the eagles on them and wear them to this day on my blue blazers. I've been wearing them now for 60 years."

His acquisitions expanded first with postcards and stamps, then later with the help of eBay and a team of pickers around the country who sent him items of interest. Today, Preston's collection of more than



TOP RIGHT: Preston Cook was stationed at Fort Huachuca in Arizona after joining the Army, where he received his first eagle keepsake: the buttons on his uniform.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRESTON COOK

RIGHT: Preston still sews his original uniform buttons onto his blazers today.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Chris Garza's flag collection ranges from personal keepsakes to historical designs that fell out of fashion. PHOTO COURTESY OF LEGNA STUDIO



THE BETSY ROSS FLAG

While lore holds that Betsy Ross designed the first American flag, there is no hard evidence pointing to any single designer. But, as the first seamstress to stitch the flag together, Historian Chris Garza says she may have influenced some of its details.

One of Chris' favorite stories is when George Washington, a Freemason, approached Ross about making the flag, he suggested the stars have six points, as is common in Masonic symbolism. Ross quickly noted that if they wanted to mass-produce the flag, five-pointed stars were much more efficient.

To prove it, she pulled out a small square of fabric, made a few quick folds and one simple cut, and handed him a perfect star. Washington was convinced, and the stars on the flag have had five points ever since.





Raising and lowering the flag continues to be a cherished tradition for Chris Garza.
PHOTO COURTESY OF LEGNA STUDIO

FLY YOUR FLAG

As a flag historian and restorer, Chris Garza, executive director of Troutdale Historical Society in Oregon, regularly encounters misconceptions about flag etiquette. A common one he shared as a child was that the flag must be destroyed if it touches the ground. He can still remember dropping the flag once while lowering it for his grandfather.

"I thought it was the end of my life," Chris says. "But he pulled me aside and explained that as long as it isn't tattered, it can always be cleaned and reflowed. That moment of relief really stuck with me."

Another common mistake is flying the flag at night. To maintain respect and visibility, the flag should either be illuminated at night or taken down at sunset and raised again in the morning.

40,000 eagle-themed items is on display at National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota. It includes historical artifacts, including buttons worn by George Washington and a Civil War knife, as well as pop culture objects, such as sports memorabilia and an Andy Warhol print.

The eagle's symbolic appeal in so many different settings has always been one of its most interesting features for Preston.

"It's a symbol people turn to in times of both peace and distress," he says. "The image of it on the Great Seal has changed from being kind of scrawny and chicken-legged to more of a full-fledged eagle. Around the 1820s, it was first used by political campaigns to show patriotism. So, it has changed over the years, but it's remained constant throughout our history."

For centuries, that presence has led many Americans to identify the bald eagle as the country's national bird. Once his book was complete, Preston turned his attention to putting a bill in front of Congress that would finally make official what everyone had always assumed.

He sent a draft to U.S. Rep. Brad Finstad, whose district includes Wabasha, as well as Sen. Amy Klobuchar. The two coordinated on the bill, which unanimously passed in both houses of Congress before President Joe Biden signed it into law in 2024.

Preston has no doubt the work was worth it. It permanently enshrines what many Americans have long felt about the bald eagle.

"For many years, it was our only living symbol," Preston says. "If you see one flying or fishing, it's such an amazing bird. It means so much to so many people. It means freedom and liberty and power and independence and family. People just don't get tired of seeing it, and I don't think there's any other symbol of America that has that kind of enthusiasm."

The Call to Citizenship

If the eagle is the American symbol that generates the most excitement, Mark Clague believes the national anthem is the most dynamic. As a musician and musical

historian teaching at the University of Michigan for the past 20 years, he has often led an introductory class on American music. His favorite way to kick it off is with Jimi Hendrix's 1969 performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock.

"It brings you immediately into some of the complexities around the anthem," Mark says. "Is there a single, appropriate way to play it? Is it a protest or burning the flag through music? Hendrix was also a member of the 101st Airborne, and aspects of the performance are quite patriotic, so is it saying something more textured?"

Those questions led him down a rabbit hole that culminated in his 2022 book, "O Say Can You Hear?: A Cultural Biography of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'" Francis Scott Key's lyrics, written after the bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry during the War of 1812, go on for four verses. Only the first is typically sung for the anthem, building to the final line, "O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave/O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

While it is often performed with an exclamation point at the end, Mark considers the question it asks to be crucial. At the time the anthem was penned, the country had faced some of its worst defeats. Key's vision of a bold and proud nation wasn't something he was seeing but a hope for the future.

"Today, I think that question asks us if we are brave enough to live up to that vision," Mark says. "Do we have the courage to be a country that celebrates liberty and justice for all? I think it has the potential to make the anthem something urgent and contemporary. It's a verb, rather than a noun."

