

the tennessee magazine

January 2026

Brought to you by
CUMBERLAND ELECTRIC
MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION

TNMagazine.org

POINT OF VIEW

‘Northern’ Lights

TRUE TENNESSEAN:
CAPT. BUTCH WILMORE

TENNESSEE CELEBRATES
AMERICA’S 250TH



the tennessee magazine

Brought to you by
TENNESSEE'S
ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVES
TNMagazine.org

Celebrating the Extraordinary Nature of Everyday Life

JANUARY 2026

FEATURES

12 Faith in Space

by Amber Weaver

Tennessee native Capt. Barry “Butch” Wilmore showed resolve and Volunteer State spirit when mechanical failures extended his stay in space.

16 Remember Well

by Amber Weaver

America commemorates its 250th anniversary in 2026, and Tennesseans can join celebrations all year long.

31 Poet’s Playground Call for Entries

Tennessee wordsmiths present their ponderings on the world around them.

32 Best of Tennessee Call for Entries

Nominate your favorites across the state in the streamlined return of our readers’ choice awards.

35 Shutterbug Call for Entries

Capture your animal friends’ personalities in our “Pet Portraiture” photo contest.



36

ON THE COVER

Capturing the northern lights in Tennessee is a rare occurrence. See Robin Conover’s “Point of View” column on page 42 to read more about it.

Photograph by
Robin Conover



PERSPECTIVES

4 **Between the Lines**

Local leadership lets you know what's happening at the co-op.

6 **Tennessee Today**

by **Mike Knotts**

The latest from a statewide perspective.

8 **From the Editor**

by **Chris Kirk**

A brief, friendly introduction to the current issue.

10 **My Tennessee Notebook**

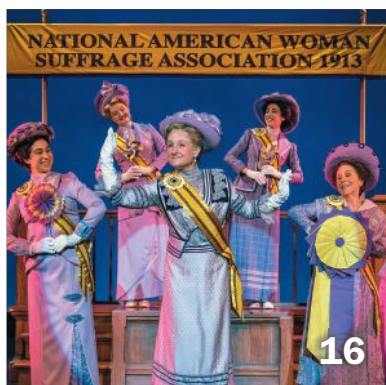
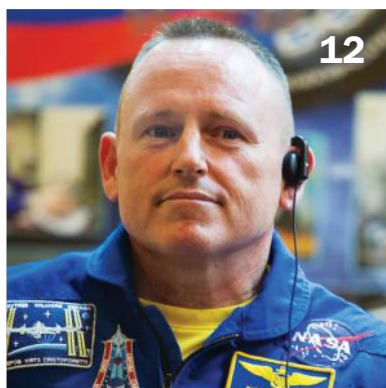
by **Antsy McClain**

A Nashville-adjacent singer-songwriter shares his observations on life.

42 **Point of View**

by **Robin Conover**

Peer through the viewfinder with an award-winning photographer.



DEPARTMENTS

20 **Co-op News**

Information from your electric cooperative or electric membership corporation.

26 **Home Energy Q&A**

by **Brad Wagner**

Achieve SMART energy resolutions in the new year.

28 **Tennessee History for Kids**

by **Bill Carey**

When our ancestors traveled the state, lengthy journeys required multiple modes of transportation.

34 **Tennessee Events**

Here's what's happening across the state this month and beyond.

36 **A Taste of Tennessee**

The slow cooker helps you set an easier pace after the holidays.

40 **Community Corner**

Check out Artist's Palette, and see our Find the Flag winners.

the
tennessee
magazine

Celebrating the Extraordinary
Nature of Everyday Life

Official publication of the
**Tennessee Electric
Cooperative Association**

**Executive, editorial and
advertising offices:**

2964 Sidco Drive, P.O. Box 100912
Nashville, TN 37204

Phone: 615-367-9284

Email: thetennmag@tnmagazine.org

General Manager

Mike Knotts

mknotts@tnelectric.org

Vice President of Communications

Trent Scott

tscott@tnelectric.org

Editor

Chris Kirk

ckirk@tnelectric.org

*Field Editor and Senior
Communications Specialist*

Nicole Christensen

nchristensen@tnelectric.org

Writer and Content Creator

Amber Weaver

aweaver@tnelectric.org

Communications Support Specialist

LaQuella Bond

lbond@tnelectric.org

Creative Director

Shane Read

sread@tnelectric.org

Advertising inquiries

American MainStreet Publications

611 S. Congress Ave., Suite 504

Austin, TX 78704

Phone: 800-626-1181

Website: amp.coop

The Tennessee Magazine is the official publication of Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association and its member electric cooperatives. It is published and distributed monthly to communicate electrical use and safety, economic development and educational and community interests of more than 1 million Tennessee families and businesses who own, operate and control the tax-paying, business-managed, locally owned electrical distribution and service systems of the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association. Copyright 2025. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.

Subscriber services — To order a subscription or change your address, write to *The Tennessee Magazine*, P.O. Box 100912, Nashville, TN 37224. Cost of subscription for members of participating electric cooperatives is \$3.96 per year (33 cents per month), plus Periodicals Postage Paid from equity accruing to the member. For nonmembers, a subscription is \$15 per year or \$30 for three years. Single copy, \$2.50.



Advertising — carried in this magazine does not necessarily reflect the beliefs, opinions or attitudes of *The Tennessee Magazine* or your local rural electric system and does not imply product or service endorsement. *The Tennessee Magazine* reserves the right to refuse advertising.

The Tennessee Magazine (ISSN 0492746X), Volume 69, No. 1, is published monthly by Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association, 2964 Sidco Drive, Nashville, TN 37204. Periodicals Postage Paid at Nashville, TN, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Tennessee Magazine*, P.O. Box 100912, Nashville, TN 37224-0912.



Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation

An equal opportunity provider and employer

CEMC Management and Staff

Chris A. Davis, General Manager

David Abernathy, Engineering and Operations Division Manager

Annebelle Pittenger, Administrative Division Manager

Mark T. Cook, P.E., Broadband Division Manager

Michael Blackwell, District Operations Manager

Jonathan Fielder, Engineering Services Manager

Seth Roberts, Member Services Manager

Brad Taylor, Financial Services Manager

Beau Baggett, Manager of Member Experience

Mike Neverdusky, Network Operations Manager

District Managers

Ashland City office: **Josh Gill**

Clarksville office: **Steve Wofford**

Dover office: **Bobby Joiner**

Gallatin office: **Travis Akins**

Portland office: **Scott Brown**

Springfield office: **Chad Crabtree**

CEMC Board of Directors

Tommy G. Whittaker, Sumner Co., President

Wesley H. Aymett, Cheatham Co., Vice President

Shela K. Williams, At Large, Secretary-Treasurer

K. Jean Beauchamp, Robertson Co., Assistant Secretary-Treasurer

Charles R. Hancock, Stewart Co.

Rex D. Hawkins, Montgomery Co.

Rodney Swearingen, Robertson Co.

Edward L. Oliver, Montgomery Co.

J. Bryan Watson, Stewart Co.

Eddie Swan, Sumner Co.

Mission Statement

Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation provides safe, affordable and reliable services the cooperative way by maintaining a dedicated, highly skilled workforce guided by cooperative values and principles and a commitment to excellence.

Between the Lines

News from your Community



Chris A. Davis

CEMC General Manager

Stay alert against utility scams

As we begin a new year, I want to take a moment to remind our members about an ongoing threat: utility scams. These scams often target electric cooperative members by impersonating our staff and demanding immediate payment, sometimes threatening disconnection if a payment is not made right away.

Scammers are becoming increasingly sophisticated. They could call, email or even show up at your door, claiming to be from Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation. They might ask for payment via prepaid cards, gift cards or online transfers, which legitimate cooperatives never require. Remember, we will never demand immediate payment over the phone or request sensitive personal information in this manner.

Protecting yourself is simple if you know what to watch for. Always verify suspicious calls or messages by contacting us directly using the number on your bill. Do not share account information, Social Security numbers or banking details with anyone who contacts you unexpectedly. If someone comes

to your home, claiming to be from CEMC, ask to see proper identification and call us to confirm before allowing them inside.

Utility scams can happen to anyone, and scammers often target people who might be busy, distracted or unfamiliar with these tactics. Staying informed is your best defense. We encourage members to talk with family and friends about these scams and share this information to help protect the community.

CEMC closely monitors scam activity and provides updates to educate our members. Reporting suspicious calls, emails or visits helps us take action quickly and prevent others from being victimized.

We are committed to keeping your electricity service safe and reliable, and we want you to stay informed and vigilant. By staying alert and following these precautions, you can help protect yourself and your neighbors from falling victim to these scams.

Together, we can ensure a safe and secure start to the new year.

NEWEST FLEET ALONG THE FLORIDA COAST



AMERICAN BUILT FOR AMERICA'S WATERWAYS

Set sail on a 9-day all-inclusive journey aboard our fleet of new small ships designed specifically to navigate the Florida Gulf Coast & Keys. With up to 130 guests, you'll enjoy an intimate onboard experience and the most spacious staterooms in the industry, each featuring a private balcony, perfect for enjoying the ever-changing scenery. Relax in elegant lounges and inviting social spaces as the tropical landscapes unfold before you—from sun-kissed St. Petersburg to the Caribbean flair of Key West, and the tranquil riverfront of Punta Gorda.

Call today for your FREE Cruise Guide
800-459-2596



By Mike Knotts

Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association

Dump trucks and good people

A little over a year ago, I wrote an article called “Tow Truck Lessons” about my son experiencing a minor car accident while away from home during his first year of college. I was worried that I had not prepared him well enough to know what to do after the wreck. However, he calmly and maturely handled the situation the day of the accident. If you’ve ever had an accident, you know that the next several weeks of dealing with insurance companies, police reports, body shops and plenty of other tasks can be very time-consuming — and oftentimes confusing.

And just like the day of, he handled all the new responsibilities well. Ultimately, the car was totaled, and he had to go find another vehicle. Once back on the road, there were a couple of pesky issues with his new ride that needed fixing. And that leads me to a pretty wild story that I think will help you feel good that there are still good people doing good things for others.

Our normal mechanic was unavailable, and a neighbor had suggested a longstanding, locally owned repair shop down the road from our home. The repairs were made, and the owner of the shop took the car on test drive to make sure all was well. As he drove around a curve, a large dump truck that had just left a nearby quarry was coming the opposite direction. His load of gravel was uncovered, and he was driving fast.

When Reece called me, he described it this way: “You ever seen one of those waterfall

showerheads? Well, it was like that. But it was a shower of gravel I drove under.” Hard to believe, but the uncovered load was piled over the top of the dump truck and was spilling over the side. And my son’s new ride got pelted.

In that moment, the shop owner made a decision that shows he cares about responsibility and what is right. Rather than pulling over, he turned around and followed the dump truck. When he caught up and realized it was not displaying a license plate, he called the sheriff’s department and told them what happened and that he was following the truck.

He believed that the trucking company needed to be held responsible for the damage to my son’s car. If he hadn’t done that, the insurance company would have to pass along the costs to all its other customers. Thanks to Reece’s tenacity, the sheriff’s deputy was able to pull the dump truck over and determine its owner.

It’s unfortunate that the car was damaged. But cars can be fixed. It’s unfortunate that my son had to deal with the hassle of repairs. But when they were finished, the car looked better than before. But our experience showed us that we are fortunate to live in a community and do business with people who care about what is right and what is wrong. That lesson will outlive the car.



RENEWAL
by **ANDERSEN**
FULL-SERVICE WINDOW & DOOR REPLACEMENT

Get a **FREE** consultation!
Call **833-694-4341**

NEW YEAR SALES EVENT

Save Big on Replacement Windows and Doors!

Buy One, Get One

40% OFF

All Windows and Doors¹

MINIMUM PURCHASE OF 4

AND

For a Limited Time, Get

\$45 OFF

Each Window and Door¹

MINIMUM PURCHASE OF 4

AND NO Money Down | **NO** Monthly Payments | **NO** Interest for 12 months¹

MINIMUM PURCHASE OF 4 - INTEREST ACCRUES DURING PROMOTIONAL PERIOD BUT IS WAIVED IF PAID IN FULL WITHIN 12 MONTHS



TESTED, TRUSTED, AND TOTALLY PROVEN.²



Offer Ends 2/28/2026

Call for your **FREE** consultation.

