

## Tennessee city leaders make things happen

This month marks my third anniversary as your executive director. It is a pleasure and honor to lead TML's team of professionals that work each day on behalf of our municipal officials, employees and the millions of Tennesseans that call our towns and cities home. Tennessee continues to grow in population, economic opportunity and prosperity.

Unfortunately, many Tennesseans assume these things just happen, like a plane on auto-pilot. Some state leaders claim their policies and actions are the reason for such successes. But we know it is also in large part to the hard work, countless hours and sometimes, thankless sacrifices, of our local officials, employees and civic leaders. Simply put, Tennessee's local governments make things happen.

Next year will be full of challenges for our towns and cities, especially as the legislature returns



Anthony Haynes  
TML Executive Director

in an election-year session. Our team is ready to engage but we will need the help of our member cities to secure the outcomes that keep Tennessee moving forward.

As we approach the holidays and 2024, our team extends our best wishes to you and your families for a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

## State revenues predicted to grow at slower pace over next two years

BY CAROLE GRAVES  
TML Communications Director

The State Funding Board met earlier this month to set revenue estimates for the remainder of fiscal year 2023, as well as set projections for the upcoming FY2024-25 budget.

Concerned that both state and national revenues are predicted to grow at a slower pace over the next two years, the State Funding Board set a growth rate for total revenue collections to fall between a negative 0.69% and a negative 0.19% for the remaining FY2023; general fund projections were set between a negative 0.5% to 0%. For the FY2024-25 budget, the

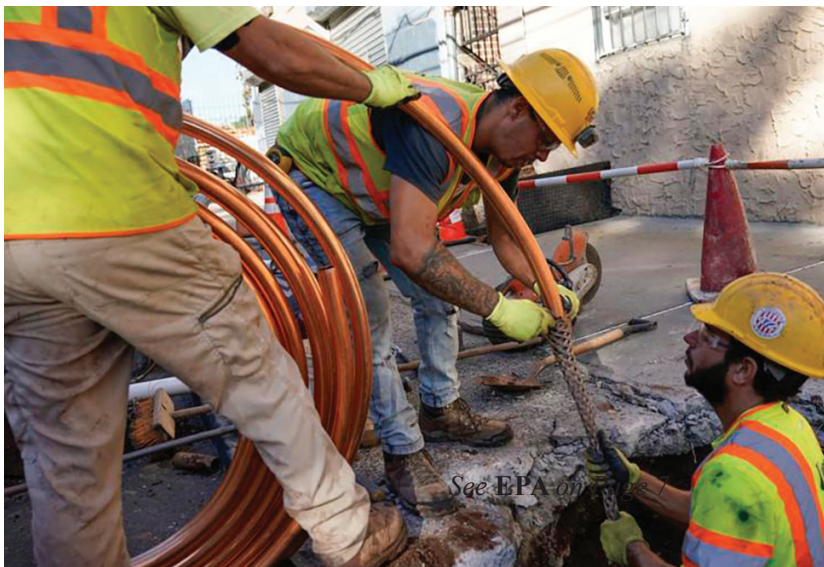
funding board adopted a modest growth range of total revenue collections of .13% to 1.3%; general fund projections were set at -0.5% to +0.5%.

"Our economy is still strong," said Tennessee Comptroller Jason Mumpower. "We've seen extraordinary population growth in the last year. We have record low unemployment. Tennessee outperformed most states coming out of the pandemic and our collections are still 40% higher than pre-pandemic."

In the past five years, Tennessee's revenue has grown from \$17.4 billion to \$24.7 billion, but revenue is expected to dip as

See REVENUE on Page 6

## Proposed EPA rule would require removal of lead water pipes within decade



Workers replace lead pipes with copper ones. A new ruling from the EPA would require all lead water pipes in the country to be inventoried and replaced within the decade due to health risks.

By KATE COIL

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is asking for feedback on a new rule proposal that would require all lead drinking water pipes to be replaced within ten years, offering few exceptions.

The announcement of the "Proposed Lead and Copper Rule Improvements" (LCRI) aims to protect residents "from the significant, and irreversible, health effects from being exposed to lead in drinking water," based on "science and existing practices utilized by drinking water systems."

Key provisions of the proposal include:

- Achieving 100% lead pipe replacement within 10 years across the country.
- Locating "legacy lead pipes" with water systems providing an initial inventory of lead pipe services lines required by Oct. 16, 2024.
- Improved water tap sampling and best practices.

- Lowering the federal Lead Action Level from 15 µg/L to 10 µg/L.
- Requiring water systems with multiple lead action level violations to provide lead-reducing filters available to all customers.

Tennessee ranks seventh among the states in the U.S. with the most lead pipes still being actively used in water supply with 4.15% of the state's pipes still containing some form of lead. Florida has the highest rate followed by Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas.

One of the concerns cited by the EPA as it considers the new rule is that lead pipes "disproportionately impact those living in disadvantaged communities" with the dangers of such.

"The use of lead pipes was banned in the 1980s, yet there are over 9 million lead service lines delivering water to families in neighborhoods across

See EPA on Page 7

## Tornadoes cause 6 deaths

Outbreak marks deadliest December tornadic event in Tennessee history; Major damage reported in Clarksville, Gallatin, Hendersonville, Nashville, and Springfield

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

Six people are dead following tornado outbreaks in Middle and West Tennessee, which may be the deadliest December outbreak in state history.

According to the National Weather Service, several storm systems moved through the state, including an EF-3 tornado in the Clarksville area that touched down on Fort Campbell and was on the ground for approximately 42 miles. An EF-2 storm system also struck Madison, Gallatin, and Hendersonville. A third tornado is believed to have begun in White Bluff in Dickson County and tracked through Cheatham County and then into western Nashville.

NWS also received reports of tornado-related damage in the municipalities Charlotte, Collinwood, Loretto, Slayden, and White Bluff. Hail was reported in Manchester and Tullahoma

The Tennessee Office of Emergency Management (TEMA) reported 13 tornado reports across Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Gibson, Montgomery, Robertson, Stewart, Sumner, Trousdale, Weakley, and Wilson counties. More than 50,000 people across Middle Tennessee were without power following the peak of the storm.

Three deaths were reported in the Madison neighborhood of Nashville – two adults and a child – while two adults and a toddler were killed in Clarksville. Clarks-



Damage in Clarksville where the National Weather Service said an EF-3 tornado struck on Dec. 9, 2023. The storm was one of at least 13 tornadoes that touched down in the state that evening.

ville Mayor Joe Pitts said a total of 62 residents were hospitalized following the outbreak while 13 were hospitalized in Nashville following the collapse of a church roof. Two people were also injured in Hendersonville after the roof of an arcade collapsed.

States of emergency were declared by Clarksville Mayor Joe Pitts, Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell, Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown, and Hendersonville Mayor Jamie Clary. The state of Tennessee has also declared a state of emergency.

Gov. Bill Lee and First Lady Maria Lee surveyed damage in Clarksville and the Madison neighborhood of Nashville.

"Maria and I are praying for all Tennesseans who have been impacted by the tornadoes that swept through the state this evening," Lee said. "We mourn the lives lost and ask that everyone continue to follow guidance from local and state officials."

Schools were closed in Sumner and Montgomery counties following the outbreak due to power

See TORNADO on Page 8

## Knoxville explores use of delivery robots as autonomous services seek expansion

By KATE COIL

Following the successful rollout of food delivery robots on the University of Tennessee Knoxville campus in 2022, city leaders in Knoxville are now considering whether or not the technology is a good fit for the rest of the city.

The Knoxville City Council issued a moratorium on self-driving robotic delivery off campus in October, citing a need to further research the issue. Carter Hall, director of strategic policy and programs for the city, said the delivery model has worked well for UT.

"On campus, things have gone really well," Hall said. "UT officials reached out to the city with a plan in place for the university before they started initial testing where a person is walking around with the delivery robot. Part of their map of operations included some city right-of-way around the campus, which brought up some concerns. There were a lot of things to consider, so we entered into an MOU that made them stick to campus roads the way they wanted to and not operate on city streets without permission from the policy and engineering departments to do so. We've had no issues with robots going onto city right-of-way nor has there been an issue of them causing a car accident or safety concerns. They seem to work well and are being used a decent amount."

However, what works well on the UT campus may not work so well elsewhere.

"The infrastructure is very different from campus to the city," Hall said. "Our sidewalks tend to be older, narrower, and have a lot more cutouts for trees. In our downtown area, there are a lot of businesses with patios and railings that extend to the sidewalks."

As a result, Knoxville officials issued a six-month robot delivery moratorium on autonomous robotic delivery. This is not the first time Knoxville officials have halted the rollout of a new technology-based product in the city to better regulate the industry; city leaders also temporarily halted the use of electric scooters until they could better



Autonomous delivery company Starship rolled out its delivery robots on the University of Tennessee Knoxville campus in March 2022. While the delivery system has been a success on campus, Knoxville leaders issued a moratorium on the robots delivering on city streets until they can determine whether or not the model is a fit for the rest of the city.

understand the implications of the emerging industry. The city ended up developing an ongoing management program for the scooters to ensure they are used in a way that is of benefit to the city.

Hall said the city needs to look at a variety of issues before moving forward, including public safety on streets and sidewalks.

"For me it comes down to if these things are operating as they are supposed to and can our infrastructure accommodate this," he said. "It's not so much of a safety issue; they are safe. It's more about whether this make sense where sidewalks are crowded in a busy downtown. There is also always the concern of what businesses contractually can work with the robots. If we are giving certain companies an edge over smaller businesses, is that something we want to contribute to? I don't necessarily think cities should use the market as a regulatory force, but it behooves the city to know what they want and know how to operate it and regulate it based on that."

City leaders have spoken with officials with Starship, the company who presently operates the delivery robots on the UT campus, and Hall said other stakeholder

groups will also be invited to contribute to the discussion including the Mayors' Council on Disability Issues, the city's engineering department, and local businessowners. UT officials may also be asked to chime in with their experience on how the process as worked on campus.