When President Herbert Hoover officially signed an act of Congress making "The Star-Spangled Banner" the U.S. national anthem in 1931, it—much like the eagle—was a recognition of something that had already been true for many Americans. The song was used as a recruiting tune for the Union Army in the Civil War and was often treated as a de facto national anthem during the

“In some ways, the song is sort of democracy in action. We made the anthem by using it.”

— Mark Clague

Spanish-American War and World War I.

“I think that makes it powerful,” Mark says. “In some ways, the song is sort of democracy in action. We made the anthem by using it. And for the same reason, changing it would be really hard. You could change the law, but it wouldn’t change how people feel.”

The music itself requires the performer to sing the anthem to life with dramatic highs and lows that take the same commitment the lyrics demand. Mark’s hope is that when people hear it, the

anthem won’t just serve as a celebration but also a call to action.

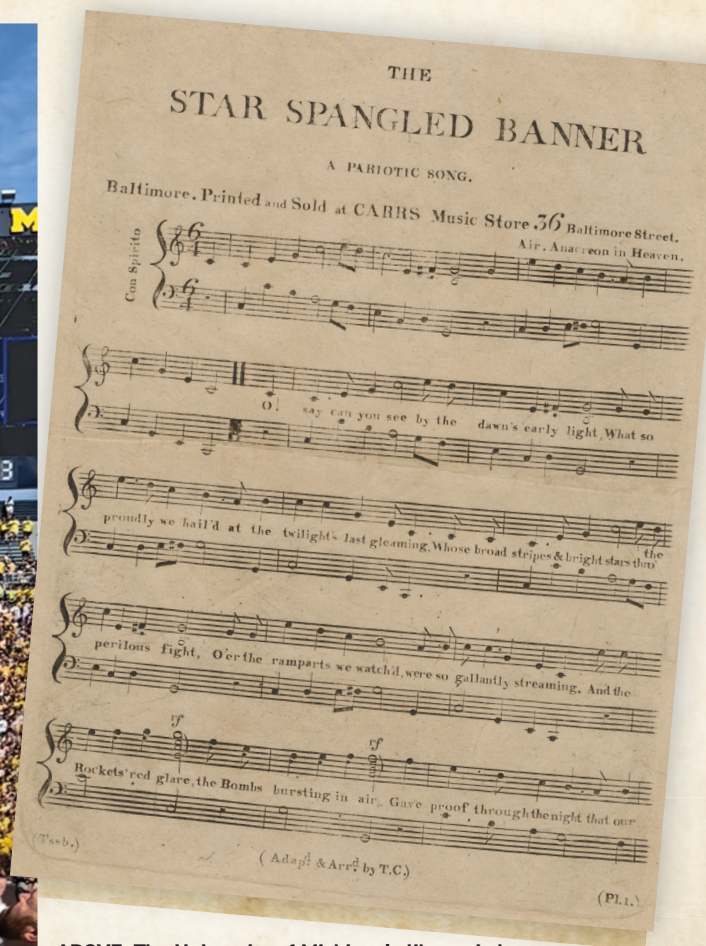
“It feels like the anthem is especially urgent right now,” he says. “U.S. democracy has really been built on people getting involved. Voting, sure, but also being informed, volunteering and lifting a hand to help your neighbor. Being patriotic is something you have to do and earn, rather than just something you have. And I think that call to citizenship is one of the coolest things about the anthem.” ■

STAR-SPANGLED SPINOFFS

While the roots of the national anthem’s lyrics are decidedly American, the music originated with Anacreontic Society, a musicians’ club in London.

Since the tune struck a chord in the United States, Mark Clague, a music historian teaching at the University of Michigan, estimates there have been more than 600 sets of lyrics applied to that melody, on subjects as varied as farm work, unionization and women’s suffrage.

