

# the tennessee magazine

April 2026

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THERE'S A PLACE:  
SOUTH PITTSBURG

LOVELY LOAVES

A photograph of a person in a blue shirt and black hat firing a rifle. The rifle is pointed upwards and to the right, with a large plume of white smoke coming from the muzzle. In the background, another person wearing a white shirt and a straw hat is visible, holding a cup. The scene is outdoors with green foliage in the background.

Festive  
Festivals

# the tennessee magazine

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TENNESSEE'S  
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Celebrating the Extraordinary Nature of Everyday Life

APRIL 2026



## FEATURES

### 12 Festive Festivals

by Amber Weaver

Get into the spirit of 1776 and attend any of a number of historical festivals occurring throughout the year across Tennessee.

### 28 Poets' Playground

Tennessee wordsmiths present their ponderings on the world around them.

### 32 There's a Place

by Mark Johnson

South Pittsburg is a community forged on pride of its world-famous foundry, championship high school athletics and hometown heritage.

**ON THE COVER**  
Reencactors give visitors a taste of frontier life during the David Crockett Homestead and Bluegrass Festival in Union City. Learn about this and other history-focused events beginning on page 12.  
*Photograph courtesy of Discovery Park of America*



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## 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

### 16 **Tennessee Events**

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

### 20 **Co-op News**

Information from your electric cooperative or electric membership corporation.

### 26 **Home Energy Q&A**

by **Brad Wagner**

Be prepared and stay safe as we enter spring storm season.

### 30 **Tennessee History for Kids**

by **Bill Carey**

Time-travel to an April 1861 public meeting where Nashville showed its support for secession.

### 36 **A Taste of Tennessee**

Quick bread recipes with common ingredients are ready in a snap.

### 40 **Community Corner**

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



the  
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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*

## From farms to front porches: Thank you, lineworkers

On April 13, the second Monday in April, we pause. Not because your work stops, but because it deserves recognition. You show up — rain, snow or shine. You make decisions that allow those around you to go about their daily lives. You carry the weight of the entire community, and we want to say thank you, not only on Tennessee Lineworker Appreciation Day, but every day.

We recognize that your line of work is not easy. Thank you for the long hours you put in to help your neighbors. Thank you for showing up to work even when the weather doesn't cooperate. Thank you for your mental focus; you know it is essential for working safely. Thank you for handling the pressure to get it right, every single time.

We ask a lot of you. By "we," we mean Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation and the members of the cooperative. We depend on your best judgment from everyday tasks to storm restoration. We make decisions knowing that

you will carry them out in the field. We rely on you, and we trust you.

We know this work asks something of your family too, and for that we are grateful. Thank you to the families who offer their support. We know power outages are never convenient for anyone, and we appreciate you sharing your loved one so they can help not only your family but all of ours. Without you, we would not have them.

We understand that your work matters. You are neighbors restoring power for neighbors. You uphold the cooperative commitment and take pride in keeping communities running, from farms to front porches. You put safety first for yourself, your team and our members.

On this Tennessee Lineworker Appreciation Day, we thank you, lineworkers, for all that you do.



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By Mike Knotts

Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association

# Biscuits, blue jackets and bright futures

**D**o you ever have one of those days when you just can't stop smiling? Perhaps it is unseasonably warm, and you enjoyed some unexpected time outside under a blue sky. Or your favorite song came on the radio as you drove to work, and you just couldn't stop humming it all day long.

Recently, I had a similarly positive "blue-sky day" type of experience. But this shade of blue was more like the color of the deep ocean and made of corduroy. You probably know someone who participated in the Future Farmers of America in their youth or you did so yourself. So you probably know all about the blue corduroy jackets members wear.

Hundreds of FFA members, advisers and supporters came to Nashville in late February to meet state elected officials and leaders and see the General Assembly in real time. They began their day with the 45th annual Tennessee FFA Legislative Breakfast. Although the meal was probably not served as early as many farmers are accustomed to, I had the pleasure of joining them, and Tennessee's electric cooperatives had the pleasure of helping sponsor the event. The smiles, direct eye contact and firm handshakes offered by so many young people couldn't help but warm my heart.

The attendees were privileged to hear from Gov. Bill Lee, who spoke about his own experiences growing up on his family's fourth-generation Hereford cattle farm and traveling to show livestock in the summers. Beginning his eighth, and final, year as governor, he shared how agricultural education prepared him for a future in farming, business and public service.

At the conclusion of his remarks, I was honored to speak next. While not qualified in any way to follow the governor as a featured speaker, I did suggest that following his example is a worthy endeavor — not only for his focus on rural Tennessee but for his integrity. The governor entered politics as someone who refused to take the low road and has steadfastly maintained his own identity. Members of both political parties admire his personal testimony and dedication to civility.

But the blue-sky moment came next. I was honored to present the Tennessee's Electric Cooperatives' Presidential Scholarship to Weston Brown. A freshman at Tennessee Technological University, he is the current state president of FFA and a fine young man. The son of an electric lineworker at Greenville Energy Authority, Brown has a keen appreciation for the hard work and humanity it takes to provide electricity 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In that moment, I couldn't help but believe that some of tomorrow's most impactful leaders were sitting right here in those blue jackets. The overwhelming optimism that Weston and the other members of the state officer team shared with me that morning was infectious. I don't know if Weston's photo will ever hang in the State Capitol like Gov. Lee's portrait soon will, but I know that all of those blue jackets will soon hang in the closets of men and women who will do great things.

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By Chris Kirk

Editor, *The Tennessee Magazine*

# Set a full schedule for exploring Tennessee

**A**round this time each year, I notice my schedule filling up quickly after a postholiday wintertime lull. What makes this period different from other seasons, though, is that for the most part, my agenda items are things I *get* to do, not those I *have* to do. I seek out reasons to be outside, and this month's edition of *The Tennessee Magazine* leans in with guidance.

This year, America celebrates its 250th birthday, and Tennessee communities are joining in the fun. We've highlighted just a handful of history-themed happenings in our spotlight on festivals across the state. See page 12 to learn more about these specific events, and let that inspire you to explore more celebrations. You can visit [tnmagazine.org/events](http://tnmagazine.org/events) to find more, and check out [tn250.com](http://tn250.com) to learn about how Tennessee is commemorating America's semiquincentennial.

A huge annual draw is the National Cornbread Festival, returning this month to downtown South Pittsburg. While the town might be best-known for that event and Lodge Cast Iron, there is much more to discover in the Marion County community. See page 32 for our latest "There's a Place" travelogue.

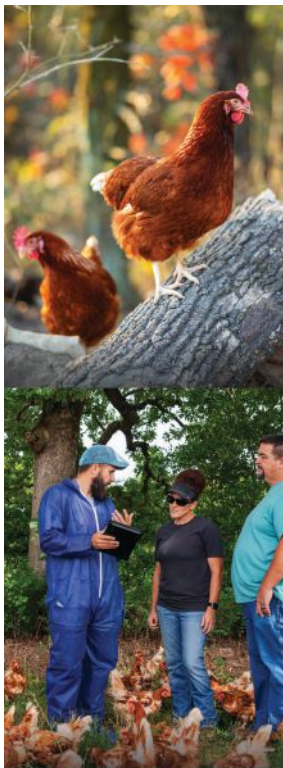
We're adding a lot to your schedules, so be sure to check out the quick bread recipes beginning on page 36. There's even one for cornbread! I think I'll try that one first to keep with our themes.

Antsy McClain gets creative in "My Tennessee Notebook," offering prose "honoring" the unofficial warm-weather soundtrack of neighborhood life: the roar of leaf blowers. Find a quiet moment to settle in, and turn to page 10.

On more relaxing notes, this month's winners of the Poets' Playground poetry contest are published on pages 28 and 29. And Robin Conover shows how smartphone photography can still beautifully capture blooming wildflowers — or any subject, really, with a little know-how about portrait mode and other features. See page 42.

So many things to see, learn and try. It's another eventful April in *The Tennessee Magazine*!

Thanks for reading,



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# The leaf blower disaster of '79

*This poem lovingly chronicles the horrible happenings  
in a small Tennessee suburb*

Sit back, dear reader,  
and take in this tale  
Of a twister that roared  
Through a Tennessee town  
A long time ago,  
And it wasn't the weather,  
No, a circle of neighbors  
Had called the doom down.

On a trip to Tool Depot,  
Gerard found a gadget  
That almost caused tears  
To well up in his eyes.  
He brought the thing home,  
Turned it on in his driveway,  
The noise made him jump back  
In shock and surprise.

Soon, all his neighbors  
Were gathered around him  
To witness the source  
Of this god-awful sound.  
They covered their ears  
And grimaced in horror,  
And watched him maneuver  
This strange thing he found.

"IT'S A LEAF BLOWER!" he said.  
Big Ralph hollered, "WHAT?"  
"I SAID, IT BLOWS LEAVES!  
NO MORE NEED FOR A RAKE!"  
"IT'S A WHAT?" yelled Ol' Manny,  
In Big Ralph's direction.  
Ralph kinda shrugged,  
"MY HEAD'S STARTING TO ACHE!"

Charlotte came running,  
"I THOUGHT I HEARD SIRENS!  
IS EVERYTHING GOOD?  
WHAT THE (BLEEP) IS THAT NOISE?"  
"IT'S A LEAF BLOWER, CHARLOTTE!"  
Yelled Donnie R., frowning,  
"A WHAT?" she screamed back,  
Wincing hard at the boys.

"WE CAN THROW OUT OUR  
BROOMS!"  
Gerard told his neighbors,  
"BUT MY BROOM IS SO QUIET!  
WHY THROW IT AWAY?"  
"WE'LL NEED TO WEAR  
HEADPHONES  
TO CANCEL THE RACKET!"  
"I'M ALREADY HALF-DEAF!"  
Shouted Ralph o'er the fray.

"YOU SHOULD ALL WEAR 'EM!"  
Yelled Gerard, "IT'S THE FUTURE!"  
And they all looked sad  
For a moment or more.  
"OUR RAKES AND OUR BROOMS  
ARE PASSE!" Gerard hollered,  
"IT'S LEAF BLOWERS, BABY!  
AND WE'RE ON THE GROUND FLOOR!"

Gerard took the straps,  
Threw 'em over his shoulders,  
Pointed that thing  
Toward a pile of debris.  
It burst up in chaos,  
Swirled over their heads,  
And fell to the driveway  
Next door, casually.