Knoxville is not the first city to deal with the growing pains of expanding robotic delivery services. Many companies that once offered these delivery services only on college campuses are now wanting to expand their operations.

Chicago, Detroit, Miami, and Pittsburgh have all worked with companies to develop pilot programs to test out delivery services before allowing them to launch in their cities while leaders in San Francisco and Toronto outright banned the usage of delivery robots due to pedestrian safety issues.

Earlier this year, UberEats and Serve Robotics announced their intention to deploy more than 2,000 delivery robots in cities across the country sometime in 2024, once a pilot program in Los Angeles is completed. Amazon, FedEx, and Starship – who operate

See KNOXVILLE on Page 7

NEWS  
ACROSS  
TENNESSEE



**ATOKA**  
The town of Atoka is leveraging the largest grant award in town history to finance the revitalization and enhancement of Atoka’s wastewater infrastructure. Atoka was granted \$8,192,350 through the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation allocation from the American Rescue Plan Act.. The funds will finance two major projects: the replacement and upgrade of the Main Street Pump Station and the replacement of the Kearns Lift Station Wastewater Force Main. The two projects will both ensure efficient and reliable wastewater services for residents and businesses through more sustainable infrastructure and help position Atoka for growth.

**BRISTOL**  
The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has awarded top honors to the city of Bristol, TN., for demonstrating a “spirit of full disclosure” when preparing the city’s annual financial report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022. The latest award recognizes Bristol’s Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for 2021-2022 and marks the 20th consecutive year the city has received GFOA’s highest form of recognition in government accounting and financial reporting. The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting was established by GFOA in 1945 to encourage state and local governments to prepare transparent financial reports that allow the public to gauge the financial health of the community.

**CLEVELAND**  
Wind River Custom Homes, LLC officials announced the company will expand in Southeast Tennessee by constructing a new facility in Cleveland. The company will invest \$2.5 million and create 77 new jobs, moving their operations into the Cleveland city limits. The new 92,000-square-foot facility will significantly increase the company’s current production time of 30 housing units per year as well as allow Wind River to expand into the modular home building industry. Wind River Custom Homes, LLC is a Tennessee-based custom home builder that specializes in designing and manufacturing park model RVs. Wind River will employ nearly 120 Tennesseans as a result of the project.

**COLUMBIA**  
The city of Columbia has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA). This is now the 24th year the city has been awarded this honor. The report has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program, which includes demonstrating a constructive “spirit of full disclosure” to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the report. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.

**FRANKLIN**  
Summit Behavioral Healthcare officials announced the company will invest \$4.5 million to expand its Franklin headquarters, creating 125 new jobs in the next five years. Summit Behavioral Healthcare was established to develop and operate a network of leading behavioral and mental health centers throughout the country. The company currently operates more than 35 inpatient facilities that specialize in helping adults, adolescents and families suffering from mental health challenges and addiction. Upon completion of the project, the company will employ more than 450 Tennesseans.

**GALLATIN**  
Simpson Strong-Tie announced the company will invest \$110 million to expand its Gallatin operations by locating a new facility on Airport Road. The company will create 37 additional new jobs. The new location will allow Simpson

Strong-Tie to better meet its growing product demand and relocate a portion of its fastener manufacturing operations to Gallatin. Simpson Strong-Tie selected local design-build developer, AI. Neyer, as a full-service real estate partner for the project. Upon completion, the company will employ nearly 250 people across Tennessee. A part of Simpson Manufacturing Co., Inc., Simpson Strong-Tie is a leading manufacturer of high-quality wood and concrete construction solutions that help people design and build safer, stronger homes, building and communities. At its Gallatin facility, the company produces structural screws, nails and its Quik Drive® collated fastening systems.

**KINGSPORT**  
The city of Kingsport is celebrating resolving more than 20,000 citizen issues through the Connect Kingsport app. Since it was launched two years ago, the Connect Kingsport app has become the quickest and easiest way for citizens to report non-emergency concerns in more than three dozen categories, including drainage issues, dead animal removal, graffiti, potholes, water leaks, high grass and sewer backups. The app also provides direct links to the city’s website, leaf line, animal services, CivicRec, KATS, building and planning departments, and provides a calendar of city events. The app’s GPS feature allows residents to give their exact location and citizens can also upload pictures or videos to aid in their request. The app allows them to track progress for requests both they and other citizens have submitted until issues are resolved. At city hall, this information can also help employees identify hot spots, increases productivity, helps prioritize projects, and can provide data points to guide infrastructure investments.

**KINGSPORT**  
Officials with the city of Kingsport have cut the ribbon on the first phase of Riverbend Park, the new newest city park. The first phase of the park includes a floating fishing pier and half-mile, granite walking trail. The park will ultimately be 22 acres of what was once a 100-acre farm operated by six generations of Kingsport residents. The land was donated to the city from an Alabama housing developer for the creation of a new city park. Plans for the park include play areas, pavilions, restrooms, benches, scenic spots, and interpretive signs spaced at various locations along the river over the next five to 10 years.

**KNOXVILLE**  
Axle Logistics, LLC officials announced the company will invest \$37.9 million to expand logistics operations at its Knoxville headquarters. The company will create 651 new jobs in Knoxville in the next five years, nearly tripling its current headcount in Tennessee. As part of the project, the company will construct an 85,000-square-foot facility adjacent to its existing operations on North Central Street. The additional space and staff will allow Axle Logistics to better meet the ongoing growth it has experienced since its founding in 2012. Axle Logistics, LLC is a Tennessee-based, third-party logistics (3PL) company that serves an array of transportation customers across the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Today, the company is headquartered in Knoxville with one satellite office in Chattanooga.

**MORRISON**  
McNeilus Steel, Inc. officials announced the company will invest \$23.4 million to expand its presence in Tennessee by locating new operations in Morrison. The company will create 55 new jobs at its new manufacturing and distribution facility on West Maple Street. The Morrison site will be McNeilus’ second Tennessee plant and will provide steel distribution services not currently offered by the company’s operations in Morristown. Upon completion of the facility, McNeilus will hire warehousing, sales, human resources, information technology, maintenance and management positions. McNeilus Steel, Inc. is a family-owned, full-line steel ser-

Bean Station cuts ribbon on BlueCross Health Place



A ribbon cutting was held at Bean Station’s Harris Court Park for a new BlueCross Healthy Place. Representatives from BlueCross Blue Shield of Tennessee, Bean Station Mayor Ben Waller, Bean Station Aldermen Mickey Ankrom and Eddie Douglas, Grainger County Mayor Mike Byrd, and other members of the community were also on hand to open the new play space. The structure is fully accessible for children of all abilities as well as a splash pad, fitness area, benches, and bike racks. The two-acre Harris Court Park is located off Main Street in Bean Station and was financed through \$1.5 million for construction and \$300,000 for maintenance from the BlueCross Foundation.

Columbia unveils Polk statues at Preservation Park



The city of Columbia, Maury County government officials, and representatives of the James K. Polk Home and Museum were present to unveil statues of President James K. Polk and First Lady Sarah Childress Polk at the city’s Preservation Park, across the street from the Polk Home and Museum. The project was initiated seven years ago by Columbia City Manager Tony Massey and former City Councilman Mike Greene. The life-sized statues are part of the West Seventh Streetscape and was installed with help from city public works crews and parks and maintenance crews, saving the project \$100,000. The unveiling ceremony was accompanied by historical lectures about the legacy of the Polks.

East Ridge breaks ground on animal shelter



Officials with the city of East Ridge have broken ground on the future home of East Ridge Animal Services. The East Ridge Animal Shelter will be than, 4,850 -square foot facility will feature more than 30 kennels, each with self-watering features. The walls and floors of the shelter will have polymer coating to withstand pressure washing for easier cleaning. The new shelter will be larger than the current facility and allow the department to offer more services. The facility will also have room to expand as needed in the future. In addition to providing more opportunities for East Ridge’s Animal Services Department, officials hope the new facility will also help take pressure off of other animal services agencies in the area.

vice center. The company houses more than 5,000 unique ferrous and nonferrous products, which are manufactured and shipped from McNeilus’ operations across Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin and Tennessee.

**NOLENSVILLE**  
The Nolensville Police Department has received a \$18,600 grant from the Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation. The grant will be used to purchase a Polaris Ranger Crew SP 570 ATV, which fulfills a critical need within the department to respond more quickly and efficiently to certain calls for service. The ATV has use in situations involving missing persons, lost children, technical responses in inclement weather during special events, and others. The Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation supports first responders and public safety organizations nationwide and recently announced \$79 million such grants. To learn more about Firehouse Subs Public Safety

Foundation or donate directly, visit [FirehouseSubsFoundation.org](https://www.firehousesubsfoundation.org).

**SPARTA**  
Sparta Metal Processing LLC officials announced the company will invest \$12.3 million to expand its metal remanufacturing operations in Sparta, creating 52 new jobs. The expansion on Turn Table Road will allow the company to purchase new manufacturing equipment, which will better assist Sparta Metal Processing in meeting its growing customer demand. Founded in 2021 and headquartered in Sparta, Sparta Metal Processing is a metal remanufacturer that specializes in transforming scrap metal into ferrous and nonferrous granules, ribbons, coils and straws for the metal manufacturing industry.

**VONORE**  
Genera officials announced the company will invest nearly \$350 million to expand production and distribution at its Sustainable Biomaterials Campus in Vonore. Genera will

create more than 230 new jobs in the next five years, bringing the company’s total headcount in Tennessee to approximately 350 people. The expansion adds 150,000 square feet to the existing facility and state-of-the-art equipment, including more than 60 robotically controlled thermoforming machines, a fleet of autonomously guided vehicles and automated packaging lines. Initially founded under the University of Tennessee System, Genera has grown to become North America’s largest vertically integrated manufacturer of circular, compostable packaging solutions for food and consumer products, retail, and food service. Genera’s products are made from locally grown regenerative grasses, offering consumers sustainable alternatives to plastics with direct benefits to local farms and communities and a significantly lower carbon impact. Genera is headquartered in Vonore with an innovation center in Houston.

