6,250 subscribers www.TML1.org Volume 76, Number 10 October 2025



#### **District Meetings Bring the Issues to You**

Our return to "in-district" meetings has been well received. We thank everyone who joined us in Jackson, Knoxville, and Kingsport, and we will see many of you later this week in Brentwood, followed by Crossville in December.

TML members and partners learned about the latest initiatives affecting your communities—from environmental permitting and reporting, to community mental health and addiction resources, to TDOT's map for the future.

Attendees also got a preview of key upcoming legislative battles during next year's General Assembly, the state's move to annual census estimates vs. the decennial census as the basis for shared sales tax funding, and how TVA plans to

meet the needs of Tennessee's growing electric power demand.

We especially want to thank our sponsors – UT's Institute of Public Service and its Municipal Technical Advisory Service, Public Entity Partners, Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund, TLM and Associates, and VC3 for hosting us at their facilities and treating our attendees to coffee breaks and lunch.

Enjoy the Fall and remember, NOW is the time to talk to your legislators about supporting our cities.



Anthony Haynes
TML Executive Director

# Campbell discusses life, leadership lessons that inspired show 'Ted Lasso'



Coach Donnie Campbell rose to prominence nationwide when comedian and writer Jason Sudeikis cited him as one of the inspirations for his character Coach Ted Lasso on the Apple+ series of the same name.

By KATE COIL TT&C Assistant Editor

Before the hit TV show *Ted Lasso* captured hearts and Emmy awards, Coach Donnie Campbell inspired students and athletes to better their performances by bettering themselves.

Campbell, a high school math teacher and basketball coach from Kansas, rose to prominence when actor and comedian Jason Sudeikis referenced his high school coach as one of the inspirations behind his character of Ted Lasso, the namesake for the Apple TV+ show that debuted in August of 2020.

"As we were watching the show, my wife pointed up to the screen and said 'Yeah, Donnie, that's you," Campbell said. "Well, I didn't see it. But I did see many of the lessons I taught Jason and his teammates 30 years earlier being applied in the show. It's incredibly surreal and humbling to know you made such an impact on someone's life."

Following a coaching career spanning many decades, Campbell now takes his lessons on leadership and teamwork across the country. He provided the keynote speech at the Tennessee Municipal League's 85th Annual Conference in Chattanooga.

#### BELIEVE

Like the character Ted Lasso, Campbell said the best leaders use the power of kindness and belief, speaking greatness into their teams to bring out the best.

"A coach is so much more than a strategist, so much more than a motivator, and so much more than a teacher," he said. "When I started out as a coach, I didn't know that. I was focused on one thing and one thing only, and that was winning."

To achieve those wins, Campbell said he worked his teams long and hard in practice. After a season of this coaching style, he said he led the

team to a 3-18 record. Trying to figure out what had gone wrong, Campbell said he stumbled across a quote by legendary UCLA head football coach John Wooden.

"Wooden defined success as peace of mind, which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable," Campbell said. "Success was not about winning; success was about developing my players to be the best person each one of them could be. I realized that when you create better people, you create winning teams."

Through that culture change, Campbell said the team went on to win the state championship in four years.

"You can develop your team to be really talented or really skilled in what you need, but that doesn't mean they're going to work together. It doesn't mean they're going to play together. You'll get lucky sometimes and you'll win, but if you want to sustain success, you have to focus on developing your people to be the best version of themselves, how to be a leader, how to take responsibility for their actions, and how to want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. It's not about the X's and O's, it's about the Johnnys and Joes."

Campbell said planning begins with practice and he often held disadvantage drills during practice to encourage players to both communicate and plan for what to do when things weren't going their way.

"Adversity is the greatest teacher," he said. "We tried to make our practices harder than a game. I wanted them to be mentally challenged. I wanted to create an environment where they had communicate. If you are having trust issues with your team, I guarantee it's a lack of communication on your part. Miscommunication creates distrust. The team that doesn't communicate is scared and selfish." See LASSO on Page 3

#### District 7, local elections held

By KATE COIL TT&C Assistant Editor

Voters went to the polls for the Tennessee District 7 Special Congressional primary election as well as two municipal elections in September and October.

Former Tennessee Department of General Services Commissioner Matt Van Epps and State Rep. Aftyn Behn will advance to the general election for the Tennessee District 7 Special Congressional election after winning their respective primaries.

In the Republican primary, Van Epps defeated challengers including State Rep. Jody Barrett, State Rep. Gino Bulso, Adolph Agbéko Dagan, Mason Foley, Jason D. Knight, Joe Leurs, Stewart Parks, and Tres Wittum. Candidates Lee Reeves and Stuart Cooper suspended their campaigns after early voting had begun but remained on the ballot.

Epps earned 19,001 votes followed by Barrett with 9,335, Bulso with 4,004, Reeves with 1,929, Foley with 1,022, Parks with 595, Knight with 381, Cooper with 239, Wittum with 133, Leurs with 122, and Dagan with 93.

In the Democratic primary, Behn defeated State Rep. Vincent Dixie, State Rep. Bo Mitchell, and Darden Hunter Copeland. Behn earned 8,648 votes, followed by



Matthew Van Epps, former Department of General Services Commissioner

Copeland with 7,716, Mitchell with 7,492, and Dixie with 7,146.

Van Epps and Behn will be joined on the ballot in December by independent candidates Teresa "Terri" Christie, Bobby Dodge, Robert James Sutherby, and Jon Thorp.

Tennessee's District 7 includes Cheatham, Decatur, Dickson, Hickman, Houston, Humphreys, Mongomery, Perry, Robertson, Stewart, and Wayne counties as well as portions of Benton, Davidson, and Williamson counties.

The last day to register to vote in the special general election is Nov. 3. Early voting in the election begins Nov. 12 and lasts until Nov. 26 with Dec. 2 scheduled as election day.



State Rep. Aftyn Behn, D-Nashville

#### CENTERVILLE

Voters went to the polls in Centerville for a municipal election on Oct. 4.

Newcomer Garry Greer defeated County Commissioner Devin Pickard 368 to 295 to take the mayoral seat previously held by Gary Jacobs, who did not seek re-election.

Incumbents Kenneth Daron,
Mandy King, Wayne Prince, and
Gary Wright will be joined by newcomer Shane Davis on the Centerville Board of Aldermen, defeating
incumbent Thomas Meador and
newcomer Glenda Delk for the five

open seats on the council.

Wright led the vote count with 449 followed by King with 415, Prince with 363, Davis with 334, See ELECTION on Page 5

## Tennessee looks to be on forefront as quantum technology changes Al

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

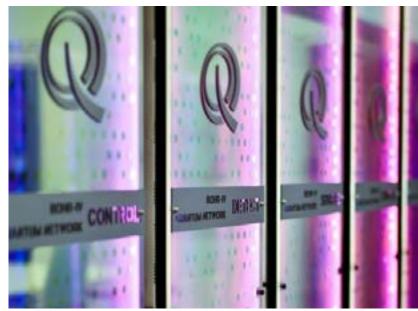
Through partnerships between Chattanooga Electric Power Board (EPB), Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Tennessee is positioning itself on the frontier of Quantum AI.

Quantum AI is the use of quantum computers and systems to run artificial intelligence (AI) systems more quickly with less cost and less energy. At present, AI is limited in its advancement and capabilities due to traditional computing resources, but many experts believe quantum technology could expand AI's abilities.

Based on quantum bits or qubits, quantum technology enables computers to process millions of operations simultaneously. While quantum AI is still being researched and explored, Tennessee is working to be on the forefront of this groundbreaking

technology.

Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly hosted a forum at TML's 85th Annual Conference in Chattanooga to discuss the future of AI and quantum computing featuring Evann Freeman, vice president of government and community relations at Chattanooga EPB; Jairobe McPherson, customer



Quantum servers at Chattanooga EPB. The utility has expanded into quantum as part of its broadband services and to encourage more tech development in the Gig City.

engineer with Google; and McKena McGraw, quantum information lead with Deloitte.

#### MUNICIPAL USE CASES

While quantum AI is already being explored for uses in healthcare and labor, McPherson said he thinks one of the ways the technology could be explored for municipal governments is with enterprise search, which takes

different data sources from different organizations, consolidates them, and asks questions of that data.

"Traditionally, it has been very difficult for the organizations that hold this data together to actually get insights out," he said. "When we look at some of the systems we have right now with AI, you can plug in different data sources. AI uses con-See QUANTUM on Page 5

## Separating fact, fiction essential in fight against human trafficking

By KATE COIL

While it is one of the fastest-growing crimes in the state, many Tennesseans are unaware of the signs of and risk factors for human trafficking.

Richard Schoeberl, director of graduate studies at the University of Tennessee Southern, has 30 years of law enforcement experience and now serves as a professor of criminology and homeland security. He has also worked with the Multidisciplinary Research Team at Baylor University, which examines human trafficking and partners with law enforcement agencies to address gaps in enforcement.

ment.

"Every county in the state of Tennessee this past year had a human trafficking case," Schoeberl said. "Human trafficking is the second-fastest growing crime in the U.S. and definitely the second-fastest growing crime in the state of Tennessee."

Schoeberl said law enforcement, educators, and those who have any interactions with the public can be



Approximately 70% of human trafficking cases are labor related rather than sex trafficking and 80% of trafficking victims are U.S. citizens.

a helpful force in putting an end to trafficking.

#### COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

One of the first misconceptions Schoeberl comes across is what human trafficking actually is. The legal definition involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to make any person of any age take part in any type of labor – sexual or not.