## These leaf blower facts will blow your mind

Gas-powered leaf blowers operate at 90-100 decibels, depending on the model; 100 decibels is equivalent to a motorcycle engine, chainsaw or a loud rock concert. Exposure to 100 decibels can cause permanent hearing damage after just 15 minutes, and 100 decibels can be heard up to 3 miles away. Electric leaf blowers are a little better at 60-85 decibels but still require hearing protection. While battery-operated leaf blowers generally operate in the 55-80 decibel range, hearing protection is still recommended.

Brooms and rakes operate at 10-20 decibels and can be safely operated without hearing protection. Many people report being able to talk to their neighbors and other people while operating a broom or rake. If you see people raking with headphones on, they are probably just listening to a podcast, which they can hear easily.

Studies show that there are two kinds of leaf blower operators: those who don't realize how obnoxious the blowers are and those who realize it but use them anyway.

Leaf blower enthusiasts claim the apparatus reduces injuries. But broom injuries count for fewer than 75 emergency room visits annually in the U.S. and generally involve splinters.

Thousands of Americans, however, report ear pain and hearing damage from leaf blowers and the like each year, with children being particularly susceptible.

Gas-powered leaf blowers are facing increased restrictions across Europe, with some cities like Zurich banning them altogether.

Most ordinances prohibit noise exceeding 70-85 decibels in commercial areas, with stricter rules for residential areas. Most neighborhoods restrict construction noise before 8 a.m. and sometimes as late as 9 a.m. or 10 a.m.

“YOU JUST MOVED IT TO MY YARD!”  
Yelled Bob with the sideburns.  
Gerard said, “GET YOU ONE,  
AND PASS IT ON DOWN!”  
“TO MY YARD?” said Ralph.  
“I JUST RAKED UP MY CLIPPINGS!  
IT TOOK ME ALL MORNING,  
AND THEN SOME, YOU CLOWN!”

Well, this went on all day  
And into the weekend,  
Gerard and his leaf blower,  
Big headphones on.  
Till one by one, neighbors  
Made haste to Tool Depot  
To blow Gerard’s clippings  
Back out of their lawn.

Forty-three neighbors  
Soon owned a leaf blower,  
Noise-blocking headphones  
Strapped to their head.  
Threw out their brooms  
And their trash bags. Who needs ‘em?  
When your neighbor next door  
Is your trash bag instead?

Blowing it one way,  
Then blowing it back,  
Spinning debris  
In a circle, until  
The sky ‘bove the suburb  
Grew darkish and stormy  
And a funnel cloud formed  
Over Power Line Hill.

That train whistle sound  
They say signals a twister,  
Well, nobody heard it,  
(Them headphones and all).  
And the leaf blowers drowned out  
The birds who were squawkin’.  
The storm hit them folks  
Like a cinder block wall.

Gerard saw a tree  
Flying over his shoulder,  
Took off his headphones  
And ran back inside.  
Neighbors took cover,  
The storm didn’t stop  
Till the last of the leaf blowers  
Sputtered and died.

Well, Gerard and his neighbors,  
They rebuilt their suburb,  
Raked up debris  
And hauled it away.  
And now they take naps  
On their porch in the sunshine,  
And listen to robins  
And squirrels as they play.

OK, this is bull,  
Y’all know it ain’t so.  
Those leaf blowers  
Ain’t going nowhere, it seems.  
But here in my head,  
I can make up my own world,  
Till a leaf blower starts up  
And crashes my dreams.





Photo courtesy of Discovery Park of America



Photo provided by the Williamson County Parks and Recreation Department

# Festive Festivals

VOLUME 2: An inside look into some of the historical festivals found in the Volunteer State

Story by Amber Weaver

Whether it's the smell of a delicious turkey leg, the pride of seeing your loved ones in a reenactment or even the heritage finds you'll purchase from local craftsmen, festivals are a point of joy in our lives — joy that is shared among communities, tourists and, most importantly, family.

Thankfully, here in Tennessee, we have festivals that stretch from the western plains to the mountains in the east. What's even better is that they take place year-round and include something for everyone. Here are three history-based ones to add to your calendar as must-attend events this year as our state and nation commemorate America's 250th birthday.

## 2026 David Crockett Homestead and Bluegrass Festival

Union City — Oct. 23-24

[discoveryparkofamerica.com/event/2026-david-crockett-homestead-and-heritage-festival](https://discoveryparkofamerica.com/event/2026-david-crockett-homestead-and-heritage-festival)

Step into the world of early Tennessee at the 2026 David Crockett Homestead and Bluegrass Festival. Toward the end of October at the Discovery Park of America, a two-day celebration is found honoring not only David Crockett's legacy but also traditional crafts, homesteading skills and Appalachian music.

"David Crockett is very near and dear to Obion County and the Discovery Park," said Clare Saum, director of marketing at the Discovery Park of America. "Our mission is to inspire children and adults to see beyond. We felt that highlighting David Crockett in such a way

perfectly aligns with that mission, and it's a fun way to have educational activities for students who might not have been exposed to his history."



Photo courtesy of Discovery Park of America

In the second year of the festival, the focus remains on celebrating



Photo courtesy of  
**Discovery Park of  
America**



Photo courtesy of  
**Discovery Park of  
America**

craftsmanship, community and the enduring spirit of the Tennessee frontier. Friday's events are designed especially for students, featuring educational demonstrations and hands-on learning experiences that bring frontier history to life. Demonstrations and sessions will be held throughout the event spotlighting heritage woodworking, blacksmithing, soap and candle making, broom making, fiber arts, chair caning, leatherworking, wood turning, dyeing, food preservation, beekeeping and trapping. Homesteading topics will cover livestock, gardening, regenerative agriculture, tractors, urban homesteading and renewable energy. There will also be some changes to look forward to, including a vibrant artisan marketplace and live bluegrass music on both days.

"I think David Crockett is so much more than just a folk hero," Saum said. "There's no better way to highlight David Crockett's impact and the changes he made as a congressman. The changes he made left an everlasting impact on Tennessee, and we get to share that with generations to come."



Photo courtesy of  
**Discovery Park of  
America**

## Tennessee Renaissance Festival

Arrington — May 2-3, 9-10, 16-17, 23-25 and 30-31

[tnrenfest.com](http://tnrenfest.com)

Moving to Middle Tennessee Electric's service territory, for 40 years the Tennessee Renaissance Festival has been celebrated every weekend in May plus Memorial Day. Three years into the event, Mike and Jackie Freeman built Williamson County's very own modern fairytale scene, Castle Gwynn,

and it has served as the backdrop of the festival or, some would say, community there ever since.

"Community is the perfect word to describe it," said Devon Russell, general manager for the festival. "While we see 10,000 people a day in those weekends, there is still such a sense of community among this festival. It's crazy how small it feels and how close-knit everyone seems to be. It is really something they look forward to every year."

The month-long immersive fair

transports visitors to a 16th-century English village named Covington Glen featuring jousts, magic shows, musical performances and, of course, themed food like the giant turkey leg. This year, the event will showcase time-honored favorites as well as some new additions.

“There’s a lot of familiarity,” Russell said. “It’s neat to see this middle ground where there are vendors and entertainers who have been there since this festival started. They have return guests coming to see them, and they’re also finding new favorites every year.”

New entertainment groups, new activities like the Fairy Flower Crown Craft and the Queen’s Promenade Dance Class, and 10 new artisan vendors in addition to the 80 that are returning are all on the books for this year. Demonstrations will also be performed over glass blowing, knife throwing and fire dancing.

“At any age and with any interests, there is a little bit of something for everybody at the Tennessee Renaissance Festival,” said Kerri Hudson, public information coordinator for Williamson County Parks and Recreation.

## Heritage Days

Rogersville — Oct. 10-11

[rogersvilleheritage.org/heritage-days-festival](http://rogersvilleheritage.org/heritage-days-festival)

Since 1979, Holston Electric Cooperative has provided service for the Heritage Days festival that takes place in Rogersville every year. In fact, the first festival held of its kind was a fundraiser to have utilities moved underground in the city’s downtown and have the streetlamps put in that are present today.

“What began nearly five decades ago as a small hometown celebration has evolved into one of the region’s



Photo provided by  
the Williamson County Parks  
and Recreation Department



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the Williamson  
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Department



Photo by  
Melissa Nelson



Photo by  
Sheldon Livesay

premier fall festivals,” said Melissa Nelson, executive director for the Rogersville Heritage Association. “Heritage Days has grown beautifully over the years — not just in size but in purpose and impact. Attendance has grown to nearly 30,000, but the heart of the festival has not changed.”

During the second full weekend in October, visitors can step into the charm and energy of both tradition and fresh experiences. More than 100 artisans and craft vendors, live

music and entertainment, hands-on historical demonstrations and a variety of regional foods — including homemade pies and the Great Chili Cook-Off — that celebrate Appalachian flavor are ready to be discovered. There’s something for every age too, including the Heritage Children’s Train that little ones can ride throughout the festival. While the festival has become a great economic driver and allows the town to look toward the future, it also brings history to life with Civil War reenac-

tors who vividly portray soldiers and camp life.

“For Rogersville, it is a time when our history comes to life in the streets where it actually happened,” Nelson said. “Generations gather side by side, sharing stories, traditions, music and craftsmanship that have shaped this town for nearly 250 years. It’s a celebration of our identity — our architecture, our Appalachian roots, our churches, our families and the deep sense of pride we have in calling Rogersville home.”