# Radar survey shines new light on historic Gallatin City Cemetery

By **KATE COIL**  
*TT&C Assistant Editor*

A walk through Gallatin’s historic city cemetery is a walk through the city’s history.

Ken Thomson, president of the Sumner County Historical Society, said the first plot of land on which the cemetery was built was donated by former Gallatin resident and Tennessee politician Felix Grundy and has expanded several times since. Established in 1814, the Gallatin City Cemetery has more than 8,000 interments and was long considered the place for prominent residents of both Gallatin and Sumner County to be buried since its first interment in 1818.

Markers in the cemetery show the graves of early settlers, two former U.S. Congressmen, Tennessee Gov. William Trousdale, Tennessee First Lady Eliza Allen Houston Douglas, and monuments and tombstones honoring veterans of wars including the Civil War, Mexican American War, World War II, World War II, and Vietnam.

However, it was more than 500 individuals without markers highlighting their final resting places who were recently honored by city officials and Gallatin residents. At the time of the cemetery’s establishment, Gallatin’s cemetery was segregated and black residents – many of whom had at one point been enslaved – were buried in the back of the property, often without markers.

Now, a permanent marker has been erected by the city to honor those buried in this section and celebrate their contributions to Gallatin. At the dedication ceremony, Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown described the project as “significant and meaningful” to the entire city.

“So many people don’t realize that the empty space here is very significant to the history of Gallatin,” she said. “The idea was created over time with a lot of creative and smart people to find an appropriate way to commemorate the people who are buried on this ground that don’t have individual markers... This speaks volumes about who we are as residents of Gallatin. It’s so much more than a grave site, and we’re really just getting started in what can be done out there.”

The project began several years ago with the creation of the Friends of the Gallatin City Cemetery, a committee intended to both preserve the cemetery’s landscape and its history. Retired educator and local historian Velma Brinkley said one of the issues the board faced was that space was running out at the city cemetery. The city received a \$15,000 donation from Volunteer State Bank to see how many spaces were still available.

“There was a section of the cemetery that appeared to be empty, but no one knew for certain if it was,” Brinkley said. “There were some who thought it was half empty and others who thought it was partially full. When the city was given these funds to hire someone to come in and conduct a study to find out how many graves where in the area and how much of the space had been utilized, that was when we learned – to our amazement – there were more than 500 graves.”

Matthew Turner, vice president of Virginia-based GeoModel, mapped both marked and unmapped graves at the Gallatin City Cemetery in 2018 using ground penetrating radar (GPR). At the time, Turner said he had performed GPR mapping for a number of cemeteries, both public and private.

The GPR process sends radar waves into the ground the time and way in which they respond back to

the machine can be used to indicate not only if something is below the surface but also the likelihood of if what is underground is concrete, asphalt, masonry, cables, pipes, metal, fresh water, structures, or event human remains. Ground penetrating radar is used in a variety of applications including studying bedrock, for environmental remediation, in archaeology, for engineering testing, detecting landmines, locating underground utilities, and mining.

Thomson said there were once records indicating burial locations in the cemetery, but a fire in the 1950s destroyed most of them. The mapping of the back section at least gives both historians and officials overseeing the cemetery a map of where there are burials.

“We have a burial book from the 1850s to the 1880s that gives some information,” Thomson said. “I have checked the list of tombstones we have against that book, and about 50% of those people have no marker today. It is not unusual to not have markers. We know certain people were buried there or had a lot, but if they don’t have a marker, we can’t find it.”

Brinkley said some of the burials may have once had temporary markers that have long since disappeared.

“We know they sometimes used field stones, because down through the years in maintaining the property, these field stones gradually disappeared,” she said. “It is hard to cut around a field stone to keep the land looking pretty.”

Thomson estimated 50% of the people buried in the cemetery are in unmarked graves, and many of those graves in the largely unmarked section may have been freed African Americans living prior to the Civil War as well as the formerly enslaved and other members of the African-American community who were buried there following emancipation. Thomson said those living in slavery were often buried on the property of their enslavers, but it also isn’t uncommon for cemeteries to have large sections of unmarked graves, often known as “Potter’s Fields,” that were set aside as burial sites for poor and non-white residents.

Since the dedication, Brinkley said not all of those buried in the cemetery have proved to be completely anonymous. At least three people have thanked her for her involvement in the project and mentioned that they have relatives buried in unmarked graves in the cemetery.

Other important historical figures buried somewhere in the section including several of the Gallatin area businessmen who launched Gallatin’s African-American Fair. Founded soon after the conclusion of the Civil War, this fair served as an important economic and cultural event for the black community in Gallatin until its last season in 1977. Following the Great Migration, it also served as an important homecoming event for Gallatin natives.

Fair founders Mack Randolph, Arthur Banks, Willie Baker, Dock Blythe, John Banks and Henry Ward created the event after being recently emancipated and also became business leaders in the community. Brinkley said she is discussing having their story portrayed as part of an annual October tour of the Gallatin City Cemetery that highlights the lives of past residents.

From a historical perspective, Thomson said the experience has added more pieces to the puzzle of Gallatin’s past.

“People need to know that these people are there and each one of them



From left to right, Sumner County Historian Ken Thomson, local historian Velma Brinkley, and Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown at the ceremony dedicating the new monument at Gallatin’s City Cemetery.

donated something to the society we live in,” he said. “They were all part of the life of this community. History needs to be documented, no matter if it’s a cemetery, structures, or people. We would have nothing if we did not have records.”

Brinkley sees the monument as a way for Gallatin to honor its past as well as put into practice its current values.

“I think that as a civilized people that we owe that much to our ancestors, regardless of what color, race, ethnicity, or whatever they were,” she said. “We owe that degree of respect to those who have passed on. They deserve our respect, and I feel we should acknowledge that we know they are there. We may not know your name, but we recognize you as having been loved, as having lived and worked here. We know you were here, and you made a difference.”

Thomson said she hopes the entire project encourages Gallatin residents to reflect on the history of their city.

“I think it’s a wonderful thing and long overdue to honor those sainted people,” Thomson said. “The city cemetery contains the history of Gallatin, and it’s up to us to preserve that history. Life is a voyage of exploration and discovery, and we definitely discovered 500 people who were part of a long chain of lives, each contributing to our community. They are among many who pioneered a new life of freedom with the ending of enslavement. We need to show our appreciation to those people, even if we don’t know who they are.”

Brinkley also encourages other city leaders to look into seemingly vacant sections of their own city cemeteries as there may be more to the hallowed ground than meets the eye.

“Typically, of that time and period in history, African Americans were buried at the very back and typically in a back corner of public cemeteries,” she said. “If you have a space in the back of your cemetery that appears to be unused, the chances are very great it houses burials for ex-slaves, depending on the age of your cemetery. There may also be the remains of those who could not afford a headstone and were buried with a simple field stone or marker denoting their location. As soon as the person who put that stone passed away, all knowledge of



Gallatin Public Works erected this monument honoring those buried in the largely unmarked section of the cemetery. It reads: “Resting in Peace, Known only to God. We dedicate this monument with highest regard. This monument is erected on behalf of more than 500 African Americans buried here. May they find eternal peace.”



Matthew Turner conducts a ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey of the Gallatin City Cemetery.

that stone and its meaning was gone. The chances are very great that if you space in the back of your cemetery or in a certain corner furthest from the entrance, more than likely you have burials of African Americans.”

Brinkley said the project shows how Gallatin is still living up to its reputation as being the Nicest City in America by *Readers’ Digest* in 2017.

“I was thrilled my city wanted to do this memorial, but I was not surprised,” she said. “That is the kind of city Gallatin is. God created us all, and we are all equal in his sight. Given that we are the Nicest City in America, this is what I really expect of my city. There are so many people who think as I do about showing respect for others. Gallatin rose to the occasion again.”

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PEOPLE



Bruce Applegate

**Bruce Applegate**, deputy city manager of the city of Alcoa, recently received the credentialed manager designation from ICMA. He is one of more than 1,300 local government management professionals currently credentialed through the ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program, which requires a member to have significant experience as a senior management executive, to have earned a degree in public administration or a related field, and to demonstrate a high standard of integrity and to lifelong learning and professional development. Applegate has eight years of professional local government executive experience. Prior to joining Alcoa in 2021, he served as director of administrative services in Oak Ridge and assistant city manager of Covington, Ky.



Mary Aveni

**Mary Aveni** has been selected as the new city administrator of Decherd. A native of Franklin County, Aveni returns to Tennessee from Villa Rica, Ga. She most recently served as a business analyst for the Clay County, Fla., Sheriff's Office since 2020. Prior to that, she was the owner and consultant of print management and sales firm for six years based on Fleming Island, Fla., and spent four years as a systems administrator with Waste Not Want Not in Orange Park, Fla. She also spent nearly eight years running a PostNet shipping and printing franchise in Orange Park and nearly nine years with the Ford Motor Credit Company where she worked in both Woodland Hills, Calif., and Franklin. She also spent five years at First American National Bank in Nashville. Aveni holds a bachelor's degree in business administration with a focus in banking and finance from the University of Mississippi.



John Chlarson

**John Chlarson**, public works consultant with MTAS, received the Dr. Bruce Tschantz Lifetime Achievement Award from the Tennessee Stormwater Association (TNSA), the highest honor given by the organization. TNSA presents the award to outstanding stormwater professionals with a minimum of 20 years of service as well as long-term contributions to stormwater management in Tennessee. Chlarson has more than 30 years' engineering experience in the public and private sector and has served as TNSA's ad-hoc secretary since its formation. He has worked hand-in-hand with TDEC as the stormwater industry has evolved and offers guidance, education, and training to MS4 communities throughout the state.