The use of any kind of physical violence or assault, use of a weapon, rape, restraint, or confinement consti*See* **HUMAN** *on Page 3* 

#### NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



#### ERWIN

BWXT officials announced the company will expand its operations in Erwin, creating 198 jobs and investing \$122 million at its Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc., facility to grow its capabilities in support of national defense needs. Nuclear Fuel Services has operated in Erwin since the 1950s and manufactures nuclear fuel material for naval reactors used in U.S. submarines and aircraft carriers. The project is the ninth that will utilize grant dollars from the \$50 million Nuclear Energy Fund, which assists nuclear power-related businesses choosing to relocate or grow in the Volunteer State.

#### **FRANKLIN**

The city of Franklin has earned the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the city's fiscal year 25/26 budget. In order to receive the award, a city must satisfy nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation, including passing a budget that serves as a policy document, financial plan, operations guide, and communications device. Budget documents must be rated "proficient" in all four categories, and in the fourteen mandatory criteria within those categories, to receive the award.

#### LEXINGTON

Nidec officials announced the company is expanding its manufacturing operations in Lexington, investing \$52.4 million and creating 200 new jobs. The investment will also enhance efficiency and capacities to support the increasing electricity demand in the U.S. and abroad. Upon completion, the company will employ more than 600 Tennesseans. Nidec Power, a division of Nidec Motor Corporation, designs and manufactures advanced alternators used in critical power generation applications such as data centers, hospitals, defense and more. Established in 1973, Nidec has grown from four-person operations to a global company with facilities on five continents and a headquarters in Kyoto, Japan.

#### MASON

The town of Mason has received nearly \$76,000 from the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) as part of \$1.8 million awarded to 16 communities through the Strategic Planning Program. The program provides communities within the DRA region with the necessary resources to develop strategies that maximize opportunities in public infrastructure, workforce development, and small business development and entrepreneurship. Mason will use the funds to develop a preliminary engineering report for the second phase of its sewer system rehabilitation project, which will prioritize project needs and support residential growth, business recruitment and job creation.

#### MCMINNVILLE

PolyFlex Products LLC officials announced the company is expanding its manufacturing operations by adding a new location in McMinnville. PolyFlex will create 58 new jobs and invest \$8.3 million in the new facility, which will assist the company's Morrison thermoform packaging operations by adding material extrusion capabilities and reuse of end-of-life industrial packaging. PolyFlex is a subsidiary to Swedish-based Nefab Group, which acquired the company in 2023. Upon completion of the expansion, PolyFlex will employ 85 in McMinnville.

(NMT) officials have selected Nashville to relocate their engineering operations. NMT will create 38 new jobs and invest \$4.5 million through the project with plans to share incubator space for research and development (R&D) at Vanderbilt University as its new Center of Excellence. The medical device company will continue its collaboration with EndoTheia, an endoscopic designer and developer led by Vanderbilt faculty member Bob Webster, which first announced a capital and business partnership with NMT in 2023. The two companies intend to build upon their work, enhancing the maneuverability and precision of current endoscopic tools in close cooperation with Vanderbilt teams. Founded in 1909, Nissha Medical Technologies, headquartered in Buffalo, N.Y., is a global leader in medical device design and manufacturing, specializing in patient monitoring and surgical solutions. It is the medical devices business unit and wholly owned subsidiary of Nissha Co., Ltd., a publicly held company based in Kyoto, Japan.

#### OAK RIDGE

Oklo Inc. officials announced the company has selected Oak Ridge as the location of a nearly \$1.7 billion expansion. Oklo, an advanced nuclear technology company, will create more than 800 new jobs through the project, which includes the development of an advanced nuclear fuel recycling facility on a 247-acre site at the Oak Ridge Heritage Center. The facility will recycle used nuclear fuel from today's operating fleet, establishing the nation's first privately funded nuclear recycling capability and providing a durable, domestic fuel supply for advanced reactors. Oklo is the fifth company to locate in Tennessee utilizing the Nuclear Energy Fund, which assists nuclear power-related businesses choosing to relocate or grow in the Volunteer State and supports the state's universities and research institutions in further developing their nuclear education programs.

#### OAK RIDGE

Radiant officials announced the company has selected Oak Ridge for a \$280 million investment that will expand the company's nuclear manufacturing and research and development (R&D). Through the project, Radiant will create 175 new jobs in Oak Ridge that will directly support the development and mass production of Radiant's Kaleidos. Upon completion of the facility, this machine will be the world's first one-megawatt portable nuclear generator capable of generating power in remote areas and providing resilient power options for military bases or disaster-relief scenarios. Radiant is the sixth company to locate in Tennessee utilizing the Nuclear Energy Fund.

#### PORTLAND

Free public wi-fi is now available at Portland's Meadowbrook Park and Main Street Portland through a partnership between the city, Sumner County, and the Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation. The initiative is being funded through a Broadband Ready Communities grant from the Tennessee Department of Economic & Community Development and delivered by Cumberland Connect. The project will provide reliable internet access for residents, visitors, and local businesses and will also include a digital literacy training component for Portland residents. Community members will be provided digital skills through the Tennessee College of Applied Technology.

# skills through the Tennessee College of Applied Technology. NASHVILLE Nissha Medical Technologies SERVPRO Cleaning Restoration Construction 24/7/365 commercial services

1-800-SERVPRO

servpro.com

## Goodlettsville breaks ground on new inclusive playground



Officials in Goodlettsville cut the ribbon on Rachel's Garden Playground, a new inclusive playground at Peay Park and adjacent to the splash pad and the Delmas Long Community Center. The playground is named for Rachel West, the daughter of Retired Fire Captain Ricky West, and was begun as a project of the Goodlettsville Fire Department's Kids Christmas Charity. Funding for the playground was raised locally with the TDEC Office of Outdoor Recreation, Community Development Partners, Kimley-Horn, Recreational Concepts, Drakes Creek Builders, Roger's Group, and B & T Landscaping all participating in the project.

#### McMinnville welcomes new fire truck



Officials with the city of McMinnville and McMinnville Fire Department held a push-in ceremony to welcome the city's newest fire truck. The Ford-550 was outfitted to meet the needs of the department with increased storage for extrication gear, a mobile winch, and increased water capacity. The truck also has an apparatus on every side to allow water to be drawn from the front and both sides of the truck.

#### Cleveland dedicates field for growing sport futsal



The Cleveland City Council has dedicated the new field at Oldfield, a futsal facility located at Blythe-Oldfield Park. The project is the result of a partnership between the city and Tennessee Department of Health with an \$80,000 Healthy Built Environment Grant to support the installation of the court. Futsal, a fast-paced variation of soccer commonly played on smaller fields, has grown in popularity across the country. The Blythe-Oldfield court will be 125 feet by 65 feet, featuring a lined, artificial turf surface. Great Southern Recreation is leading the installation of the turf, while the city's Public Works Department is contributing matching in-kind services through site preparation.

#### Kingsport celebrates 90th birthdays of former mayors



TMLAt-Large Director and Kingsport Mayor Paul W. Montgomery recently hosted a special 90th birthday celebration to honor former Kingsport Mayors Hunter Wright and Jeanette Blazier. More than a dozen former and current aldermen as well as three city managers joined in on the festivities. Wright served as Kingsport's mayor from 1985 to 1995 while Blazier served as the city's mayor from 1999 to 2005.

#### Separating fact, fiction essential in fight against human trafficking

**HUMAN**, *from Page 1* tutes force. False promises of a better life, job, or romance constitute fraud while Schoeberl said psychological intimidation of any kind and threats against a person or their loved ones fall under coercion.

Schoeberl said substance abuse is also often overlooked as a type of

"Drugs are a common tool to use as a mechanism to control someone," he said. "I interviewed a girl named Heather who was a victim of human trafficking and was addicted to heroin. She said she didn't always use it, but it was given to her by another girl to get through a day of being sexually trafficked. It made her dependent on her trafficker for not just food, clothing, and shelter but also her addiction.'

At present, 28 million people live in modern-day slavery, which Schoeberl said is a \$236 billion industry. He said there is not an industry that is not touched by human trafficking in some way. Additionally, less than 1% of trafficking victims are kidnapped by a stranger.

"That is too much attention, and traffickers don't need that," Schoeberl said. "They want someone who is under the influence of drugs, alcohol, romance, or something else. Victims also don't self-identify, and we are going to see less of that. When we start doing mass deportations, then you are going to see people who would rather stay in exploitation than say they are victims of trafficking. They would rather be exploited than deported. There is also a myth that if you get paid you aren't a victim. That is not the case. Traffickers often pay their victims, though they may be paying them \$5 an hour versus what they should be paying them."

Schoeberl said 80% of trafficking victims in the U.S. are U.S. citizens and not foreign-born.

#### **RED FLAGS**

There are several factors that can put an individual at more risk of being trafficked including a lack of personal safety, isolation, homelessness, childhood sexual abuse, having a family member involved in exploitation, family dysfunction, poverty, mental illness, learning disabilities or developmental delays, lack of social support, emotional distress, substance abuse, and a history of being a runaway.

However, Schoeberl said these conditions can come together in different ways to create victims.

"If I asked everyone for a chocolate cake recipe, I would get a bunch of different recipes," Schoeberl said. "At the end of the day, all these recipes are going to get me a chocolate cake."

Children who have been in foster care are 50-60% more likely to be victims of trafficking with the average age of trafficking victims being 13-17. Schoeberl noted there is no one ethnicity or race that is more likely to be victimized, but ethnicity



Police aren't the only city employees who may come into contact with trafficking victims. Educating employees can save lives.

and race of victims typically align with the population where they are being trafficked.

Signs a person is being trafficked may include poor physical or dental health; they appear overwhelmed, nervous, tense, or paranoid; evidence of current or previously untreated physical injuries or abuse; untreated STDs; tattoos or brands that emphasize property; inappropriate clothing; an inability to speak for themselves; scripted responses to questions; and avoiding eye-contact or social interaction.