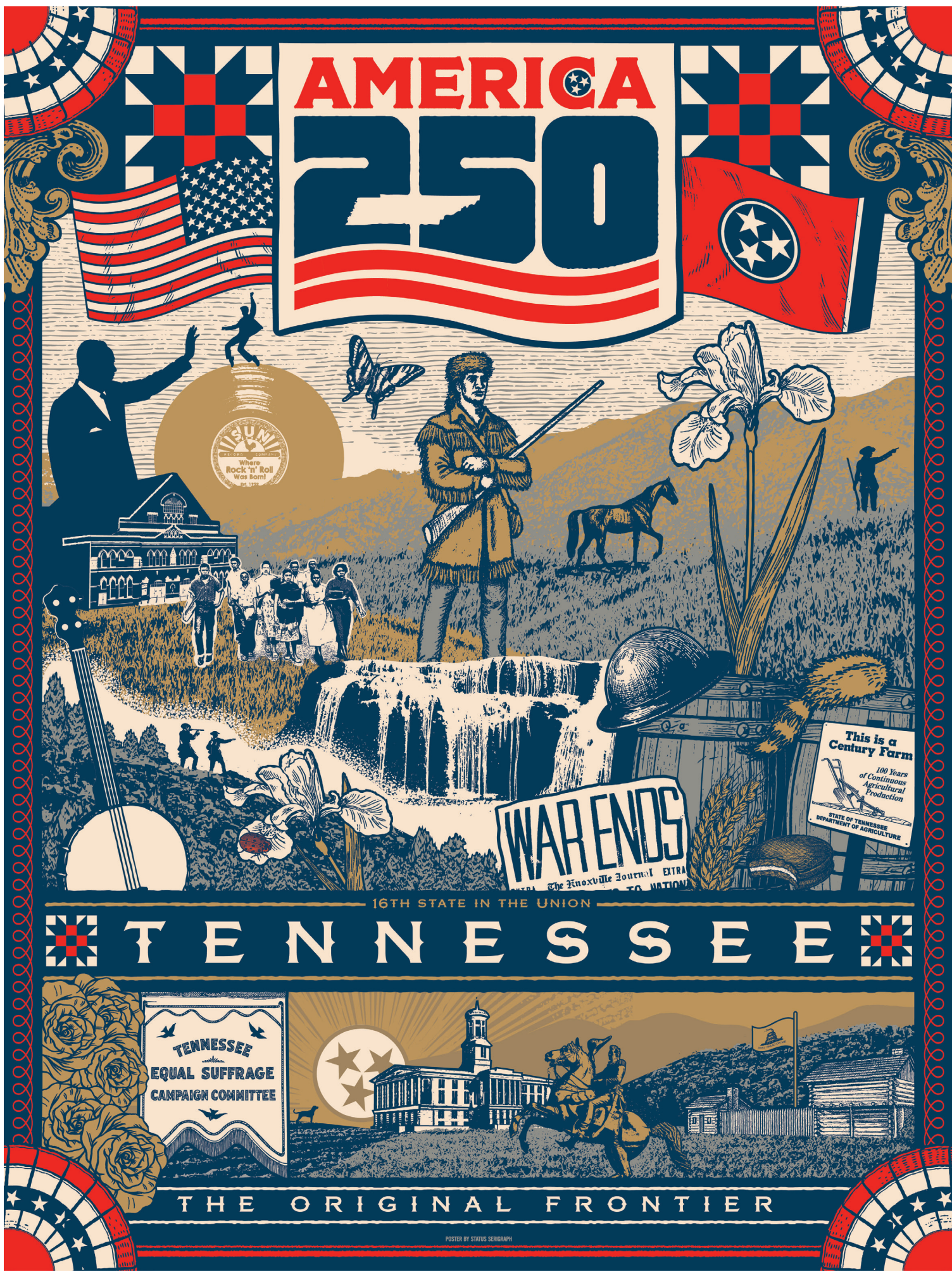
“It’s interesting to see how many different words fit the melody,” he says. “It really supports the notion that ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ is not just one iconic thing but kind of a conversation about American life.”



ABOVE: The University of Michigan’s library is home to the first sheet music edition of the song to use the “The Star-Spangled Banner” title. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WILLIAM L. CLEMENTS LIBRARY LEFT: Mark Clague conducts the anthem at a University of Michigan home football game. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK CLAGUE

AMERICA

250



TENNESSEE

TENNESSEE
EQUAL SUFFRAGE
CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE

THE ORIGINAL FRONTIER

POSTER BY STATUS SENIOPH

AMERICA Anniversary Celebrations



Knoxville-based designer Justin Helton created a poster titled “Original Frontier” to mark the United States Semiquincentennial.

“From Tennessee’s rich agricultural history to its iconic musical contributions to its role in westward expansion, the Civil Rights Movement and women’s suffrage, the poster represents Tennessee’s part in shaping American culture, economy and democracy,” according to Tennessee America250 planners.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The poster “Original Frontier” showcases Tennessee’s music, agriculture and westward expansion. IMAGE COURTESY OF TN250

UPCOMING TENNESSEE EVENTS

COOKEVILLE

Through Sept. 12
Becoming America

This exhibit at the Cookeville History Museum invites visitors to explore the people, events and ideals that shaped the nation’s journey over the past 250 years. It highlights pivotal moments in our nation’s history while encouraging reflection on the stories, challenges and achievements that continue to define the American experience today.

cookeville-tn.gov

CLINTON

Through Dec. 31

TN250 Trail

Museum of Appalachia highlights the people, objects and stories that connect Tennessee to the broader American story. The TN250 Museum Trail is a curated, self-guided experience woven throughout the museum. It highlights a selection of artifacts across the grounds and exhibit buildings that reflect Tennessee’s role in shaping the country—through innovation, conflict, craftsmanship and everyday life.

museumofappalachia.org

UNION CITY

Through Feb. 1, 2027

Brush Strokes of a Young Nation: The Art of David Wright

Discovery Park of America invites visitors to experience the nation’s early story through art. This special exhibition is presented in the museum’s Southern Artist Showcase as part of the nationwide America250 commemoration.