Austin Clark

**Austin Clark** has been selected as the new public works director for the city of Jackson. Clark comes to Jackson from Clifton where he spent nine years as the city's director of public works and assistant airport manager. Clark has numerous certificates and licenses in water treatment, wastewater treatment, water distribution, and sewer collections. He was recognized as the Roger Booher Young Professional of the Year in 2022 by the Tennessee Association of Utility Districts.



Chris Coughlin

**Chris Coughlin** has been selected as the new assistant city engineer for the city of Jackson. A native of Jackson, Coughlin holds a bach-

elor's degree in engineering at Memphis State College – now the University of Memphis. He spent six years with Norfolk Southern Railways and then 33 years with the Jackson Energy Authority (JEA). Through his tenure at JEA, he held various management positions and worked on city infrastructure. He served as a project manager at Clark Engineering beginning in 2016 where his projects included a gas line pipeline for Blue Oval City.



Kristie Diamond

**Kristie Diamond**, has been selected as the new town clerk for the town of Collierville. Diamond will take over from Lynn Carmack, who retired after 28 years of service. Diamond has been working with the town since 2019 when she was hired as an accounting technician in the finance department. She then moved to the administration department as a senior administrative specialist in 2022. Diamond has 20 years of accounting experience including with R.R. Donnelley Moore and Sunrise Chevrolet Buick GMC.



Jenny Bess Hibbett

**Jenny Bess Hibbett**, the first female mayor of Mt. Juliet, died on Saturday, Oct. 28, 2023, at the age of 86. Hibbett earned her bachelor's degree at Tennessee Technological University and her master's from Peabody College. She was an educator for 54 years, serving in Metro Nashville and founded the Mt. Juliet Christian Academy. Hibbett served as a Mt. Juliet City Commissioner and then the city's first female mayor. She was also married to former commissioner and late Mayor N.C. Hibbett.



Walter Lee

**Walter Lee**, vice mayor of Orlinda, died suddenly Nov. 6, 2023, at the age of 63. Lee first served as a city commissioner for Orlinda in the early 1990s at the time when the town was transitioning for a three-person commission to a five-member city council. He was also instrumental in creating the city's rainy day fund, which contributed to the city's ability to later build a new city hall and post office. After leaving the city council for several years, he returned in 2009 and served on the council for 11 years before being selected as vice mayor in 2020. Lee also spent 23 years with Kroger as well as working as a salesman for Guppton Motors.



Roger Page

**Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Roger Page** will retire after a decade on the state's highest court. He was first appointed to the court in 2014 by then Gov. Bill Haslam and served as chief justice from 2021 to 2023. A seventh generation West Tennessean, Page earned his law degree from the University of Memphis Law School in 1984. He served as a law clerk for then-U.S. District Court Judge Julia Smith Gibbons and later practices at firms in Atlanta and Jackson. He served as an assistant attorney general for the state of Tennessee in Jackson from 1991 to 1998. He then served as a circuit court judge in the 26th Judicial District and also served as an appellate judge on the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals from December 2011 to February 2016.



Jason Ray

**Jason Ray** has been selected as the assistant finance director and treasurer for the city of Tullahoma after the announce-

# Huntingdon City Hall renamed in honor of former TML president, late Mayor Dale Kelley



The city of Huntingdon has renamed its city hall the Dale R. Kelley Center in honor of late Mayor Dale Kelley. In addition to his long service to the city as mayor, Kelley also served as a state representative, county commissioner, county assessor, commissioner of transportation, commissioner of labor, and director of athletics for Bethel University, where he was also a standout basketball player. Kelley also served as a past president of the Tennessee Municipal League and West Tennessee Mayor's Association, and on the boards of the TML Risk Management Pool (now Public Entity Partners) and Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund. TML named him mayor of the year in 2008.

## Eldridge, Waddell join MTAS

The University of Tennessee Municipal Technical Advisory Service (UT-MTAS) has announced two new team members will be joining the agency.

Desiree Eldridge will be joining MTAS as a library associate in the Knoxville office while John Waddell will serve as a legal consultant in the Nashville office.

Eldridge comes to MTAS from the UT Department of Nuclear Engineering where she served as an administrative specialist. She holds a bachelor's degree in urban studies as well as a master's in fine art and information science, both from UT Knoxville.

Waddell comes to MTAS after serving as a senior associate counsel with the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. Since 2015, he has worked in several state departments, including as deputy legislative director for the Department of Safety and general counsel and chief legislative officer with the Department of Veterans' Services.

He holds a bachelor's degree from Lipscomb University and his law degree from the University of Mississippi.



Desiree Eldridge



John Waddell

## Memphis, Pikeville hold December city elections

Two municipal elections have been held in Memphis and Pikeville.

### MEMPHIS

The city of Memphis held a municipal run-off election on Nov. 14 to determine races in three city council races that were not decided during the city's primary election held in October.

Newcomer Jerri Green defeated fellow challenger Scott McCormick with 1,752 votes to 1,696. Green has spent the previous two years as senior policy advisor for Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris. The District 2 seat was held by Frank Colvett, who did not seek re-election.

In District 3, newcomer Pearl Eva Walker defeated fellow challenger Kirkwood with Walker earning 781 votes to Kirkwood's 767. The seat was previously held by Patrice J. Robinson, who was term limited.

Incumbent Michalyn Easter-Thomas fended off challenger Jimmy Hassan in the District 7 race. Easter-Thomas earned 966 votes to Hassan's 504. She has been a member of the council since 2020, when she became the younger woman ever elected to the Memphis City Council.

### PIKEVILLE

The town of Pikeville held a municipal election on Dec. 2.

Incumbent mayor Philip Cagle was unopposed and received 142 complimentary votes.

In the town's alderman race, incumbents Senia Anderson, Jane R. Humble, Jeania Lansing, and Dale Wheeler defeated challengers Allen Brown and Ronald Fields to keep their four seats on the board. Humble led the vote count with 118 followed by Wheeler with 115, Anderson with 11, Lansing with 110, Fields with 41, and Brown with 39.



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EV adoption to increase as public, private investment charging options grow

By KATE COIL

While electric vehicle sales are less than industry experts predicted, continued investment in EV infrastructure is expected to help bridge the gap.

Officials with Ford announced they would be scaling back investments in Kentucky, but that construction of Tennessee’s Blue Oval City will continue as expected in light of consumer demand. Officials with the company said EV sales are still growing, but have been less than initially predicted – possibly the result of a lack of EV infrastructure in the U.S. as well as consumers switching first to hybrid vehicles before making the EV switch.

Beth Emmons, director of community relations with TDOT, said EV infrastructure remains a good investment for Tennessee for multiple reasons.

“TDOT can’t predict the future, but it is assumed EV adoption will accelerate as more stations go online and the current gaps are filled,” Emmons said. “The Tennessee Clean Fuels Coalitions have set a goal to have at least 200,000 EVs in Tennessee by 2028; and the automakers that have set up shop in Tennessee have - or will be - producing electric vehicles. Smaller communities could benefit from more EV industry suppliers setting up camp near the automotive plants. There is also potential as the workforce moves to more EV-related skills.”

Alexa Voytek, deputy director of TDEC’s Office of Energy Programs, said the office tracks EV adoption statewide through the Tennessee Department of Revenue’s records of active EV registration. At present, there are just under 35,000 EVs on the roads in Tennessee – up from a mere 4,000 in 2019.

“We are seeing the percentage of growth increase quarter over quarter,” Voytek said. “We are still essentially on track to meet the goal of 200,000 EVs on the roads by 2028. We have worked with TVA on some of the key market barriers to adoption. Infrastructure deployment is obviously one of those key market barriers we’ve been chipping away at.”

In addition to EVs for the general public, Voytek said the agency may also eventually roll out new goals for electric buses and fleet semi-trucks as heavier duty EVs come on the market. New federal tax credits are also allowing local governments to receive direct payments for adding EVs to their fleets as well as charging stations to city properties. The Tennessee EMPOWER project, led by the East Tennessee Clean Fuels Coalition, is also working with employers, including government entities, to determine if workplace charging infrastructure is a good fit for their place of business.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT

Emmons said work continues on the Tennessee Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (TEVI) program, which itself is a part of the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program funded under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The state expects to receive approximately \$88 million from the federal government over a five-year period to executive the TEVI deployment plan approved by the federal government in fall 2022 and updated in summer 2023. The goal of the plan is to provide an EV charging network with high-powered fast chargers every 50 miles along Tennessee’s interstates and U.S.-64, which are the state’s designated Alternative Fuel Corridors.

Over the summer of 2023, Emmons said TDOT and TDEC worked together to release their notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for the TEVI program.

“Awardees will purchase, install, own, operate, maintain, and report on program-funded EV charging infrastructure throughout the state of Tennessee,” Emmons said. “In response to the NOFO, 167



Officials with TVA, the city of Brownsville, the Brownsville Energy Authority, and the West Delta Heritage Center cut the ribbon on a new fast-charging station featuring four chargers at the center and museum. The installation is part of the Fast Charge TN Network, one of several projects funded through Volkswagen Settlement money and federal grants to fill in charging gaps across the state.



A TVA-TDEC partnership has helped build fast-charging stations like this one in Clarksville with the goal of providing a minimum backbone for private investors to then take charge of building more EV charging stations. Much of the public investment is going every 50 miles on major interstate routes and alternative fuel corridors, as outlined in the state’s TEVI plan. Gas stations such as Pilot Travel Centers and Buc-ee’s have already begun installing chargers across Tennessee, filling up the gaps.

applications were submitted, from a combination of public and private partners, to fulfill 32 gap areas along Tennessee’s Alternative Fuel Corridors; we intend to announce awards by mid-January 2024.