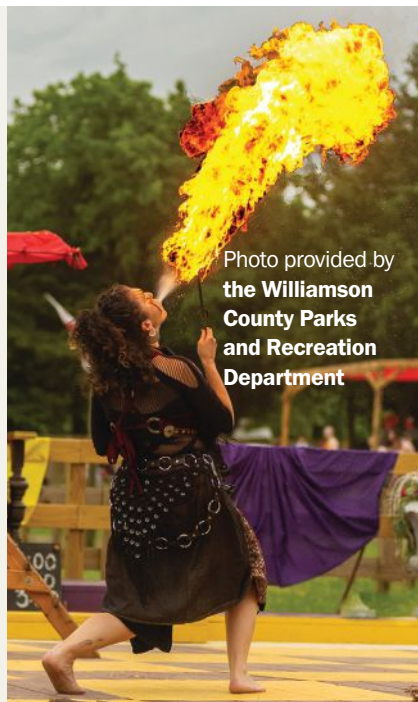


Photo provided by  
the Williamson  
County Parks  
and Recreation  
Department

## Discover more Tennessee festivals!



Granville — July 25  
**Upper Cumberland Family History and Genealogy Festival**  
[granvilletn.com/family-history-festival](http://granvilletn.com/family-history-festival)

Spencer — Sept. 11-13  
**48th Annual Mountaineer Folk Festival**  
[tnstateparks.com/parks/event\\_details/fall-creek-falls/#/?event=48th-annual-mountaineer-folk-festival-9-11-13-2026](http://tnstateparks.com/parks/event_details/fall-creek-falls/#/?event=48th-annual-mountaineer-folk-festival-9-11-13-2026)

Cowan — Sept. 18-20  
**Fall Heritage Festival**  
[fallheritagefestival.org](http://fallheritagefestival.org)

Jonesborough — Oct. 2-4  
**National Storytelling Festival**  
[storytellingcenter.net/festival/main](http://storytellingcenter.net/festival/main)

# Tennessee Events

Festivals, celebrations and other happenings around the state

May 2

## Tennessee Maneuvers Remembered

Downtown Carthage.  
[smithcountyhistoricaltourism.org](http://smithcountyhistoricaltourism.org)

Every first Saturday in May, an event takes place in downtown Carthage called Tennessee Maneuvers Remembered.

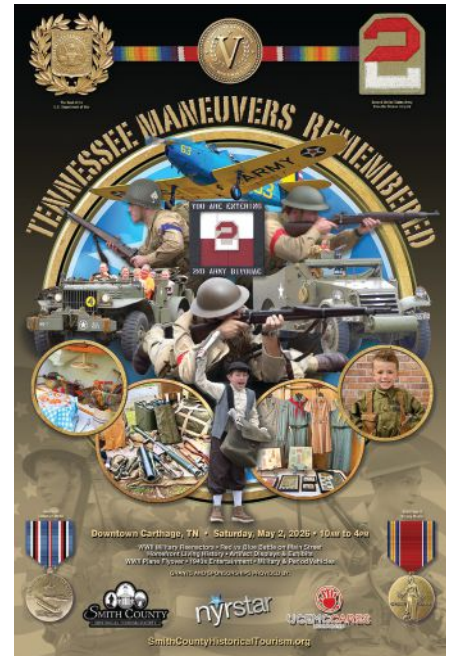
What were Tennessee Maneuvers? As found on the Smith County Historical Tourism website, they were “combat college for troop leading.” During World War II, the idea was for soldiers to make mistakes during maneuvers

(in practice scenarios) versus while in battle.

Maneuvers took place in Middle Tennessee for more than 52 weeks over the span of three years of the war, according to the website.

This event seeks to teach attendees about the history of Tennessee Maneuvers through education and demonstration booths, a red vs. blue battle, military/period vehicles, a World War II plane flyover, 1940s entertainment and artifact/sweetheart displays.

This year, the event is taking place on Saturday, May 2, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, go to [smithcountyhistoricaltourism.org](http://smithcountyhistoricaltourism.org).



Event poster courtesy of Tennessee Maneuvers Remembered.

## West Tennessee

APRIL 11

### Fayette Cares Plant Sale

Oakland Elementary School.  
901-465-3802  
or [fayettecares.org/plants](http://fayettecares.org/plants)

APRIL 18

### Lawn and Garden Expo 2026

Brighton High School. 901-476-0231 or  
[tiptoncountymastergardeners.com](http://tiptoncountymastergardeners.com)

APRIL 23-25

### Sounds Like Collierville: Celebrating 250 Years Through Song

Collierville Town Square. 901-457-2770 or  
[colliervilletn.gov/visitors/explore-collierville](http://colliervilletn.gov/visitors/explore-collierville)

APRIL 24

### Fayette Cares Golf Tournament

Fair Oaks Golf Club, Oakland.  
901-465-3802 or [fayettecares.org/golf](http://fayettecares.org/golf)

## Middle Tennessee

APRIL 9-11

### Mule Day

Columbia. 931-381-9557 or  
[muleday.com](http://muleday.com)

APRIL 10-12

### Trails & Trilliums

Beersheba Springs, Tennessee.  
[friendsofsouthcumberland.org/trails-and-trilliums](http://friendsofsouthcumberland.org/trails-and-trilliums)

APRIL 11

### Annual Herb and Plant Sale

The Fairgrounds Nashville.  
[herbsocietyofnashville@gmail.com](mailto:herbsocietyofnashville@gmail.com) or  
[herbsocietynashville.org](http://herbsocietynashville.org)

APRIL 11

### Perennial Plant Society Annual Plant Sale

Woodmont Hills Church, Nashville.  
312-259-6350 or [ppsmtn.org](http://ppsmtn.org)

APRIL 18

### Rutherford County's Earth Day Celebration

Murfreesboro Historic Downtown Square.  
[amybyers@mte.com](mailto:amybyers@mte.com) or [facebook.com/RCEarthDay](https://facebook.com/RCEarthDay)




SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS: [events@tnmagazine.org](mailto:events@tnmagazine.org)

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APRIL 25-26

## St. Jude Rock 'N' Roll Series

Downtown Nashville. 813-868-5940 or [runrocknroll.com/events/nashville](http://runrocknroll.com/events/nashville)

MAY 2

## Murfreesboro Breakfast Rotary's 14th Annual Boro BBQ Festival

Hop Springs, Murfreesboro. 615-450-1907 or [borobbqfest.com](http://borobbqfest.com)

MAY 2

## Timeless Treasures: Spring Hill Founders' Day Historic Home Tour

Spring Hill Main Street. 931-626-1357 or [historicspringhilltn.org](http://historicspringhilltn.org)

MAY 2

## WCMGA Garden Festival and Plant Sale

Williamson County Ag Expo Park, Franklin. 615-790-5721 or [wcmga.net](http://wcmga.net)

## East Tennessee

APRIL 18

## Grainger's Green Jubilee 'Your Garden Starts Here'

Rutledge Elementary School. 865-828-4222 or [graingercochamber.org](http://graingercochamber.org)

APRIL 24-25

## Flower, Lawn and Garden Festival

Cumberland County Community Complex, Crossville. 931-484-6743 or [cmga.org](http://cmga.org)

APRIL 24-25

## The Polk County Ramp Tramp Festival

4-H Camp McCroy, Reliance. 423-338-4503 or [ramptrampfestival.com](http://ramptrampfestival.com)

APRIL 24, MAY 1

## Sheep Shearing Days

Museum of Appalachia, Clinton. 865-494-7680 or [museumofappalachia.org](http://museumofappalachia.org)

MAY 2

## 34th Annual Ralph Stanton Memorial Bass Tournament

Quarryville Boat Ramp, Mooresburg. 423-272-2695 or [hawkinscorescuesquad.org/bass-tournament](http://hawkinscorescuesquad.org/bass-tournament)

MAY 15-16

## Bloomin' BBQ Music and Food Festival

Historic downtown Sevierville. 865-453-6411 or [info@visitsevierville.com](mailto:info@visitsevierville.com)

[tnmagazine.org/events](http://tnmagazine.org/events)

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## Welcome to Cadiz-Lake Barkley

### SPRING STARTS HERE

Spring is a wonderful time to discover Lake Barkley. As the season unfolds, Cadiz invites you to make a weekend of it with boating, fishing, hiking, golf and antique shopping in our historic downtown. Stay close to the water in a cabin, a cozy bed-and-breakfast or a lakeside glamping site designed for easy mornings and slow afternoons. Then, mark your calendar for the 50th anniversary of the Trigg County Country Ham Festival this October, celebrating Kentucky heritage with food, music, crafts and friendly small-town charm.

[GoCadiz.com/things-to-do](http://GoCadiz.com/things-to-do)



## Taste the Fun in Cave City

### BOURBON, COFFEE AND SOUTHERN DISHES

Cave City is the gateway to Mammoth Cave National Park, but there's more to Cave City than caves. Sample spirits at two new tasting rooms, with another craft distillery opening this spring. Stop by Cave City Cars and Coffee for some Saturday morning fun. Hungry? The mouthwatering Southern plates at Buckingham's Honey and Oak are a must.

[CaveCity.com](http://CaveCity.com)



## Lift Your Spirits

### EXPLORE THE WINE, WHISKEY & ALE TRAIL

Just 20 minutes south of Louisville, explore the Bullitt County Wine, Whiskey & Ale Trail. Discover the James B. Beam American Outpost & Distillery, the Four Roses Bourbon Warehouse & Bottling Experience and Coxs Creek Distilling. The trail also features four award-winning wineries and two craft breweries. Get a free souvenir glass when you complete the trail.

[TravelBullitt.org](http://TravelBullitt.org)



# Safety starts before the climb



**A**t Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation, safety comes first. Protecting the people who restore power and the members they serve is the foundation of every job. From helmets to boots, every piece of gear worn or used by lineworkers is designed to prevent injuries and keep work moving safely. Here are a few items crews depend on every day.

## Hard hat

**What it is:** A hard hat is a protective helmet worn whenever lineworkers are on the job, especially near poles, equipment or overhead lines.

**What risk it reduces:** Hard hats protect against head injuries from falling tools, branches, equipment or unexpected contact with energized lines.

**How it helps members:** Hard hats help lineworkers work safely and efficiently, keeping restoration efforts moving and protecting everyone on the jobsite.

## Safety glasses

**What they are:** Safety glasses are impact-resistant eyewear designed for outdoor and electrical work.

**What risk they reduce:** Safety glasses protect eyes from flying debris, dust, ice, wind, sparks and other hazards common during line work.

**How they help members:** Safety glasses allow lineworkers to maintain clear vision and work precisely and safely, reducing the risk of mistakes that could delay repairs.

## High-visibility vest

**What it is:** A high-visibility vest is a bright, reflective vest worn over regular work clothing, especially near roadways or in dark conditions.

**What risk it reduces:** High-visibility vests make lineworkers easier to see for drivers, equipment operators and fellow crew members, reducing the risk of vehicle or equipment accidents.

**How it helps members:** High-visibility vests enhance visibility, keeping work zones safer and helping crews stay focused on restoring power without unnecessary interruptions.