833-694-4341

FINDYOURWINDOW.COM

More 5-Star
Reviews



Than Other Leading Full-Service
Window Replacement
Companies³

¹DETAILS OF OFFER: Offer expires 2/28/2026. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Buy one (1) window or entry/patio door, get one (1) window or entry/patio door 40% off, and 12 months no money down, no monthly payments, no interest when you purchase four (4) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 1/1/2026 and 2/28/2026. 40% off windows and entry/patio doors are less than or equal to lowest cost window or entry/patio door in the order. Additional \$45 off each window or entry/patio door, minimum purchase of four (4) required, taken after initial discount(s), when you purchase by 2/28/2026. Subject to credit approval. 12-month Promo Period: while no payments are due, interest accrues but is waived if the loan is paid in full before the Promo Period expires. Any unpaid balance owed after the Promo Period, plus accrued interest, will be paid in installments based on the terms disclosed in the customer's loan agreement. Financing is provided by various financial institutions without regard to age, race, color, religion, national origin, gender, or familial status. Savings comparison based on purchase of a single unit at list price. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. License numbers available at renewalbyandersen.com/license. Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. ²Based on testing of 10 double-hung units per ASTM E2068 20 years after installation. ³It is the only warranty among top selling window companies that meets all of the following requirements: easy to understand terms, unrestricted transferability, installation coverage, labor coverage, geographically unrestricted, coverage for exterior color, insect screens and hardware, and no maintenance requirement. Visit renewalbyandersen.com/nationsbest for details. ⁴Review aggregator survey of 5-star reviews among leading national full-service window replacement companies. January 2024 Reputation.com. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are trademarks of Andersen Corporation. © 2026 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. RBA14201



By Chris Kirk

Editor, *The Tennessee Magazine*

Take a beat

When you take a deep breath in January, what follows? Is it a sigh of relief, or do you huff from boredom?

My family's Halloween-to-New-Year's stretch is typically packed pretty tightly with parties, travel, baking, shopping, studying, etc., so I welcome January's reintroduction of a more set schedule. Once all of the holiday treasures have been stored away, I'm glad to kick back and relax — and gorge myself on the waning days of the college and pro football seasons.

I hope you take a beat to recharge this month and focus on a bright 2026 ahead of us. And I have just the reading recommendation for you! Set aside some time to flip through this year's first issue of *The Tennessee Magazine*. Whether you're seeking respite or motivation, I think you'll find what you're looking for in this edition.

Ready to settle in somewhere warm for some entertainment? You'll appreciate Antsy McClain's sentiments on pages 10-11. And I know I was captivated by Tennessee native Capt. Butch Wilmore's story of preparation, perseverance and faith when his stay in space was extended following mechanical failures. See page 12.

Motivated to make plans for 2026? Learn about the celebrations Tennessee has scheduled for America's 250th birthday this year. See page 16. Of course, you can find all sorts of things to do in our events listing on page 34 as well as online at tnmagazine.org/events.

Feeling that creative itch? Enter one of our contests! We're accepting entries from poets, photographers and young artists — and submissions are due soon! Find information on Poet's Playground (page 31), the Shutterbug Photography Contest (page 35) and Artist's Palette (page 40).

Discovered the state's best bakery, burger, dessert, festival, museum or park? Let us know for our Best of Tennessee Readers' Choice Awards (pages 32-33), and enter for a chance at some great prize packages.

Draw in a deep, calming breath after the hectic holiday season. Does the icy burn of the crisp, wintry air invigorate you or send you under the covers? Either way, let *The Tennessee Magazine* guide and accompany you through this year's adventures.

Thanks for reading,

FOLLOW US ONLINE



Find us at [@theTNMagazine](https://www.instagram.com/theTNMagazine) on your favorite social media platforms or visit our website at tnmagazine.org.

How a Safe Step Walk-In Tub can change your life

Remember when...

Think about the things you loved to do that are difficult today — going for a walk or just sitting comfortably while reading a book. And remember the last time you got a great night's sleep?

As we get older, health issues or even everyday aches, pains and stress can prevent us from enjoying life.

So what's keeping you from having a better quality of life?

Check all the conditions that apply to you.

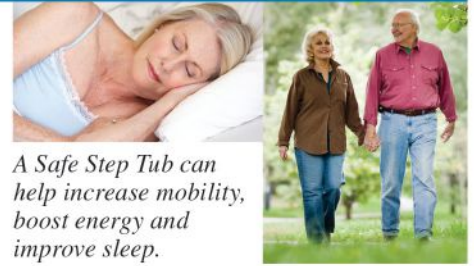
Personal Checklist:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arthritis | <input type="checkbox"/> Dry Skin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insomnia | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lower Back Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Circulation |

Then read on to learn how a Safe Step Walk-In Tub can help.

Feel better, sleep better, live better

A Safe Step Walk-In Tub lets you indulge in a warm, relaxing bath that can help relieve life's aches, pains and worries.



A Safe Step Tub can help increase mobility, boost energy and improve sleep.

It's got everything you should look for in a walk-in tub:

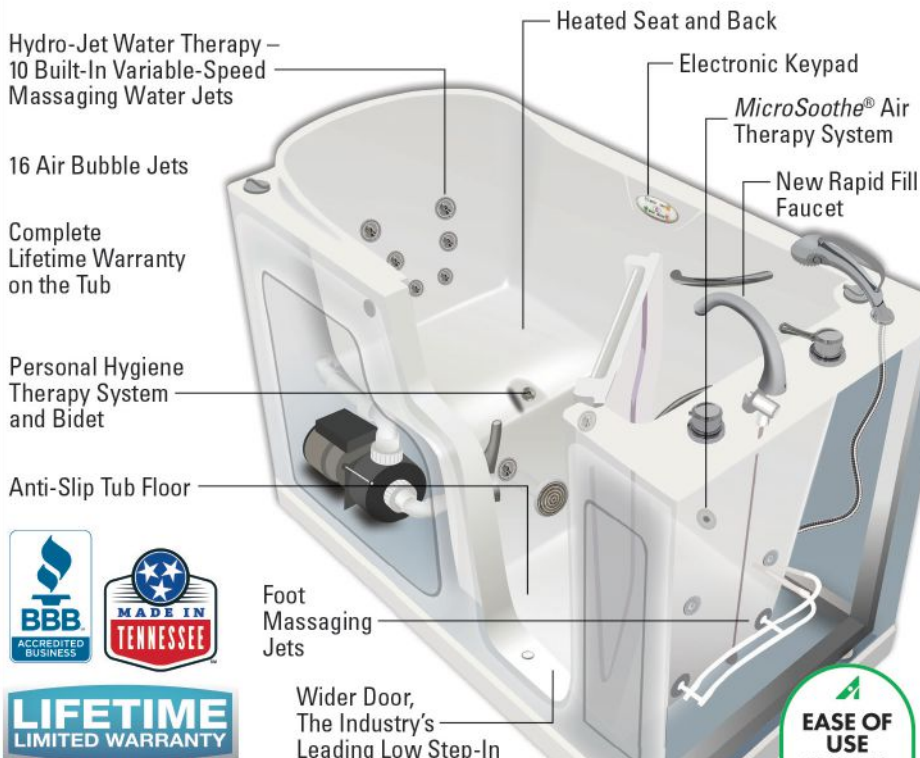
- Heated Seat – Providing soothing warmth from start to finish.
- *MicroSoothe*® Air Therapy System – helps oxygenate and soften skin while offering therapeutic benefits.
- Pain-relieving therapy – Hydro massage jets target sore muscles and joints.
- Safety features – Low step-in, grab bars and more can help you bathe safely and maintain your independence.
- Free Toilet

Learn More about our new Stairlifts!



SCAN ME

Safe Step includes more standard therapeutic and safety features than any other tub on the market, plus the best warranty in the industry:



CSLB 1082165 • NSCB 0083445 • 13VH11096000 • CGC1537181 • ROC 312990 • CCB 244331
SAFEWW784PS • PA127501 • MHIC 134223 • TN 5887 • RL 884533 • RBB 49248 • UT 13229623-5501

For your **FREE** information kit and our **Senior Discounts**, Call Today Toll-Free

1-800-693-1632

Financing available with approved credit.

**CALL TODAY AND
RECEIVE EXCLUSIVE SAVINGS**
**FREE TOILET
PLUS \$2000 OFF**

FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY

Call Toll-Free 1-800-693-1632

Offer expires 1/31/26. Free toilet with purchase and installation of a walk-in tub or walk-in shower only. Offer available while supplies last. No cash value. Must present offer at time of purchase. Cannot be combined with any other offer. Market restrictions may apply. Offer available in select markets only.

safestep
www.YourSafeStepTub.com

My Adventures in Bushcraft

These cold winter months put me at odds with my inner Neanderthal

There is a quiet magic in the crisp, cold air of winter, filled as it is with warm memories of holidays, family gatherings and favorite comfort foods. The snow days of my boyhood were always met with unbridled excitement. But these days, rather than excite me, the cold slows me down, calms me, settles me. Not unlike a hibernating bear, I find myself sleeping heavier, reading more. I get more ponderous and meditative as the days grow shorter and the temperature drops.*

For instance, I've been fascinated by a little ladybug in our sunroom who's been there for days.**

Being a positively phototactic insect (meaning attracted to light, like moths), this ladybug loves our big-screen TV and will roam its surface for hours as Michelle and I watch movies. We've come to love the tiny, restless creature as she (or he) marches over every inch of the screen. In fact, I feel a strange kinship with the little guy (gal?). Ladybugs are not uncommon here in colder months, and I, too, feel leftover from summer and autumn that just never seem long enough. Like the ladybug, I meander my world in a daze at times, mulling over things like time and space and where did everybody go?***

This morning, our ladybug had moved somewhere unseen. I turned the TV on, and within minutes, the light and warmth of the screen had beckoned our little friend back, and I watched her (or him) exploring a bushcraft video with me on YouTube.

For those of you unfamiliar with the world of bushcraft, young men from around the world — and more than a few young women — go out in the woods and build small cabins and lean-to structures by hand — no power tools allowed — much in the same way homes were built before electricity. It also showcases fire-building, food-foraging and water-gathering, the way it was

done centuries ago. The videos are mostly silent, without music or narration. And there is often a dog. After the structure is built, the host will build a fire and cook a sumptuous meal of meat and potatoes. He might even pull a beer out of his backpack and curl up for a well-deserved night's sleep, dog at his feet. The end. Next video, please!

The irony is not lost on me: a retired man in a comfortable Wilson County subdivision, binging bushcraft videos while sipping coffee and nibbling on toasted bagels. Still, it has awakened something ancestral in me, and I found myself longing for a simpler, off-the-grid existence, even if just for a few days. This is what Tennessee's cold winter months do to me.

So yesterday, I rose from the sofa and smiled at the notion of taking a break from modern conveniences. I would start small by cooking a simple paleo meal over a fire I had built myself. The very thought sent a surge of masculine energy through my blood, and I power stepped out to the garage.

First, I would have to address the matter of fire.

I pulled my Yukon® 27-inch stainless steel Solo Stove™ out of its box and dragged it to my driveway. Realizing I had no wood to burn, I drove to Kroger® where I picked up six pieces of firewood wrapped in red plastic mesh. Feeling more masculine by the minute and not that far removed from my hunter/gatherer ancestors, I threw the wood in my cart and bounded happily to the meat department, where I found a hunk of rib eye for \$45. Trying not to hyperventilate over today's meat prices, I grabbed a see-through plastic bag of potatoes and headed to the checkout counter.

I was ready for a bushcraft-style meal cooked on an open flame. My mouth was watering as I scanned my debit card, thanked the Kroger® staff and carried my heaping plastic bags to the parking lot.

These footnotes pair well with a bowl of soup and fresh-baked bread.

* Last week, I had tickets to a comedy show in Nashville, just 30 miles away. I had bought them two months prior when it was warmer and moving around was easier. The afternoon of the show, I looked at Michelle, she looked at me, she pulled up her weather app — 36 degrees and cloudy — and we just sank back into the soft, cozy sofa under a big quilt. The way I saw it, I had supported the local economy — and a few favorite comedians — by buying the tickets. No need to mess it all up by showering (brrrr!) and getting dressed! I'm fine paying the \$30 ticket price, but asking me to go anywhere when it's 36 degrees outside is a bridge too far. If we had decided to go, we would

have had to sit in a cold car while it warmed up each way, there and back. Not to mention the walk to and from the car. Due to Nashville's greed-induced parking crisis, it would be five blocks from the venue. I love to laugh, but it's 2026 now, and no one has to walk five blocks in the cold just to laugh anymore. We are not barbarians. We have Netflix.

** I'm always reluctant to call them *ladybugs*, as biological science would suggest at least some of them would have to be male in order for them to exist. I mean, what would the male ladybug think of the name? I'm sure the more macho of the male ladybugs would take great offense

to the moniker, perhaps even asking the question, "Why aren't we called gentleman bugs?" But in light of our lopsided, male-dominated world history, I'm inclined to let it slide. Ladybug is a fine name. We have medieval farmers to thank for the name, as it turns out. They were so grateful for the ladybug's appetite for pests, they felt the need to attach deific connotations to the insects and named them after the Virgin Mary, who was often depicted wearing a red cloak.