Building this statewide EV fast charging network will power the growth of EVs across Tennessee and reduce barriers to transportation electrification. Tennessee is investing in its future and is paving the way to lead the nation as an EV epicenter.”

Meanwhile, TDEC is partnering with TVA for the buildout of the Fast Charge TN Network, which will install fast charging stations every 50 miles on major roadways, including secondary highways and interstates. Mark Finlay, senior energy analyst with TDEC, said much of the Fast Charging TN Network will supplement the TEVI plan and will serve largely rural communities.

“Really over the course of the past year, these installations have

been going up across the network and TVA’s entire service area – which includes the vast majority of Tennessee,” Finlay said. “In Tennessee, there are currently 10 of these sites live. Eight of them have been funded directly by TVA. Two more have been funded through TDEC’s participation in the program. Going forward, there are approximately 30 more sites that have been approved or have a local power company under contract. Of those, 11 will be through TDEC and the remaining 19 will be through TVA. There is a good spread across the state where those will be located. They are primarily located in more rural areas, and a lot of the reason for that is to fill in where those infrastructure gaps are.”

Voytek said Tennessee State Parks have been the focus of another charging network project with TDEC and electric vehicle manufacturer Rivian. The company plans to install charging stations at all viable Tennessee State Parks with no cost

to the state.

“Most of those are live at this point, and it’s a great complement to the Fast Charge Network,” Voytek said. “You can use the Fast Charge Network to get to the state parks and then top off once you’re there.”

PRIVATE INVESTMENT

As a result of these programs, Voytek said private industry is starting to take charge of further buildout.

“There is a decent amount of investment being made outside of state and utility investment,” Voytek said. “State and utility investment can help build that minimum, viable backbone of charging infrastructure, but then the private sector can come in and take it from there. We are already starting to see some of that with Pilot opening a couple of fast charging locations in Tennessee in the past few months. We have also heard recently about partnerships with Buc-ee’s and others to build more charging stations throughout

the state.”

As more private sector investment continues, Finlay said new EV charging programs will focus on areas that are not currently attracting private sector investment, such as rural destinations and multi-family housing developments. Finlay said money for these programs will come from the Volkswagen Settlement Environmental Mitigation Trust funding, similar to how the Fast Charge TN Network is being funded.

“One of the main of the goals of these programs, including Fast Charge and others we have on the horizon for Level 2 charging funding is to really identify those areas that are suited for public investment in order to help catalyze the market. Rural destination charging and multi-family housing charging are two use cases we identified that are primed for public investment right now in order to help build that infrastructure baseline and feel needed infrastructure gaps. These may not see necessarily profitable returns for an investor in the short term as EV penetration is still relatively low. What we are seeing is that for truck stops and corridor charging areas, there is a significant and growing business case.”

MADE IN TENNESSEE

Voytek said the state is also working with innovators and researchers to find answers to challenges associated with the grid in order to support this charging infrastructure build out.

“Tennessee Tech University is doing a lot of work in demonstration in rural applications for charging and deployment. Dr. Pinggen Chen has received a couple of awards from the Department of Energy to do this work, not only in the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee, but in broader Appalachia, which comprises a big part of rural Tennessee as well. He has one initiative called Rural Reimagined that is focusing on rural EV charger deployment and building economic development use cases for communities. There is another initiative or project we are a part of called the SMART Project that he is the lead on as well. It is looking at areas where it may be cost prohibitive to upgrade the electrical grid to support charging deployment. What he is doing is an innovative, first-of-its-kind use of used electric vehicle batteries (a second-life battery demonstration) as energy storage to support mobile, non-grid-tied solar-assisted Level 2 chargers.”

In addition to added infrastructure, the fact that so many EVs are – or will be – made in Tennessee is one of the major factors Voytek said contributes to why many Tennesseans are choosing EVs for their next vehicle.

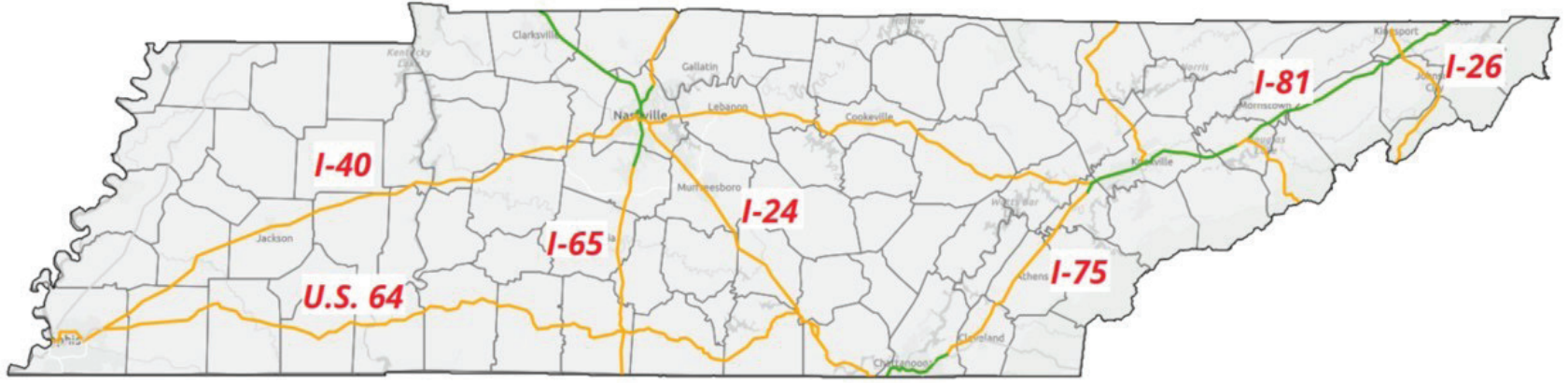
“Partly we are seeing adoption go up because we are seeing new models from all automakers, so the number of options keep increasing,” she said. “I expect we will see some favoritism toward vehicles that are made in Tennessee because they are locally produced vehicles. Another thing to consider is that now that we have had EVs around for a bit, we are also seeing more options in the used EV space. A lot of people aren’t in the financial position to buy a new car, but that is a way for more people to adopt an EV. With the Inflation Reduction Act, you can also get the tax credit for used EVs as well as new EVs, which makes it more affordable.”

Finlay said dealership education has also improved, allowing them to provide better information to consumers on cost benefits, tax credits, and other advantages of EV ownership.

“We are also recognizing the need to have dealerships on the ground know how to sell these things and answer questions with the public,” Finlay said. “That was something that was lagging behind when the options for EVs started to grow a few years ago, and we are seeing that catch up.”

Ultimately, Voytek said EV adoption will increase as more consumers find it a better investment and fit for their lives, especially as tax incentives encourage adoption.

“For me, the most compelling reason to drive an EV is the fuel and operational cost savings you see over time with an electric vehicle. In Tennessee, we are unique in that we have some of the most affordable electricity rates in the country. That means we have that much more to gain by using that cheap electricity as a transportation fuel. I think that’s a huge added benefit.”



A map of the major interstates and highways where pubic investment is building a backbone of EV charging. Once fast chargers are installed approximately every 50 miles on these corridors, private industry will be tasked with filling in the remaining gaps.

# STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee is expected to outperform the national economy again in 2024 and avoid a recession, according to economic forecasts from the UT Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research. The center projects Tennessee’s economy will grow at 3.3% this year, outpacing the national average of 2.4%. Projections also have Tennessee growing another 1.8% next year, again faster than the average U.S. pace of 1.4%. Tennessee is benefiting economically from an influx of residents and business into the state, even after stimulus-accelerated post-pandemic growth begins to slow. The downside of the increase of 82,000 more residents through domestic in-migration is rising mortgage and rental costs. Tennessee listing prices averaged more than \$20,000 higher than the national average with rates reaching \$150,000 above average in Nashville and \$45,000 above in Knoxville.

A record-breaking number of students have applied for the Tennessee Promise scholarship program, according to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC). More than 66,000 high school seniors applied for the program as of the close of the current cycle on Nov. 1, an increase of 3.6% over the previous year. This marks the highest number of applicants to the program since its inception in 2015. The Tennessee Promise program includes a last-dollar scholarship that provides students with the opportunity to complete an associate degree, certificate, or diploma program free of tuition and mandatory fees at public or private universities participating in the program. Students are also paired with mentors and support.

Student reading scores for third graders improved in thrice-yearly screenings and over their previous years’ scores, according to a review of the Tennessee Literacy Success Act by the Comptroller’s Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA). The study found more third graders scored proficient on TCAP’s English language arts assessment in the 2022-23 school year than have in the last six years, though the study did not include an analysis of causation. Additionally, about two-thirds of all licensed staff received TLSA-required instruction. TDOE has also developed a new reading test that educators wishing to obtain, renew, or advance their licenses must pass with a score of 80% in order to be certified for kindergarten through third grade instruction. To find the one-page snapshot and the full report, please visit the Comptroller’s website at: [tncot.cc/orca](https://tncot.cc/orca)

RetireReadyTN has received three awards for its readiness education programs that benefit Tennessee public employees and teachers. The program receive the Pensions and Investments 2022 Excellence and Innovation Award, Plan Sponsor Magazine 2023 Public Defined Con-

tribution Plan Sponsor of the Year; and National Association of Government Defined Contribution Administrators’ 2023 Leadership Award for Participant Education and Communication. All three organizations recognized RetireReadyTN for implementing a strategic plan in partnership with its recordkeeper, Empower Retirement.

Tennessee’s October unemployment rose 0.1% over September, increasing to 3.3%. The state’s unemployment rate remained 0.6% lower than the national unemployment rate of 3.9%. Tennessee maintained an all-time low unemployment rate of 3.1% in July and August of this year, but was 0.2% lower than the rate for October 2023. Tennessee employers have added 40,100 jobs to the state’s workforce since October 2023. The education and health services sector saw the most growth, followed by the government sector, and then the other services sector.