## Safety gloves

**What they are:** Safety gloves are specialized, insulated gloves designed specifically for electrical work.

**What risk they reduce:** Safety gloves protect hands from electrical contact, cuts, burns and extreme temperatures.

**How they help members:** Safety gloves provide proper hand protection, allowing lineworkers to handle equipment safely and

confidently, helping ensure reliable repairs.

## Tool belt

**What it is:** A tool belt is a sturdy belt that holds essential tools and safety equipment within easy reach.

**What risk it reduces:** Tool belts keep tools secured, reducing the chance of dropped objects and minimizing unnecessary movement while working at heights.

**How it helps members:** Tool belts allow efficient access to tools that allows lineworkers to complete tasks safely and quickly, which can shorten outage times while maintaining safety standards.

## Work boots

**What they are:** Work boots are protective, heavy-duty boots designed for safety, climbing and electrical hazard protection.

**What risk they reduce:** Work boots protect against slips, falls, sharp objects, heavy equipment and rough ground.

**How they help members:** Work boots secure lineworkers' footing, allowing them to move safely and confidently around jobsites and preventing injuries that could slow restoration efforts.

Lineworkers' gear is inspected regularly, and crews train extensively to use it correctly. Those safety procedures must be followed every time, even when they add minutes to a repair, because keeping power flowing starts with keeping people safe.

For CEMC, protecting our members and employees will always be top priority. We're grateful for our employees' dedication to working safely from head to toe.

# LINEWORKER GEAR



## HARD HAT

A hard hat is a protective helmet worn whenever lineworkers are on the job, especially near poles, equipment or overhead lines.



## SAFETY GLASSES

Safety glasses are impact-resistant eyewear designed for outdoor and electrical work.



## HIGH-VISIBILITY VEST

A high-visibility vest is a bright, reflective vest worn over regular work clothing, especially near roadways or in dark conditions.



## SAFETY GLOVES

Safety gloves are specialized, insulated gloves designed specifically for electrical work.



## TOOL BELT

A tool belt is a sturdy belt that holds essential tools and safety equipment within easy reach.



## WORK BOOTS

Work boots are protective, heavy-duty boots designed for safety, climbing and electrical hazard protection.





## MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY

Thursday, May 14 • 10:30 am - 1:30 pm

Free lunch & giveaways at your local CEMC office!

### Save the date: CEMC Member Appreciation Day is Thursday, May 14

Join us at your local Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation office on Thursday, May 14, for Member Appreciation Day! Enjoy grilled hot dogs, chips, cookies and soft drinks from 10:30 a.m.

to 1:30 p.m. at the following CEMC locations: Ashland City, Clarksville, Dover, Portland, Springfield and White House.

Members who attend will also have the opportunity to enter a drawing to win an electric grill,

with one winner selected at each location. (Limit one entry per household. Only members present at the event may register.)

Mark your calendars and make plans to join us for Member Appreciation Day on Thursday, May 14.

### Go paperless for a chance to win a \$100 bill credit!

Are you looking for an easy way to manage your electric and internet bills while reducing the paper clutter on your countertops?

Paperless billing from Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation and Cumberland Connect is an easy way to receive your monthly bill without the hassle of sifting through piles of mail, keeping up with paper bills, writing and mailing checks and missing payment dates due to delivery delays.

To sign up, visit [cemc.org](http://cemc.org), log in to your SmartHub account, and choose “Yes” when prompted to turn off paper bills. You can also turn off paper bills through the SmartHub mobile app. Once you’ve signed up, you’ll receive an email notification each month when your bill is ready, so you can take care of business without waiting for a paper bill to arrive.

In honor of Earth Day, CEMC and Cumberland Connect are

offering an incentive for members who participate in paperless billing. All members enrolled in paperless billing prior to Wednesday, April 22 (Earth Day), will be entered into a drawing for \$100 bill credits! Five lucky members will win! Members who have already enrolled in paperless billing will be automatically entered into the contest.

Good luck, and thank you for going green with paperless billing!

# CEMC shares its story during day on the hill

**E**lectric cooperative leaders from across the state met in Nashville on Tuesday, Feb. 17, through Wednesday, Feb. 18, for the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association's 2026 Legislative Conference.

"Reliable, affordable electricity is the foundation for strong communities and local economies," said Justin Maierhofer, TECA's senior vice president of government affairs. "Whether we're responding to an ice storm or serving families on an ordinary day, electric cooperatives are focused on keeping the lights on and costs low. Our role at the Legislative Conference is to make sure policymakers understand the real impact their decisions have on the people and communities we serve every day."

On Tuesday, directors and staff from Cumberland Electric Membership

Corporation connected with more than 150 other electric co-op members and employees to learn more about pressing legislation that will impact electric co-ops and the members they serve. On Wednesday, co-op leaders met with their legislators during the day on the hill at the Cordell Hull State Office Building and shared the important role co-ops play in their communities.

"There is real power in electric cooperatives gathering in one place to speak with a unified voice," said CEMC General Manager Chris Davis. "This conference allows us not only to learn from one another but also to sit down face-to-face with our state legislators and share how their decisions directly impact the members and communities we serve every day."

**Below, CEMC directors and staff meet with Rep. Johnny Garrett to discuss issues impacting electric co-ops and rural Tennessee during the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association's 2026 Legislative Conference. From left are Bryan Watson, Eddie Swan, Rep. Garrett, Chris Davis, Jeannie Beauchamp, Edward Oliver, Annebelle Pittenger, David Abernathy, Thomas Talley, Charlie Hancock, Tommy Whittaker and Wes Aymett.**



# Portland celebrates 85th Annual Middle Tennessee Strawberry Festival

The Portland Chamber of Commerce is proud to announce the 85th Annual Middle Tennessee Strawberry Festival, happening Friday and Saturday, May 8 and 9, with special events planned throughout the week. This year's patriotic theme, "Berry Proud to Be an American," promises a celebration filled with community spirit, family fun and a long-standing tradition that continues to make history in Middle Tennessee.

Families, friends, and visitors from near and far are invited to experience one of Tennessee's most beloved annual festivals. From live entertainment and carnival rides to fresh strawberries and a hometown parade, there's something for everyone.

## A week of festivities

**May 1-2:** Strawberry Quilt Show at Richland Gym.

**May 5-9:** Carnival fun all week long at Richland Park.

**May 5:** Four-Person Golf Scramble at Kenny Perry's Country Creek Golf Course. Entry fee is \$600 per team and includes breakfast, lunch, mulligans and games package.

**May 7:** Portland Farmers Market 2026 grand opening from 3:30 to 7 p.m. at Richland Park.

**May 7:** Strawberry Festival Art Showcase at Richland Gym from 4 to 7:30 p.m.

**May 8:** Strawberry Jam Concert featuring Nashville Yacht Club at 6 p.m. on the Old Hickory Credit Union Stage. Live music and food vendors begin at 5 p.m. (*Bring a chair or rent one for \$5 while supplies last.*) Fireworks begin at 8:30 p.m. (*Free parking and shuttle service available at Portland High School from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m.*)

## May 9: Main Festival Day!

- Rotary Club Pancake Breakfast begins at 7 a.m. at Portland First Baptist Church.
- Strawberry Stride 5K Walk/Run sponsored by Portland High School Athletics – 8 a.m. at Portland High School.
- Kid Town USA – Play all day for \$5 beginning at 9 a.m.
- Mechanical Bull rides – \$5 per ride, cash only.
- Strawberry Jam live entertainment – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Strawberry Lane: Fresh strawberries for sale – while supplies last, beginning at 10 a.m.
- Magic Shows on the N. Russell Stage at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.
- Meet and Greet with Robocars and AmirrorCAN MEN at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.
- Visit more than 225 vendors across six festival locations.
- Bingo begins at 1 p.m.
- Festival Parade begins at 4 p.m. Applications for entry are available online at [MiddleTNStrawberryFestival.com](http://MiddleTNStrawberryFestival.com).
- FREE parking and shuttle at Portland High School and Generation Church beginning at

10 a.m. (*Accessible parking and shuttle available at Generation Church*).

- Meet mascot Patch, purchase official merchandise, and visit the "Where Did You Travel From?" booth.

## Continuing a sweet tradition

The Portland Chamber of Commerce and the City of Portland look forward to welcoming both longtime attendees and first-time visitors to this milestone 85th celebration.

For additional details and updates, visit [MiddleTNStrawberryFestival.com](http://MiddleTNStrawberryFestival.com) or call the chamber at 615-325-9032.



# A smarter way to garden

## Gardening with a little help from smart technology



If you've lived in Tennessee long enough, you know when spring has officially arrived. The lawn mower comes out, pollen covers everything in sight and someone in your neighborhood is already planting tomatoes way too early.

Springtime is when many of us start paying attention to our yards again. For years, that meant setting sprinkler timers and guessing whether we'd watered the grass enough or too much. Nowadays, more homeowners are adding something new to the routine: smart technology.

Don't worry — smart gardening doesn't mean going hands off and letting a computer run the show. It just means adding a few tools to help you make better decisions for your plants and eliminate a lot of the guesswork. Especially in Tennessee, where weather can swing from soaking rain to dry heat in a matter of days.

### Smarter watering

If you've ever set a sprinkler to run at sunrise only to wake up and find it's raining, you already understand the appeal of smart irrigation.

Today's connected sprinkler controllers pull in local, real-time weather data and adjust automatically. If there is rain in the forecast, the controller will skip a cycle. During a heat wave, it will extend your sprinklers' run times. You can check or change everything from your phone

instead of fiddling with a plastic timer mounted in the garage.

For larger yards or rural properties, controlling your system remotely is especially helpful. Walking a couple of acres to check watering zones is not most people's idea of a relaxing Saturday.

Smart sprinkler controllers also help with a problem that is easy to fall into: overwatering. Tennessee lawns are often watered more than they need to be. Too much water can stress plants just as much as too little. A system that responds to real conditions and live data instead of guesswork can save water and improve results at the same time.

### Monitoring the soil

Gardening has always involved a little trial and error. Keeping an eye on your plants used to mean sticking your finger in the soil, looking at the leaves and hoping you're reading the signs correctly.

Now there are soil sensors that sit in garden beds and tell you exactly how much moisture is present. Some track temperature and sunlight too. Instead of guessing, you get a notification on your phone that your raised bed is drying out or that the soil is still holding moisture from last night's rain.