*** I have stepped off life's proverbial treadmill by way of retirement. When that happens, the world stops needing you as much, and a new season begins.

Things really change when you realize the world never really needed you as much as you thought it did. That was a notion brought on by my own narcissism and my need to be needed. And these days, I don't have all that pesky need. I need very little, as it turns out, and I want for even less, thankfully. It's a lovely place to be, my little corner of contentment. For decades, I was wired for 220 — providing a family of seven three meals a day, clothing, housing, all that. I was amped up, going full speed ahead. I was proud to do it, honored even, but I get exhausted just thinking about it now. This is better, quieter, healthier. And, dare I say, a lot more fun.

Once home, I grabbed my favorite Cuisinart® Chef's Classic™ stick-free pan and a Williams Sonoma® Open Kitchen™ silicone spatula and headed out to the driveway where my Solo Stove™ awaited. Bundled up in my parka from The North Face® and a Life is Good™ knit cap, I pulled my Yeti® Cabana™ lounge chair close to the would-be fire and sighed.

Suddenly I realized I needed some Pam® spray oil. I drove to Kroger®, also picking up a box of long matches. Once home again, I put the wood in the fire pit and looked for my Duraflame® fire starters, finding them in a darkened corner under some damp rags. I took one of the starters and lit it, to no avail. Undeterred, I doused the starter with Kingsford™ lighter fluid. I was just minutes away from my bushcraft meal made from scratch on an open fire I had built myself.

It took 30 minutes and two more fire starter packets for the uncured firewood to take flame, but it still wasn't hot enough to cook a steak. My stomach growled, followed by a distinct echo.

Tired of driving back and forth to Kroger®, I DoorDashed a sandwich from a nearby pizza place. That would tide me over until the fire got going.

The last Duraflame® starter fizzled out in a damp poof of smoke. I looked at the modern debris around me — the cookware, the stove, my ultra-comfortable lawn chair — and I groaned.

I carried the rib eye inside to my Ninja® Air fryer Pro™, closed the lid and set it for 12 minutes. I placed a large potato in a plastic Ziploc™ sandwich bag and opened

the microwave door. As I pushed the button that said "potato," the doorbell rang and I went to the door to meet a smiling delivery guy with a hot sub sandwich. I ate it while the air fryer and microwave did their jobs efficiently, effortlessly, perfectly.

Off-the-grid isn't for everyone. A long time ago, I might've been able to make it work. But these days, I'm too soft, made softer each year by technology and my dependency on it.

The steak was delicious, the "baked" microwaved potato melted in my mouth and the sub sandwich appetizer — which, incidentally, cost \$1.50 more than the steak — was just fine.

So what if I'm not bushcraft material? So what if I'm not a wildlife-dwelling, modern day Henry David Thoreau? I'm happy. I'm an *indoor* enthusiast, as it turns out. And that's OK. It's cold. It's really, really cold out there. And I have a heat pump.

If a zombie apocalypse takes place anytime soon, you're likely to find me in the sunroom with my honey, under a quilt, eating a DoorDashed sandwich and watching ladybugs. And the way I see it, that's not a bad way to go out.

Download "Jenny's Jungle Room"

Antsy McClain is a Nashville-adjacent singer-songwriter, author and graphic artist. Go to unhitched.com for more. Use this QR code to download "Jenny's Jungle Room" **FREE** to readers of *The Tennessee Magazine*. It's about a woman who redecorates her sunroom after a breakup.





Capt. Barry "Butch" Wilmore

FAITH IN SPACE

How trust in God guided one Tennessean through the unexpected

By Amber Weaver • Photographs courtesy of NASA

“Go Starliner. Godspeed, Butch and Suni. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Ignition and lift off of Starliner and Atlas 5. Carrying two American heroes drawing the line to the stars for all of us.”

Those were the encouragements announced from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida on Wednesday, June 5, 2024, as the Boeing Starliner spacecraft took flight. That moment and the following events of failing thrusters and leaking helium changed one Tennessean’s life instantly. Capt. Barry “Butch” Wilmore and Capt. Sunita “Suni” Williams went from a planned week at the International Space Station to 286 days.

“The apostle Paul had a lot of challenging things happen to him, and yet, he wrote most of the New Testament,” Capt. Wilmore said. “He was in the middle of the Lord’s will, and that brings contentment. I felt that then at the space station and feel now the same way. I strive to stay where the Lord would have me be and realize that he’s working out His plan and His purpose for His glory and good to those who will believe.”

Whatever state I am to be content

Before he was a NASA astronaut and U.S. Navy test pilot, Capt. Wilmore

was a small-town boy from Mt. Juliet in Middle Tennessee Electric’s service area.

“I’m a Tennessean through and through,” Capt. Wilmore said. “I don’t have a career without my Tennessee roots and education.”

His early years began with his father, mother and brother surrounded by farm animals and a love for football. Capt. Wilmore graduated from Mt. Juliet High School and then made the move east to attend Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville. There he continued to play football and majored in electrical engineering. While he was working toward his master’s degree in electrical engineering and later a master’s in aviation systems from the University of Tennessee, he made another move.

“I had that patriotic tug to do my part for my country,” Capt. Wilmore said.

He entered the U.S. Navy with thoughts of wanting to fly. He went through Aviation Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Florida, and came out as an ensign (O-1). He then went into and graduated from the United States Naval Test Pilot School. From there, Capt. Wilmore accumulated more than 8,000 flight hours and 663 carrier landings. As a fleet Naval officer and aviator, he completed

four operational deployments and flew missions in support of operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield and Southern Watch and over Bosnia. During that time, Capt. Wilmore flew mostly A-7E and F/A-18 aircraft, but he had his sights on something a bit more elevated in height and speed.

“I went through that program and those missions and then started thinking that you can’t fly any higher and faster than a space shuttle,” Capt. Wilmore said.

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound

Higher and faster are exactly where Capt. Wilmore soared. He was selected as an astronaut by NASA in July 2000 and began working that August. Two years of training and evaluation turned into three spaceflights, a total of 464 days in space and 25 years with the agency in the blink of an eye.

“Every day was different,” Capt. Wilmore recalled. “I felt like the Johnny Cash song, ‘I’ve Been Everywhere.’ Because of this opportunity, I have been everywhere, and I am grateful. I am beyond humbled by it all.”

Before Capt. Wilmore’s fateful extended mission, he was launched to the International Space Station as he piloted the space shuttle Atlantis and

aboard a Russian Soyuz. Most recently, Capt. Wilmore was selected for Boeing's Starliner project. It would mark the sixth time NASA carried out the first launch of a crewed spacecraft. A couple of years passed, and he eventually became the commander of the mission. Capt. Wilmore went through developmental tests and preparation to fly the spacecraft over the course of several years.

Eventually, the day of the launch, June 5, 2024, had arrived. Capt. Wilmore and Capt. Williams made it safely to the International Space

said. "My family and I were used to it because of my service with the Navy, but this extension was much more visible."

This was the first launch for Boeing's Starliner, and both astronauts prepared like it was, meaning they trained for everything from space walks, working the robotic arm and maintenance. That preparation is why there was no need for an additional launch to rescue Capt. Wilmore and Capt. Williams. They continued and furthered the work they set out to do as Starliner returned to Earth without

I am to share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

When he returned home, Capt. Wilmore was asked the right question in order to do so.

"This is the kind of message that I was able to and wanted to share after this experience," Capt. Wilmore said. "The biggest thing was that I allowed truth to play out in contentment. Not that I was content about what happened or what got us there because that's all about the process that we have to work through. I am content about the whole of everything that took place because of the truth I found in scripture."

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

While at the International Space Station, Capt. Wilmore made the decision to fly a beloved symbol.

"I was proud to fly the Tennessee state flag," Capt. Wilmore said. "That flag represents a volunteer type of mentality of going the extra mile. It represents the best mantra in the nation, and I'm so grateful to have this Tennessee pride wherever I am."

Embodying that Volunteer spirit is why *The Tennessee Magazine* recognized Capt. Wilmore with the True Tennessean award in November 2025 at the annual meeting of the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association. This award recognizes individuals who make unique contributions to the state. This is only the second award of its kind to be given, with Tony Vitello, former head coach of the University of Tennessee baseball team, receiving the first in 2024.

"I'm a guy who was given an opportunity that others weren't," Capt. Wilmore shared. "The Lord gave me the desire in my heart to always glorify Him, especially with something like this recognition. I'm just so honored that this magazine and the



Capt. Wilmore works aboard the International Space Station.

Station the next day but not without some difficulty both in launch and in orbit.

"We had several helium leaks in Starliner's service module and thruster system. Then we had multiple failures in the spacecraft's reaction control system," Capt. Wilmore explained. "We did successfully dock at the space station, but as everyone now knows, we stayed a little longer than planned."

Eight days turned into nine and a half months.

"Extension is not uncommon in this line of work," Capt. Wilmore

them. Finally, on March 18, 2025, aboard a SpaceX Dragon capsule, the astronauts splashed home off the coast of Florida. Less than five months later, Capt. Wilmore announced his retirement.

Everywhere and in all things

Needless to say, Capt. Wilmore had no idea that he'd be where he is today.

"I always wondered if I would be in the position to do a first," Capt. Wilmore reflected. "I never even dreamed, though, that I would be the commander of the first flight for a spacecraft or reach the point of where

co-op world would look at me and say, 'Hey, that's our guy.'"

Capt. Wilmore was also the keynote speaker at TECA's annual event, sharing powerful lessons about how to adapt and lead when plans change — lessons that resonate deeply with the challenges and opportunities facing electric co-ops today.

"I know the Lord is working out His plan and His purposes in all types of life's circumstances," Capt. Wilmore said in his address. "That's one of the things I shared 4 minutes prior to launch, and one of the main things I wanted to get across was that life is tough. Things happen a lot, and how you handle those tough situations, relying on and going back to those circumstances, that God providentially placed you in will be a benefit to you later."



Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever

Capt. Wilmore and his wife, Deanna, are now supporting their two daughters, Daryn and Logan, as they finish college.

"All three of them are wonderful and beautiful ladies," Capt. Wilmore

Capt. Wilmore with wife Deanna and daughters Daryn and Logan.



shared with a smile. "I am blessed to have them in my life."

Putting aside all his great accomplishments, Capt. Wilmore knows the greatest legacy he will leave behind are his daughters. So, he started writing a book that will be available this March so they would know his story even after he is gone.

"An astronaut is not who I am," he said. "It doesn't define me. However, when I am introduced, I am introduced as an astronaut. That's the way it goes, but that doesn't define who I am. It defines what I do and what the Lord has allowed me to take part in, and I am excited to share that story with my girls and the rest of the world."

Preorder "Stuck in Space" by
Capt. Wilmore today using this
QR code, or visit butchwilmore.com.





Remember **TENNESSEE** Well **AMERICA 250** VOICES & VOLUNTEERS

How volunteers are commemorating America's 250th anniversary

By Amber Weaver

250 years ago, the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence, establishing the United States of America as a new nation.

Even though the Volunteer State didn't become a part of the Union until 1796, Tennesseans across the three grand divisions are celebrating the nation's semiquincentennial in a grand way.

"I really think that for me, it's about what it looks like to remember well," said Carrie Tipton, Ph.D., America 250 coordinator for the state of Tennessee. "What does it look like as

a state to look back to our past and not just stop with a sense of nostalgia but to look back at the past in a way that creates tangible benefits for the future?"

Laying its foundation on such principles

In 2019, the Tennessee State Legislature appointed a commission to develop and execute a mission to commemorate America's 250th in the state. The Tennessee America 250 Commission consists of Gov. Bill Lee as an honorary member, four state legislators and the heads of major historical and cultural organizations throughout Tennessee. It didn't take long for the members to decide that they didn't want to create a purpose

by themselves. They wanted to hear firsthand from the ones who would be celebrating, and they did so through listening sessions throughout the state.

"The Commission asked Tennesseans what they envisioned for the celebration, and consistently it was communicated that they wanted a statewide commemoration," Tipton said. "They wanted it to be diverse, reflect the full scope of Tennessee history and support projects that would be lasting."

A mission was constructed to articulate what was understood from those sessions: "Tennessee America 250 celebrates and commemorates America's 250th anniversary by interpreting and preserving the unique Tennessee stories, objects, landmarks and places that have defined who we are as Tennesseans and Americans."

