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At more than 15,000 feet above sea level, Mark Johnson stands near a cairn of stacked rocks above Nepal’s Pheriche Valley, about one day’s hike from the foot of Mount Everest. See page 10 to learn more about Hobnail Trekking Co., Mark and Holly Johnson’s adventure travel company. Photograph by Bill Shupp

THIS PAGE

Edgar Evins State Park is one of the largest breeding sites of the cerulean warbler. Read more about the park beginning on page 10. Photograph by Mark Taylor

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Between the Lines
News from your community

Looking back at a historic event

Early in the morning on Friday, Dec. 23, we received a message that we hoped to never get. Our power generator and regulator, the Tennessee Valley Authority, was calling for the Emergency Load Curtailment Plan (ELCP) Step 50. That doesn’t mean much to most people, but to those of us in the power business in this area, it was serious.

The ELCP is a carefully designed blueprint to reduce system demand when energy use spikes to critical levels. The early steps of the plan include shutting off lights and equipment at our offices, and later steps of the plan call for interruption of industrial plants and large commercial businesses.

This was the first time in TVA’s nearly 90-year history that the agency called for Step 50, mandatory rolling blackouts. It would be called twice in a 24-hour period.

The events of Friday and Saturday, Dec. 23 and 24, were extremely unusual.

Winter Storm Elliot brought record cold temperatures to much of the country in what the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration called a “historic arctic outbreak.” CEMC and TVA both set new record-high energy use, TVA had multiple power generation plants unexpectedly go offline.

The Tennessee Valley region needed more energy than could be generated. When demand exceeds supply, catastrophic damage can occur to the power grid, resulting in long-term and widespread power outages.

The quick action of CEMC employees protected our community and the region from large and extended power outages. Our team implemented ELCP Step 50 to reduce our system load in a controlled fashion as was required of us by TVA. While this resulted in temporary power outages for some of our members, the impacts of the event could have been far worse.

Our lineworkers, system control operators, engineers and operations personnel sprang into action when they were called. Crews went out into extreme conditions to operate equipment and manage the situation. Their efforts minimized impact on families, businesses and critical infrastructure.

While I fully understand that these events caused frustration for many, especially given that they occurred during the holidays, the reality is that longer, more widespread outages were avoided due to ELCP Step 50 and the quick action of CEMC and other power companies across the territory.

I am proud of CEMC’s response and how our employees worked through this major event. From yearly system maintenance to the hard work and coordination that occurs any time we have a major event, CEMC always meets the challenges and performs well. And rest assured, we are already working with TVA to analyze this event, learn from it and improve.

We know you depend on CEMC to ensure that the lights come on when you flip the switch, and that is not something we take lightly. And while we cannot guarantee there will never be power interruptions — whether that is due to an emergency such as what we experienced in December, an ice or wind storm or even a curious animal that causes trouble on our lines — we will always do our part and continue to work hard to provide the power upon which our members rely.
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TENNESSEE TODAY

Viewpoint

Sharpening our focus

The Tennessee Valley Authority’s objective is to never interrupt the flow of power to your cooperative. That’s what we strive for. TVA recognizes that we fell short of that during Winter Storm Elliott.

The National Weather Service referred to Elliott as a “once-in-a-generation storm” that brought record-breaking cold temperatures and high winds to our region and all across the nation. On Friday, Dec. 23, the morning lows were 1 degree below zero in Nashville, 1 degree in Memphis, 4 degrees in Knoxville and 7 degrees in Chattanooga.

Because of these low temperatures and high winds, TVA set multiple records for energy use across the Tennessee Valley. These included the most electricity ever used during a 24-hour period, the third-highest amount of electricity used at a single time and the highest amount of electricity ever used at one time on a weekend. For reference, the amount of energy we supplied on Dec. 23 alone is enough to power more than 70,000 homes for an entire year.

TVA anticipated and prepared for this weather event, yet the storm’s speed and intensity exceeded our efforts. TVA’s directly served and industrial customers acted quickly — in 30 minutes or less — to reduce their consumption. Preliminary results show that end-use participants in demand response programs provided about 1,500 megawatts of relief during the event. But these actions alone were not enough to protect the grid from potentially catastrophic damage.

For the first time in its history, TVA had to direct local power companies, including your co-op, to implement temporary localized power interruptions due to the extreme demand for electricity.

We’re aware that your cooperative and the other local power companies we serve know the best way to reduce that demand without impacting critical infrastructure. They also know how to cycle load reduction to minimize the duration and impact on all customers.