These same technologies are already being used on a much bigger scale across Tennessee farms. Precision agriculture tools rely on connectivity to manage irrigation

and monitor crops. The backyard version is simply a smaller, more affordable step in the same direction.

### Beyond the plants

The connected garden doesn't stop at irrigation. Outdoor cameras help protect equipment and monitor plants. Smart lighting can reduce wasted energy while keeping walkways safe. Personal weather stations mounted on fences provide hyper-local forecasts that are often more accurate than what you see on TV.

Even small greenhouses can now use automated vents that open when temperatures climb too high. No more sprinting outside because the sun suddenly came out.

### Extending your connection

Now that reliable broadband has become the standard across CEMC's service area, homeowners are discovering that connectivity is about more than streaming or email. It supports irrigation systems, weather stations, security cameras and the growing number of smart devices that live outside the four walls of the home. With new options like Cumberland Connect's Outdoor Wi-Fi coverage, that connection can extend beyond the walls of your home.

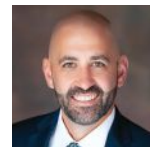
None of this technology replaces good old hands-in-the-dirt gardening. But this spring, you could let your garden do a little more thinking for itself.



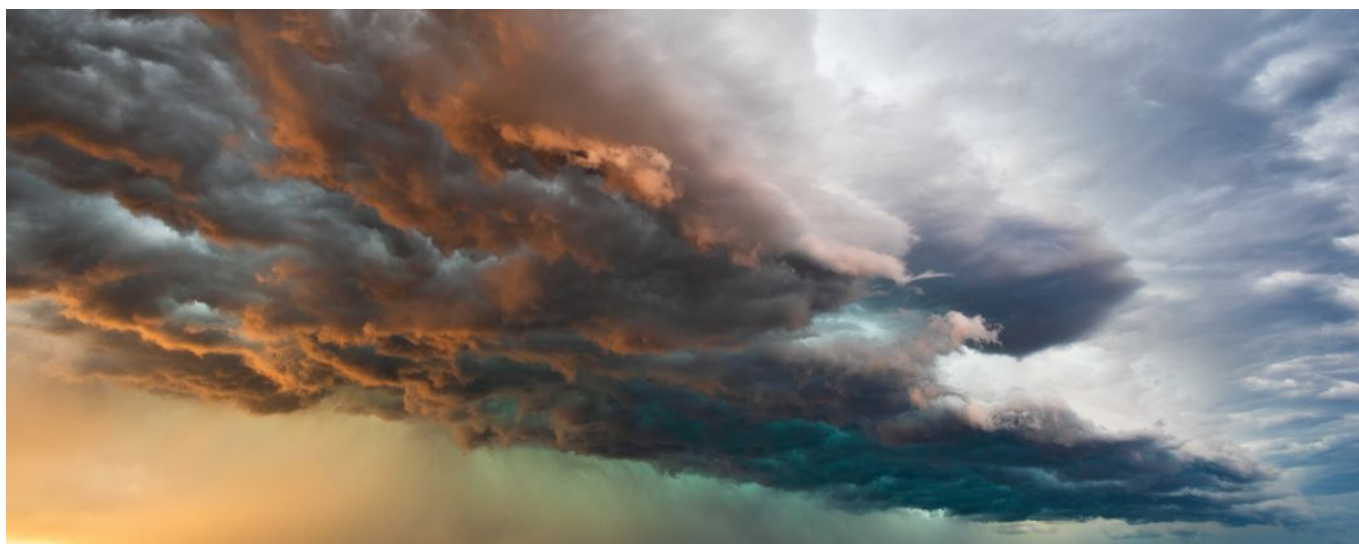
*This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*



Stay connected inside and out!  
Scan to learn about Outdoor  
Wi-Fi from Cumberland Connect.



## Practical ways to stay safe and save money during storm season



**Q:** How can I protect my home and be prepared for storm season?

**A:** Smart storm preparation doesn't just keep your family safe — it can also help prevent costly damage, wasted energy and expensive repairs.

### Secure the basics

First, make sure you have access to a place to shelter during extreme weather events. Identify the strongest portion of your home — typically the lowest level — with minimal or no glass. Consider stocking your shelter with flashlights, camp chairs, bottled water and a few shelf-stable snacks and meals. To help pass the time, stow away a few magazines and games to keep

the family occupied during longer weather events!

If your home doesn't have a basement or sheltered area on the first floor, coordinate with your neighbors or identify a nearby community shelter.

### Stop the surge

Not only can powerful storms lead to power outages, but they can also cause unanticipated voltage spikes that can damage or destroy appliances, electronics and HVAC systems.

Depending on the frequency of severe weather in your area, you might want to consider installing a whole-home surge protector. The device is installed at your electrical panel and acts like a shield for everything in your house. It diverts excess voltage away from sensitive equipment —

such as computers, TVs and appliances — before the surge can cause damage.

### Invest in a generator

A home generator can be a lifesaver during extended outages. Portable generators that run on gas and/or propane can keep the goodies in your fridge and freezer from spoiling, your phone charged and your household essentials running. They're also pretty great for tailgating, camping and family get-togethers!

If you live in an area prone to extended outages, a whole-home generator or a battery backup system could be a worthwhile investment. Whole-home generators are permanently installed and can power your entire home. They're powered by natural gas, gasoline or propane. So-

lar-powered battery backup systems are typically quieter than conventional generators and produce no carbon monoxide emissions. Make sure generators and battery systems are installed by professionals to be sure safety devices are in place to prevent electricity from backfeeding onto power lines.

Only use portable generators outdoors at least 5 feet away from your house. Most manufacturers recommend keeping them 20 feet away from windows, doors, vents and flammable structures.

### Weatherproofing for severe weather

Storm readiness and energy efficiency go hand in hand. A tightly sealed, well-insulated home is more comfortable in extreme heat or cold — and stays comfortable longer. Air leaks allow outdoor air to rush in

during storms, making your HVAC system work harder and driving up energy bills.

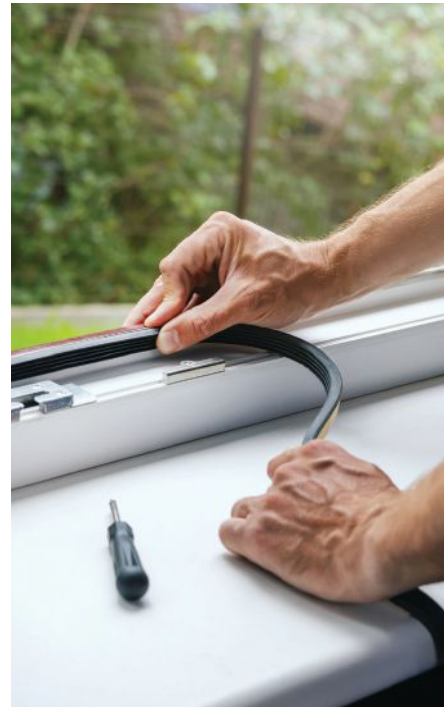
Installing weather stripping and caulking gaps are inexpensive improvements that can make a big difference.

Good insulation also helps your home coast through outages. In winter, it keeps the warmth inside longer. In summer, it slows down heat buildup. Attics and crawlspaces are especially important areas to insulate.

### Smart storm prep pays off

Storm preparation isn't just about surviving the next outage — it's about protecting your home, your budget and your peace of mind.

When your house is sealed, insulated and protected from power surges, it runs more efficiently every day, not just during bad weather.



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. Visit [EnergyRight.com](http://EnergyRight.com) for more energy-saving tips and recommendations.

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# Poets' Playground

Inspiring words from your neighbors

## AGE 8 AND YOUNGER

### *Tennessee Grasslands*

Over the prairies to the meadow. Deer chewing on grass. So much land as far as the eye can see. Look up and the birds fly so gallantly. Take your eyes off for one second to look at the pond. Look up again. They're gone. The sunset is what takes me away, pink, blue, orange. It's lovely. As I sigh, the air of Tennessee — so warm and lovely. Sitting on a rock, hard as metal, but unique. Everything is beautiful. Every speck and piece of air is special. Oh, I don't want to leave my home of Tennessee.

**Caroline Jones,**

*Middle Tennessee Electric*

## AGE 9-13



### *Joy from an Empty Cottage*

Firelight flickers onto a snow-draped valley from a cottage just over a hill. The house looks cheery, homey and snug though frost covers the window sill. An aroma of gingerbread drifts through the valley from the cottage's one chimney pipe. And sweet Christmas carols can be heard in the cabin all through the Christmas night. Children's laughter fills the small house and if you happen to pass, You're bound to pause and lean into the sill embracing the memories leading over the hill.

**Mariam Ostapenko,**

*Volunteer EC*

## AGE 14-18



### *My Dear Spring,*

Spring peeks its head around the corner  
Like a child waiting to pounce  
On a mother  
who is calling out their name.

Garden lions raise their heads  
Yellow mouths open wide  
Roaring proudly  
towards the sky.

Mockingbirds chatter  
High in the trees  
Arguing about the newest fashion  
And keeping feathers clean.

Squirrels gather below  
Planning for a heist  
Glancing toward the bird feeder  
Hanging nearby.

The tall oaks groan  
About growing pains  
From new leaves sprouting  
And heavy rain.

Now the child races  
Leaping into mother's arms  
Happily screeching  
"Here I was all along"

**Lily Boulineau,**

*Middle Tennessee Electric*

## AGE 19-22

### *The Holler*

When I speak normally, it  
bounces right back  
I let out a yell, it tries to retract  
My voice is a whisper, the softest  
of sounds  
It goes so far, floats beyond bounds

A delicate twig snaps under my shoe  
It bounced off the trees, right  
back to you  
I sing out a note, as blissful can be  
When it returns, it plays like a  
symphony

Leaves crunch as I make my return  
Up the hill, my legs start to burn  
So I turn around to look at the  
vibrant color  
Painted around my beautiful holler

**Imagen Ogden,**

*Middle Tennessee Electric*





#### AGE 23-64

##### *Where Time Learns to Breathe*

Tennessee unfolds slowly,  
not in spectacle, but in belonging.  
Mornings rise through misted hollows,  
the Smokies breathing blue and patient.  
Above them, the sky stretches wide and honest,  
pink at dawn, vast and forgiving by night.  
Rivers remember us —  
the Tennessee, the Cumberland —  
carrying stories past limestone and time.  
White-tailed deer pause at fence lines,  
hawks stitch quiet circles in open air,  
cicadas measure summer evenings.  
Living here means seasons speak clearly.  
Porches hold conversation and silence equally.  
Age finds room beneath this sky,  
where beauty is steady, rooted, enduring,  
and life moves with intention, not hurry.