That mission is being carried out by countless voices and volunteers through events, education, grants and the governor's office.

In the course of human events

Revolving around the idea of a statewide celebration, the Commission decided that there isn't going to be just one event to celebrate America's 250th birthday. Instead, the Commission is helping host, sponsor and amplify many events across the state. One you won't want to miss opens at the Tennessee State Museum this month.

"The 'Tennessee Voices, American Stories' exhibit will look at the lives of a number of Tennesseans who have contributed to U.S. history in a notable way," Tipton said. "Some of those will be Tennesseans that people are very familiar with, and some will be Tennesseans that people may never have heard of before."

The exhibit, free and open to the public, will explore and explain the lives of those people through artifacts



Left, bedspread by Margaret Wood Dodge and John Wood Dodge, 1860.



Above and left, "The Tennessee Jacket" by Manuel Cuevas, 1996.

Below, watercooler by George Hedgecough, 1920 to 1930.



Right, quilt by Rebecah Foster, 1808.



and show how they connect to the American story. Their stories will be organized through different zones all fittingly named after excerpts from the preamble of the U.S. Constitution and reveal the theme that the American Revolution is an unfinished process.

"It's the idea that everyone can continue to contribute to the national story," Tipton said. "By the end of the exhibit, the visitor is left hopefully thinking about the questions, 'What will my story contribute to the American story?' and, 'How will I carry on the spirit of the Revolution?'"

Aside from the exhibit, the Tennessee America 250 Commission is also sponsoring the musical "Suffs" at the Tennessee Performing Arts

Center in Nashville March 3-8. It's a show about American women who fought tirelessly for the right to vote. The Commission felt this fit right along with the mission because the 19th Amendment was ratified in the Volunteer State. Some other key celebrations to be mindful of are Statehood Day on June 1, Sharing the Spirit of America on July 8 where there will be synchronous readings of the Declaration of Independence and the 2026 Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair in August where many 250 activations will take place.

We hold these truths to be self-evident

In order to preserve the unique Tennessee stories throughout time,

the Commission is working to aid teachers in sharing this history in an immersive way. Three summer Teacher Institutes across the three grand divisions are being sponsored. The first one took place in summer 2025 in East Tennessee. The summer 2026 Institute will be held in Middle Tennessee and the summer 2027 Institute in West Tennessee.

"When the teachers come to the workshops, they get to hear from historians and other experts," Tipton said. "They visit historic sites and get to experience live history demonstrations. Then, they leave with resources they can take back to the classroom."

Other classroom resources in which educators can partake are traveling trunks. The Tennessee Civics and You Traveling Trunk is a portable, comprehensive resource designed to make teaching civics both fun and engaging. The trunk is shipped for free to the school and includes a variety of materials, including lesson plans, interactive activities, museum-quality graphics, books, discussion prompts and all the tools needed to conduct a mock legislature. There is also the Patriot Chest, which is a collection of reproduction artifacts used for student presentations. These artifacts allow students to get hands-on with history, specifically the Revolutionary War. Teachers can reserve those trunks on the Commission's website, tn250.com.

Provide new guards for their future security

The Commission is also offering grant opportunities for organizations and communities that support the mission of Tennessee's America 250 celebration by highlighting Tennesseans, events and landmarks that have shaped American democracy from the Revolutionary era to the present.

How you can celebrate



1

Find a celebration nearby.



2

Submit story ideas and events.



3

Obtain teacher resources.

Project and community-support grants available!

Go to tn250.com/grants for details and applications.

4



“So, kind of the idea of fireworks are cool, but those fade in a few minutes,” Tipton said. “The Commission heard from Tennesseans that they wanted this to be a time where there could be projects that would endure into the future, whether that was restoring old buildings that are important in Tennessee history or something as simple as cleaning up old cemeteries.”

The state made available \$3.5 million for the Tennessee State Museum to administer on behalf of the Commission. The grants are split among four categories: community support, archival support, historic preservation, and exhibits and programs. Applicants can be awarded up to \$25,000.

The first round of the Tennessee America 250 grant program was a highly competitive process. In total, 220 applications were received that totaled nearly \$4 million in requests. The Commission has made full or partial awards for 80 grants across the state, representing 37 counties, for a total of \$1,566,325. Some of the organizations awarded were Discovery Park of America, the National Museum of African American Music and the Great Smoky Mountains

Heritage Center. The deadline for the second and potentially final round of funding is coming up this month on Jan. 20.

Pledging to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor

The honorary member of the Tennessee 250 Commission is commemorating the anniversary in a big way. On July 1, Gov. Lee kicked off the yearlong celebration with the announcement of his 95-county visit with events honoring Tennessee agriculture. He began the tour at historic farms in Greene, Williamson and Tipton counties for ceremonial signings of the Farmland Preservation Act, which is landmark legislation ensuring family farms can be preserved for future generations. Gov. Lee also unveiled a commemorative poster titled “Tennessee: The Original Frontier” that highlights the iconic people, places and events that define Tennessee’s contributions to America.

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness

As one could imagine, Tennessee is not the only state providing an op-

portunity to pause and reflect on our nation’s past and look ahead toward the future. In fact, most states and territories have 250 planning bodies. In Tipton’s role, she can see how other places are celebrating, and the one thing that stood out to her the most was the sense of pride across the Volunteer State.

“Even though Tennessee 250 was something created by the legislature, without that state pride, it wouldn’t be taking off the way it is,” Tipton said. “It takes two ingredients. There had to be this Commission created and funded, but then the people must come along with enthusiasm. And they definitely have.”

The Commission will know that the mission has been successful not through the coming year’s celebration but how well history remembers it.

“To make a good 250 celebration, I wouldn’t think about 250,” Tipton said. “I would think about the tricentennial. This Commission is facing the past, but they’re also facing the future and thinking how we can make sure Tennesseans 50 years from now are able to have some of the same history that we can now experience and celebrate.”

START THE NEW YEAR RIGHT **SAFEGUARD YOUR WEALTH**

In times of economic uncertainty—when inflation rises, markets fluctuate, and long-term financial stability feels less predictable—many investors turn to gold as a dependable store of value. By holding a portion of your wealth in gold, you can help safeguard your portfolio and preserve long-term financial security, even when broader economic conditions are unclear.

American Gold Reserve is releasing Government issued **\$5 Gold American Eagles** completely free of dealer mark-up for only \$459 each. These beautiful \$5 Gold American Eagles are a perfect way to enter the gold market. They are set for immediate public release and **will sell out fast**.

**Since 2015, gold has surged over 400% —
outpacing both the S&P 500 and the Dow
during the same period.**

GOVERNMENT BACKED U.S. GOLD

- Teach the importance of wealth preservation.
- Great way to pass on wealth to children and grandchildren.
- A symbolic act of the commitment to your family.
- Gold provides your children and grandchildren with a built-in safeguard during times of financial instability.

PLACE YOUR
ORDER TODAY

\$459 ea.

Minimum order of 5 coins

LIMITED OFFER

Special arrangements on orders over \$50,000

Mention vault release code: **AMS-TT02**



24 hours - 7 days a week **1-866-852-3346**



**AMERICAN
GOLD RESERVE**

Street limit of 10 per household, per lifetime. For new clients only.

Get to know your electric bill

Your monthly Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation bill is designed to be clear, informative and easy to understand. Here's a quick guide to help you understand what each part means and how to manage your energy use.

Understanding your energy use

Your bill includes helpful charts and graphs to show how your energy use changes over time.

Monthly energy use comparison

This chart compares your electricity use from:

- Last month
- This month
- The same month last year

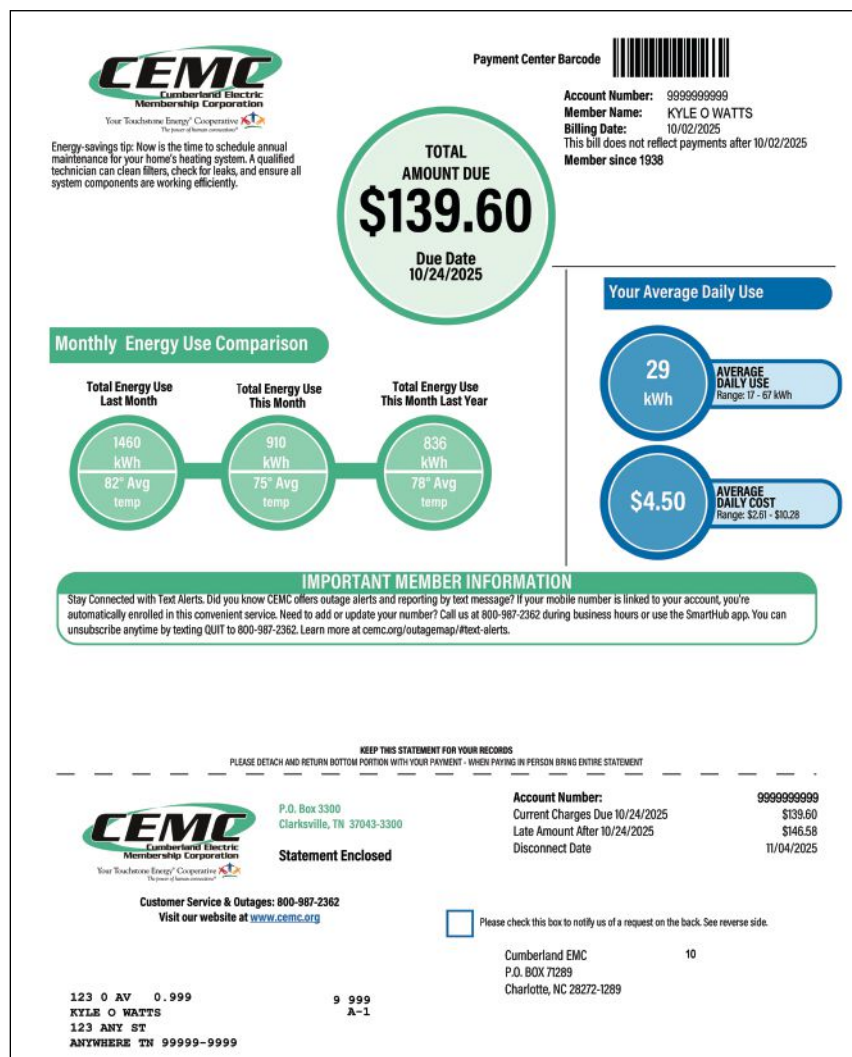
You'll also see the average temperature for each period since weather is one of the most significant factors affecting your energy use.

Average daily use

This section breaks down your daily electricity use and cost, showing the average number of kilowatt-hours (kWh) you consume. It's a simple way to see how your daily habits such as thermostat settings or appliance use impact your bill.

Your energy use over the last 24 months

This bar graph illustrates your total energy consumption over the past two years. It helps you recognize seasonal trends and track improvements from



energy-saving changes in your home.

Understanding your charges

Base Charge

You might notice a change on your bill. What was once called the **Customer Charge** is now the **Base Charge**. This fixed charge covers the cost of providing electric service to your home or business before any electricity is even used. It helps pay for:

- Maintaining power lines, transformers and meters

- Meter reading and billing services
- System maintenance and customer support

Changing the name to “Base Charge” more clearly reflects what this fee represents — the foundational cost of keeping your service available and reliable 24/7.

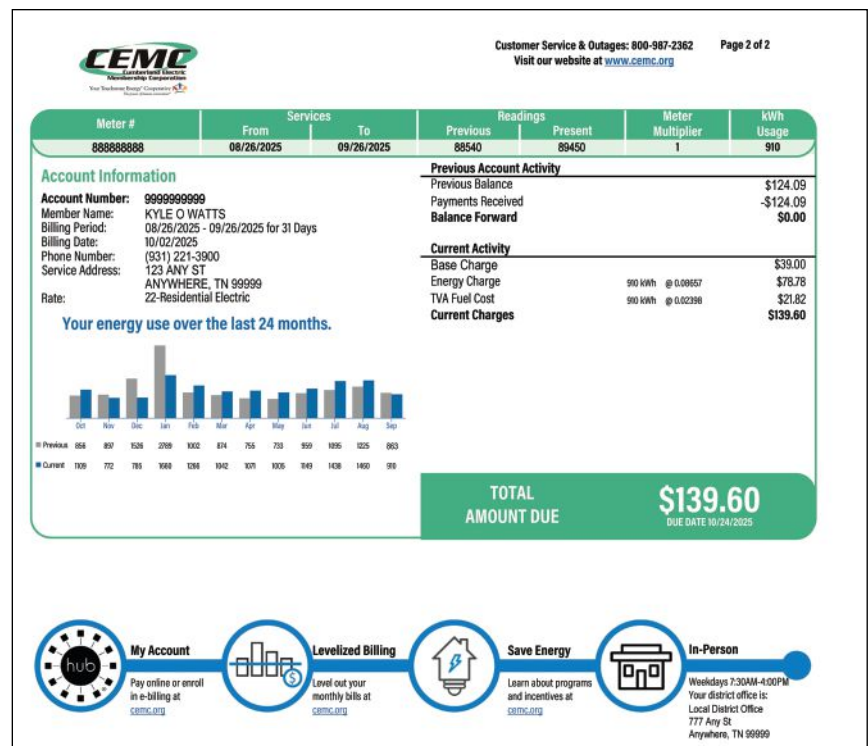
Energy Charge

This portion of your bill is based on the amount of electricity you use, measured in kilowatt-hours (kWh). The

more energy you use during the month, the higher the charge will be.