"We rescued this girl once whose pimp decided that he was a freelance surgeon," Schoeberl said. "Her arm broke, and he took some coffee stirrers and duct tape to fix it. It had been there so long her skin had grown up around the duct tape. The doctor looked at me and said he spent years in the Middle East with Doctors Without Borders during the Afghan War, but this was the most traumatic thing he had seen on a live person. Traffickers dehumanize; it's what they do."

Schoeberl said many victims do not walk away because they have developed a trauma bond with their trafficker.

"These people are victims," he said. "They are not doing this to make a living. They are doing this to survive. They are being forced to do it."

#### LABOR TRAFFICKING

While sex trafficking is often the focus of media coverage, Schoeberl said forced labor is actually the most common type of trafficking in

There is also a difference between trafficking and human smuggling, as trafficking does not require a person to be transported while smuggling does. However, these two crimes are often connected.

"I have never seen anybody raise their hand and say will you please

traffic me, but we have seen about 10 million people over the last 5 years raise their hands and say, 'will you please smuggle me into the U.S.,"" Schoeberl said. "I want you to think about this. The average cost of smuggling someone is between \$10,000 and \$60,000. If you have \$60,000, you are probably well off in your country and will stay right there. If you owe someone \$60,000 for smuggling you into the country, how do you pay that off? It's either through bonded labor or commercial sex. These smuggling fees are like a payday loan. You're never paying off the initial principal, just maybe the interest you owe. You can go your entire life and not pay it off.'

Child labor trafficking has become a rising issue in the U.S., particularly as the labor market tightens. As a result, more underage employees are working in dangerous conditions. Schoeberl said larger corporations are frequently the perpetrators of child labor trafficking and usually only face fines as a result.

"We are talking about people who are vulnerable, who were often pushed into this country or pulled because of violence or better opportunities," Schoeberl said. "They then get exploited and caught up in labor trafficking. These cases are hard and extremely complex. Prosecutors tend not to prosecute these cases because of how difficult they are. In the past 20 years, U.S. federal prosecutors focused 93% on sex trafficking cases and only 7% on forced labor, yet 70% of people are trafficked for labor and only 30% for sex."

Domestic servitude is one of the most common ways people are labor trafficked. Schoeberl said he had worked on the case of a woman who came from the Philippines to take a job working as a maid for a family in California. She helped raise the family's kids and take care of their parents after the kids had moved out. The woman slept on the

berl said. "It's become a normalized behavior for a lot of teenagers. A growing concern for parents and teachers alike is sextortion. This is extortion for sex or money. [Criminals] talk to these young kids to normalize sending risqué photos. Only 17% of those who are sextorted ever report it." Sextortion is not sexual traffick-

ing but is a gateway to that crime, with Schoeberl indicated 83% of sextortion happens over social media. While 80% of these victims are girls, Schoeberl said those statistics may be skewed because boys are highly likely to not report victimization. Schoeberl said one in four sextortion victims are under the age of 13.

Schoeberl worked with a student for an experiment to create several fake profiles of underage girls online. He said within 24 hours they were getting emails from strangers, even though the girls were identified online as being middle school age. They engaged in conversation with the respondents, who sent them pictures of themselves and promised that they would send money if pictures were returned.

"How many kids who live in poverty would raise their hand and say sure I'll send some photos for \$10,000," Schoeberl said. "This is what we are dealing with. This whole thing took place in 72 hours. It's a game of statistics for the people who are out there. If they do it enough, someone will send them photos."

Based on his research, Schoeberl said these groomers look for kids online, earn their trust, meet their needs - particularly emotionally - and then isolate them. They then maintain control of their victims, often through information their victims have given them like phone numbers, home addresses, the schools they attend, and images they may have sent.

"Traffickers don't need to go to the mall anymore and pick up runaway children," Schoeberl said. "They can find people online so easily. The important thing to do is to educate the community about this. We have to identify where this is happening and not be naive and think this doesn't happen here."

In addition to training law enforcement to conduct complex investigations and maintain a victim-centric approach, Schoeberl said it's important to other city officials also know what to look for.

"Think about the other people in your city government who might come into contact with traffickers or people being trafficked," he said. "Think about your first responders, your utility department staff, your water department staff—the people who go out to houses all the time. Identification is key, and I'd rather someone report a situation and be wrong than not say something and



what was leftover on the family's plates following meals. She was not paid for her work. She went to a hospital during COVID and told a nurse what had

floor and was only allowed to eat

happened to her. The nurse then reported it to the police. The 76-yearold woman had been working as an indentured servant for 38 years. The family was prosecuted, and funds were set aside to put the woman into an assisted living facility. "I met with her a year after this, and she asked me if she had to go

back to the house," Schoeberl said. "I told her she never had to go back to that house. The interpreter leaned over and told me she actually said, 'when do I get to go back to the house.' It felt like I had fallen out of a tree. She had formed such a trauma bond with this family. They were all she ever knew."

#### **ONLINE DANGERS**

One of the difficulties for law enforcement is how easy the Internet has made trafficking. Websites like eBackpage.com are often based outside the U.S. and are thus beyond reach of law enforcement. Traffickers also often use Airbnb and similar services to stay on the move.

"Online exploitation can take a lot of forms, whether it's grooming, production of child sexual abuse material, or livestreaming," Schoebe right."

#### Campbell discusses life, leadership lessons that inspired show 'Ted Lasso'

LASSO, from Page 1

**CREATING CULTURE** 

To make a culture change, Campbell said leaders need to focus on what he calls MVP: mission, values, and planning. Ultimately, Campbell said the mission is to create better people who become better in their individual roles and thus improve the team as a whole.

"We always tell our players that how you treat people who can do nothing for you shows your real character," he said. "You cannot believe – all of you with the positions you are in – the impact that you make every day from just being kind and respectful. As a leader, setting the right example makes all the difference. My players never particularly liked me, but they respected me. In your positions, you are going to make some hard decisions. You have to be able to look at yourself in the mirror and say you made the right decision. Some of those decisions you will make, people won't like them."

Campbell said values became important to him in his own playing career when he watched an opposing team's coach intimidate officials.

"On the ride home on the bus, I looked at my coach and said, 'That wasn't right tonight; that wasn't fair," Campbell said. "He said to me, 'You know Donnie, if I have to act like a horse's behind to win a game, it's time for me to retire.' Our coach had standards and values about how you treat people. He treated everyone with kindness and respect. If you want people to be kind, you better set the bar. If you want people to be treated with respect, you better be respectful."



Kansas basketball coach and math teacher Donnie Campbell shares lessons he learned on and off the court with TML Members during the 85th Annual Conference in Chattanooga.

Campbell said values are non-negotiable and some of the most important values are trust, accountability, commitment, and character. He cited trust as the foundation of relationships that cannot exist without honesty as well as the importance of people who are committed to the team first and embrace their role.

According to Campbell, the best teams are made up of people who both hold themselves and each other accountable. By having team members who believe in themselves, want to get better, and focus on being the best they can be, Campbell said you create a team focused on achieving

#### TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Over the course of his career, Campbell said he has seen how one player can bring down an entire team. He said having team members who can deal with mistakes and failure is just as important as having ones who can win.

"Bottom line is, you have to have people you can lose with," he said. "You're going to have a lot more losses than wins. You better have the right people on your boat. You can pick captains, but you can't pick leaders. Doers make mistakes. You recognize the mistake, you admit the mistake, you learn from it, and you forget. You be a goldfish and move on. Be where your feet are."

As a coach, Campbell said he often had to make hard choices, including cutting a player from a team who was skilled at basketball but had a personality that put him into conflict with fellow players, coaches,

and teachers. "When you are a leader, you have to make tough decisions," he said. "Sometimes, they're gut-wrenching decisions like this one. I can still remember him taking off his practice gear, throwing it, and cussing at me. Two days later, his dad calls and wants to meet with me. Before we sit down and start talking, he said 'I want to thank you for holding my son accountable.' The decisions we make every day have to be what's best for the team."

Campbell recalled another player who was good at shooting but not at guarding. After warning the player if he didn't improve his defense he might be cut, Campbell said the player went on to improve his body and his game, and later earned a college scholarship.

"You can either pout, moan, sulk, and blame everybody or take the bull by the horns, take the challenge and get better," he said. "I've always told my players I can fix your mistakes, but I can't fix your excuses. You need to think about if there is someone on your team who is a diamond in the rough, who needs a little bit of help. Everybody deserves a second chance. You also have to listen to your team members, because when you do it empowers them."

After his team lost a championship game, Campbell remembered feeling very discouraged walking into his classroom the next Monday. He was surprised when the principal came to the class and talked to the students about how lucky the school was to have Campbell on staff. Campbell said that uplift from a leader was what he needed in that

"You are all in leadership positions," he said. "Isn't it great to be positive and speak greatness into people when things are going well? But what about when things aren't going well? Are you that leader when things aren't going well who makes every one of their team members know you believe in them?"

Ultimately, Campbell said a leader cares just as much about how a team member performs today as setting them up for success in the future.

"What's important to me is how these kids end up 5, 10, and 15 years from now," he said. "The best teams work hard and work hard together with no one caring who gets the credit. It all starts when you create good people. You don't have to win a championship to be a champion. It's about who you are."



#### **PEOPLE**

Charlie Cole, chief of the Gatlinburg Fire Department, has announced his intention to retire in January following a



Charlie Cole

38-year career with the city. Cole joined the Gatlinburg Fire Department in 1987 as a volunteer firefighter before transitioning into a full-time role. During his time with GFD, he served as a firefighter, EMT, paramedic, EMS Coordinator, training officer, and was eventually appointed assistant chief. In 2018, he became the seventh chief of the department.

Craig Cruise has been selected as the new public information officer for the city of Pigeon Forge. Cruise is the first PIO in the city's



Craig Cruise

history and most recently served as the community outreach officer for the Pigeon Forge Police Department. As PIO, Cruise serves as the primary liaison between the city of Pigeon Forge government services and the community, including local media outlets. He has spent 13 years with the city, including working with police dispatch, patrol unit, and serving with the crisis negotiation unit.