**Margo Morlock,**  
*Tri-County Electric*

#### AGE 65 AND OLDER

##### *A Hero Comes Home*

He was an old man  
Who served his country well.  
He had fought in wars and had stories to tell.  
He fought where brothers fought brothers  
Signs all around of places he'd seen.  
He was there when they fought the British in New Orleans.  
Stately homes all gone now.  
Crumbling chimneys were all that remained.  
Franklin, Murfreesboro and Nashville  
They were all the same.  
When he lost an arm in a battle one day.  
They sent him home  
Home to the mountains in Tennessee.  
In summer or winter snow.  
This is where he wanted to go.

**Gloria Denney,**  
*Middle Tennessee Electric*

## 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](http://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, June 1. First-place poems will be published in the August 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](http://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.



## The night Nashville declared war on the United States



**This flag lay hidden in William Driver's house when the pro-war meeting took place at the Davidson County Courthouse on April 15, 1861.** National Museum of American History photo

I recently found a newspaper article about a remarkable pro-war rally that occurred in Nashville 155 years ago this month.

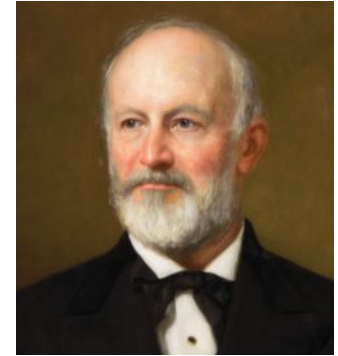
The background: As Tennessee (public school) fifth and eighth graders learn, the Volunteer State didn't secede from the Union at first. After Abraham Lincoln was elected president in the fall of 1860, South Carolina was first to leave the Union, on Dec. 20, 1860. It was followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas — all by Feb. 1, 1861.

On Feb. 8, 1861, Tennessee's voters went to the polls to vote on whether to secede. In advance of the vote, there were newspapers in favor of it and

newspapers against it. The *Memphis Daily Argus* called the idea of secession a "point of rational, international law," while the *Knoxville Whig* called it a "vile heresy."

In the referendum, 54% of Tennessee's voters chose not to secede.

Opposition to the Confederacy was greatest in East Tennessee. Because of its mountainous terrain, East Tennessee did not have as many large plantations such as the ones in West and Middle Tennessee. This lack of large plantations meant there were fewer enslaved people in East Tennessee. Because of this, East Tennesseans were less likely to want to fight a war to defend slavery.



**Vernon K. Stevenson**

George Healy artist; Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery

However, many Tennesseans changed their minds in April 1861. That month, Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter, and President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to join the U.S. Army.

Many people, even those who did not want to leave the Union, were angry that Lincoln wanted to force states back into it at gunpoint.

On Monday, April 15, there was a public meeting in favor of secession in the Davidson County Courthouse in Nashville. Despite pouring rain, the room was "jam full," according to a front-page article in the *Nashville Union-American*.

At the meeting, one person after another made speeches against Lincoln and in favor of war against the United States government, including (among others):

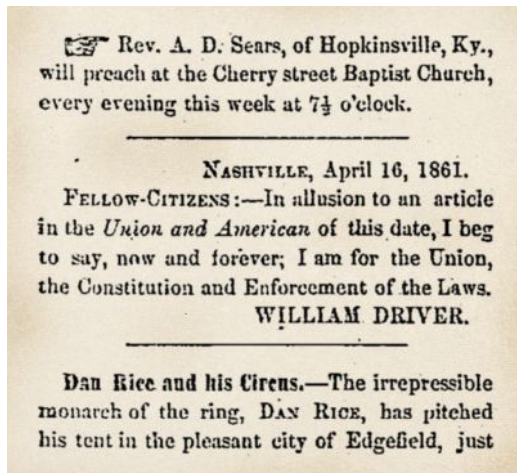


**Rev. J.B. McFerrin**

United Methodist Publishing House photo

- Nashville Mayor Richard B. Cheatham, who the reporter said was “applauded throughout” his speech. Cheatham said he intended to not only defy Lincoln’s order to disperse all “illegal assemblies” but to “cheer” such meetings and “bid them God speed in the righteous cause in which they were engaged” against the “tyrants and usurpers in Washington.”
- Vernon K. Stevenson, the president of the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad, who spoke “of all the wrongs we have endured with patience at the hands of the North.”
- Gen. William Moore, who had fought with Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812. “His voice, now tremulous with age, went to the hearts of his audience as he recounted the perils and valiant deeds of the fathers of some of those present, and invoked them as they loved the dead who died in the sacred cause of liberty, as they loved their country and their country’s honor, to stand forward now as one man to resist at whatever cost and whatever peril, aggressions upon our rights, and an unholy war upon our Southern brethren.”
- The Rev. J.B. McFerrin of the McKendree Methodist Church, who didn’t speak from the podium but “assured the assembly of his profound sympathy, and his devout prayer to God in the success of the right.”
- A young man from Mississippi, whose name the reporter did not know, who thanked everyone present for their sentiments and promised “a cordial welcome to the family of Confederate states.”

After the speakers concluded, the packed room of citizens adopted two resolutions unanimously. The first called on the Tennessee General Assembly to meet as soon as possible



*Republican Banner, April 17, 1862*

to prepare for war. The second urged people of different counties to “organize military companies under the laws of the state.”

“As the crowd dispersed in various directions, in the midst of the rain, which still continued to pour down, a thousand cheers went out for Southern independence,” the article concluded. “Again, we say, there had never been nothing like it before in the city of Nashville.”



**William Driver**  
*Tennessee State Library and Archives*

However, there was one Nashville resident who had the courage to not only side with the U.S. government but to proclaim his defiance publicly. His name was William Driver, and he would later be famous as the man who gave the American flag the nickname “Old Glory.” In 1861, Driver was a little-known shoe merchant who lived at 158 Summer Street (later Fifth Avenue). On April 17, the day after the article ran about the

meeting, a small advertisement appeared on page 3 of the (Nashville) *Republican Banner*. It said:

“Fellow-Citizens: In allusion to an article in the *Union-American* of this date, I beg to say, now and forever; I am for Union, the Constitution, and Enforcement of the Laws.”  
WILLIAM DRIVER.

We have no written evidence of retribution against Driver for stating this sentiment publicly. But Driver was so worried that secessionists would raid his home and burn his American flag that he hid it.

A few weeks after the meeting, Tennessee Gov. Isham Harris asked the General Assembly to put the matter to another statewide vote again on June 8, 1861.

This time, even more newspapers called for secession. “You will be called upon to exercise the right of suffrage in the most important election ever held in the state,” the *Nashville Patriot* said in an advance of the second referendum. “The government, under whose protection you have lived and prospered, has been converted into an instrument of oppression and tyranny.”

This time, Tennessee voted to secede.

The big shift in public opinion was in Middle Tennessee. In February, more than half of the Middle Tennessee voters sided against secession. In June, 88% voted to leave the Union.

In the latter part of 1861, soldiers from all over Tennessee signed up to fight. During the next four years, about 185,000 Tennesseans would sign up to fight for the Confederacy and 50,000 for the Union.

## South Pittsburg

# Cast iron constitution

*South Pittsburg takes a circuitous route to become the home of America's rural cookware and cornbread*

Story by Mark Johnson • Photographs by Robin Conover

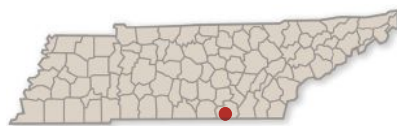
**T**here's a place in the southeast Tennessee county of Marion called South Pittsburg. You'll find it in the Sequatchie Valley, about 30 miles north of the Alabama state line and west of Chattanooga. This geographic setting gives South Pittsburg a dramatic natural backdrop: The rugged cliffs of the Cumberland Plateau rise sharply to the west while the broad waters of the Tennessee River shape the eastern edge of the valley.

I rolled into South Pittsburg via Interstate 24 from Nashville on a brisk December afternoon, and one of the first things I noticed is that the town doesn't revolve around a square with a courthouse in the center like many in Tennessee. Instead, South Pittsburg features its "main drag," Cedar Avenue, which contains a collection of storefronts; a recently restored 1950s-era theater; the headquarters of Sequachee Valley Electric Cooperative; and a smattering of banks, pharmacies and other community-related businesses. Immediately to the east of Cedar Avenue is the gigantic Lodge Cast Iron factory, the Highway 72 bypass and the Tennessee River. One block west runs Elm Avenue, which contains most of the town government buildings. Then, around 20 blocks of

historic homes — many dating back a century or more — climb their way up South Pittsburg Mountain, which overlooks the whole kit and kaboodle.

After entering the north end of Cedar Avenue, I turned right on Second Street and made my way to the Dixie Freeze restaurant — a small, retro meat-and-three dating back to the mid-1950s. There, I met my first interview "victims" of the day, Mayor

### An iron-clad destination



City of South Pittsburg  
Contact: 423-837-5012  
southpittsburg-tn.org

Shawn Hensley and City Administrator Michael Hudson. The three of us grabbed a table in the small dining room, ordered our lip-smackin' lunch plates (I chose the pork barbecue plate) and chatted about the town.

"South Pittsburg is a unique place," Michael told me. "Geographically, it's beautiful, and the landscape is suited for people who love the great

outdoors. Although the town itself is small, we're known for our high school sports, particularly the football team. The (South Pittsburg) Pirates have won seven state titles in the past and are going for their eighth Friday. (They won!) The Pirates are known all over the state, and some of the larger universities in the Southeast have our football coaches on speed dial."