TVA Fuel Cost Adjustment (FCA)

The TVA Fuel Cost Adjustment reflects the changing cost of the fuels used to generate electricity such as natural gas, coal or renewable energy sources. Because these costs can vary from month to month, the FCA ensures your bill matches current power production costs. CEMC does not profit from this adjustment; it's a direct pass-through from the Tennessee Valley Authority.



5 ways to take control of your electric bill

Even though the Base Charge and TVA Fuel Cost Adjustment (FCA) are fixed or outside your control, your energy habits significantly impact your total bill.

Here are some simple ways to save:

1. Adjust your thermostat

- In cooler months, set your thermostat to 68 degrees or lower when home.
- In warmer months, aim for 78 degrees or higher.
- Use a programmable thermostat to adjust settings automatically when you're away or asleep.

2. Seal and insulate

Seal around windows and doors and add insulation where needed to stop drafts. This will help your heating and cooling systems work more efficiently.

3. Switch to LED lighting

LED bulbs use up to 75% less energy and last much longer than incandescent bulbs.

4. Unplug energy "vampires"

Many electronics continue to draw power even when turned off. Unplug chargers and devices when not in use or use smart power strips.

5. Maintain your HVAC system

Schedule regular maintenance and replace filters often. A clean, well-tuned system runs more efficiently and saves money.

For more energy-saving tips, programs and incentives, visit cemc.org. You can also use SmartHub to track your use, manage payments and view your energy trends in real-time.

Calling all high school juniors:

Enter the 2026 Electric Co-op Creative Writing Contest

High school juniors living within Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation's service area have the chance to win the experience of a lifetime, including an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., scholarships worth thousands of dollars and the opportunity to meet other young leaders from across Tennessee and the nation, all by writing one powerful short story.

Tennessee's electric cooperatives are inviting students to participate in the 2026 Electric Cooperative Creative Writing and Scholarship Contest. This year's theme is "Energizing Every Moment." Entrants are asked to write a short story of no more than 900 words that shows how electric cooperatives energize their communities through reliable power, broadband expansion, education and economic development.

Winners will join nearly 2,000 students from across the country on the Washington Youth Tour in June. Highlights of the trip include visits to the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Capitol, the White House and historic landmarks such as Mount Vernon and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Travel, lodging and meals are covered by Tennessee's electric cooperatives.

**900 WORDS
CAN CHANGE
EVERYTHING**

WASHINGTON YOUTH TOUR

The Tennessee electric cooperative
creative writing and scholarship
competition for high school Juniors

➤ LEARN MORE

YOUTHTOUR.TNELECTRIC.ORG

Beyond the trip, participants can earn college scholarships, including statewide awards of \$3,000, \$2,000 and \$1,000. Delegates who stay active with their co-ops after the Youth Tour could also qualify for a drawing for a \$10,000 Cooperative Youth Ambassador Scholarship. Past winners have gone on to become business leaders, educators, engineers and even Fortune 500 executives.

To enter, students must:

- Be a high school junior living within CEMC's five-county service area.
- Write a short story titled "Energizing Every Moment."
- Keep entries under 900 words (double-spaced, with exact word count listed).
- Submit their stories to their local electric cooperative by the deadline provided by their school or co-op representative.

The deadline to enter is Friday, Feb. 27.

Resource materials and additional information can be found online at cemc.org and youthtour.tnelectric.org or by contacting CEMC Community Relations Coordinator Susie Yonkers at 800-987-2362, ext. 1143, or via email at syonkers@cemc.org.

This is your chance to write your way to Washington, D.C., and discover how Tennessee's electric cooperatives are truly energizing every moment.

SENIORS: WIN A \$1,000 SCHOLARSHIP

APPLY ONLINE AT [CEMC.ORG](https://cemc.org)



Investing in tomorrow's leaders: Senior Scholarship Program

Each year, Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation invests in the next generation of leaders by awarding scholarships to outstanding high school seniors through its Senior Scholarship Program.

This year, 12 students will each receive a one-time \$1,000 scholarship to help cover the expenses of their freshman year, including tuition, textbooks, lab fees and other required classroom materials. The program is coordinated through each school's senior guidance counselor.

Eligibility requirements:

- Must be a graduating high school senior whose parent or guardian is a CEMC member

and receives electric service from CEMC at their primary residence.

- Must have a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA.
- Must plan to enroll as a full-time student at an accredited Tennessee college, university or trade school by fall 2026 (Murray State University and Western Kentucky University are also eligible).
- Must submit a completed application, including two letters of reference — one from a teacher or school official and one from a community leader.
- Must write an original essay of at least 300 words describing what you most look forward to about attending college and how receiving this scholarship will help you achieve your

educational goals. Essays will be judged on content, composition, grammar and neatness.

Applications are available through your school's senior guidance counselor and on the CEMC website: cemc.org. The deadline to apply is Friday, Feb. 27.

Children of CEMC, Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association or Tennessee Valley Authority employees, directors or attorneys are not eligible to apply.

For more information, contact Susie Yonkers, CEMC community relations coordinator, at 800-987-2362, ext. 1143, or via email at syonkers@cemc.org.

CEMC seeks young artists for 2027 calendar contest

Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation is inviting students in grades kindergarten through 12 who live within CEMC's five-county service area to submit original artwork for its 2027 Wall Calendar. Winning entries will be featured in the calendars displayed in homes, schools and businesses across the region. Calendars are free and will be available at CEMC's offices beginning in November. (Get your 2026 calendar at any CEMC office while supplies last!)

Each grade is assigned a month to illustrate, with suggested seasonal or holiday themes: **kindergarten** — July; **first** — August; **second** — September; **third** — October; **fourth** — November; **fifth** — December; **sixth** — January;

seventh — February; **eighth** — March; **ninth** — April; **10th** — May; **11th** — June.

Seniors will design the calendar covers, with the freedom to include elements representing CEMC's service area such as rural scenes, barns, wildlife or utility equipment.

Artwork must be original, hand-drawn and horizontal on white, unlined paper (8.5 by 11 inches to 11 by 14 inches). Digital creations, photocopies or artwork with glitter, sand or liquids cannot be accepted. Complete student information — including name, grade, school or homeschool, teacher and parent names — must be included on the back of each submission.

Deadline for submissions is Friday, Feb. 27.

Winners will be announced by March 31. Prizes include:

- Kindergarten through fifth grade: \$25
- Sixth through eighth grade: \$50
- Ninth through 12th grade: \$75
- Overall Winner: \$100
- Honorable mentions: \$10

Complete contest details and instructions are available on the Community Programs page at cemc.org or by contacting CEMC Community Relations Coordinator Susie Yonkers at 800-987-2362, ext. 1143, or via email at syonkers@cemc.org.

This contest is a wonderful opportunity for students to showcase creativity, gain recognition and celebrate local artistry. CEMC looks forward to featuring young artists in the 2027 calendar.

Below, the artwork of Kirkwood High School student Brystolyn French was the overall winner of CEMC's 2026 Calendar Art Contest.



The hidden internet behind daily life

How your connection works behind the scenes

When most people think about using the internet, they think about the simple things: streaming a movie, joining a video call, checking email or scrolling through their phones. But the truth is that your home, and much of the world around you, depends on far more digital activity than you ever see. Behind almost every modern convenience is a quiet connection working in the background, constantly keeping things running.

According to the Fiber Broadband Association, the average household in the U.S. has 17 connected devices, and many of them stay busy even when no one is online. A doorbell camera doesn't just record a clip when someone walks up. It uploads short videos, sends push alerts to your phone and updates its software throughout the day. Smart locks, motion sensors, smart leak detectors and indoor cameras all communicate with cloud servers so they're ready the instant you need them. Home automations you set months ago rely on the same steady connection — like your porch lights turning on at sunset, thermostats adjusting based on the weather or who's home and sprinklers receiving new schedules.

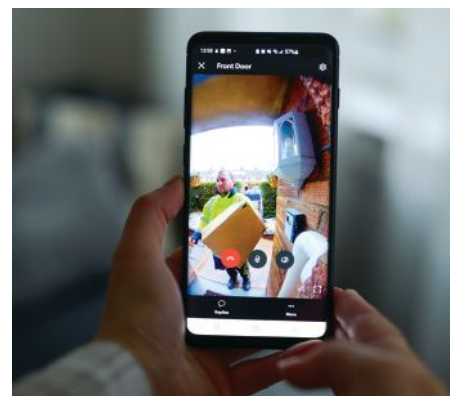
Even the devices we rely on the most throughout the day are constantly connected, whether we are using them or not. Phones

back up photos overnight, tablets and laptops download security patches and gaming consoles install large updates without anyone noticing. Simple, everyday tasks like verifying a banking app login, saving a child's online school assignment or pulling up a weather forecast on your phone all rely on split-second communication with the internet.

Even if you're aware of the connected devices in your home, it's easy to overlook how much farther this invisible layer of connectivity extends. Much of the world around us relies on the same quiet, constant communication. Modern farms use GPS-guided tractors, soil and moisture sensors, and smart irrigation tools that adjust automatically depending on crop needs and weather changes. Weather forecasting relies on huge amounts of data being exchanged across networks to create radar images, generate storm models and broadcast emergency alerts. Package delivery depends on real-time routing, inventory tracking and navigation systems that operate entirely through connected tools.

And it isn't just these day-to-day services relying on quiet connectivity. Some of the most essential systems in our lives depend on it as well. Financial networks, for example, rely on constant verification, fraud

detection and secure transfers every time a card is used or a payment is processed. Health-care has followed the same path, with telehealth visits, prescription systems, insurance portals and remote medical devices all needing a stable connection to function properly. And transportation is more connected than ever, from newer vehicles downloading software updates to the systems that track commercial flights in real time.



Once you start noticing how many everyday systems rely on the internet, it becomes clear that connectivity isn't just about what you see on your screen. A reliable internet connection helps keep these hidden processes working smoothly, making sure the things you count on each day stay on track. At Cumberland Connect, we'll continue doing our part by providing the dependable connection your home or business relies on each day.

Your connection starts here!
Scan to explore fiber internet
from Cumberland Connect.



This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



SMART energy resolutions that add up

Q: My New Year's resolution is to save more money — especially on home expenses. What are some realistic, energy-saving resolutions that can actually make a difference on my bills?

A: Saving money tops the list of New Year's resolutions for many families across Tennessee. However, we all know that resolutions can be tough to stick to. That's why I'm a big fan of SMART goals — and energy-saving resolutions fit into the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound sweet spot perfectly.

Resolution No. 1: Program your thermostat for savings.

A vague goal like “use less energy” is hard to stick with. Instead, make it specific:

Goal: Set my thermostat to a high of around 68-70 degrees in the winter and a low of around 75-78 degrees in summer for at least three months.

Outcome: You can save as much as 10% a year on heating and cooling by simply turning your thermostat back 7-10 degrees for eight hours a day from its normal setting (U.S. Department of Energy). While you might have to layer up (or down) to stay comfortable, this is the kind of aggressively SMART goal that can add up to real energy savings.

If you have a programmable or smart thermostat, set a clear schedule that adjusts automatically when you're asleep or away. If you don't have one yet, make “Purchase a smart thermostat this week” your first resolution!

Resolution No. 2: Take a free Home Energy Assessment.

If you want to see measurable results, start by establishing a baseline. A DIY Home Energy Assessment gives you a detailed report of where your home is wasting energy.

Goal: Complete a DIY Home Energy Assessment by Jan. 31, and make a list of at least three energy-saving recommendations.



Outcome: Learning more about the ways your home uses and loses energy will uncover new opportunities for energy savings and can help keep you motivated.

Resolution No. 3: Seal leaks and drafts.

Achieving your energy goals doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start small with something you can actually finish in a weekend.

Goal: Seal all window frames and doors by the end of February.