Walter Denton has been selected as the new assistant city administrator for community and economic development for the city of



Walter Denton

Franklin. Denton is taking over from Vernon Gerth, who retired after 18 years of service. Denton has 33 years of local government experience, including 23 years as the city administrator for O'Fallon, Ill. His previous roles included serving as assistant city administrator for Cape Girardeau, Mo., and as state coordinator for the Koch Crime Commission based in Wichita, Kan. In addition to his extensive experience in local government, Denton served as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where he taught graduate courses in the master's in public administration program.

Jon Glass, manager of the Tullahoma Municipal Airport, has announced his retirement after 26 years of service. Glass has overseen



Jon Glass

major airport improvements, secured grant funding, and managed daily airport operations since 1999, helping to power the city's economic growth. During his tenure, the airport has seen the addition of 40 new hangars, a new terminal building, the addition of 160 new aircraft based at the airport, and new Vanderbilt LifeFlight services.

Jon Lane has been selected as the new director of Water and Sewer Services for the city of Johnson City. Lane is taking over from



Jon Lane

Tom Witherspoon, who retires in November. Lane has 11 years of service in the WSS department, working both as a civil engineer and most recently as assistant director for the past six years. He holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Tennessee and a master's degree in civil engineering from North Carolina State University. He also holds a professional engineer's license in the state of Tennessee.

Andrew Morkert has been selected as the interim city manager of Collegedale following the departure of Wayon Hines as city manager and city engineer. Morkert has served as the city's building inspector and code enforcement official since 2009. Prior to that,

he held several project management roles in both the private sector and Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise. He holds a bachelor's degree



Andrew Morkert

in construction technology from Northern Michigan University.

Keith Morrison, Algood city administrator and TML District 4 Director, has been selected as TML's representative on the Local Gov-



Keith Morrison

ernment Corporation (LGC) Board. Headquartered in Columbia, LGC is a private, nonprofit corporation, chartered to provide computer services to local government entities. The 11-member LGC board guides the organization as it serves local and state government agencies. Morrison has served as Algood's city administrator since 2013 and is also the city's Certified Municipal Finance Officer (CMFO).

Kelly North
has been
named the
new executive
director of the
Tullahoma
Area Economic development Corporation (TAEDC)



Kelly North

by the Tullahoma Board of Mayor and Aldermen. The TAEDC serves to drive economic development in the Tullahoma region. North comes to Tullahoma from Bedford County where she has served in a variety of economic development roles, including as interim CEO of the Shelbyville-Bedford Partnership since October 2024. She holds a master's degree in social innovation and non-profit management and a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship, both from Middle Tennessee State University.

Lea Powers has been appointed vice mayor of Bristol by her fellow city councilmembers. Powers steps into the vice mayor seat af-



Lea Powers

ter previous Vice Mayor Vince Turner became mayor upon the resignation of former mayor Mark Hutton to take a permanent job. Powers will remain as vice mayor until an election to fill the vacant East District seat on the board can be held. The council will appoint an interim to hold the seat in the meantime.

Josh Suddath has been named the executive director of the new Center for Local Planning with the University of Tennessee



Josh Suddath

Institute for Public Service (IPS). The position is funded from state recurring moneys to establish a dedicated local planning function to assist Tennessee's cities and counties with economic development, zoning and infrastructure planning. Suddath comes to IPS from serving as director of planning and engineering for Sumner County, where he has worked since 2018. Prior to that, Suddath served as an assistant town administrator for Collierville. He earned a bachelor's degree in history and a master's in public administration, planning and economic development, both from East Tennessee State University.

#### Haynes appointed to TCRS Board



Tennessee Municipal League Executive Director Anthony Haynes has been selected as the municipal employee representative on the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System (TCRS) Board of Trustees. From left to right, Tennessee State Treasurer David H. Lillard, Jr., with board members Haynes, retired McNairy County Schools teacher Patsy Moore, Springfield Police Chief Jason Head, Tennessee Highway Patrol Nashville District Wrecker Lt. Wayne Jackson, and TDMHSAS Psychiatric Hospital Nurse Executive Zachary Edmiston.

Tennessee Municipal League Executive Director Anthony Haynes has been selected as the municipal employee representative on the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System (TCRS) Board of Trustees.

Haynes was selected as the municipal employee representative on the board. The board is responsible for the general administration and proper operation of TCRS within the requirements and provisions of state statute (T.C.A., Title 8, Chapters 34-37).

"The TCRS program is one of the best managed programs in the entire country," Haynes said. "You can ask any financial expert, and they will agree. Our leaders have done a great job managing it for growth while also protecting people's interests and assets. And it's something I'm glad I have. I am also glad for the services that come with that."

Tennessee State Treasurer David H. Lillard, Jr. serves as chair of the board and welcomed Haynes and other new board members.

"The TCRS program is one of the best managed programs in the entire country," Haynes said. "You can ask any financial expert, and they will agree. Our leaders have done a great job managing it for growth while also protecting people's interests and assets. Personally, I appreciate the RetireReady tools and use many of the services provided by the system."

Other members recently appointed to the board include:

- Retired McNairy County Schools teacher Patsy Moore (retired teacher representative)
- Springfield Police Chief Jason Head (public safety representative)
- Tennessee Highway Patrol Nashville District Wrecker Lt. Wayne Jackson (state employee representative)
- Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Psychiatric Hospital Nurse Executive Zachary Edmiston (state employee representative)

The 20-member Board meets quarterly and is subject to the call of the chair for special meetings.

### Norris to step down, Carrier serve as interim MTAS executive director

MTAS Executive Director Margaret Norris is returning to her role as a municipal management consultant with the agency.

Angie Carrier, program manager for municipal management consultants, will serve as interim executive director.

"We appreciate Margaret for the eight years she served as executive director of MTAS, and the guidance she gave to the agency," said IPS Vice President Dr. Herb Byrd. "I understand her decision to return to her first love, serving the municipalities of Tennessee as a consultant."

Norris joined MTAS in February 2001. She became executive director in August of 2017. Prior to becoming executive director, Norris was a municipal management consultant for a portion of East and Middle Tennessee cities.

"I am eager to again provide director support to Tennessee municipalities; and I appreciate Dr. Byrd for allowing me the opportunity to do so," Norris said. "MTAS is an amazing agency, and I am privileged to work with such a terrific group of professionals."

Carrier, municipal management program manager, joined MTAS in January 2018. Prior to joining



Angie Carrier

MTAS, she served Johnson City as the development services director. She has a master's degree in city management. Carrier will assume the interim executive director position on Oct. 1.

"MTAS has been an integral part of my professional journey, starting from my days working with a management consultant on my intern project at the city of Maryville, to my roles as a city administrator in two cities and development services director in one, and now as a member of the MTAS team for almost eight years," Carrier said. "When Dr. Byrd entrusted me with the responsibility to serve in this interim role, I felt truly honored. I am committed to continuing the forward momentum



Margaret Norris

of MTAS and am excited to collaborate with our exceptional team of employees to achieve our goals."

TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes said TML will provide continued to support to MTAS through the transitional period.

"We are immensely grateful to Margaret for her tireless work to strengthen the ties between TML and MTAS," TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes said. "We wish her the very best as she focuses her talents to directly serve cities. TML is dedicated to supporting Angie as the interim executive director so that our members may continue to benefit from this long-term partnership."

#### Former UT System President Petersen dies

Former University of Tennessee System President Dr. John Petersen died Sept. 11, 2025, at the age of 77 in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Tennessee Municipal League Executive Director Anthony Haynes said Petersen helped support and grow higher education at UT and the services the university provides to the public.

"Dr. Petersen helped strengthen UT's presence and co-leadership at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL)," Haynes said. "He was an early advocate for degree attainment and performance-based funding for public higher education. And his support for the outreach mission of the university through the Institutes of Agriculture and Public Service was unwavering. Our condolences go out to his wife, Carol, and their family."

Current UT System President Randy Boyd also recognized Petersen's importance to UT.

"A chemist by training, his tenure saw notable research milestones, including the opening of the Spallation Neutron Source at ORNL,



Dr. John Petersen

and a record \$65 million NSF grant that positioned UT and ORNL as leaders in supercomputing," Boyd said. "Our heartfelt condolences go to his family and friends."

A native of Los Angeles, Petersen earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry from California State University in 1970 and his doctorate in inorganic chemistry in 1978 from the University of California.

After serving as an assistant professor of chemistry at Kansas State University, he joined the faculty of Clemson university in 1980

and was associate dean and head of the chemistry department. He spent a year at Universität Regensburg in Germany as the Alexander von Humboldt research fellow and guest professor before going to Wayne State University, where he served as dean of the College of Science from 1980 to 1995.

Petersen served as provost and executive vice president for academic affairs for the University of Connecticut from 2000 until 2004, when he was appointed president of the UT system. Petersen would serve as UT's president until 2009, during which time he helped increase the university's research output, expanded partnerships, and invested in university infrastructure.

After his departure from UT, Petersen served as executive director of RTP Solar Fuels Project and IUPAC before retiring. He was a longtime member of the American Chemical Society and served on their executive compensation committee. Petersen is survived by his wife, Carol, two children, two grandchildren, and a large extended family.



J. R. Wauford & Company, Consulting Engineers, Inc.

#### Tennessee looks to be on forefront as quantum technology changes Al

QUANTUM, from Page 1 text windows, which is the amount of data you can pull in as context to any query you ask of an AI system. Those context windows are getting really large. You can throw questions into AI models and get insights in a lot easier manner."