discoveryparkofamerica.com

KNOXVILLE

Through Feb. 14, 2027

Lines Were Drawn: The Treaty of Holston and Its Legacy

This exhibit at the East Tennessee Historical Society’s Museum of East Tennessee History places visitors at the center of Tennessee’s early history. Lines Were Drawn traces the events that led to the Treaty of Holston from the fall of Fort Loudoun and the British Royal Proclamation of 1763, through the American Revolutionary War, the formation of the Southwest Territory, and on to the decades of Cherokee resilience, removal and survival that followed. The exhibition also features animated map sequences, engaging video presentations and five interactive visitor-response stations that invite visitors to locate themselves within the history.

easttnhistory.org

JOHNSON CITY

Nov. 7

A Walk in Their Boots

This timeline reenactment at Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site honors the history of the American soldier. The event aims to start Veterans Day week by giving the public a chance to experience a day in the life of the American soldier during the conflicts that shaped our country’s rich history. The event has extensive displays of military and civilian equipment, gear, weapons, etc., representing various time periods from the Revolutionary War to modern day, including the history of America’s allies and enemies. The event is free to attend and features a Veterans Recognition Program, battle reenactments, weapons demos, military vehicles, lecture series and more.

tn.gov/historicalcommission/events

KINGSPORT

Nov. 7

Open Doors

Visit the Exchange Place Living History Farm as volunteers open the doors to the past. Explore the farm and witness living history demonstrations, such as open-hearth cooking, blacksmithing, spinning and weaving, old-fashioned games, old-time music and more.

exchangeplacetn.org

ELIZABETHTON

Nov. 14-15

Colonial Harvest Celebration

Join the festivities at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park as Washington County Militia reenactors gather at Fort Watauga to celebrate victories in the War for Independence and give thanks for a bountiful harvest. Enjoy demonstrations of 18th-century life and living history presentations.

tnstateparks.com/parks/sycamore-shoals

Easy Morning Meals

Start the day with breakfast casseroles

There's something undeniably comforting about a warm breakfast casserole fresh from the oven. Whether you're feeding a crowd on a lazy weekend or planning ahead for a busy weekday morning, these hearty dishes do the heavy lifting for you.

From a cheesy hash brown side dish to a blueberry French toast bake, these recipes are as easy to make as they are satisfying to eat. Best of all, most can be prepped the night before—so all you have to do in the morning is enjoy.

BACON, SWEET POTATO AND EGG CASSEROLE

- 1 pound bacon
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, seeds removed, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 12 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 3 cups fresh or frozen diced sweet potatoes
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 green onions, chopped

Heat oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray, and set aside.

In a large skillet, cook bacon over medium heat until crispy. Remove bacon, and place it on a paper towel-lined plate. Roughly chop bacon. Set aside.

Add onion and red pepper to the skillet. Cook over medium heat until tender. Add garlic, and cook for 2 minutes. Set aside.

In a large bowl, beat eggs. Whisk in milk. Stir in cooked vegetables, potatoes and 1 cup of shredded cheese. Set aside ¾ cup of bacon, and stir in the rest. Season with salt and pepper.

Pour mixture into prepared baking dish. Top with remaining

cheese and green onions. Bake for 20 minutes. Evenly distribute remaining bacon on top of casserole.

Bake for an additional 20 to 30 minutes or until eggs are firm and top is slightly golden brown. Let stand for 10 minutes. Cut into squares, and serve warm.

Note: This casserole can be prepared in advance. Pour mixture into baking dish, and refrigerate for up to 24 hours. Bake when ready to eat.



PHOTOS BY MARK GILLILAND, STYLING BY RHONDA GILLILAND

CRUSTLESS QUICHE CASSEROLE

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 12 large eggs | Dash of pepper |
| ½ cup milk | 2-3 green onions, thinly sliced |
| 2 tablespoons sour cream | ¼ cup bacon bits |
| ½ cup shredded Swiss cheese | Spinach and/or mushrooms, sautéed and lightly salted |
| ¼ teaspoon salt | |

Heat oven to 350 F.

Spray a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray. Set aside. In a medium-size mixing bowl, add eggs, milk, sour cream, cheese, salt and pepper. Whisk together until mixed well.

Add green onions, bacon and sautéed vegetables. Mix well.

Pour the mixture into the greased pan. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until the center springs back when touched.



HASH BROWN CASSEROLE

- | |
|--|
| 32 ounces frozen, shredded hash browns, thawed |
| ½ cup melted butter |
| 10½ ounces condensed cream of chicken soup |
| 16 ounces sour cream |
| ½ cup finely diced onion |
| 2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided |
| ¼ teaspoon black pepper |

Heat oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-by-13-inch casserole dish.

In a large bowl, combine hash browns, butter, soup, sour cream, onion, 1½ cups cheese and pepper. Spread the mixture into the prepared baking dish, and top with the reserved ½ cup of cheese.