A new federal grant will help the Tennessee explore the possibility of a new passenger rail corridor that could connect Chattanooga, Nashville, Memphis, and Atlanta as well as cities in between. The state will receive a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor Identification Development program to develop a scope, schedule and cost estimate for preparing, completing, and documenting service development plans. The passenger rail system would not only be a major shot in the arm for the state in terms of tourist development but could also help link suburban cities to metro areas. Connections to Memphis and Atlanta would also allow Tennesseans to travel to a wide variety of other cities via passenger rail as both are presently hubs for rail travel to cities including New Orleans; Chicago; New York City; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Jackson, Miss.; Greenville, S.C.; Charlotte, N.C.; and Birmingham, Ala.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) has partnered with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to create a new electronic guide called the *Mountain Byways of Tennessee & North Carolina*. The web-based resource gives travelers routes to tour the scenic roadways of the two states with enhanced mapping and route planning features, as well as clickable hyperlinks to attractions. The resource also functions as a PDF when printed at home. The e-Guide showcases visitor experiences and attractions found along 14 individual Scenic Byway routes located adjacent to either Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Cherokee National Forest, or the Nantahala National Forest. Tennessee boasts a statewide collection of 13 Scenic Byways, 10 of which are designated as either a “National Scenic Byway” or an “All American Road” by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation.

## State revenues predicted to grow at slower pace over next two years

REVENUE from Page 1  
COVID relief funds expire, significant cuts to the business tax have slowed franchise and excise tax collections, and internet sales tax collections have leveled off.  
“I think everybody recognizes that the last two or three years have been extraordinary, and this is part of a resetting that’s occurring,” said state Budget Director David Thurman.  
In November, the funding board heard presentations from economists and finance experts from the University of Tennessee, East Tennessee State, the Department of Revenue, and the State Fiscal Review Committee, who detailed Tennessee’s economic outlook, and gave projections for future tax revenue over the next two years.  
The projected growth rates represent the lowest revenue estimates in several years, and a significant drop when compared to the most recent fiscal year that saw projections between 6.8% and 7.7%.  
Monthly revenue reports from the Department of Finance and Administration also reflect slightly lower tax collections due in most part by the three-month grocery tax holiday and lower business tax collections. Year-to-date revenues for three months were \$108.9 million

less than the budgeted estimate. August through October, general fund revenues were \$114.7 million less than estimates; yet, the four other funds that share in state tax revenues exceeded estimates by \$5.8 million.  
New business filings in Tennessee are also up with more than 19,300 companies registered during the third-quarter and reflecting the highest third-quarter number in the 25-year history of the state’s data collections.  
“We’ve had all-time filing records in each quarter of 2023,” said Secretary Tre Hargett. “Tennessee’s economy continues to be strong and resilient, aided significantly by a welcoming business environment of lower taxes, reasonable regulation, and responsible fiscal management.”  
The State Funding Board – whose members are Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson, Secretary of State Tre Hargett, state treasure David Lillard and Tennessee Comptroller Jason Mumpower – develop consensus ranges of state revenue estimates for the current fiscal year and the next succeeding fiscal year as part of the state’s budget process. Revenue estimates are presented to Gov. Bill Lee’s Administration to use as he develops his spending plan for the upcoming year.

## Downtown improvement grants awarded to 17 cities

Downtown improvement grants totaling more than \$4 million have been awarded to 17 Tennessee Main Street and Tennessee Downtowns communities.  
Grants were awarded to organizations that illustrated the need for improvements and the ability to execute an effective design plan for building facades, wayfinding signage, gateways and streetscapes.  
“I congratulate each of the recipients that have been awarded funding through the latest round of Downtown Improvement Grants,” said Gov. Bill Lee. “Tennessee’s downtown districts and main streets are the focal point of our communities, and these grants will help attract new business and promote tourism at the local level.”  
As part of the program, each new grant recipient will be required to match 25-percent of the funding received.  
“Tennessee would not be known for its exceptional quality of life if it weren’t for the leaders across our state that have chosen to invest in their main streets and downtown districts,” said Commissioner McWhorter. “These 17 communities have a better chance at securing new investment and spurring job creation because of the Downtown Improvement Grants, and we are proud to partner with them in their revitalization efforts.”  
Communities receiving Down-



Dyersburg is among 17 cities that received downtown improvement grants from TNECD.

- town Improvement Grants are:
- Bristol - \$300,000
  - Cleveland - \$300,000
  - Dyersburg - \$300,000
  - Elizabethton - \$300,000
  - Etowah - \$300,000
  - Halls - \$206,250
  - Johnson City - \$300,000
  - Lawrenceburg - \$150,000
  - Lewisburg - \$300,000
  - Madisonville - \$300,000
  - Martin - \$299,276
  - McMinnville - \$300,000
  - Newbern - \$177,373
  - Sevierville - \$159,600
  - Smithville - \$300,000
  - Sweetwater - \$150,000
  - Union City - \$300,000

“We are excited that these 17 communities will benefit from the latest round of Downtown Improvement Grants and look forward to seeing how each city and town uses this opportunity for revitalization to create jobs and investment in their central business districts in the years to come,” said TNECD Main Street Director Nancy Williams.  
To be eligible for a Downtown Improvement Grant, communities had to submit an application and be a designated Tennessee Downtowns or Tennessee Main Street community. To learn more about the Downtown Improvement Grant Program, visit the website [here](https://www.tnecd.org).

## Tourism enhancement grants awarded to 13 cities

Tennessee Department of Tourist Development announced 13 cities will be among the 29 recipients of more than \$2.22 million in Tourism Enhancement grants.  
Tennessee’s [Tourism Enhancement Grants](#) support cities and counties seeking to invest in their local tourism assets, lift visitation and increase economic impact. Eligible projects include stages, signage, historic preservation, ADA compliancy and other improvements to local attractions and venues.  
“We’ve seen first-hand how tourism can transform communities,” added Commissioner Mark Ezell, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. “Tourism development is economic development, and these investments are essential to Governor Lee’s mission to expand opportunity for rural Tennesseans.”  
The municipalities of Bell Buckle, Bolivar, Columbia, Dandridge, Dyersburg, Johnson City, Kingsport, Martin Maryville, Monterey, Sevierville, Smithville, South Pittsburg, and Tracy City joined 15 counties in receiving funds.



South Pittsburg was awarded tourism enhancement funding to support its National Cornbread Festival.

“Tourism is vital for the growth and sustainability of communities throughout Tennessee, especially in our rural communities,” said Melanie Beauchamp, Assistant Commissioner of Rural Tourism and Outreach, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. “These projects create opportunities for visitors, enhance the quality of life for residents and ultimately, bring more funds back into the communities.”

Grants of \$100,000 were awarded to Columbia, Dandridge, Dyersburg, Kingsport, Maryville, Monterey, and Sevierville while South Pittsburg received \$90,000. Tracy City received \$88,350, Smithville received \$75,000; Martin received \$67,720, Bell Buckle received \$35,000, Bolivar received \$28,500, and Johnson City received \$15,000.  
The list of awardees follows, with a full list of projects [here](#).

## State October revenues less than estimated

Tennessee’s tax collections less than budgeted for October and less than the same month the previous year, largely driven by the three-month grocery tax holiday and lower business tax collections.  
According to Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson , overall October revenues were \$1.48 billion, which is \$50.9 million less than October of last year and \$62.1 million less than the budgeted estimate. The growth rate for October was negative 3.33%. Sales taxes collected by the state in October reflect September consumer spending.  
“October revenues fell short of expectations primarily because of losses in sales tax receipts, reduced corporate tax filings, and depressed realty transfer and realty mortgage tax collections,” Bryson said. “Lower collections from each of these taxes represent concerns we have expressed for some time. The sales tax holiday on groceries decreased state collections. Franchise and excise tax collections were also lower, as more corporate refunds from overpayments were processed during the month. Furthermore, real estate transaction taxes, continue to weaken as interest rates remain high. We continue to closely watch the current economic environment and will carefully monitor our revenue and expenditure patterns for the balance of this fiscal year.”  
On an accrual basis, October is the third month in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.  
General fund revenues for October were \$61.7 million less than the budgeted estimate, and the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$0.4 million less than the budgeted estimates.  
Sales tax revenues were \$23 million less than the estimate for October. The October growth rate

was negative 1.63%. Year-to-date revenues are 1.49% more than this time last year.  
Franchise and excise taxes combined were \$26.7 million less than the October budgeted estimate of \$110.2 million. The October growth rate was negative 26.18%, and the year-to-date corporate tax growth rate is negative 9.02%.  
Gasoline and motor fuel revenues decreased by 3.26% and were \$4.5 million less than the budgeted estimate of \$113 million. Year-to-date fuel tax collections are greater than budgeted estimates by 1.52%.  
Motor Vehicle Registration revenue receipts increased by 72.22% from this same time last year when the state allowed for a one-year registration renewal waiver and were \$5 million more than the October estimate.  
Tobacco tax revenues for the month were \$1.6 million less than the budgeted estimate of \$18.5 million. For three months, revenues are \$4.7 million less than the budgeted estimate.  
Privilege tax revenues were \$13.4 million less than the budgeted estimate of \$54 million, and on a year-to-date basis are less than estimates by \$38.5 million.  
Business tax revenues were

\$1.9 million more than the budgeted estimate. Year-to-date, business tax revenues are \$1.9 million more than the budgeted estimate.  
Mixed drink, or liquor-by-the-drink, taxes were \$1.4 million more than the October estimate, and on a year-to-date basis, revenues are \$2.6 million more than the estimate.  
All other tax revenues were less than estimates by a net of \$1.2 million.  
Year-to-date revenues for three months were \$108.9 million less than the budgeted estimate. August through October, general fund revenues were \$114.7 million less than estimates and the four other funds that share in state tax revenues exceeded estimates by \$5.8 million.  
The budgeted revenue estimates for 2023-2024 are based upon the State Funding Board’s consensus recommendation from November 28, 2022 and adopted by the first session of the 113th General Assembly in April 2023. Also incorporated in the estimates are any changes in revenue enacted during the 2023 session of the General Assembly.  
These estimates are [available on the state’s website](#).