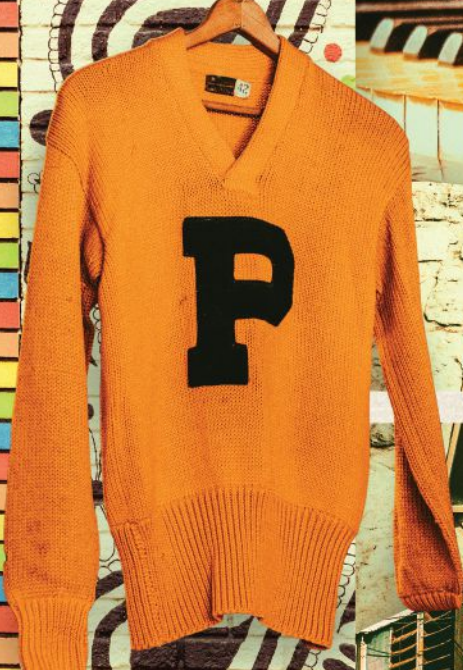
Shawn added that the success of South Pittsburg's high school sports can be largely attributed to the loyalty and support of the community.

"Nobody misses a football game here on Friday nights," he said. "The whole town turns out for it and supports it, just like they do with the cornbread festival."

That's right — South Pittsburg hosts an annual cornbread festival. But not only a cornbread festival, *the* cornbread festival, the national one. It's the cornbread festival that sets the standard for all other cornbread festivals.

(And, yes, there are others — I checked.)

Since 1997, the town has hosted the National Cornbread Festival (NCF) on the last full weekend of April. It's an event that annually draws around 23,000 Southern-fare-loving visitors to a town with a population of only

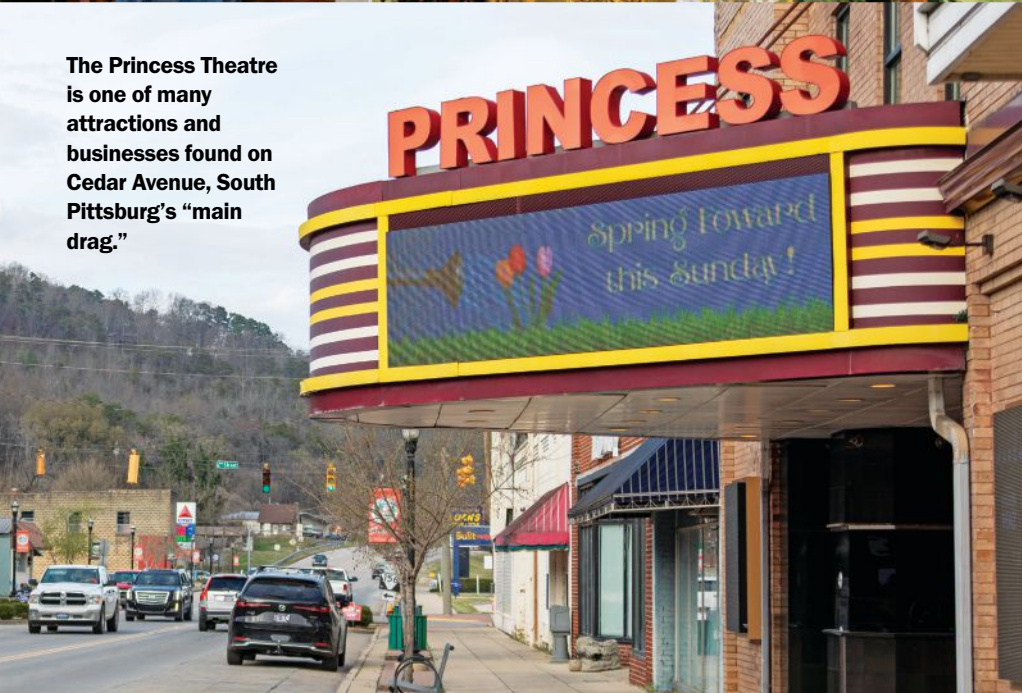




**This year's National Cornbread Festival will be held April 25-26.**  
Photo courtesy of Sequachee Valley Electric Cooperative and SVEConnect



**South Pittsburg Antiques owner Rick Horton decorates his storefront window.**



**The Princess Theatre is one of many attractions and businesses found on Cedar Avenue, South Pittsburg's "main drag."**

around 3,000. But the notoriety of the NCF and the town's football team is only eclipsed by one thing, the entity that gives context to why such a small town hosts a famous cornbread festival: the Lodge Cast Iron factory. Arguably the most well-known cookware brand in America, Lodge's 30-acre campus — which includes a vast foundry, a factory outlet store, museum, restaurant and various other facilities — sits two blocks east of Cedar Avenue. Anchored on one end by the bright yellow-and-black color scheme of the factory store, the campus is impossible to miss.

So how did an iconic cookware company and the hub of all things cornbread end up in such an unassuming Tennessee town? And for that matter, how did that town end up with the unlikely name of South Pittsburg?

As you might have guessed, these elements are connected. Shawn explained.

"In the late 1860s, South Pittsburg started out under a different name — Battle Creek Mines — as a nod to local coal mining," he said. "Within a couple of years, though, the area was being scouted by British investors and industrialists as a possible site for developing a Southern-based iron industry. The nearby iron ore deposits combined with easy rail and river access made this area an industrial no-brainer."

It started to make sense. Since Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was already well established as a world leader in iron and steel production, the Battle Creek Mines investors boldly decided to rename the tiny settlement "South Pittsburg" (inexplicably dropping the h at the end) in a surge of confidence, foreseeing a major industrial city.

Much to everyone's chagrin, the steel industry and a bustling metropolis never took off, but the craft of stove manufacturing and cast-iron molding did. In 1886, United States Stove Company (originally called Perry Stove Works) opened a foundry in South



David Johnson is the proud owner of Dixie Freeze, a South Pittsburg staple.

Pittsburg to produce wood stoves. Ten years later, itinerant craftsman Joseph Lodge launched a cast-iron company called Blacklock Foundry, later to be changed to Lodge Cast Iron.

Over the next century, South Pittsburg experienced triumphs and tragedies in its stove-making and cast-iron endeavors. Most famously, the town was nearly derailed entirely when a union/labor dispute in 1927 resulted in a Christmas Day shootout smack in the middle of Cedar Avenue; six people were killed, and 50 Tennessee National Guardsmen had to be called in late that night to restore peace.

Though it took years for the town to recover, both US Stove and Lodge carried on. Although US Stove moved production to Alabama in 2004, its roots still run deep in South Pittsburg, and one of its old shop buildings — now affectionately called “The Hooch” — has become a popular community gathering center. The owner, US Stove Chairman Richard Rogers, offered to put me up in one of the Hooch’s two apartments during my stay, which I gratefully accepted.

After lunch at Dixie Freeze, Sean, Michael and I made the short drive to Lodge for a manufacturing tour, a fascinating look at how the company’s iconic cast-iron skillets and cookware are produced. Our tour was expertly

guided by a longtime employee named Jessica, who spoke to us through soundproof headsets as we walked through the deafening foundry.

The cookware part of the equation completed, it was time to move on to the cornbread. After leaving Lodge, Shawn and I visited with Beth Duggar, president of the National Cornbread Festival, in the event’s tiny office on Cedar Avenue.

“The idea for the NCF came about in the mid-1990s after the state constructed the Highway 47 bypass,” Beth explained. “As soon as the bypass came in, people stopped driving into our town, and we felt we needed something to offset that lost business. Wheels started turning, some calls were made to Lodge and somebody suggested a cornbread festival. It made perfect sense — cornbread and cast-iron skillets.”

Beth told me that “it rained cats and dogs” during the first festival, and the crowd was small.

“That was probably a blessing because we were totally unprepared,” she laughs. “Within a year or two, we’d have to draft every available cornbread maker in the town to keep up with the demand during the festival. From high school kids to our elderly citizens, practically every resident of South Pittsburg is involved in making the

festival a success, and most of them are volunteers.”

Now in its 29th year, the NCF has become part of the cultural landscape of the Southeast U.S. and has been featured in many media outlets, including Southern Living, Taste of Home, Food Network and PBS. Among the regular events are Lodge Cast Iron Cornbread Cook-Off, Cornbread Alley, the Cornbread 5K race, the Miss National Cornbread Pageant, the Cornbread Fondo cycling event, a Sunday morning worship and live music across four stages.

“In addition to those NCF standards, we try to throw in something different every year,” Beth said, noting that this year’s festival will be April 25-26. “I tell people that it’s like making cornbread: You have your eggs, cornmeal, butter and buttermilk as the base, but sometimes, you add some different flavors just to keep it exciting. We do that with the festival too.”

The NCF and Lodge have undoubtedly kept the little town vibrant. Even on a random Tuesday in early December, Cedar Avenue was busy, with cars vying for parking spaces in front of the renovated Princess Theatre, the Arts in the Burg art studio, Chenchó’s Cocina & Cantina restaurant and the South Pittsburg Historic Preservation Society, among other popular businesses.

As I drove back toward Nashville the next day, it occurred to me that although little South Pittsburg might not have fulfilled the original industrial dreams of those British investors, the town has probably far exceeded the expectations of its original founders. And for my money, an identity based on cornbread, cast-iron cookware and championship high school football is a pretty great peg to hang your hat on.

To learn more about the National Cornbread Festival, visit [nationalcornbread.com](http://nationalcornbread.com).

# You'll love these loaves

Recipes by Tammy Algood  
Food styling by Cynthia Kent  
Photographs by Robin Conover

**We get it. You're busy ... but also hungry. That's why quick breads were invented.** These recipes are breads that don't need hours to rise or bake. Even better, the recipes below use lots of ingredients that are easy to find and might already be in your kitchen. So snap to it — get started making one of these delicious breads now. You won't have to wait long to have a slice!

## Easiest Herb Bread

*Biscuit mix makes this superfast to get in the oven.*

Yield: 1 loaf

- 3¾ cups biscuit mix
- 1 cup + 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning or Herbes de Provence
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 (15-ounce) can evaporated milk
- 1 egg
- ¾ cup water

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease a standard loaf pan and set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, stir together the biscuit mix, 1 cup of the Parmesan, seasoning and salt. In a medium bowl, whisk together the milk, egg and water until smooth. Stir into the Parmesan mixture just until moistened.