I want to thank all of our 153 local power companies, the employees of TVA and your co-op who braved the elements to serve their communities, local officials and the people in the region for their support throughout this event. During an extreme event like this, it takes all of us working together to successfully mitigate the duration and impact on the whole system. TVA recognizes that we fell short of the public’s expectations to deliver reliable electricity 24/7/365, even under extreme conditions. We are conducting a comprehensive review of the actions we took before and during the event, and we look forward to gathering input from various stakeholders. We will learn from this event and put actions in place to ensure we are prepared to manage events like this in the future.

TVA defines energy security as power that is affordable, reliable and resilient. For nearly 90 years, TVA has had a relentless focus on achieving all these attributes simultaneously. We are sharpening that focus even further. Our commitment is to deliver a diverse energy system that provides affordable, reliable, resilient and clean energy. It’s what you expect and deserve. And it’s what TVA will deliver.
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The National Weather Service in Nashville recorded the highest temperature of 2022 on June 22 when the mercury climbed to 101 degrees. The lowest temperature of the year was recorded on Dec. 23 when the official reading dropped to 1 degree below zero. This was the first official subzero reading for Nashville in nearly 27 years. It was the first year since 1983 in which a triple-digit temperature and a subzero temperature occurred in the same year.

New species of ‘horned’ turtle identified from Gray Fossil Site

Researchers at Gray Fossil Site recently identified an extinct species of painted turtle, one that is entirely new to science and unique to the northeast Tennessee site. Scientists named it Chrysemys corniculata, or the “horned painted turtle.” The name comes from a conspicuous pair of pointy projections on the front edge of the shell.

This is the third new species of fossil turtle to be identified from the Gray Fossil Site. The first two were the musk turtle Sternotherus palaeodorus and the slider turtle Trachemys haugrudi.

2022 WEATHER RECAP

The National Weather Service in Nashville recorded the highest temperature of 2022 on June 22 when the mercury climbed to 101 degrees. The lowest temperature of the year was recorded on Dec. 23 when the official reading dropped to 1 degree below zero. This was the first official subzero reading for Nashville in nearly 27 years. It was the first year since 1983 in which a triple-digit temperature and a subzero temperature occurred in the same year.
50 YEARS AGO: FEBRUARY 1973

The February 1973 magazine featured a profile on Orlinda, some little-known facts about George Washington, tips to customize your kitchen and a story about the Reelfoot Arts and Crafts Festival. View the entire February 1973 edition online at tnmagazine.org.

App brings lawmakers one click away

The 113th session of the Tennessee General Assembly convened last month. If you’re interested in state politics, the Tennessee General Assembly app, developed by Tennessee’s electric cooperatives, is a handy tool to connect with state legislators. Search for “TN General Assembly” in your device’s app store.

NO-COST TIPS TO SAVE ENERGY AND MONEY THIS WINTER

February often brings some of the highest energy bills of the year. By being proactive about saving energy, you can increase the comfort of your home and save money. Here are some easy things you can do today:

Mind the thermostat. Experts recommend setting your thermostat to 68 degrees when you’re home and lower when you’re away or sleeping.

Use window coverings wisely. Open blinds or drapes during the day to allow natural sunlight in to warm your home. Close them at night.

Think outside the box. Add layers of clothing, wear thick socks and bundle up under blankets. If you have hard-surface flooring, consider purchasing an area rug.

MADE IN TENNESSEE

Sparta’s Jackson Kayaks

Founded in 2003 by whitewater paddlers Tony Lunt, Eric Jackson and David Knight, the Sparta business has grown to claim a leading position as an elite kayak manufacturer in not only the whitewater sector but in the kayak fishing niche as well.
Over the last six years, Mark and Holly Johnson of Kingston Springs have poured their individual expertise into a gig that has grown into an international adventure travel company built on integrity, ingenuity, accessibility and the belief that anyone can grow from a typical beachgoing vacationer into a seasoned, adventurous world traveler.

Seeds for the business were sown among the pages of Jon Krakauer’s thrilling bestseller “Into Thin Air” chronicling the 1996 climbing tragedy on Mount Everest. After both read the book in 2004, the Johnsons discovered that it is possible to experience Earth’s largest peak by trekking to Everest Base Camp. Mere mortals, it turns out, don’t have to take the leap of millionaire thrill-seekers and alpine adrenaline junkies starving to test their limits against one of the most formidable summits in mountaineering. Enthralled with the idea, Holly added the base camp trek to her bucket list, which Mark says meant it was also on his.