Bake for 45 to 55 minutes or until hot and bubbly.



OVERNIGHT BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

- | |
|--|
| 1 can crescent rolls |
| 1 pound mild breakfast sausage, browned and grease drained |
| 6 extra-large eggs, beaten |
| 1 block cream cheese, cut into small cubes |
| 2 cups shredded extra-sharp cheese |

Heat oven to 350 F.

Spray a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.

Unroll crescent rolls in the bottom of the dish. Press seams together to form a sheet. Top with sausage. Pour eggs over sausage. Spread cream cheese cubes evenly, and top with shredded cheese. Bake for 30 minutes.

Note: You can prepare everything the night before. Cover baking dish with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until ready to bake the next morning.

OVERNIGHT BLUEBERRY FRENCH TOAST CASSEROLE

- | |
|---------------------------------------|
| 8 ounces cream cheese, softened |
| 1 cup confectioners' sugar |
| 2 tablespoons milk |
| 1 tablespoon vanilla extract, divided |
| 2 cups blueberries, divided |
| 2 loaves French bread, cubed |
| 2 cups milk |
| 8 large eggs |
| 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon |
| ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg |

Mix cream cheese, confectioners' sugar, milk and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract in a bowl until smooth and creamy. Fold in 1 cup blueberries.

Cover the bottom of a 10-by-14-inch baking dish with a layer of bread cubes. Spread cream cheese mixture over bread layer. Top with remaining bread cubes.



Whisk milk, eggs, 2 teaspoons vanilla extract, cinnamon and nutmeg in a large bowl. Pour over bread mixture.

Sprinkle 1 cup blueberries over bread-egg mixture. Tightly cover dish with aluminum foil. Refrigerate 8 hours to overnight. Remove from refrigerator 30 to 60 minutes before baking.

Heat the oven to 375 F. Bake for 45 minutes. Remove foil, and continue baking until the center is set, about 30 minutes.

PLANNER



Celebrate the season with Tennessee traditions that have delighted families for generations. From apple festivals and bluegrass concerts to artisan fairs, hometown celebrations and Christmas parades, these events offer plenty of opportunities to experience the people, places and flavors that make the Volunteer State special.

SOMERVILLE

Sept. 12

Cotton Festival

Celebrate Fayette County's agricultural heritage during the 26th annual Cotton Festival on the historic Somerville Square from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Browse arts and crafts vendors, enjoy live music and food trucks, cheer on the 5K and car show, and take part in family-friendly activities, including a canning contest and baking contests.

fayettecountychamber.com

UNION CITY

Sept. 18-19

Celebration of Native American Culture

Experience two days of Native American history, traditions and culture at Discovery Park of America. Watch colorful powwow dance sessions, hear stories passed down through generations, browse handcrafted goods from Native artisans and enjoy demonstrations of beadwork, pottery and other

traditional crafts. Interactive workshops, educational exhibits and Native-inspired food vendors offer something for visitors of all ages. Admission is included with park admission or membership, and school groups receive free admission on Friday.

discoveryparkofamerica.com/event/2026-celebration-of-native-american-culture/

SPRINGFIELD

Oct. 2

First Fridays—Fall Finale

From 6-9 p.m., downtown Springfield caps its 2026 First Friday series with live music, more than 80 vendors, food trucks, a kids' zone and a cruise-in. It's a fun evening for the whole family while supporting downtown beautification projects.

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

SPARTA

Oct. 10

Liberty Square: A Lester Flatt Celebration

Celebrate White County's bluegrass heritage during this free, daylong festival in historic downtown Sparta. National and international bluegrass artists—



ERWIN

Oct. 2-3

Unicoi County Apple Festival

More than 400 vendors transform downtown Erwin into one of the Southeast's premier fall festivals. Browse handcrafted goods, watch live entertainment on two stages, cheer on runners in the Apple Festival 4-Mile Road Race and 3K Race Walk, admire entries in the Apple Decorating Contest and Blue Ridge Pottery Show, and sample homemade favorites during the Apple Cooking Contest. Festival hours are 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and admission is free.

unicoicountyapplefestival.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF
UNICOI APPLE FESTIVAL



including The Isaacs, ETSU Bluegrass Pride Band and Kentucky Just Us—perform from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on the main stage in front of the Oldham Theater. Browse more than 100 food and craft vendors, enjoy small-town hospitality and honor hometown legends Lester Flatt and Benny Martin, whose musical legacy helped shape the bluegrass sound.

spartatn.gov/lesterflatt

LEWISBURG

Oct. 9-10

Goats, Music & More Fair

Spend two days celebrating one of Marshall County's most unique traditions at Rock Creek Park. Meet and learn about Tennessee's famous fainting goats during shows and demonstrations, browse craft and food vendors, and enjoy live music throughout the weekend. Saturday's entertainment includes performances by Winter Creek and Scott Southworth & The Honky Tonk Anonymous Band, with country music star Pam Tillis headlining the evening concert. Gates open at 10 a.m. Friday and 9 a.m. Saturday.