Immediately transfer to the prepared loaf pan and sprinkle the remaining Parmesan over the top. Bake 35 to 37 minutes or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan 10 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

## Almost a Meal Cornbread

Yield: 12 servings

- 2¼ cups self-rising cornmeal
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 heaping teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

- ¼ teaspoon cayenne
- 4 eggs
- 1¼ cups small-curd cottage cheese
- ½ cup buttermilk
- ½ cup vegetable or canola oil
- 1 (10.5-ounce) can whole kernel corn, undrained
- 4 green onions (green tops only), sliced
- ½ cup coarsely grated sharp cheddar cheese, divided

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Grease a 12-inch ovenproof skillet and set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, stir together the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, salt, pepper and cayenne. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs then add the cottage cheese, buttermilk, oil, corn and green onions. Blend well and add to the cornmeal mixture, stirring to mix. Add all but 2 tablespoons of the cheese and transfer to the prepared skillet. Top with the remaining cheese.

Bake 30 minutes or until golden-brown. Allow to stand at least 5 minutes before slicing into wedges and serving warm.

## Cranberry Bread

*Pull out those leftover frozen cranberries from the holidays for this lively bread!*

Yield: 1 loaf

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup sugar

- ¾ cup water
- ⅓ cup orange juice
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon finely grated orange zest
- 1 cup halved frozen or fresh cranberries
- 1 cup chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease a loaf pan and set aside.

In a medium bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Set aside. In a large mixing bowl, combine the sugar, water, orange juice, egg and zest. Mix well and add the flour mixture, stirring just until moistened. Stir in the cranberries and pecans.

Transfer to the prepared loaf pan and bake 60 minutes or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan 10 minutes before removing to cool completely on a wire rack. Slice and serve at room temperature.

## Sharp Cheddar Buttermilk Bread

Yield: 1 loaf

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese (extra sharp is even better!)
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup buttermilk
- ¼ cup vegetable oil

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Lightly grease a loaf pan and set aside.



In a mixing bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and cheese. Make a well in the center and set aside.

In a separate bowl, combine the eggs, buttermilk and oil. Add to the flour mixture, stirring just until moistened. Transfer to the prepared pan, spreading evenly.

Bake 30 to 35 minutes or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan 10 minutes. Slice and serve or cool completely on a wire rack for later use.

### Italian Mini Loaves

Yields: 3 mini loaves

- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1¼ teaspoons dried basil or Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ⅓ cup oil-packed dried tomatoes, chopped
- 2 eggs
- 1¼ cups buttermilk
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup shredded provolone cheese
- ¼ cup fresh chopped parsley

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease 3 small loaf pans (5¾-by-3-inch) and set aside.

In a mixing bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder, sugar, basil or Italian seasoning, salt, baking soda and pepper. Set aside.

Pull 2 tablespoons of oil from the tomato jar and place in a medium bowl along with the eggs, buttermilk and vegetable oil. Whisk until smooth and stir into the flour mixture just until moistened. Fold in the tomatoes, cheese and parsley.

Evenly transfer to the loaf pans and bake 40 to 45 minutes or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes in the pan before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

### Soda Bread

Perfect with any soup or salad!

Yields: 2 loaves

- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1¾ cups buttermilk
- 1 cup golden raisins, currants or dark raisins\*
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line a large rimless baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.

Place the flour, sugar, baking soda and salt in the bowl of an electric mixer. Stir to blend and add the softened butter. Mix on low speed just until crumbly. Add the buttermilk and dried fruit and mix until moistened. Batter will be lumpy.

Remove the beater and attach the dough hook. Beat on low speed 1½ minutes until a sticky dough forms. Divide the dough in half, and with lightly floured hands, form each into a dome. Place on the baking sheet at least 4 inches apart. Use a second baking sheet if necessary.

With a sharp knife, cut a half-inch-deep X on the top of each loaf. Brush the tops with the melted butter.

Bake 35 to 40 minutes or until golden-brown. Cool completely on wire racks before slicing and serving.

*\* For extra moisture, soak the dried fruit in rum or fruit juice for 30 minutes. Then drain and use as directed.*

## Ask Chef Tammy

*Robert writes, "It is best to use cold or room-temperature eggs for beating?"*

Robert, eggs separate much better when they are cold but will beat to a higher volume at room temperature. My practice is to separate them right out of the fridge, then allow them to sit at room temperature for about 30 minutes before beating.

*Kayleigh asks, "I have bread recipes that call for teaspoons of dry active yeast. How much is that in an envelope?"*

Kayleigh, those envelopes are mighty convenient! Each one contains 2¼ teaspoons of yeast.

Email your cooking questions to Tammy Algood: [talgood@tnelectric.org](mailto:talgood@tnelectric.org).

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.

## Tips & Tricks

- Measure the ingredients carefully and precisely for the best, most uniform results.
- Don't overmix the batter. Instead, stir just until combined. Overmixing can give you tough bread with a chewy texture.
- Always preheat the oven to prevent uneven rising.
- Unless otherwise instructed in the recipe, use room-temperature ingredients. This will make everything mix together easily and quickly.
- Allow the cooked breads to cool on a wire rack after baking. This is especially important for loaves that will need to be sliced before serving.



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# Community Corner

– What our neighbors are up to –

## Find the Tennessee Flag

**W**e 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



February's flag location

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](http://tnmagazine.org/flag) or email [flag@tnmagazine.org](mailto:flag@tnmagazine.org). Entries must be postmarked or received via email

by Friday, May 1. Winners will be published in the June issue of *The Tennessee Magazine*.

### February flag spotters

Thanks for the postcards and emails again this month identifying the location of the flag, left, which was found underneath the table on page 29.

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

#### Robert Tarkington

Dyersburg, Forked Deer EC

#### Jan D. Cox

Hurricane Mills, Meriwether Lewis EC

#### Beka Smith

Crossville, Volunteer EC

## Artist's Palette Assignment for June

### 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 — June, 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 Friday, May 1.

### 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 June 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 April Winners

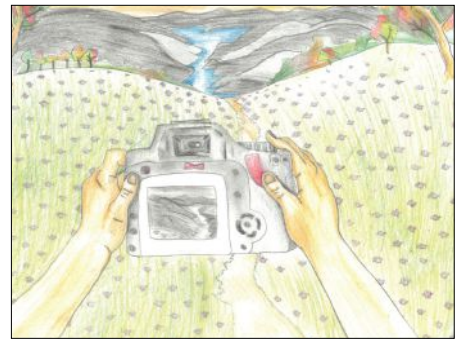
## 14-18 AGE GROUP WINNERS



**FIRST PLACE:** Madison Lindsay,  
18, Middle Tennessee Electric



**SECOND PLACE:** Brooklynn Sessum,  
15, Middle Tennessee Electric



**THIRD PLACE:** Keira Carmichael,  
14, Cumberland EMC

## 9-13 AGE GROUP WINNERS



**FIRST PLACE:** Jacob Herod,  
12, Duck River EMC



**SECOND PLACE:** Zoey Hernandez,  
12, Volunteer EC



**THIRD PLACE:** Campbell McCombs,  
9, Middle Tennessee Electric

## 8 AND YOUNGER AGE GROUP WINNERS



**FIRST PLACE:** Lane Schill,  
8, Duck River EMC



**SECOND PLACE:** Ishita Seru,  
8, Middle Tennessee Electric



**THIRD PLACE:** River Singleton,  
7, Powell Valley EC

# Point of View

by Robin Conover



“Pink Lady’s Slipper”

Apple iPhone 14 Pro,  
f2.8 at 77mm,  
ISO 50, handheld

There has come a moment in this photographer’s life when I must begrudgingly confront an uncomfortable truth — smartphones can make decent photographs. I know that many of you figured this out a long time ago, but my standards have kept me from facing it until now.

While I still contend that a skilled photographer with professional equipment will almost always create a better technical image, smartphone photography certainly has its place, and the advantages of ease of use and convenience make it a worthy contender.

The advents of better software, better sensors, built-in lenses and countless creative apps mean you can create a decent image with a smartphone that will be beautiful on social media, on any screen and will even make a nice 5-by-7 or 8-by-10

print. And let’s face it; this is above and beyond what 95% of the general public wants in the first place.

Professional photographers tend to want more. We might want to have the largest file size possible, be able to print a 20-by-30-inch print with no loss in quality and be able to zoom in to the nth degree and still see sharpness in every detail. For most, these desires are somewhat overkill. For me, it’s not. It’s what I do.

I will still drag out my tripod, macro lens, polarizer and heavy camera and spend 15 minutes fiddling before I ever push the shutter button. Meanwhile, a smartphone photographer might have already captured the image, reviewed it, made a few edits, posted the beautiful image on all their socials and be at a coffee shop watching the likes and comments roll in.

For years, those of us who lug around camera bodies, multiple lenses, tripods, diffusers and enough accessories to supply a small expedition have taken quiet pride in our craft. The technical choice of aperture, the precise focus on the subject and the ability to capture beautiful light all felt like skills safely beyond the reach of a smartphone.

Until now, that is — artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed at least one smartphone mode, and that is portrait. There are others to mention like the nighttime mode, which I will save for a future column.

Take, for example, this pink lady’s slipper I photographed as a demonstration while leading a photography workshop in Beersheba Springs during the annual Trails and Trilliums event.

With a traditional camera, I might open the aperture to f/2.8 or f/4 and use a large telephoto lens to isolate

the flower by completely blurring the background.

Smartphones can do a pretty respectable job of mimicking the shallow depth of field. The computational photography in newer smartphones accomplishes this effect quite well by analyzing the scene, identifying the subject and applying a mask to the background.

The simpler the subject and the more distant the background, the better the mask will work. But there are still limits to the illusion. You can see it break down in this image in the sharpness of the flower’s green stem. My smartphone identified the pink bloom as the subject and wasn’t completely sure if the green stem was subject or background.

When the subject has clean, obvious edges like a person standing against a distant background, the technology performs well.

Areas where the subject isn’t easy to define can cause odd halos and transitions between subject and background. The smartphone’s software is guessing. The mask can be adjusted with some success using your phone’s basic photography software and other third-party apps.

A real lens, on the other hand, doesn’t guess. The physics of the lens’s optics determines what falls in focus and what isn’t. Every blade of grass, every curve of the petal, every layer of leaves transitions naturally according to distance from the sensor.

So, yes, I begrudgingly must admit that smartphones have gotten impressively good at isolating a subject like a lady slipper from the cluttered background in this image.

But when you look closely, you can still tell the difference between a blur created by glass and light and one created by “smart” technology.



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