McPherson said he thinks another avenue for local governments is using conversational AI or virtual agents to engage with constituents and free up employee time. These AI programs can deliver information and resources faster than a human counterpart and with more specifics than a frequently-asked-questions page on a website. He also believes that AI can be used to deliver information to the public as well as break down sophisticated data into easy-to-understand facts, figures, and talking points.

Sometimes, simple use cases can be the most impactful. McPherson said the city of Chicago has developed an AI that interprets bus and rail routes and changes to those routes in a variety of languages. The result has been increased usership of those transit services as well as clearer communication when buses or routes have to change.

A county in Kentucky used AI in their strategic planning, allowing citizens to submit ideas and plans digitally and then have the AI sift through, categorize, and prioritize these ideas into a generated report with action items for county officials. This also allowed city officials to separate the ideas that had the most support from those that were just being shared by the loudest voices.

"However big or small your city or agency is, there are likely applications for AI use cases that can help you really achieve the aims you are looking for," McPherson said.

However, McGraw said AI alone cannot be the answer for everything.

"There are some things that AI

on a classical computer can never learn," she said. "With quantum, we can access a new space and think about generalizing our AI capabilities to solve very hard problems. AI can't solve a physics or science problem, and it never will. With quantum and the computational power it can allow for, we can take AI to the next level."

#### QUANTUM TRANSITION

McGraw said quan- and quatum fundamentally changes the way we think about information.

"We are actually able to use properties of atoms and molecules to do useful things," she said. "Quantum information is very different than what is on your phones or your laptop. Quantum allows us to access a new scale and solve programs on a bigger scale than even the fastest super computers at ORNL can do. It's a challenge that has been put on by Google and IBM to beat those machines at ORNL on much smaller machines using quantum information."

Quantum can make processes more efficient, which renders more accurate solutions more quickly. It also provides a new type of security.

"The idea is that as we move into quantum information, we can use quantum cryptography on quantum networks and quantum computers," McGraw said. "For instance, through something known as blind computing, no one would be able to know what you were doing on your phone or who you were talking to based on properties of quantum physics."

Freeman said part of Chattanooga EPB's mission is to enhance quality of life, which is why the



From left to right, EPB Vice President of Government and Community Relations Evann Freeman, Google Customer Engineer Jairobe McPherson, and Deloitte Quantam AI Scientist Dr. McKena McGrew discuss the future of AI and quantum technology at TML's 85th Annual Conference in Chattanooga.

utility began working on municipal broadband. The utility has also partnered with ORNL to improve electric service and output for Chattanooga and EPB's wider service area through the use of microgrids and other future energy technology.

"One of the things that came up in 2006 was the Department of Energy (DOE) called us about working with San Francisco-based Qubitekk to use quantum to secure our substations," Freeman said. "It was successful, and we continued to do tests with them."

The success of this project prompted Chattanooga EPB, the city of Chattanooga, and Qubitekk to build a quantum network in Chattanooga. The network allows private companies, government agencies, national labs, and universities to explore what quantum computing can do for them, as well as test and upgrade their security.

"The idea is similar to us building our broadband service for our community," Freeman said. "We built the infrastructure and didn't know how it would turn out. We didn't expect more than 9,000 jobs to be created or \$2.7 billion in economic impact and lots of companies locating here in our community. We are

building this infrastructure because we believe in this infrastructure and that it can do big things."

#### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are always ethical issues to consider with implementing any AI system or new technology. As AI technology evolves, so do the ways that bad actors seek to exploit that data.

"It is a lot easier to get data into some of these AI systems than it is to get it out," McPherson said. "Any data you put into an AI system can be used for training. You have to really think about the privacy of the data you are inputting. For hyperscale models like those provided by Google or Microsoft, you are going to have to hand over some data to them. It is important that you have a technology partner that has the tools and safety in place to make sure data is kept private and secure."

There is also concern that human biases can be entered into AI systems, making their output biased as well.

"These AI are trained on data by humans, and as human beings, we are, by nature, biased creatures," McPherson said. "The best thing you can do as a local government agency leveraging this technology is to be aware of that bias. You can sometimes use some of these same tools that have bias in them to eliminate that bias. You have to implement things to mitigate and resolve those risks and gaps."

McGraw said being able to explain results generated by technology is another ethical concern.

"You give AI a bunch of data, but you don't know what it is learning from that data before it spits out an answer," McGraw said. "There are instances where that is not OK. The ability to explain an outcome of a machinery or algorithm is very important. I can't go to a customer and tell them I think they're involved with human trafficking without telling them way. This is where you need something that is explainable."

With data centers opening in communities across the country, there is concern that Big Data is overloading the electric grid at the expense of local power users. Freeman said quantum can be used to optimize electric grids that require more output for data centers.

Presently, McGraw said the use of AI requires more data centers, and bigger data centers are needed for AI to solve bigger problems. Incorporating quantum technology into the equation may provide a solution. "This is kind of an open problem we are figuring out," Mc-Graw said. "The idea behind it is that these quantum computers can get to a solution exponentially faster than a classical computer with a lot smaller infrastructure. As quantum computers become more commercially available, instead of huge data centers across Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico hidden in the mountains powering AI, we would be able to do so with much smaller facilities and much more accuracy. Of course, it is still speculative in what we are able to do."

#### District 7, local elections held



ELECTION, from Page 1 Daron with 333, Meador with 256, and Delk with 249.

#### DICKSON

The city of Dickson held a municipal election on Sept. 11.

Incumbent Jason Epley defeated challenger Karen Ramey Bell 110-59 to retain the Council Ward 1 seat.

Incumbent Kyle Sanders fended off challenger Bill Woods to retain the Council Ward 2 seat. Sanders earned 231 votes to Woods' 62.

Ward 3 incumbent Stacey Lynn Levine and Ward 4 incumbent Michael James Outlaw both ran unopposed and were re-elected with 57 and 50 complimentary votes respectively.

#### LEXINGTON

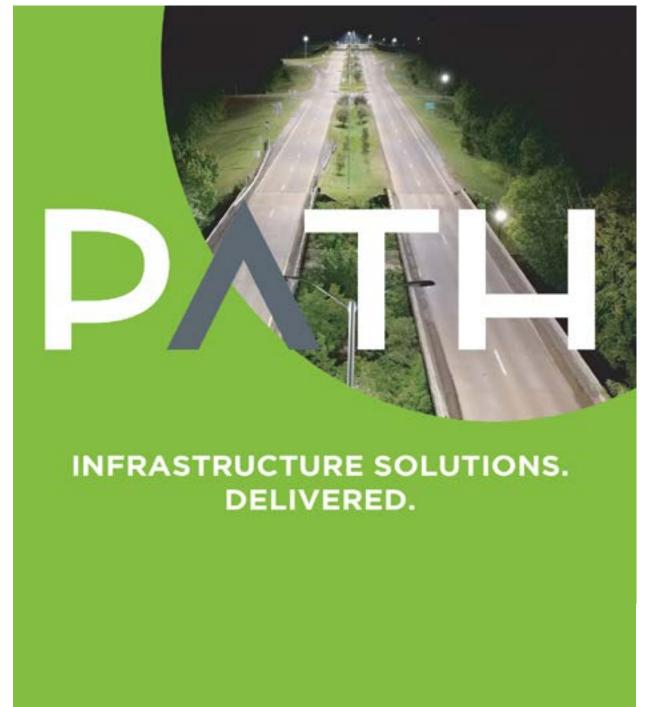
A municipal election was held in Lexington on Sept. 11.

Alderman Gordon Wildridge defeated challenger and County Commissioner Andy Anderson to take the mayoral seat in Lexington. Wildridge earned 965 votes to Anderson's 878 votes. The mayoral seat had previously been held by Jeff Griggs, who did not seek re-election as mayor but ran for an alderman seat.

Newcomer Donna Ross defeated incumbent Fred Ellis and challengers Candi Davis and Jack Johnson to take the Alderman Position 4 seat. Ross led the vote count with 895 followed by Ellis with 429, Johnson with 342, and Davis with 133.

Incumbent Jimmy M. White fended off both Griggs and newcomer Patrick Cherry to retain his Alderman Position 5 seat. White garnered 828 votes followed by Griggs with 755 and Cherry with 219.

Newcomer Chip Clark defeated fellow challengers Blake Mitchell and Ernest Ray Thomas, Jr. for the Alderman Position 6 seat. Clark earned 736 votes followed by Mitchell with 563 and Thomas with 411. The seat had previously been held by Gordon Wildridge.



# COVERAGES DESIGNED TO PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY

- · GENERAL LIABILITY
- · CYBER COVERAGE
- LAW ENFORCEMENT LIABILITY
- EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES
   LIABILITY
- · WORKERS' COMPENSATION
- · PROPERTY



www.PEPartners.org

800.624.9698



#### STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee's August unemployment rate remained at 3.6% in August, according to data from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD). The August rate remained unchanged from both July 2025 and August 2024. The U.S. unemployment rate was 4.3% at August. Between July and August 2025, Tennessee's total nonfarm employment across the state increased by 9,500 jobs. The largest increases were in the transportation, warehousing, and utilities sector, followed by the retail trade and construction sectors.

Secondary-education enrollment is up by 2.9% in Tennessee, according to newly released numbers by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. The new report on fall enrollment showed a 2.9% increase in both headcount and full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment with the first-time freshman rate increasing by 3.4% in headcount and 2.8% in FTE. Community colleges also reported a 4.6% headcount increase while 4-year institutions saw a 2.0% increase. Only graduate student enrollment saw a decline. For more info, visit the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's website.

Home prices continued to climb across Tennessee in the second quarter, according to a report on the state's housing market from the MTSU Business and Economic Research Center in the Jones College of Business. The report found home prices in the state edged up 0.7% over the first quarter, above the U.S. rate of 0.5%, and increased

3.7% year-over-year, compared to a national year-over-year increase of 3.9%. Single-family housing permits declined across all regions of the state with Tennessee reporting a decrease in single-family permits of 2%. The greater Morristown area posted the strongest growth in home prices with a rise of 3% followed by the Johnson City area with a 2.7% increase, and the Clarksville area with a 2.1% increase..