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# Knoxville explores use of delivery robots as autonomous services seek expansion

KNOXVILLE, *from Page 1*

the delivery robots on UT’s campus – have also begun rolling out robotic deliveries in cities across the U.S., Japan, and UK, including a similar delivery program offered by FedEx on the University of Memphis campus. Amazon has also piloted autonomous delivery of packages in Franklin.

Tennessee is one of 16 states across the country to establish a formal policy about how food delivery robots can operate. Gov. Bill Lee signed into law [Tennessee Code § 55-8-209](#), regulating personal delivery devices. Under the bill, such devices must have the ability to yield to the right of way of all other traffic, not reasonably interfere with either vehicle or pedestrian traffic, be equipped with lighting and identification, and cannot go above 10 miles per hour.

“At the end of the day, we have to ask what benefits do these things serve?” Hall said. “They may decrease road congestion, but they’re adding to road congestion. They may give businesses a few more sales. We need to see if we can maximize benefits, whatever they might be. It’s our job to do what’s best for Knoxville.”

Hall said the city may consider regulations such as only allowing deliveries to operate in certain areas of the city, especially since the robots are typically limited by a 3-mile delivery range to ensure food arrives hot and on time.

“It always comes down to what are the advantages for our citizens,” he said. “If the disadvantages or potential drawbacks are going to outweigh the benefits



The University of Tennessee campus in Knoxville is not the only place where robotic delivery is being piloted. FedEx has launched a similar pilot program at the University of Memphis and college campuses across the country have become testing grounds for autonomous delivery. However, this delivery model may not always be able to make the transition to city sidewalks. UberEats and partner Serve Robotics recently launched a pilot program for autonomous food delivery on the streets of Los Angeles, as seen above. When the pilot program comes to a close, the companies plan to launch 2,000 robots for similar delivery in unnamed cities across the country.

to the people who live in the city, I think it is the responsibility of a city to go ahead and regulate something. I understand not wanting to stifle innovation and new ideas, but not all new ideas are going to benefit citizens equally. If an idea is going to utilize city right-of-way and city property, I think a city should really be considering if

they are benefiting from that use. It’s important to not be scared of technology and not to jump to the worst-case scenario with a lot of technology. Be realistic and have plans for the worst-case scenario.”

As new innovations continue to change the way citizens live and do business, Hall said it is important for city leaders to be

thinking about how autonomous technology may affect their own communities.

“Fortunately, we often can see things pop up in other cities and decide we need to get ahead of this,” Hall said. “We may preemptively regulate something there isn’t a market for yet. It’s important to be forward thinking. The new thing

about these robots is the autonomous nature of it. There will be similar things coming down the pike with autonomous vehicles, taxis, and other autonomous things that will be using city right-of-way. This is a little bit of a primer of how we start thinking about autonomous and AI devices in cities and Knoxville.”



## Proposed EPA rule would require removal of lead water pipes within decade

EPA, *from Page 1*

America,” an EPA statement reads. “These lead pipes have been hidden underground for decades and pose an ever-present risk to the health and wellbeing of Americans. These lead pipes remain disproportionately concentrated in low-income and people of color communities.”

Health concerns generated by lead pipes are another reason for the proposed rule change.

“There is no safe level of lead in drinking water,” the EPA statement reads. “Exposure to lead in drinking water can cause serious health effects in all age groups, especially pregnant people, infants (both formula-fed and breastfed), and young children. Some of the health effects to infants and children include decreases in IQ and attention span. Lead exposure can also result in new or worsened learning and behavior problems. The children of persons who are exposed to lead before or during pregnancy may be

at increased risk of these harmful health effects. Adults have increased risks of heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney or nervous system problems.”

The EPA has invited members of the public to review the proposed LCRI and supporting information and once published in the *Federal Register*, provide written comments in the public docket associated with this rulemaking at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov), Docket ID Number: EPA-HQ-OW-2022-0801.

The agency will host an informational webinar for the public on **Dec. 6, 2023** about the proposed LCRI. Learn more and register [here](#). The EPA will also hold a virtual public hearing on **Jan. 16, 2024**, at which the public will be invited to provide EPA with verbal comments. Learn more and register [here](#).

For more information and resources about the proposed improvements, [visit here](#).

## USDA, EPA partnership to expand to improve wastewater infrastructure

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have announced they will be strengthening their partnership and a network of 25 organizations to help rural and underserved communities access affordable, modern, and safe wastewater infrastructure.

Goals of the collaboration include revitalization the nation’s wastewater infrastructure, improving water quality, and protecting health, specifically targeting the 2.2 million Americans who lack basic running water and others who are presently being served by unsafe water infrastructure, including lead pipes. Across the U.S., decentralized (septic or onsite) technology can provide communities and homeowners with a safe, affordable wastewater treatment option.

The [Memorandum of Understanding](#) signed by USDA Rural Development Deputy Under Secretary Farah Ahmad and EPA Deputy Assistant Administrator Benita Best-Wong outlines the industry-wide initiative to improve the overall performance and management of decentralized systems in rural areas. Goals of the MOU

include:

- Identify and work with state and local finance partners to increase access to funding for rural communities.
- Connect rural communities to technical assistance resources provided through the [Closing America’s Wastewater Access Gap Community Initiative](#).
- Foster connections between technical assistance providers to support the design, construction and financing of sustainable decentralized wastewater infrastructure.

The new MOU more broadly formalizes those efforts with an emphasis on the sharing of information, technology, and other resources through technical assistance, training, and more.

“Decentralized wastewater systems are an integral component of our nation’s wastewater infrastructure, especially in rural areas where centralized treatment is often too expensive or unavailable,” Ahmad said. “USDA is committed to doing everything we can to ensure every family in America has access to modern, reliable waste-

water infrastructure. That’s why we are strengthening our partnership with EPA to help historically underserved communities identify and pursue federal funding opportunities to address their wastewater needs. These efforts have enormous impact because when we invest in rural infrastructure, we invest in the livelihoods and health of people in rural America.”

According to the 2015 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Housing Survey (AHS), approximately one in five homes in America are served by individual decentralized

wastewater systems.

“Safely managing wastewater is essential to protecting people’s health, their property, and the environment. Millions of Americans living in small, rural, and suburban communities rely on septic systems to play this important role every day,” said EPA Deputy Assistant Administrator for Water Benita Best-Wong. “This Memorandum brings together national organizations to engage with local partners to adopt best practices and help strengthen our communities.” To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

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# Tornadoes cause 6 deaths in Middle Tennessee

**TORNADO**, from Page 1

outages and other concerns.

Hendersonville closed its city hall due to damage with employees working remotely where possible. Minor damage was reported to a wastewater treatment plant in Nashville with 11 pumping stations being run by onsite generators due to power outages, according to a statement from Mayor Freddie O’Connell’s office. A substation was damaged in Springfield after taking a direct hit from the storm.

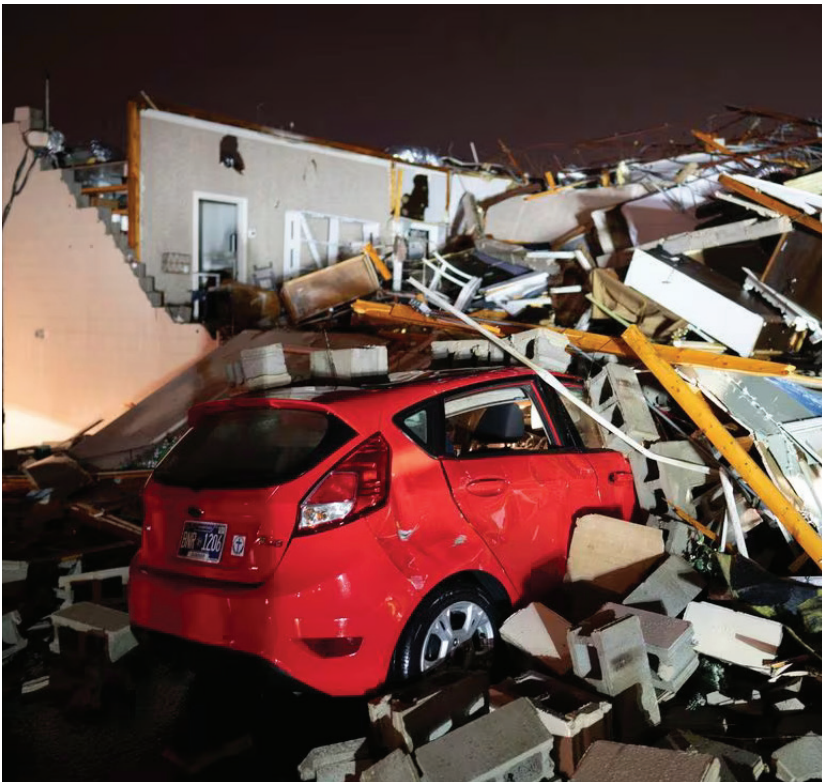
Clarksville has reported in an initial survey that 91 structures were totally destroyed, 271 were majorly damaged, and more than 400 had some damage. In the White Bluff vicinity, at least 9 structures were reported destroyed and 59 were damaged in some way. In West Tennessee, residents were trapped in damaged homes in Weakley County with significant damage reported in Gibson County. The fire station for the town of Rutherford was destroyed.

Damage assessments are still ongoing in other communities. Despite the damage, a statement issued by TEMA said Tennessee was showing its true spirit.