Outcome: Caulking and weather stripping are simple, low-cost projects that can save money and make your home more comfortable. Sealing leaks also means that your HVAC system doesn't have to work as hard to keep your home comfortable.

Resolution No. 4: Upgrade the energy MVPs.

If your water heater, HVAC system or appliances are nearing the end of their lifespan, proactively replacing them with high-efficiency models is one of the smartest, most relevant energy goals you can set this year.

Goal: Identify one major appliance or system — like your refrigerator, water heater or HVAC system — that's nearing the end of its life expectancy. Replace your aging model with an Energy Star-certified product by the year's end.

Outcome: An energy-efficient heat pump water heater, for example, can save the average family of four about \$300 per year and approximately \$4,500 over the water heater's lifespan.

Resolution No. 5: Build new habits in 30 days.

Behavioral changes can lead to long-term savings, especially when you give yourself a clear timeframe to practice and build momentum.



Goal: For 30 consecutive days, turn off lights, unplug devices (or purchase an advanced power strip!) and only run full laundry and dishwasher loads.

Outcome: After a month, these small actions become habits that stick. Try using a checklist or reward system to keep your family engaged.

Resolution No. 6: Quick wins can yield timely results.

If attainable time-bound goals are your cup of tea, try these quick wins on for size ... this week:

Goal: Replace five indoor or outdoor incandescent bulbs with LEDs.

Goal: Clean your refrigerator coils and dryer vent.

Goal: Set reminders to replace your HVAC filter every 30 days.

Outcome: LEDs use less electricity than incandescent bulbs, your refrigerator and dryer will run more efficiently and you'll enjoy peace of mind.

When you set SMART energy goals, you create a clear roadmap to success. Whether you're sealing leaks, upgrading your thermostat or simply turning off the lights, each action moves you closer to achieving your money-saving resolution while enjoying a more efficient, comfortable and affordable home.

Brad Wagner is a programs operations manager at TVA EnergyRight, and he's committed to helping people make informed decisions and lower their energy costs.





Coach, Boat, Train, Hack: Journeys across Tennessee in the old days



This horse-drawn hack went from
Huntsville to Helenwood in Scott County.
Tennessee State Library and Archives photo.

I'm not proud to admit this, but when I drive across the state, I usually want to get where I'm going as fast as I can. I take the interstate if possible and use GPS to help me avoid traffic delays.

Our ancestors, on the other hand, could not have imagined traveling with the speed we are used to today. They rode horse-drawn stagecoaches and hacks that moved about as fast a person can jog, stopped about every

10 miles and took roundabout routes from point A to point B.

When "advancements" such as the steamboat and railroad came along, they weren't much faster — even though historical fiction and televised "period dramas" have led us to believe they were.

Here are seven examples of what it was really like to get from place to place in Tennessee before people had cars:

1. **Knoxville to Huntsville, Alabama, 1829**

Today it takes about three and half hours to drive from Knoxville to Huntsville, Alabama. In 1829, the same journey took a week.

According to an advertisement in the May 29, 1829, *Knoxville Register*, to get from Knoxville to Huntsville, you first boarded a stagecoach Friday at 1 p.m. The coach then passed through and spent consecutive

nights in Maryville, Madisonville, Athens, Washington (Rhea County), Pikeville, Jasper and Bellefonte (Jackson County, Alabama), arriving a week later at 11 a.m.

And what did the ticket cost?

According to the ad, 6.25 cents per mile, which is about \$15.50. An inflation calculator tells us that \$15.50 in 1829 is about \$540 today. And the cost of lodging wasn't included in the ticket price.

Other examples of how long it took to get from one part of Tennessee to another by stagecoach (taken from newspaper ads):

- Three days and 20 hours to get from Nashville to Knoxville in 1817.
- Three days and 12 hours to get to get from Nashville to Memphis in 1830.
- Twenty-nine hours to get from Sparta to Gallatin in 1838.

2. Nashville to Memphis, 1853

When railroads were first being built, you could buy a ticket to make a journey via various methods. A Nashville-to-Memphis ticket adver-

tised in the July 21, 1853, *Nashville Banner* described a journey that started on a train, then switched to steamboat, then train again, then stagecoach and then train yet again. And instead of going west from Nashville, it left Middle Tennessee heading southeast.

Passengers would board the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad and ride it all the way to the Tennessee River at Stevenson, Alabama. Then they'd disembark from the train and get on a boat that took them west to Decatur, Alabama. Then they'd transfer to a train that took them to Tusculumbia, Alabama. Then they'd get off the train and ride a stagecoach 90 miles to La Grange, Tennessee. Then they'd transfer to a train that would take them the rest of the way to Memphis.

The ad did not say how long the five-part journey took. But it did cite a price of \$15 (\$630 today).

3. Nashville to Chattanooga, 1854

As I wrote in my book *True Tales of Tennessee: Earthquake to*

Railroad, the first train reached Chattanooga on the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad on Jan. 15, 1854.

If you think this event immediately brought the travel time between the two cities down to something modern passengers might think reasonable, you would be wrong.

According to the Aug. 23, 1854, *Loudon Free Press*, the passenger train "leaves Nashville at half past eleven o'clock at night and arrives at Chattanooga at 10 minutes to ten next morning."

That's 10 hours and 20 minutes from Nashville to Chattanooga — a drive that now takes about two hours.

4. Nashville to Beersheba Springs, 1873

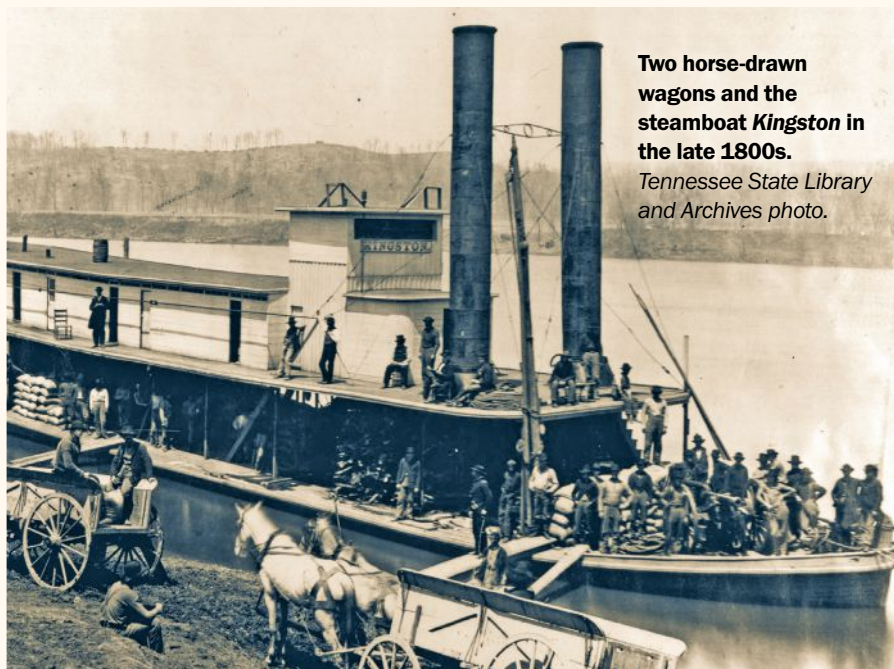
In the 1800s, many wealthy Nashville residents spent weeks or months at mineral springs hotels. These often had to be reached through a combination of railroad and hack — a small, horse-drawn conveyance that moved about 5 miles per hour and also often delivered the mail.

To get from Nashville to Beersheba Springs in 1873, passengers left

This photo of ladies and gentlemen on the deck of a steamboat in Tennessee in the early 1900s reminds us that people used to dress up when traveling.

Tennessee State Library and Archives photo.





Two horse-drawn wagons and the steamboat *Kingston* in the late 1800s.

Tennessee State Library and Archives photo.

Nashville at 9:30 a.m., heading southeast on the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway. At Tullahoma, they'd transfer to a train that took them northeast to McMinnville.

At McMinnville, they'd get in a hack that took them the remaining 22 miles past farms, through valleys, over creeks and, finally, to the base of Cumberland Mountain.

At the bottom of the mountain, the hack driver would ring a loud bell a certain number of times to let the hotel staff (800 feet above) know how many passengers he was carrying (for dinner-planning purposes). Weather permitting and horses able, guests arrived in time for a late dinner.

5. Knoxville to Pigeon Forge, 1905

There are more than 10,000 hotel rooms in Pigeon Forge, and today it takes less than an hour to reach the town from Knoxville.

In 1905, Pigeon Forge had only one place for visitors to spend the night — the 32-room Henderson Springs Hotel.

To get to Henderson Springs, Knoxville passengers would board a

hack to Sevierville — a 28-mile trip that took three and a half hours. In Sevierville, riders would transfer to a different hack and be taken on a four-hour journey, passing Boyd's Creek (where the horses were changed) and Baker Springs (where the horses were changed again). If all went well, passengers would arrive at Henderson Springs at 9:30 p.m. — about nine hours after leaving Knoxville.

On July 20, 1905, the *Knoxville Sentinel* said that passengers were happy that the journey didn't take longer. "As the hacks come to the points where horses are changed, fresh horses are in waiting and there is only a few minutes delay at each place," the *Sentinel* said. "The mail hacks are liberally patronized by passengers who appreciate the quick service."

6. Nashville to Celina, 1910

Today it takes less than two hours to drive from Nashville to Celina in Clay County. In 1910, roads were terrible, and almost no one had a car. To get from Nashville to Celina required a journey by rail and steamboat.

Passengers would take the 4 p.m. Tennessee Central Railroad from

Nashville to Carthage, arriving at 7:20 p.m. Then they would transfer to a steamboat heading upstream on the Cumberland River. The steamboat would arrive at Granville at 1 a.m., Gainesboro at 8 a.m. and Celina at 1 p.m. — 21 hours after leaving the state capital.

7. Nashville to Roan Mountain, 1880

My favorite journey that I've ever read about in Tennessee newspapers came from the Aug. 19, 1880, *Nashville Banner*. It recounted the adventures of two young men who had recently gone to Cloudland, a resort hotel on the Tennessee/North Carolina border at Roan Mountain. The story tells a lot about how cars have changed the world.

First, the men took the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway to Chattanooga. Then they took the Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railroad to Johnson City — arriving at about 4:30 a.m. A few hours later, along with some fellow passengers from Georgia, they boarded a horse-drawn hack destined for the Cloudland Hotel.

Eight hours and 25 miles later, the group reached the base of Roan Mountain, where they were still 7 miles from Cloudland. By that time, according to the article, "The road up the mountain side, the grade of which rose one foot in ten, was exceedingly muddy, and as the fog was fast obscuring the mountain from their vision, the driver concluded to defer the ascent until the morrow."

Since there were no hotels in that part of Carter County back then, the group separated, and the two young men knocked on the door of a small house. The man who answered the door, after some coaxing, reluctantly agreed to let them stay. But he said he couldn't feed them because his wife was away and, apparently, he

Do you have a way with words?

We're searching for Tennessee's most talented and gifted poets. Enter our next Poet's Playground contest!

SUBJECT: Poems do not have to include the word "Tennessee" explicitly, but their themes should celebrate our state and what makes it beautiful — whether highlighting something unique to Tennessee, memories of the state or the beautiful nature it has to offer.

AGE CATEGORIES: The competition has six age divisions — 8 and younger, 9-13, 14-18, 19-22, 23-64 and 65 and older. Each group will have first-, second- and third-place winners. First place wins \$50 and will be printed in the magazine, second place wins \$30 and third place wins \$20. Poems capturing first-, second- and third-place honors will be published online at tnmagazine.org.

WHAT TO ENTER: A poem of **100 words or fewer, including articles**, pertaining to the theme. One entry per person, and please give your entry a title.

DEADLINE: Entry must be submitted online or postmarked by Monday, Feb. 2. First-place poems will be published in the April issue.

PLEASE NOTE: By entering, you give *The Tennessee Magazine* permission to publish your work via print, online and social media.

Please enter online at tnmagazine.org or mail handwritten entries to:

**Poetry Contest,
The Tennessee Magazine
P.O. Box 100912
Nashville, TN 37224**

Make sure to print your poem legibly, and be sure to keep a copy of your poem as submissions received via mail will not be returned.

All entries must include the following information, or they will be disqualified: your name, age, mailing address, phone number, email address and the name of your local electric cooperative.

didn't know how to cook. He asked his female neighbor for help, and she came over and began cooking a meal of ham, eggs and coffee.

Meanwhile, another horse-drawn hack arrived at the same house — this one heading from the top of the mountain to Johnson City. It carried three young ladies and three men, including the driver, and its passengers also needed shelter. The man agreed to let them stay as well, and the combined party, now numbering eight, proceeded to play card games such as seven-up and old maid to pass the time and amuse themselves.