goatsmusicandmore.com

BROWNSVILLE

Oct. 17

Hatchie Fall Fest

Historic Court Square comes alive with live music, children's games, food vendors, artisan booths and family activities celebrating Haywood County's heritage. The free festival also features local entertainment and seasonal contests throughout the day.

hatchiefallfest.com

MORRISTOWN

Oct. 24-25

Mountain Makins Festival

Browse handcrafted Appalachian artwork from more than 70 juried artisans while enjoying traditional music, storytelling, demonstrations and children's activities. Hosted by Rose Center, this annual festival is one of East Tennessee's premier arts events.

rosecenter.org/mountain-makins

For a complete list of what's happening in Tennessee, visit tnvacation.com/calendar.

SEVIERVILLE

Begins Nov. 6

Smoky Mountain Winterfest

Celebrate the start of the holiday season as Sevierville, Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg sparkle with more than 15 million lights along a 25-mile stretch through the Smokies. In addition to the dazzling displays, visitors can enjoy holiday shopping, seasonal shows, outdoor ice skating and special attractions like Shadrack's Christmas Wonderland drive-thru light experience.

visitsevierville.com/winterfest

MORRISTOWN

Dec. 3

Morristown Christmas Parade

Bundle up and enjoy one of East Tennessee's favorite holiday traditions as illuminated floats, marching bands and community groups parade through downtown beginning at 7 p.m. Bring lawn chairs and enjoy an evening filled with Christmas spirit.

morristownchamber.com

SEVIERVILLE

Dec. 5

64th Annual Sevierville Christmas Parade

Historic downtown Sevierville welcomes the holidays with festive floats, marching bands, dancers and a special visit from Santa. The parade begins at 11 a.m. and is one of the Smokies' favorite hometown Christmas traditions.

scoc.org/ChristmasParade.aspx



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.



CENTERVILLE

Oct. 3-4

National Banana Pudding Festival

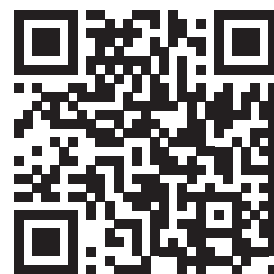
Bring your sweet tooth to the Hickman County Ag Pavilion for one of Tennessee's tastiest fall traditions. Sample 11 unique banana puddings along the famous Puddin' Path, watch chefs compete in the live National Banana Pudding Cook-Off, enjoy entertainment on two stages, browse nearly 100 Southern craft vendors and let the kids play in the Little 'Nanners Kids' Area. Festival hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

bananapuddingfest.org

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL BANANA PUDDING FESTIVAL

STORM CHASERS AND SIGNAL MAKERS:

CAREERS IN ELECTRICITY



Courtesy of the Ayers Foundation Trust

Dawson Gambrell

Tennessee is quietly positioning itself as a major powerhouse for infrastructure development, with the state's economic future hanging from utility crossarms 40 feet in the air. In a recent episode of TennTalks, the heights of one of the state's most rugged and vital skilled trades was explored: linemancy.

Erwin Utilities Lineworker Dawson Gambrell was recently featured on TennTalks, a docuseries produced by the Ayers Foundation, highlighting careers in skilled trades.

Forget the old misconception that technical career paths require a desk and a computer screen. The reality is that keeping the

lights on across Tennessee's 95 counties demands a unique mix of technical problem-solving, physical endurance and crew-level synchronization.

Whether you are a high schooler looking to secure a lucrative, debt-free future straight from graduation, a local veteran transitioning to civilian service, or a woman ready to break barriers in a male-dominated field, this specialized trade offers unparalleled job security and six-figure earning potential.

Scan the QR code above to hear firsthand stories of grit, late-night storm restoration, and true community impact. ■