Centerville and Milan will share in \$9.6 million in funding shared among 34 communities through the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development's latest round of ThreeStar Grants. Centerville Mainstreet will receive \$74,500 while Milan will receive \$250,000 through the program, which supports local workforce training, health and economic development initiatives. The program now incorporates asset-based planning and a two-year timeline to accomplish long- and short-term goals. Funding will be used for a variety of local community development initiatives including education, workforce development, health, tourism, small business, entrepreneurship and economic development programs, among others that were prioritized through each community's strategic planning process. The program helps communities develop goals to maximize their local assets and drive economic development. TNECD will again

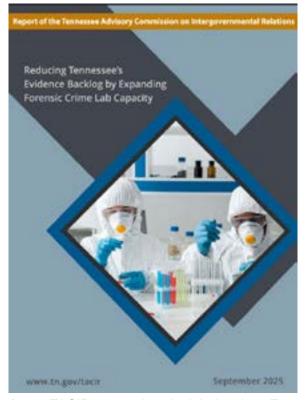
#### TACIR releases TBI testing backlog report

While the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) has increased testing capacity and hired additional scientists, evidence backlogs will continue to affect investigations, prosecutions, and justice for Tennesseans unless lab capacity is expanded and more funding is allocated.

The Tennessee Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) delivered an 81page report requested by the General Assembly to determine the best route forward for forensic testing in the state. "Evidence backlogs

affect investigations; prosecutions; and justice for victims, communities, and those wrongfully accused," the report stated. "The ripple effects of these delays extend beyond individual cases, influencing public trust and safety. The Ten-

nessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) has increased its testing capacity by hiring additional scientists, and turnaround times for some testing cate-



A new TACIR report gives insight into how Tennessee can best deal with evidence backlogs at TBI labs to ensure swift justice for all.

gories have improved. But other categories have not improved, and on top of that, demand for testing continues to increase."

Key findings from the report included a need to expand crime lab capacity in each grand division - including the replacement of existing Knoxville lab and the addition of a new lab in Chattanooga.

Prior to the report being issued, TBI and Memphis had already signed an agreement to expand forensic support for criminal investigations in the city by assigning two forensic scientists at TBI's Jackson lab—one in DNA and one in firearms—to work solely on Memphis cases

In the meantime, the report also recommended the General Assembly amend DNA testing laws to law rapid DNA implementation at booking stations and that the state support resource-sharing partnerships for training local law enforcement agencies across the state through funding and technical assistance.

The report was commissioned by the General Assembly in 2024 to evaluate the feasibility and need for establishing additional crime labs throughout the state.

#### Register for Tennessee Water Regulation forum

Registration is now open for the inaugural Tennessee Water Regulatory Forum

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), Division of Water Resources (DWR), has invited officials to the one-day conference on Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2025.

The forum will bring together water professionals from across the state, providing an in-person opportunity to learn more about TDEC's water programs, network with state program staff, and explore the water challenges affecting Tennessee. Featured topics will include:

- Division of Water Resources Overview and Mission
- Who's Who: Get to Know TDEC's Water Programs and
- Division of Water Resources Priorities and Key Activities
- Looking Towards the Future: **Emerging Issues**

Registration is \$25. Lunch and refreshments will be provided. Preview the draft agenda.

Please visit this link to register for the conference.

Individual breakout session space may be limited. Watch for a link to sign up for breakouts in your registration confirmation email. For any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Regan. McGahen@tn.gov.

#### Ford Good Neighbor grants awarded to five municipalities

Five municipalities will receive funds for their police and fire departments as part of the \$201,000 Good Neighbor Grant program from the Ford Motor Co.

Part of a \$9 million investment on building community, career preparation, and environmental project through Ford's Good Neighbor Plan for West Tennessee, the 13 grants focus on public safety initiatives in the region.

"Through group meetings and listening sessions, we heard that investing in public safety and community centers was a top priority here, and that's why we made it a focus area for grants as part of Ford's Good Neighbor Plan," said Ford community relations director Gabby Bruno.

The Braden Volunteer Fire Department received \$10,000 for new firefighter safety gear while

both the Galloway Volunteer Fire Department and Somerville Fire Department received \$15,600 for battery-powered extrication tools.

accept applications through

December 30 of this year. <u>Learn</u>

more about the awards.

The Mason Police Department received \$20,000 to acquire a used police vehicle while the Mason Fire Department received \$5,000 for a new truck and garage door repairs. The town of Stanton's Fire Department received \$19,645 for lifesaving rescue equipment.

Additional funds were awarded to the Three Star Volunteer Fire Department, Fayette County Fire Department, Fayette County Emergency Response, Haywood County Fire Department, Pilgrim Rest Community Center, and D-HCT Carver Alumni Association.

#### Tennessee August revenues \$15.6M above estimates compared to August 2024: Tennessee Department of Filast year. Although corporate tax collections fell short of projections,

nance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson announced revenues were above budgeted estimates for the first month of the state's fiscal year.

August revenues were \$1.6 billion, which is \$15.6 million more than the monthly estimate and \$57.6 million more than August 2024. The total growth rate for the month was 3.72%.

General fund revenues were \$8.1 million more than the August estimate, while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$7.5 million more than the estimates.

On an accrual basis, August is the first month in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

"August revenues exceeded expectations," Bryson noted. "Sales tax receipts, which reflect consumer activity from July, demonstrated strong growth compared to the same month

all other revenue sources surpassed expectations for the month. We are encouraged by the start of the new fiscal year and remain cautiously optimistic about continued growth. We will closely monitor economic activity to ensure that our monthly budget estimates are met."

#### Individual tax performance compared to August 2025 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 2.03% or \$25.6 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 34.92% or \$16.3 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 2.85% or \$3.1 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 1.85% or \$3.2 million

Individual tax performance

Sales Taxes: Up 5.19% or

- \$63.4 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 24.14% or \$9.7 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 1.03% or \$1.1
- All other taxes: Up 1.59% or \$2.8 million

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2025-2026 are based on the State Funding Board's consensus recommendation from Nov. 25, 2024, which was adopted by the first session of the 114th General Assembly in April 2025.

These estimates also incorporate any revenue changes enacted during the 2025 General Assembly session. Monthly estimates for fiscal year 2025–2026 are available on the state's website.

#### No loan is too large or too small



The city of Red Bank has used TMBF's various programs 14 times since September 1997. The most recent loan was in June for a\$100,000 note issue for police vehicles through the TMBF alternative loan program. Seated: Red Bank City Recorder Tracey Perry, left, and Mayor Stefanie Dalton, right. Standing Red Bank CFO Kris Pickel, left, and TMBF Representative Steve Queener, right.



TMBF was able to assist the town of Stanton with obtaining a \$1 million public building authority draw loan to finance the renovation of the town hall, construction of a new public works shop, and renovation and improvement of the town's fire station. Security Bank and Trust, a local bank, was the lender for the loan. Pictured are Mayor Norman Bauer, Jr., seated, and TMBF Representative Justin Hanson, standing.



See us for your special projects needs (615) 255-1561

Tennessee Municipal League 2025-2026 Officers and Directors

**PRESIDENT** Julian McTizic Mayor, Bolivar VICE PRESIDENTS **Kevin Brooks** Mayor, Cleveland Blake Lay Mayor, Lawrenceburg

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT Paige Brown

Mayor, Gallatin

**DIRECTORS** Michael Baker

Alderman, Erwin (District 1) **Gary Chesney** 

Mayor, Morristown (District 2)

**Stefanie Dalton** Mayor, Red Bank (District 3)

Johnny Dodd Councilman, Jackson

**Roland Dykes** Mayor, Newport Tim Ellis

City Manager, Goodlettsville (District 5)

**Bethany Huffman** Alderwoman, Millington (District 8)

Tim Kelly Mayor, Chattanooga Indya Kincannon Mayor, Knoxville

**Paul Montgomery** Mayor, Kingsport Keith Morrison

City Administrator, Algood (District 4) Freddie O'Connell

Mayor, Metro Nashville

Jessica Salamida Vice Mayor, Nolensville (District 6)

Joe Pitts Mayor, Clarksville

Kim Foster City Manager, Paris (District 7)

Paul Young
Mayor, Memphis
AFFILIATE DIRECTOR

Mike Callis,

Mayor, Portland (TMBF)

Asst. City Manager, Brentwood (TCMA)

#### TML SPONSORS

FEATURE LEVEL GovDeals SERVPRO

Rackley Roofing

DIAMOND LEVEL

Voya Financial Advisors PLATINUM LEVEL

Keep Tennessee Beautiful

RSA Advisors Siddons-Martin Emergency Group

TN Electric Cooperative Association Verizon

#### GOLD LEVEL

Asa Engineering AT&T

C-Spire

First Horizon Bank J.R. Wauford & Co.

Strongside Solutions

Alexander Thompson Arnold

Bank of New York Mellon, Co. **BCA** Environmental Consultants

Blue Cross Blue Shield BuyBoard Purchasing Cooperative CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen) LLP

Collier Engineering Cunningham Recreation

Davenport & Associates Energy Systems Group

**Environmental Products Group** Fortiline Waterworks

Holiday Designs

Local Government Corp. Mark III Employee Benefits

Mattern & Craig, Inc.

OpenGov Pavement Restorations, Inc.

Performance Services Recreational Concepts

Rehrig Pacific

Sherill Morgan Siemens

Sierra-Cedar

Simmons Wealth Management Southeast Cement Promotion Assn.