Discussion turned to the sleeping arrangements since there was only one bedroom in the house with no more than three beds in it. After considerable fretting from the landlord and his neighbor, the women agreed to sleep in two of the beds, which were in an upstairs bedroom, while the men moved the third bed to the front porch, where they slept. To

make sure the women felt safe, one of the men loaned the women a revolver for the night.

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, "Good wishes and farewells were exchanged, and the two parties separated."

The travelers from Nashville then boarded the Johnson City-to-Cloudland hack, which made the remaining 7 miles in five and a half hours. By

the time they reached the hotel, they were tired but in good cheer.

"Since that trip, the two Nashvillians have met with many experiences, but none so truly thrilling as the one above narrated," the *Banner* said. "And although the snows of many winters may whiten their dark brown hair, they can never forget that memorable night in the lonely valley by Roan Mountain."



This stagecoach made daily runs from Nashville to Chapel Hill in Marshall County in 1894.

Tennessee State Library and Archives photo.



20
26

best — of — tennessee

*The Tennessee Magazine
Readers' Choice Awards*

We're searching for the Best of Tennessee

Vote now in Readers' Choice Awards

Our readers are the foremost experts on all things Tennessee, and we need your help naming the Best of Tennessee for our 2026 Readers' Choice Awards. We have further streamlined the contest that will make the entry process easier and quicker for submitting your nominees and allow us to more fully spotlight the winners.

There are two ways to enter. Simply visit tnmagazine.org/BOT26,

or use the form in this magazine. (Online entries will be entered in a drawing for an additional \$250 prize!) Fill out the form with your choices for each category, nominating your favorites from East, Middle and West Tennessee.

"No one knows Tennessee better than readers of *The Tennessee Magazine*," said editor Chris Kirk. "We think that by choosing only a few

categories each year, we can highlight the diverse offerings across the state. And the whole process will be quicker for our busy readers."

Submit your nominations today, and be entered in the sweepstakes for a chance to win some fantastic prizes.

Help us honor your community's local businesses that serve you and your neighbors each day. Join us in recognizing Tennessee's best.



Help us honor Tennessee's most unique eats and destinations:

NOMINATE YOUR FAVORITES!

ENTER ONLINE AT [TNMAGAZINE.ORG/BOT26](https://tnmagazine.org/BOT26).

OFFICIAL RULES: No purchase necessary. One entry per person. Ballot must be postmarked or submitted online no later than Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026. • To be eligible for the prize drawings, ballots must have a "Best of Tennessee" vote in at least four categories. You can cast votes in any or all of the regions. • Drawing to be held on Friday, Feb. 20. Must be at least 18 years old to win. Grand-prize winners will be notified by mail. • Best of Tennessee results will be published in the June 2026 edition of *The Tennessee Magazine*. • Electric cooperative employees and their immediate families are not eligible for the prize giveaways.

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN ONE OF THREE GRAND PRIZE PACKAGES THAT INCLUDE:



A \$200 gift certificate to be applied toward a stay at a park cabin or lodge.



A basket of locally made artisan foods from Pick Tennessee Products.



\$250 to spend while you're enjoying your state park visit.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

ZIP: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

Email: _____

Electric cooperative: _____

The division of the state in which you live:

West _____ Middle _____ or East _____

All entries must be postmarked by Thursday, Jan. 15. Return the completed forms to:

Best of Tennessee

The Tennessee Magazine

P.O. Box 100912, Nashville, TN 37224

Bakery

West: _____

Middle: _____

East: _____

Burger

West: _____

Middle: _____

East: _____

Place for Dessert

West: _____

Middle: _____

East: _____

Festival

West: _____

Middle: _____

East: _____

Museum/Art Gallery

West: _____

Middle: _____

East: _____

State Park

West: _____

Middle: _____

East: _____

Tennessee Events

Festivals, celebrations and other happenings around the state

NOW–FEB. 8

Zoolumination

Nashville Zoo at Grassmere, Nashville. 615-833-1534 or nashvillezoo.org/zoolumination

Zoos across Tennessee are lighting up the night as a way to attract visitors even during the coldest season of the year.

The Nashville Zoo at Grassmere has held Zoolumination since November 2019. This year, the zoo will be decorated with more than 1,000 custom-made silk lanterns, making it the country's largest lantern festival.

If you don't live close to the Nashville Zoo, there are fun and

interesting events across the state! Find lantern festivals at the zoos in Memphis and Chattanooga, and if you're looking for a different kind of nighttime light show zoo experience, Zoo Knoxville is offering "Smoky Night Lights" until early March.

Winter season zoo events across the state:

Asian Lantern Festival: Forest of Fantasy: Chattanooga Zoo, now – Jan. 17.

Lantern Festival: Memphis Zoo, now – Feb. 1.

Smoky Night Lights: Zoo Knoxville, now – March 7.

Zoolumination: Nashville Zoo at Grassmere, now – Feb. 8.



Photograph courtesy of the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere

West Tennessee

JAN. 1–31

Free admission for children

Discovery Park of America, Union City. 731-885-5455 or discoveryparkofamerica.com

JAN. 20–25

"The Outsiders"

The Orpheum Theatre, Memphis. 901-525-3000 or orpheum-memphis.com

FEB. 7

Savannah Lions Club Pancake Breakfast

First United Methodist Church, Savannah. savannahtnlionsclub@gmail.com

FEB. 12

John Mulaney

Graceland Soundstage, Memphis. 877-777-0606 or gracelandlive.com/shows

Middle Tennessee

JAN. 10

Blood Assurance Blood Drive

Nashville Zoo. 615-833-1534 or nashvillezoo.org

JAN. 11 & FEB. 1 & 15

Music at Grace

Grace Lutheran Church, Clarksville. 931-647-6750 or glctn.org

JAN. 20–24

"Les Misérables"

Tennessee Performing Arts Center, Nashville. 615-782-4040 or tpac.org

JAN. 25

2026 Happily Connected Wedding Showcase

National Museum of African American Music, Nashville. 615-497-7990 or hcweddingshow.com

JAN. 30

Gene Watson and The Farewell Party Band

Cookeville Performing Arts Center. 931-528-1313 or genewatsonmusic.com

JAN. 31

Family Geocaching Day

Owl's Hill Nature Sanctuary, Brentwood. 615-370-4672 or owlshill.org

FEB. 5–13

Mayberry Valentine Dinner Theatre

T.B. Sutton General Store, Granville. 931-653-4151 or granvilletn.com

East Tennessee

JAN. 7–FEB. 26

Tennessee Juried Open Art Show 2026

Nancy Cantrell Dender Gallery, Etowah. easttnartcenter@gmail.com or easttnartscenter.org

JAN. 31

Chattanooga Symphony and Opera present "Star Wars: A New Hope"

Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium, Chattanooga. 423-757-5580 or tivolichattanooga.com

JAN. 31

OtherWorldly Affair Intuitive Arts Market

Bud's Creative Arts Center, Hixson. randomfox.com/otherworldly

FEB. 10–15

"The Sound of Music" (Touring)

Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium, Chattanooga. 423-757-5580 or tivolichattanooga.com

Submit
your events

Visit tnmagazine.org to submit your events and view our complete events listing.

Call for Entries

Shutterbug Showcase

In our next Shutterbug Photography Contest, *The Tennessee Magazine* wants to meet your furry and feathered friends as you showcase your skills in **“Pet Portraiture.”** Show us the personalities, quirks, activities and attributes of your pets.

Animals in costume are not what we are looking for. Your photographs can — but do not have to — include people with your pets. They can be selfies or just photographs of your pets by themselves.

Just keep in mind a few basics: Use natural light, make strong compositions and focus on interesting subject matter.

The Tennessee Magazine will name first-, second- and third-place winners as well as honorable mention recipients in each division — **Shutterbug**, **Junior Shutterbug** (ages 17 and younger) and **Professional**.

As you accept this challenge, please stay safe. We don’t want anyone to take a tumble or any animals harmed

or “embarrassed” in the name of the Shutterbug contest.



“Waiting on a Friend” by Lauren O’Brien, honorable mention in our 2017 “Pets” contest

SHUTTERBUG ASSIGNMENT

“Pet Portraiture”

SUBMISSIONS — ONLINE ENTRIES ONLY

To enter, visit tnmagazine.org and click on “Entry Forms” under the “Contests” tab.

Entries must be entered online by the end of the day on Thursday, Jan. 15. Winners will be published in the March 2026 issue.

PRIZE PACKAGES

Judges will select a first-, second- and third-place winner in each age group. These prizes will be awarded: First place wins \$150, second place \$100 and third place \$50.


CONTEST RULES

1. The contest is open to amateur and professional photographers. For the purposes of this competition, you are considered a professional if you regularly sell your images or garner more than 50% of your income from photography.
2. Photographs must have been taken by you.
3. A photographer can enter no more than three photographs. There is no cost to enter.
4. All entries must be made online. We won’t accept prints for this contest. Sign on to tnmagazine.org and click on “Entry Forms” under “Contests.” Complete the form and upload your photograph(s).
5. Employees of Tennessee’s electric cooperatives and their immediate families are not eligible to win.
6. Please include the name of each recognizable person, if any other than yourself, in your photograph. It is the photographer’s responsibility to have the subject’s permission to enter his or her image in the contest. You must include the subject’s name and contact information with your submission. Omitting any of this information can result in disqualification.
7. By entering the contest, photographers automatically give *The Tennessee Magazine* permission to publish the winning images in print and digital publications, to social media and on websites.

It's SLOW time

Slow cooker recipes that aren't soups or stews

Gone are the glittering gifts, the colorful garlands and strings of blinking lights. The holidays are over. It's time to slow down *everything*, including the way you cook. Slow cooker recipes can help you take a breath and settle into a cozy winter, making daily life a little simpler just when you need it. Happy New Year!

A close-up photograph of a rustic, dark metal bowl filled with a creamy, chunky dip. The dip is topped with finely chopped green chives. The bowl is surrounded by an assortment of bread and chips: thick slices of toasted, crusty bread are on the left, and a variety of golden-brown, irregularly shaped chips are on the right and bottom. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Deconstructed Reuben Sandwich Dip

Deconstructed Reuben

Sandwich Dip

Yield: 8 servings

- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese (not reduced- or low-fat), softened
- ¾ pound deli sliced corned beef, chopped
- 2 cups shredded Swiss cheese, divided
- 1 cup chopped sauerkraut
- ½ cup Thousand Island salad dressing
- 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
- ¼ teaspoon caraway seeds
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- Fresh chopped parsley for garnish
- Sturdy wheat crackers

Grease the inside of a medium slow cooker. Add the cream cheese, corned beef, 1½ cups of the Swiss cheese, sauerkraut, salad dressing, vinegar, caraway seeds and pepper. Cover and cook on low for 2½ hours. Uncover and stir well. Top with the remaining cheese, cover and cook 30 minutes longer. Garnish with the parsley and serve warm with crackers.

Asiago and Country Ham Grits

Yield: 8 servings

- 8 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable stock
- 2 cups regular grits
- ½ cup finely chopped country ham
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ⅓ cup grated Asiago, divided
- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- Chopped fresh chives for garnish

In a lightly greased medium slow cooker, stir together the stock, grits, ham, butter, peppers and 1 tablespoon of the Asiago. Cover and cook on low for 4 hours or on high for 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Stir in the remaining cheese and sour cream. Garnish with the chives and serve immediately.

Variation: Substitute 6 slices of chopped bacon for the ham and grated Parmesan for the Asiago cheese.

Sausage and Cheese Strata

Perfect for breakfast at dinner, or put it on before bedtime and let the aroma wake you up the following morning.

Yield: 10-12 servings

- 8 slices white sandwich bread, cubed
- 3 cups frozen diced potatoes
- 1 pound cooked regular, maple or hot sausage, crumbled
- 1 sweet onion, peeled and diced
- 1 large green or red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 2 cups shredded Colby or sharp cheddar cheese
- 8 eggs
- 1 (10.75-ounce) can condensed cream of mushroom or cream of celery soup
- 2 cups half-and-half or whole milk

In a lightly greased medium or large slow cooker, layer half the bread, potatoes, sausage, onions, bell pepper and cheese. Repeat the layers.

In a large bowl whisk together the eggs, soup and half-and-half. Pour over the layers, pressing with a spatula to saturate the layers completely. Cover and cook on low for 7 to 8 hours or until the eggs are set. Serve warm.