CELEBRATING *Public Power Week* OCTOBER 4-10



James Arwood



Seth Berry



Luke Blackmon



Shane Buchanan



Marsha Crain



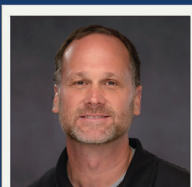
Dawson Gambrell



Greg Helton



Petie Johnson



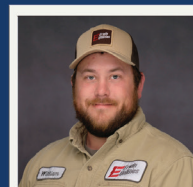
Kip Lemon



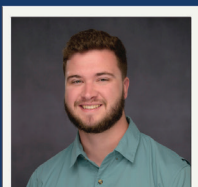
Roby Lemon



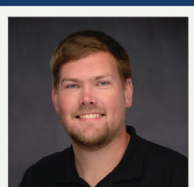
Steve McCurry



William McInturff



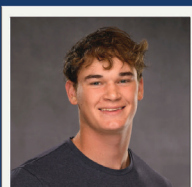
Wes Milhorn



Trevor Shelton



Scott Saylor



Noah Tilson



Chris Tolley



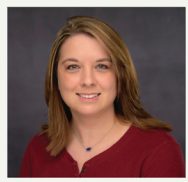
Joseph
Wigington

CELEBRATING
Customer Service Week

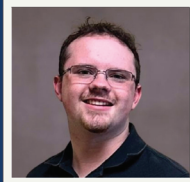
OCTOBER 5-9



Kala Allen



Hollie Benard



Andy Cole



Jo Cole



Jessica Duncan



Katherine Gouge



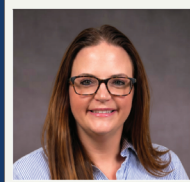
Emily Johnson



Kayla Lynch



Jenny Morefield



Logan Myers



Tammy Peterson



Samara Waldrop

CELEBRATING
Water Operator Appreciation Day

OCTOBER 23, 2026



Randy Arrowood



Gavin Casey



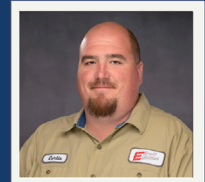
Luke Cole



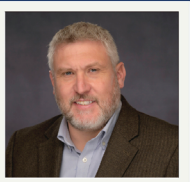
Jose Diaz



Chuck Edney



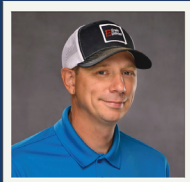
Curtis Edwards



Jason Foster



Clay Hepburn



Michael Kincheloe



Josh Peterson



Shawn Treadway



Kelse Watts

 Erwin
Fiber

 Erwin
Utilities



ADVENTURE AWAITS

Journey from mountain streams to the sea at the Tennessee Aquarium

What Is It?

Located along Chattanooga's scenic riverfront, the Tennessee Aquarium takes visitors on a journey from the streams and rivers of Southern Appalachia to the open ocean. Admission includes two separate buildings—River Journey and Ocean Journey—where guests can encounter everything from playful river otters and giant freshwater fish to penguins, sharks, sea turtles and colorful reef life. The aquarium is one of Chattanooga's most popular attractions and is nationally recognized for its conservation and education efforts.

A Bit of Background

The Tennessee Aquarium opened in 1992, helping transform what was once an industrial waterfront into one of the city's most visited destinations. Rather than beginning with the ocean, the aquarium tells the story of water from its origins in the Appalachian Mountains all the way to the sea—a concept that remains unique among major aquariums. A second building, Ocean Journey, opened in 2005, expanding the experience to include marine habitats.

What to Do

Explore River Journey's forests, wetlands and freshwater habitats before crossing the plaza to Ocean Journey, where sharks glide overhead, penguins dive through chilly waters and butterflies flutter inside a tropical garden. Daily keeper chats, animal feedings and diver presentations add to the experience, and Tennessee's only IMAX with Laser theater offers nature films and Hollywood blockbusters just steps away. During October, the aquarium celebrates ODDtober, featuring not-so-spooky wildlife programs, underwater pumpkin-carving demonstrations and themed animal enrichment.

Beyond the Aquarium

Spend the rest of the day exploring Chattanooga's walkable riverfront. Stroll across the historic Walnut Street Bridge to Coolidge Park, ride the century-old carousel or browse shops and restaurants on the North Shore. Nearby, the Creative Discovery Museum offers more hands-on fun for younger children, while the Bluff View Art District is a favorite for coffee and pastries.

More Info

The aquarium is open year-round, with daily hours and special programming varying by season. General admission includes River Journey and Ocean Journey, and children ages 3 and younger are admitted free. Purchasing tickets online in advance is recommended, especially during holiday weekends. For current hours, special fall events and ticket information, visit tnaqua.org.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
TENNESSEE AQUARIUM

Stretch Your Growing Season

As summer heat gives way to cooler fall temperatures, many vegetable gardeners start to feel the impending gloom of the dreaded first frost. Though the cold weather will eventually take its toll on gardens across the state, thankfully, not all hope is lost.

For thousands of years, gardeners have been using season-extension practices to support a longer growing period for their plants. There are many ways to extend the growing season for vegetable gardens. Some of these season-extension practices, such as greenhouses and high tunnels, can be very expensive and labor intensive. But there are lower-cost alternatives. Mulches, floating row covers and low tunnels are great ways to extend the season without breaking the bank—or your back.

Mulches

On the surface, using mulch for season extension may sound farfetched. But when used properly, it can be very beneficial as cold temperatures approach.

Besides its ability to help the soil hold moisture and control weeds, mulch also buffers temperature changes in the soil and provides some warmth to plant roots. This is important as cold temperatures can damage plant roots through the freezing and thawing process.