Tennessee Development District Assn. The Jefferson Health Plan

Thompson & Litton

Tidalwave Screen Printing & Fulfillment

Trane Commercial Systems TriGreen Equipment UKG

Veregy Waste Connections of Tennessee

A2H, Inc

Waste Management BRONZE LEVEL

Deckard Technologies Employee Benefit Specialists Flock Safety

Gallagher Benefits Service

Smith Seckman Reid TLM Associates, Inc.

TML Sponsored Programs **Public Entity Partners** 

Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund TML PARTNERED PROGRAMS

American Fidelity Everywhere.care

GovCard Peachtree Recovery Services, Inc.

Tennessee Drug Card VC3

TML STAFF

#### **How to Train Municipal Staff for Al**

By CHRISTOPHER JORDAN NLC

Generative AI-powered tools are prompting meaningful change to the way organizations think about work.

To make the most of their potential, and to do so securely, it's important for local governments to equip their staff with the right resources to successfully innovate.

That's why some local governments are investing in training programs tailored specifically to the needs of the public sector workforce. Internal training programs are designed to build the confidence and skills public servants need to work with technology effectively in service of the public.

#### What Should Municipal **Staff AI Training Include?**

#### 1. Teach the Fundamentals of **Prompt Engineering**

To get meaningful results from AI tools like Microsoft Copilot or ChatGPT, staff need to understand how to give clear and specific instructions. This process, called prompt engineering, is essential for tasks like summarizing reports, drafting emails or analyzing trends. Training should show employees how to phrase questions or tasks in ways that AI can interpret accurately, how to refine prompts when the output isn't useful and how to identify situations where AI shouldn't be used at all, such as with confidential information or when human judgment is critical.

#### 2. Connect Training to Everyday Job Functions

AI is most valuable when it helps people do their existing jobs better. That's why training should include real examples tied to different roles. Administrative staff might use AI to prepare meeting notes or write memos more quickly. Data analysts could apply AI to sort

Americans blame inves-

tors, landlords, and elected

officials for the high cost

of housing, according to a

new survey. The American

Association of Realtors re-

ported 93\$ of Americans said

housing prices were "unrea-

sonable" in a recent survey

conducted by the Searchlight

Institute. With only 3% of

respondents believing hous-

ing costs were reasonable,

15% said costs are "a little

too high," 36% "too high," and 43% "way too high."

Housing affordability is at

a four-decade low relative

to income with more than

half of renters classified as

NATIONAL BRIEFS

and interpret large datasets, like thousands of 311 requests. When employees can immediately see how these tools save time or improve workflows in their specific job, they're more likely to use them confidently and creatively.

#### 3. Reinforce the Importance of Oversight and Responsibility

AI can help streamline tasks, but it can also make mistakes, present outdated information or offer misleading results. Staff need to understand that anything produced with AI still requires careful review. Training should emphasize that employees are ultimately responsible for the accuracy and quality of any content they use or share, even if it was generated with AI.

#### 4. Ground AI Use in Local Poli-

cies and Governance Finally, staff must be aware of the policies that guide how AI is used within their organization. This includes knowing what kinds of data can be shared with AI tools, what platforms are approved for use and how to handle issues like privacy, bias and transparency. Training should help staff understand these local rules and why they matter. Examples from AI Trainings from Local Governments and Agencies

Rolling out AI trainings for public sector employees can look different across settings. While some local authorities are adopting AI-powered tools across their organizations, some are starting with job-specific pilot cohorts or relying on partnerships to bring in specialized learning modules.

Scaling Co-Pilot in San Francisco,

San Francisco, CA is equipping nearly 30,000 city employees with Microsoft Copilot Chat and has launched a five-week training campaign to ensure staff can use the tool effectively. The city is offering live workshops, office hours and government-focused courses in partnership with InnovateUS to help employees apply AI to everyday tasks like drafting reports, summarizing documents and analyzing data. This training

overburdened. Housing econo-

mists and realtors have cited a

chronic shortage of houses as the

main culprit of the crisis with 4

million homes needed to alleviate

issues, but the survey found the

majority of Americans have dif-

ferent opinions. Approximately

48% of Americans said investors

purchasing homes for profit is a

major cause, followed by 43%

who cited landlords setting rents

too high. Another 33% blamed

elected officials for not prioritiz-

ing affordable-housing policies.

Only 9% cited the length of time it

takes to build new housing while

11% cited people using homes

short-term rentals rather than

long-term rentals.

effort builds on a six-month pilot involving 2,000 employees, where participants reported saving hours each week by using AI to reduce administrative workload.

To support the rollout, the city updated its generative AI guidelines and reinforced requirements under its AI Transparency Ordinance. Staff are responsible for how they use AI-generated content, and all tools must meet strict privacy and security standards.

Building AI Talent in San

San Jose, CA is training city employees to build and apply AI tools through its AI Upskilling Program. This is a 10-week course developed in partnership with San Jose State University. Staff dedicate one hour per week to learning how AI might impact their daily work, such as summarizing 311 reports or analyzing large datasets. The program includes two learning tracks: one for general staff to boost administrative efficiency and another for data analysts focused on tools like Python, SQL and GIS. Two cohorts have completed the training so far, with a third launching this fall and a goal of reaching 1,000 of the city's 7,000 employees next year.

One analyst built a custom assistant to identify trends in 311 requests to help improve responsiveness to resident concerns. The city estimates the program has already saved \$50,000 and up to 20,000 staff hours by reducing reliance on external consultants.

Supporting Teachers and Students in St. Charles, MN

St. Charles, MN public schools are launching a new AI training program for teachers through edtech provider Gruvy Education, aiming to equip educators with the skills to both use and teach AI. The district will pay a base fee plus \$30 per participant, with the training expected to help teachers save around 3 hours per week on lesson planning and administrative tasks. Teachers will also be required to integrate at least one unit on AI into their curriculum, ensuring students are introduced to appropriate and ethical AI use in the classroom.

The Federal Reserve cut inter-

est rates by a quarter of a per-

centage point, the first interest

rate cut this year and nine months.

since the last rate cut. The rate

stands between 4% and 4.24%,

still above the pre-pandemic in-

flation rates. Fed Chair Jerome

Powell said hiring slowdowns

and upticks in inflation has put

stress on the bank's main goals

of both keeping inflation under

control and maximizing employ-

ment. Many economists have said

the U.S. has entered a period of

"stagflation," which occurs when

there are sharp hiring slowdowns

coupled with rising inflation.

## TENNESSEE

#### **FESTIVALS** Oct. 25: Franklin

<u>Pumpkinfest</u>

Middle Tennessee's largest family Fall festival stretches along Main Street and its side avenues in downtown Franklin and offers tons of festive fun for people of all ages.

#### Oct. 25: Goodlettsville

**GOODFest** in the Park

This beloved annual event welcomes thousands of attendees for a day of family-friendly fun, shopping, entertainment, and seasonal

#### Oct. 25: Humboldt

Main Street Humboldt Festival

This fun-filled day is free for attendees\* and includes food, music, artisans, crafts booths, merchandise vendors, and more.

#### Oct. 25: Huntsville Fall on the Mall

Centered on the historic Courthouse Mall in downtown Huntsville, Fall on the Mall will feature a full day of events and activities.

#### Oct. 25: Livingston

Fall-O-Ween

This beloved community tradition brings together thousands of families at Livingston's Central Park.

#### Oct. 25: Smyrna

29th Annual Halloween in the Park A fun-filled evening with trickor-treating, a pie eating contest, haunted corn maze and hayride, train rides, food and craft vendors, and costume contests.

#### Oct. 25: Tellico Plains

9th Annual Cherohala Skyway **Festival** 

Visit the Charles Hall Museum and Heritage Center for juried arts and crafts, lots of living history and plenty of incredible food and treats.

#### Oct. 25: Morristown Mountain Makins Festival

A folk life festival celebrating the unique culture of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

#### Oct. 26: Lexington

Fall Festival and Lexington City **Bicentennial** Enjoy a day filled with fun for the

whole family with vendors, food, and more. Nov. 1: Townsend

#### **Grain & Grits Festival** Come experience our thriving craft

spirits and gourmet food community, while discovering some of the region's legendary distillers and blenders.

#### Nov. 14-15: Fayetteville Host of Christmas Past

Each year, on the second weekend in November, downtown Fayetteville becomes the setting for a magical holiday experience.



For more than 30 years, Voya in partnership with the Tennessee Municipal League has provided retirement plan services to municipal employees all across the great state of Tennessee.

#### Competitive Retirement Plan Services for Tennessee's Towns & Cities

#### Contact Ed Stewart at 615-627-5936 or ed.stewart@voyafa.com

Investment adviser representative and registered representative of, and securities and investment advisory services offered through Voya Financial Advisors, Inc. (member SIPC). 385783777\_0321



Ed Stewart, ChFC, CLU, CF **Financial Advisor** 

Chad Jenkins, Deputy Director Kate Coil, Asst. Communications Director & Asst. Editor, Tennessee Town & City Corinne Gould, Sr. Communications Director Jackie Gupton, Executive Assistant  $Sylvia\,Harris, Sr.\,Conference\,Planning\,Director$ John Holloway, Government Relations Director Debbie Kluth, Director Corporate Sponsorships & Conference Expo Kelly McKinley, Asst. Communications Director of Digital Strategy

Anthony Haynes, Executive Director

#### New state parks to provide economic, tourism opportunities statewide

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

Tennessee is welcoming the addition of eight new state parks, boosting recreational, tourism, and economic development opportunities for multiple communities.

Since 2023, Gov. Bill Lee's conservation strategy has called for the addition of more new state parks than any other previous administration, according to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, which oversees the state park system.

"Tennessee continues to invest in a conservation strategy for our state's future, and Tennessee State Parks are a cornerstone of our efforts," said Gov. Bill Lee. "Tennessee's natural beauty and rich resources drive tourism and our economy, particularly in rural areas, and we welcome Tennesseans and visitors alike to enjoy all that the Volunteer State's great outdoors have to offer."