“Our hearts and minds are with all Tennesseans and their families that have been impacted by the tornadoes and severe weather that swept through our state,” the statement read. “As we begin the initial assessments, the Volunteer spirit has been on full display as many people have reached out about what they can do to help the communities that have been affected. Until we have a better idea of what kinds of supplies, assistance, donations, etc. that these communities need, we ask that you please refrain from sending anything that has not been requested by the state or local authorities.”



Tornado damage to an auto parts store in Gallatin.



A car sits amid the rubble of a building in downtown Hendersonville. Damage was also done to Hendersonville’s City Hall.



A Kroger store in Springfield was struck during the event.



After the roof of this Nashville church collapsed, 13 people were hospitalized.



Gov. Bill Lee tours a tornado-damaged neighborhood in Clarksville.



Clarksville Mayor Joe Pitts talks with residents amid the devastation.

## No loan is too large or too small



The Town of Dresden closed a \$6 million loan through the TMBF fixed rate loan program. The loan will be used to finance the construction and equipping of a new municipal complex to replace the building that was destroyed by the December 2021 tornado. The lender is Security Bank and Trust Company. Pictured are Dresden Mayor Mark Maddox, TMBF Marketing Representative Justin Hanson and City Recorder Jennifer Branscum.



The City of Tullahoma has used the TMBF loan programs 24 times since November 1986. The most recent closing was a \$7.5 million loan through TMBF’s fixed rate loan program. The proceeds will be used to finance various projects for the city over the three-year draw period. The lender was First Farmers and Merchants Bank in Columbia. Pictured are (seated) Mayor Ray Knowis and City Recorder Lori Ashley. Standing are Finance Director Susan Wilson, TMBF Marketing Representative Kevin Krushenski, and Interim City Manager and Fire Chief Ken Peason.



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# How to use generative AI to improve operations while protecting data

Large language models like ChatGPT offer state and local agencies exciting new capabilities, but they also introduce new security risks.

BY MIKE MORPER  
*Route Fifty*

ChatGPT captured the public’s imagination with neat tricks like churning out grocery lists in the style of a Shakespeare sonnet. But the generative artificial intelligence tool has the potential to revolutionize business processes.

It can write reports, provide customer support, perform data analysis, summarize market research, develop training materials, automate emails, schedule appointments and much more. It’s already being deployed across industries as diverse as technology, finance, e-commerce, media, law and health care.

Public and private sector agencies recognize that generative AI is a powerful tool that will be affordable, ubiquitous and transformational—but not without risk.

Today, generative AI produces outputs primarily based on the vast public datasets commercial solutions were trained on.

But agencies that want to use the technology to analyze budgets, boost customer experience with personalized information, or query in-house knowledge bases will have to train their generative AI solutions using their own proprietary information. That raises a host of cybersecurity concerns.

AI outputs based on in-

ternal data could increase the risk of leaking sensitive information to malicious actors. They could also expose employees’ and citizens’ personally identifiable information, placing their privacy at risk.

Here are three effective strategies agencies can use to take advantage of generative AI while protecting their sensitive data:

**1. Implement a comprehensive data classification strategy.** If organizations intend to leverage their data stores as generative AI inputs, then it’s incumbent on them to precisely identify which data is safe to include and which is so sensitive that it must be excluded. Achieving that goal begins with systematic data classification.

The federal government has been classifying data for a long time, and its experience offers useful guidance to state and local agencies on how they can classify their data.

Of course, federal civilian and military agencies have their Secret and Top Secret classifications. But in general, organizations should categorize and tag data based on its value to the organization, its criticality for internal operations or for serving the public and its sensitivity should that data become exposed.

**2. Set policies and educate employees on “shadow AI.”** When employees or teams in an agency use an AI system that isn’t formally approved or managed by the organization, they’re using what’s called shadow AI. Because these AI systems lack managerial oversight,

integration with other systems and compliance with policies, they can expose an agency to security, operational and regulatory risks.

To protect against shadow AI, set clear policies for the use of AI and communicate those policies to all employees.

Establish a process for teams to request AI capabilities from the IT department and receive formal approval. Make approved AI tools and training available so that teams don’t feel the need to go around AI policy. And monitor network and data access to detect unauthorized AI use.

**3. Practice good generative AI governance.** Create a formal policy on approved and prohibited generative AI use cases, as well as on the internal data that may be used in AI applications or to train AI models.

A generative AI governance board with representatives from the IT, HR and legal departments can help agencies formally assess use cases and associated data.

If there’s one constant in emerging technologies such as generative AI, it’s that they’re always changing. The same could be said for cyberthreats.

The power of data-centric security is that as capabilities and risks evolve, data protections persist.

Agencies can benefit from generative AI while protecting privacy and preventing sensitive data from falling into the wrong hands, thereby keeping agency, employee and citizen data safe

**Dec. 29: Memphis**  
[AutoZone Liberty Bowl](#)  
The SEC and Big 12 Conference battle in the AutoZone Liberty Bowl Football Classic, one of the most tradition-rich and patriotic bowl games in America

**Dec. 31-Jan. 1, 2024: Gatlinburg**  
[SkyPark - NYE Lights of Wonder](#)  
Ring in the New Year at the Gatlinburg SkyPark! The city of Gatlinburg is getting ready to have its fireworks display from the top of the Gatlinburg Space Needle this New Year’s Eve.

**Dec. 31-Jan. 1, 2024: Knoxville**  
[New Years' at the Sunsphere](#)  
Bring in 2024 with your friends and family at World’s Fair Park with food trucks, free activities including a silent disco at 9:00pm, DJ music with Knox Vegas DJs on the main stage starting at 9pm, live music with WIVK Band starting at 10:00pm-11:55pm with the Ball drop from the Sunsphere at Midnight.

**Dec. 31-Jan. 1, 2024: Memphis**  
[New Years' Eve on Beale](#)  
pend the last day of 2022 in Memphis at one of the many celebrations happening around the city. Beale Street brings the party every night, but especially on New Year’s Eve as tens of thousands of people dance to live music and enjoy the bars and restaurants on one of America’s iconic streets. Note that to join the party, you’ll need to be at least 21 years old.

**Dec. 31-Jan. 1, 2024: Nashville**  
[Jack Daniels' New Years Eve Live](#)  
Ring in 2024 in Nashville with hours of live music, fireworks, and the signature midnight Music Note Drop.

**Jan. 13-14: Graysville**  
[32nd Annual Sandhill Crane Festival](#)  
The festival is a celebration of 20,000 or more sandhill cranes that migrate through or spend the winter on or near the Hiwassee Refuge

## NATIONAL BRIEFS

**The average American needs a yearly salary of \$107,000 per year in order to purchase a home,** according to a new annual report on home affordability from the National Association of Realtors. The amount Americans need to earn on average per year to afford a house jumped 22% over last year from \$88,000 due to surging mortgage rates, rising home prices, and a lack of infrastructure. The median income Americans is \$75,000, putting purchasing a home further out of reach for many. This is only the second time since the National Association of Realtors began keeping records that a six-figure income was the average needed to buy a home. Still, the number of first-time homebuyers did increase over last year – up to 32% of all homebuyers – but remaining below the historical average of first-time buyers making up 38% of the market. The average first-time home buyer is also approximately 35 years old.

**The U.S. economy added 199,000 jobs in November, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.** Unemployment

dropped to 3.7% and is the latest sign that the American economy remains far from a recession despite continued interest rate increases weighing on consumer spending and business investment. Analysts believe the durability of the recovery is linked to cash consumers have saved during the pandemic. However, as that cash flow disappears, economists predict a decline in job growth in early 2024.

**Estimated life expectancy for U.S. residents has risen over the past year, but still isn’t back to estimated rates prior to the pandemic.** The U.S. life expectancy is set at 77 years and 6 months, the same rate it had reached two decades ago. For decades, life expectancy rates rose a little every year until a decade ago when they began flattening and then trending downward. Suicides and overdose deaths were largely blamed for stalling the upward progress. The rise to 77 years and 6 months is still more than a year more than estimated in 2022.

**Consumer prices rose 3.1% in the year through November, meaning inflation is holding**

**steady.** Adding in more volatile energy and food prices, the rate increased by 4%. The report is the latest sign that inflation has cooled substantially from a peak in June 2022 and the Federal Reserve is unlikely to change interest rates at its final meeting of the year. Inflation only climbed by 0.1% between October and November. Food prices rose 0.2% during the same period while gas prices were down 6%. The cost of housing remains high, however, with costs up 6.5% from last year and rents up 6.9% in the same period.

**Americans expect to spend an average of \$975 this holiday season, exceeding consumer holiday spending from last year by more than \$100.** Gallup said the average of \$975 is the highest consumers have spent during the holiday season since 1999. U.S. holiday spending reached a record-low of \$616 during the 2008 recession and had remained steady at around \$850 since the pandemic. Nine in ten Americans plan to spend something this holiday with young and middle-income shoppers showing the biggest growth in holiday spending.

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Ed Stewart, ChFC, CLU, CFP  
Financial Advisor

# Tennessee municipalities spread holiday cheer



**Above:** TML President and Farragut Mayor Ron Williams, right, helps Santa Claus officially turn on the lights for the town's annual Light the Park event. The holiday lights go down Campbell Station Road to Farragut's Campbell Station Inn Plaza, where visitors can tour dozens of lighted displays erected by city employees.

**Top Right:** A local youth football league participates in Red Bank's Christmas parade.

**Right:** Jasper's outdoor skating rink gives residents a chance to ice skate. Local vendors also sell hot chocolate to help skaters stay warm.



Santa and Mrs. Claus bring Season's Greetings from Saltillo.



Smyrna officials get a word in with Santa and Mrs. Claus prior to the town's Christmas parade.



Bristol's Public Works employees work to make the downtown merry and bright for the season.



Bolivar Mayor and TML Second Vice President Julian McTizic visits with Santa Claus prior to Bolivar's Christmas parade.



Franklin residents attend the city's tree lighting ceremony.



Collierville's city officials were on hand to serve up hot chocolate at the town's Tree Lighting event.