Mulch provides cold protection by absorbing light, which warms the soil below, and by reducing heat loss through evaporation. Mulch does need to be applied properly, though, to see these benefits. If using organic mulches, such as straw or wood chips, ensure they are spread evenly around the plants, without touching the stems. When using inorganic mulches, like black plastic or woven fabric, irrigation may be necessary.

Floating Row Covers

Another way to extend the growing season in a vegetable garden is to use a floating row cover. Floating row covers are typically made from permeable fabric and can help increase temperatures around plants, while also providing added protection from harsh weather and pests.

These covers are usually placed directly over plants, without a supporting structure, and the edges are held down by weight that

is easily moved. When used for season extension, floating row covers trap sunlight, warming the air and soil under them.

During the fall, it is important to monitor the temperature under the cover, as plants can overheat on warmer, sunny days.

Low Tunnels

Low tunnels function like floating row covers but typically use polyethylene plastic or agricultural fabric with a small structure supporting them. Usually 2- to 3-feet tall, low tunnels are commonly constructed from electrical conduit, PVC or wire.

This design allows for more space between the plant and the cover and creates a larger air barrier, which helps provide more consistent temperatures. If a nonpermeable plastic is used as a cover, create vents in it, as low tunnels can heat up very quickly on warmer days.

Alternatively, the covers can also be rolled up or removed if the temperatures in the garden bed climb too high.

Some Final Thoughts

Mulch, floating row covers and low tunnels are all great ways to extend the growing season as we work our way into the colder months. While they won't keep warm-season vegetables alive through the winter, many gardeners have seen great results using them with cool-season crops.

All these systems require some effort, but overall, they are fairly simple and cost-effective ways to achieve a longer growing season. ■

For more detailed information on season extension, please read UT Extension's publication W346-F – Season Extension Methods at <https://uthort.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/228/2023/11/W346-F.pdf> or contact your local UT-TSU Extension office.



Rylan Thompson is a University of Tennessee Agriculture & Natural Resources agent in Franklin County. His responsibilities include production agriculture, nursery production and the Master Gardener program.

Strong fighters, spotted bass might hit anything shiny, such as a spoon.
PHOTO BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Spotted Fever

Vicious and powerful fish provide outstanding action

Commonly called Kentucky spotted bass, the Northern spotted bass is a ferocious species that can outfight any largemouth of similar size.

With a greenish-white coloration, spotted bass look very similar to largemouth, but with a slightly smaller mouth and more black splotches along its lateral line. Its defining feature, a rough “tooth patch” on its tongue, distinguishes this species.

Common in many Tennessee rivers and lakes, spotted bass range throughout the Eastern United States, especially in the Mississippi and Ohio river drainages. The state record weighed 6 pounds, 1 ounce and came from Chickamauga Lake. The state record Alabama bass, a similar species, weighed 7 pounds, 3 ounces. It came out of the Oconee River. Other good places to catch spots include Dale Hollow, Center Hill and Percy Priest Lakes.

While spotted bass look like a largemouth, they act more like a smallmouth. Spots love hard, rocky bottoms and deeper, cooler flowing water. Spots commonly hunt near main channel points, ledge edges, rocky shorelines, shell beds, sandbars, riprap and similar places.

“Many river reservoirs have hard-bottom areas where mussels form and grow, particularly on the Tennessee River,” says Randy Howell, a former Bassmaster Classic champion. “The shell beds often become uncovered during high current flow. These old shell beds are always great places to catch spotted bass.”

For large impoundments, check the dam’s generation schedule. Water flowing through a dam creates current that stimulates feeding activity. Fish around rocky points close to deep water. Spotted bass frequently hide behind current breaks, but face into the flow ready to snatch anything delicious that

might come their way.

Spotted bass might hit anything that would interest a largemouth or smallmouth, but they prey most heavily upon shad. They attack anything that mimics a threadfin shad. In clear water, spots might rise quite a distance to smash a suspending or slow-sinking jerkbait. Toss a suspending jerkbait to a good area, then vigorously jerk the rod several times to make the lure dive. At the desired depth, jerk the bait side to side to make it dart like an injured fish. Then pause. Bass regularly strike a hovering bait.

“Not many baits can beat a jerkbait for spots,” Randy says, noting they’re especially effective in the fall. “People can fish a jerkbait many ways. To best fish a jerkbait, fish it with a pop, pop, stop; pop, pop, stop cadence with a couple seconds between the fall and the start back. That causes the bait to flick from side to side. It’s almost the same action as a walk-the-dog topwater bait, but under the surface. When the bait hovers in the strike zone, it stops in their face. That’s when bass eat it reactively.”

In the deepest water, vertically jig a 1/8- to 3/4-ounce chrome spoon. As it flutters down, it mimics a dying shad. When it hits bottom, jig it up and down a few times. Bass normally hit as it falls.

Although typically caught as bonus fish, spotted bass can provide outstanding action, especially on light tackle. ■



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 on Facebook.



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- Economic development
- Local decision-making





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