State parks had an economic impact of \$1.9 billion in 2024, including \$111.8 million in state taxes and \$22.1 million in local tax revenue. Additionally, some 13,587 people are employed by state parks, generating \$550 million in household income.

"We are proud of the impact our state parks have on the Tennessee economy," said David Salyers, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. "We are grateful to Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly for having such vision and commitment to conservation, and the figures show how that works for all Tennesseans."

In addition to spending on gas, food, and overnight stays, state parks can provide opportunities for recreational guide and outdoor equipment businesses in communities. Local conservation efforts also tie in directly to preserving the unique landscape of each park for visitors to enjoy.

Recreational opportunities in the eight new parks range from whitewater rafting and paddling sports to cycling and mountain biking, hiking, camping, fishing, and more. While some of these parks have already opened to the public, others have been announced and are in the process of being developed.

Devil's Backbone Location: Hohenwald Opening Date: TBD Offerings: Cycling, scenic drives, camping, hiking

Developed from the 950-acre Devil's Backbone State Natural Area, this state park along the Natchez Trace Parkway will preserve the rich biodiversity of Tennessee's West Highland Rim. The natural area was established in 1997 to protect the area's impressive natural beauty and provides a popular hiking loop just off the Natchez Trace.

The current 3-mile hiking trail at Devil's Backbone features a 393-foot elevation change through forested ridges and hollows, including oak-hickory forests, beech-tulip poplar stands, and sycamore groves. Plans for the park include \$20 million to enhance the trail system, improve public access, develop overnight camping, and expand recreational offerings. Staff will include a park manager, gift shop clerk, and maintenance and campsite personnel.

Fort Southwest Point Location: Kingston



A view from Welch's Point at the new Scott's Gulf Wilderness State Park near Sparta. The park was created out of several State Natural Areas.

Opening Date: TBD
Offerings: Historical interpretation, education

Locatedalong the Clinch River and Watts Bar Lake in Kingston, Fort Southwest Point was the site of a federal frontier outpost that operated from 1797 until 1811 and played a vital role in the early history of Tennessee. Cherokee Agent Col. Return J. Meigs was in charge of the fort from 1800 until 1807 as more settlers came into the newly established state. Fort Southwest Point was frequently used as a waystation for early migrants and

others traveling

between Knoxville and Nashville. Eventually, merchants in the city of Kingston offered supplies to travelers, and the fort was no longer needed

Archaeological surveys conducted at the site in the 1980s revealed that the area was occupied by Native American groups as far back as the 1350s. Today, a reconstructed fort based off archaeological excavations stands there, along with a museum showcasing artifacts. The fort has also been the frequent focus of historical re-enactments and events. Presently operated as a city park by the city of Kingston, the 39.7-acre site will become a state historic park as amenities are added. The state has allocated \$659,000 for the project, including the hiring of four staff members and the development of recreational opportunities and amenities.

Head of the Crow Location: Sewanee, Winchester Opening Date: TBD

**Offerings**: Hiking, caving, spelunking, hunting, fishing

Created from 4,258 acres, this state park was once a noncontiguous portion of South Cumberland State Park. The new park was formed to improve land management and ease navigation for tourists and emergency responders. The park is named for the headwaters of Crow Creek and will include



The Buggytop Cave entrance at Head of the Crow State Park, which is near Sewanee and Winchester.

much of what was the Lost Cove area of South Cumberland. The park will also include four other state-protected sites: the Sherwood Forest State Natural Area, the Mr. And Mrs. Harry Lee Carter State Natural Area, Natural Bridge State Natural Area, and Hawkins Cove State Natural Area.

The state park will include a significant cave system with an underground river, the 25-foothigh sandstone Natural Bridge, and several hiking trails. Numerous ancient artifacts have been found within the deep cave system, which has entrances at Lost Cove, Buggytop Cave, and Peters Cave. Additionally, the area is home to several rare species including the Morefield's leather flower, Eggert's sunflower, the painted snake coiled forest snail, and others. The state has allocated \$25 million to construct a visitor center, maintenance facility, park amenities, and related infrastructure.

Hiwassee Scenic River Location: Etowah Opening Date: Sept. 20, 2025 Offerings: Birding, boating, fishing, hiking, primitive camping, and

nature photography
Hiwassee Scenic River State
Park is one of two new state parks
created by dividing the former Hiwassee-Ocoee State Park. The 23mile stretch of the Hiwassee River
stretching from the North Carolina

border was the first river managed in the State Scenic River program, offering Class II and Class III rapids. Numerous boat launch ramps enable access for boating, canoeing, kayaking, paddling, and whitewater rafting. Numerous outfitters and rafting vendors can also provide guided trips down the river for vicitors.

Additionally, a portion of Tennessee's John Muir Trail winds through the river gorge. There are popular fishing streams for anglers of all ages and abilities with largemouth bass, yellow perch, catfish, and brown and rainbow trout. More than 100 species of birds are also known to live within the park, making it a popular destination for birders and nature photographers.

Ocoee River State Park Location: Benton Opening Date: Sept. 20, 2025 Offerings: Birding, canoeing, kayaking, paddling, whitewater rafting

The second park formed out of the former Hiwassee-Ocoee State Park, this park is home to the internationally recognized Ocoee River, which was the site of the whitewater slalom competition for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and one of the first hydroelectric power sources in the state. Floating, canoeing, and rafting continue to be the most popular activities with a range of easy Class I to some of the most difficult Class VI rafting waters east of the Mississippi. The 10-mile stretch of river offers opportunities for all.

Visitors also enjoy hikes to waterfalls, swimming holes, picnic spots, and fishing for largemouth bass, yellow perch, catfish, and trout. More than 100 species of birds have also been observed in the park, including great blue herons, bald eagles, spotted herons, mockingbirds, swallows, buntings, and woodpeckers. The Sugarloaf Mountain Day Use Area and Rhododendron Trail from the Ocoee Whitewater Center are two popular destinations for birds in the spring and fall.

Middle Fork Bottoms Location: Three Way Opening Date: Aug. 12, 2024 Offerings: Birding, cycling, fishing, hiking, nature photography, paddling

Created out of an 850-acre natural area, Middle Fork Bottoms

provides nearly 5 miles of paved trails for hiking and biking, opportunities for kayaking and canoeing, a 10-acre lake stocked for fishing, other fishing spots along the river, wildlife areas, and even a place to train retriever dogs for wetland hunting. Located along the Middle Fork of the Forked Deer River, the original recreation area was created to manage agricultural flooding caused by the channelization of the Hatchie River. What began as a flood resiliency project now offers unique recreational opportunities between Jackson and Three Way.

The wetlands, upland prairies, bottomland hardwood forests, cypress groves, woodlands, grass marshes, and an oxbow lake found in the park are small examples of the wider ecosystems prevalent throughout West Tennessee. The park is also home to two nationally endangered species - the whorled sunflower and Indiana bat – along with several threatened species including the northern long-eared bat, Lamance iris, blue sucker, red star vine, and lake-bank sedge. Future plans for the park include a visitor's center, boardwalks, boat launches, and more.

North Chickamauga Creek Gorge

**Location**: Signal Mountain, Soddy-Daisy

**Opening Date**: Sept. 5, 2024 **Offerings**: Camping, cycling, fishing, hiking, kayaking,

At more than 6,000 acres, this state park contains the 10mile long, deep gorge cut into the sandstone of Walden's Ridge by Chickamauga Creek. Formerly a natural area managed by Justin P. Wilson Cumberland Trail State Park, this park is billed as the southern gateway to the Cumberland Trail. As a result, the park is also vital to efforts to develop the Great Eastern Trail, an American Hiking Society project aiming to create a new long-distance hiking trail between Alabama and New York. Visitors can enjoy steep slopes, sandstone bluffs, and rich coves as well as highly diverse plant and animal communities. There are ten state and federally threatened or endangered plants in the park with frequent sightings of bald eagles and peregrine falcons.

Once a major logging industry site, tulip poplar, yellow buckeye, and basswood trees are returning to the area, along with oak-hickory and oak-pine forests. Upland ponds, sandstone glades, and barrens add to the area's color and beauty. Visitors can enjoy 20 miles of hiking trails, including part of the 300-mile Cumberland Trail. Additionally, the park offers backcountry camping and mountain biking trails. Upcoming enhancements to the park include parking areas, a visitor's center, ADA viewing platform, and trail improvements.

Scott's Gulf Wilderness Location: Sparta Opening Date: May 9, 2025 Offerings: Camping, canoeing, fishing, hiking, hunting, paddling, rafting,

Officially the 60th park in the Tennessee State Park system, this canyon situated along the Caney Fork River stretches for approximately 18 miles from the Cumberland Plateau down to the eastern Highland Rim and is home to one of the largest, undisturbed deciduous forests in the state of Tennessee. Dotted with numerous waterfalls, caves, geological formations, and Class IV and V whitewater rapids, the 9,500-acre Scott's Gulf Wilderness State Park integrates areas formerly managed by Fall Creek Falls – including the Virgin Falls State Natural Area, Lost Creek State Natural Area, Dog Cove Historic Area, and Hardie Trailhead – into a new state park.

The ruins of an old mining town, karst caves, panoramic views, and dozens of waterfalls can be found in this primitive wilderness. Hunters and fishers have long enjoyed this tranquil landscape with 6,500 acres of the park open to hunting. The park also provides 14 primitive campsites as well as hiking trails to a variety of unique natural features. The park includes river access to the Caney Fork at Mitchell Ford. Blending history and natural beauty, plans for the development of this park include a visitor center on Bon Air Mountain - the former site of a luxury hotel as well as future trails, overlooks, restrooms, and campgrounds.



Middle Fork Bottoms State Park contains the seven ecosystems found throughout West Tennessee in 850 acres.