Coconut Milk Chicken

Yield: 6 servings

- 6 skinless bone-in chicken breasts
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can pineapple slices, undrained
- 2 cups baby carrots
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and julienned
- ½ cup coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- Fresh snipped chives for garnish

Place the chicken and chickpeas in a lightly greased large slow cooker. Add the pineapple slices and juice as well as the carrots and red peppers.

In a small bowl, whisk together the coconut milk and cornstarch until smooth. Stir in the sugar, curry powder, garlic salt, black pepper, lime juice and red pepper flakes. Pour the milk mixture over the chicken. Cover and cook on low for 7 to 8 hours. Serve warm with a garnish of fresh snipped chives.

Seafood Macaroni and Cheese

Yield: 8 servings

- 6 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 heaping cups uncooked elbow macaroni
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened and divided
- 1 small sweet onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour
- 3 cups half-and-half
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- ½ teaspoon white pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 pound small raw peeled shrimp
- 2 cups shredded Swiss cheese
- ¾ cup shredded Parmesan cheese, divided
- ½ cup dry breadcrumbs
- ½ teaspoon Cajun seasoning

Place the water and salt in a large pot over high heat. When boiling, add the macaroni and cook for 6 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water. Transfer to a lightly greased large slow cooker and set aside.

Meanwhile, in a large saucepan over medium heat, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter. Add the onions and garlic and cook for 4 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the flour and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Whisk in the half-and-half, garlic salt, white pepper and cayenne. When the mixture comes to a boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 2 minutes. Pour over the macaroni, and stir in the shrimp, Swiss cheese, and ½ cup of the Parmesan.

In a medium bowl stir together the remaining ¼ cup Parmesan, remaining 2 tablespoons butter,

breadcrumbs and Cajun seasoning. Scatter evenly over the macaroni mixture. Cover and cook on low for 3 hours or on high for 1½ hours. Let stand uncovered for 10 minutes before serving warm.

New Years Day Peas and Greens

Yield: 6 servings

- 1½ cups dried black-eyed peas
- 1 sweet onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 small green or red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and diced

- 4 cups turnip or collard greens (½ bunch), washed, shaken dry and cut in strips
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon hot sauce

Place the peas in a large pot of water and let soak overnight in the refrigerator. Drain the peas and discard the soaking water. Layer the peas, onions, celery, bell peppers, jalapeños and greens in a lightly greased large slow cooker.

In a large bowl, combine the stock, Creole seasoning, bay leaf, garlic salt, black pepper and hot sauce. Pour over the layers. Cover and cook on low for 7 hours or on high for 3½ hours or until the peas are tender. Remove and discard the bay leaf. Serve warm with additional hot sauce, if desired.

Variation: Substitute mustard greens for the turnip greens or collards or use a combination.

Tammy Algood develops recipes for **The Tennessee Magazine** that feature farm-fresh Tennessee food. Those fresh, local ingredients will always add cleaner, more flavorful foods to your table. We recommend visiting local farms and farmers markets to find the freshest seasonal produce.



Asiago and Country
Ham Grits

Tips & Tricks

- You release heat every time you disturb cooking by opening the lid. Resist that urge!
- There is no need to stir the ingredients in a slow cooker unless specifically called for in the recipe.
- Sizes of slow cookers range from a miniature 16 ounces to 7 quarts. Select the size that most closely holds the amount of food you will be cooking. Always fill a minimum of half full and no more than two-thirds full.
- Make sure the removable insert has completely cooled before washing.
- Slow cooker liners make cleanup a breeze, especially for recipes that contain a fair amount of cheese.

Ask Chef Tammy

Rob asks, "Which setting is the best to use with a slow cooker? High or low?"

Rob, it depends on how quickly you need the dish to be ready and what you are cooking. I generally stick with the low setting for the most consistent results. Remember that 1 hour on the high setting is roughly equal to 2 hours on low.

Clarisa writes, "I have a favorite slow cooker recipe from my mom that calls for the meat to be browned before adding to the cooker. Can I skip this step? It cooks all day on the low setting."

Clarisa, you can, but start the recipe on high for the first hour. This will raise the temperature of the meat quickly, which is one of the benefits of browning it beforehand. After that first hour, you can reduce

the setting to low for the remainder of cooking time.

Email your cooking questions to Tammy Algood:
talgood@tnelectric.org.

Steel Mobile Home Roofing
Leaks? High energy bill? Roof rumble?
Contact us at 800.633.8969
or roofover.com
PERMA-ROOF®
from Southern Builders

Mobile Home Roofover Systems
Since 1983

VALUE PACKAGE!
\$15,000 + tax

www.jcpolebarns.com
NEW YEAR NEW BARN
JC POLE BARN 30x50x10
1-10' Sliding Doors
1-36' Man Door
FOR MORE INFORMATION:
270-776-7869 • 270-850-8079

SUPREME COIN AND BULLION

If you are buying as an investment, a gift, or just safeguarding your cash, this is the perfect way to do so! We are looking forward to EARNING your business, not just gaining it!

- Free of dealer markup.
- Portfolio Diversifier.
- Inflation proof.




\$369
per coin
Vault Code: **TNT26J**

CALL TODAY!
(346) 445-6656

\$5 Gold American Eagles at **COST!** It's that simple. These Government issued coins are the easiest and safest way to protect your money and your family! A 5 minute call can change everything.
DON'T WAIT!

Accepted Payment Methods:



LIMITED OFFER

"Gold is money.
Everything else is credit."
- J.P. Morgan

Community Corner

– What our neighbors are up to –

Find the Tennessee Flag

We have hidden somewhere in this magazine the icon from the Tennessee flag like the one pictured above. It could be larger or smaller than this, and it could be in black and white or any color. If you find it, send us a postcard or email with the page number where it's located. Include your name, mailing

address, phone number, email address and electric cooperative. One entry per person. Three winners will be chosen from a random drawing, and each will receive \$20.

Note that the icon we hide will not be on an actual flag or historical marker, will not appear on pages 20-25 and will not be placed in any ads. This month's flag will not appear on this page (that would just be too easy). Good luck!

Send postcards only (no phone calls, please) to: *The Tennessee Magazine*, Find the Flag, P.O. Box 100912, Nashville, TN 37224. Or you can fill out the form at tnmagazine.org/flag or email flag@tnmagazine.org. Entries must be postmarked or received via email

by Monday, Feb. 2. Winners will be published in the March 2026 issue of *The Tennessee Magazine*.

November flag spotters

Thanks for the postcards and emails again this month identifying the location of the flag, left, which was found on Stan Dobson's hat on page 13.

Winners are drawn randomly from each month's entries. November's lucky flag spotters are:

Jimmy Ferguson

Selmer, Pickwick EC

Gail Wallen

Walling, Caney Fork EC

Barry Pleasant

Butler, Mountain EC



Artist's Palette Assignment for March

Three age categories:

8 and younger, 9 to 13 and 14 to 18 years old. Each group will have first-, second- and third-place winners.

Media:

Drawing or painting on 8½-by-11-inch unlined paper, canvas or board. We encourage the use of color. Please follow these size guidelines. Oversized canvas entries are especially difficult to handle and cannot be returned. Framed pieces will not be accepted.

Entry:

Send your original art to: *The Tennessee Magazine*, Artist's Palette — March, P.O. Box 100912, Nashville, TN 37224. (Please make sure you include the month on the outside of the envelope!) Only one entry per artist, please.

Deadline:

Art must be postmarked by Monday, Feb. 2.

Include:

Your name (legibly, please!), age, mailing address, phone number, email address and electric cooperative. Leaving anything out will result in disqualification.

*Please note: By entering, you give **The Tennessee Magazine** permission to publish your work in print, online and via social media.*

Artwork will not be returned unless you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) with your submission. Only the U.S. Postal Service will be used for returns. For best reproduction results, do not fold artwork.

Each entry needs its own SASE, please.

Siblings must enter separately with their own envelopes.

Attention, teachers:

You may send multiple entries in one envelope along with one SASE with sufficient postage.

Winners will be published in the March 2026 issue of *The Tennessee Magazine*.

First place wins \$50, second place wins \$30 and third place wins \$20. Winners are eligible to enter again after three months. Winners will receive their awards, artwork and certificates of placement within six to eight weeks of publication.

Artist's Palette January Winners

14-18 AGE GROUP WINNERS



FIRST PLACE: Ana Vazquez,
14, Middle Tennessee Electric



SECOND PLACE: Madison Lindsay,
17, Middle Tennessee Electric



THIRD PLACE: Brenda Gonzalez Linares,
17, Sequachee Valley EC

9-13 AGE GROUP WINNERS



FIRST PLACE: Layla Simmons,
13, Caney Fork EC



SECOND PLACE: Ryann Payne,
13, Middle Tennessee Electric



THIRD PLACE: Rhema Huck,
12, Volunteer EC

8 AND YOUNGER AGE GROUP WINNERS



FIRST PLACE: Alana Carter,
7, Caney Fork EC



SECOND PLACE: Josie Ralph,
7, Middle Tennessee Electric



THIRD PLACE: Marchall Hendrix Hoehn,
6, Pickwick EC

Point of View

by Robin Conover

“Northern Lights Over Tennessee”

Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, EF 16-35 mm
f2.8 L II USM at 16mm, ISO 2000, *f*-8.0
at 10 seconds, Gitzo tripod

I’ve taken some of my best photos under the most unexpected circumstances. One such recent experience was seeing and photographing the northern lights in Middle Tennessee for the second time in less than two years.

About two months ago, I was already in bed, scrolling through social media, when I started seeing posts about the northern lights being visible again near me in Sumner County. I only know of this happening twice in my lifetime in Tennessee. The first was in May 2024 and, more recently, in November 2025.

On this particular evening, I hadn’t heard a word about the chance of them being visible. I had the urge to stay in bed, but due to my stronger “fear of missing out,” I reluctantly got up and went to see what I could find. I dressed warmly, grabbed my gear and headed north.

I wanted to find the darkest sky, away from as much light pollution as possible, to increase the chances of seeing the elusive aurora borealis. It wasn’t long before I could actually see the beautiful magenta hues in the sky and yellows and greens

toward the horizon. In 2024, they had only appeared as faint white streaks with no color visible to the naked eye.

I’ve since learned that the northern lights are very unpredictable. They can show up anywhere — how intense the colors will be and how long they’ll stay visible are all up in the air.

As I drove about 30 miles toward Kentucky, I stopped a few times to take pictures, but I kept moving quickly, knowing the light show could fade and disappear at any moment.

I was looking for something I could frame in the foreground, silhouetting it against the ethereal sky. Without a good composition, I knew my photos would look like everyone else’s, snapped with their smartphones.

I had a hunch to take the next road to the right, and I ended up on Haywood Fisher Road near Orlinda. There, I had stumbled upon the perfect spot. The barn on the cover and the field in the photo above became my viewpoint for the next hour.

As I sat in awe, the colors and aurora ebbed and flowed as thin clouds pushed by invisible winds do, silently fading only to return more intensely and widespread than minutes before. Soon, they simply faded away into the starry black sky.

I took all my photos that night from a tripod with a weight bag on the lens to reduce vibration. The exposure and lens settings I used above seemed to work best for capturing the barn and sky in focus and the details in the night sky.

Once I settled into this spot, I was completely captivated by the view and the experience. It’s amazing how nature comes together to create the northern lights.

Watching the light dance silently and effortlessly across the night sky was one of the most peaceful experiences I’ve ever had while taking photos. It gave me a sense of wonder and awe that’s hard to describe.

If you’re interested in learning more about finding official dark skies in Tennessee, check out tnstateparks.com for more information.



Ring in energy-saving resolutions with a

DIY Home Energy Assessment.

Looking to save money this year? Trim your energy consumption — and costs — with a free DIY Home Energy Assessment and rebates from TVA EnergyRight® and your local power company.



\$50–\$300 rebate
on HVAC tune-up and
duct sealing.



\$300–\$500 rebate
on air sealing and insulation.



\$500 –\$800 rebate
on 17 SEER2 or higher
heat pumps.



\$800 rebate
on mini split heat pumps.



Visit our website to take your free assessment and learn more about rebates. Brought to you by TVA EnergyRight and participating local power companies.

EnergyRight.com/diyhea

TVA EnergyRight®

Find new ways to save money this New Year!

Terms and conditions apply. All TVA EnergyRight rebate-eligible upgrades must be installed by a TVA-vetted member of the Quality Contractor Network. All upgrades are eligible for program financing with participating local power companies. Complete a DIY Home Energy Assessment and receive a \$10 home improvement gift card and free energy-saving kit in the mail within 4–6 weeks. Questions? Call 1-855-237-2673.



100% COMPLETE!



Fiber internet is now available to every eligible CEMC member.



Check Service Availability and Sign Up Today at
CumberlandConnect.org/Status-Map

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