“And that was really about the end of it,” he says, “because how do you even approach something like that? We didn’t know how to go about researching it, and we also assumed that something like that was way too expensive and way too outrageous and physically demanding. You had to be an elite Italian athlete to do something like that.”

The wanderlust was relegated to the “someday” section on life’s itinerary until a family trip to Walt Disney World in February 2016. A section of the Animal Kingdom theme park, appearing as the Western world’s interpretation of a Himalayan village with tea houses and a rollercoaster titled Expedition Everest, awakened the Johnsons’ Nepalese dreams.

“We got excited about it again,” Johnson says, remembering their bucket list revival, adding that they still had no idea how to accomplish it.

A few months later, an email from outdoors retail cooperative REI included pricing and itinerary information on excursions to Everest Base Camp. The Johnsons were

Mark Johnson presents “The Everest Base Camp Experience” program at a Mountain High Outfitters store in Auburn, Alabama. Johnson and his wife, Holly, have made the multimedia presentation in stores across the Southeast U.S.
finally learning how attainable the trip could be, and a chance encounter via Lyft would be a catalyst that marked off a bucket-list item and spawned a unique business venture.

Johnson, soon to leave his position as director of communications with the Tennessee Wildlife Federation, had decided that his next life chapter would cast him in a corporate position with the ride-hailing company, but he figured he should try the service before signing on. Needing to pick up his old truck from the mechanic, he requested a ride through the Lyft app on a fateful Wednesday in August 2016 and made a remarkable connection.

“I download the Lyft app, hit the button and immediately get this message that Dawa is on his way,” Johnson says. “He showed up, I got in his car and we had a good time talking just for the 10 minutes to my mechanic’s shop. I was leaving the car, and I said, ‘Dawa, where are you from?’ And he said, ‘Nepal.’ I stopped in my tracks, sat back down in his car and said, ‘Nepal? Do you know anything about the Everest Base Camp trek?’ He smiled at me and said, ‘Mr. Mark, I’m an Everest Region Sherpa. I grew up there, and I’ve guided that trek dozens of times.’ You could’ve knocked me over with a feather.”

Only a few days later, Johnson had left his job, and he and his wife met with Dawa Jangbu Lama Sherpa Left: Robert Tretsch of Atlanta, who trekked to Everest Base Camp with Hobnail Trekking Co. in the fall of 2019, poses by the “Way to Everest B.C.” sign, an iconic landmark for trekkers. Above: Members of Hobnail Trekking’s 2018 inaugural trek make their way up a mountain trail near the Himalayan village of Upper Pangboche, Nepal. Several of the hikers were Middle Tennesseans. Photo by Bill Shupp.
at a Nashville Starbucks to discuss a trip to the base camp. An hourlong conversation yielded a "rough price," Johnson says, through Dawa’s small trekking company headquartered in Kathmandu. The Johnsons walked out of that coffee shop with a commitment to complete the trek in March 2018. They started training and telling people what they were planning.

“A lot of people told us, ‘Oh, I want to do that, too,’” Johnson explains. “So one day, I was out walking around a track at a park, and an idea popped into my head. ‘I don’t have a job right now. I build websites and write and know marketing. Dawa is a professional guide who grew up in that industry and has that network already in place. What if we combined forces and started a little company?’”

“It was absurd,” he acknowledges. “There was no reason that a guy like me should have the gall to decide to open a Himalayan trekking company. But I’ve done crazy things all my life, and, frankly, this sounded like fun.”

In January 2017, Hobnail Trekking Co. was officially launched.

“We had no visions of grandeur,” Johnson notes. “We just thought it would be a neat little side thing that Holly and I could work on together.”

In 2018, a group of 16 people, including Mark and Holly Johnson, completed the Everest Base Camp trek with Hobnail Trekking Co., an adventure Mark calls “amazing, life-changing, all of those things.” The copious notes he kept on the trip were intended to be material for his popular “Doofus Dad” blog, but on a drive through Nashville, Johnson dreamed bigger and decided to, instead, write a book. His memoir about the trip, “Doofus Dad Does Everest Base Camp,” in the vein of Dave Berry humor, was completed that fall. It sold well around the world via Amazon, and that led the Johnsons to decide to more aggressively pursue their new business.

“When we decided to start the company, we did research,” Johnson says. “What we found is that there were only a few companies in America that did this, and they were all headquartered on the West Coast like REI. The Southeast U.S. doesn’t have a strong culture of adventure...
travel. We thought, ‘There have to be a lot of people in the Southeast who dream of doing epic things, but they don’t know how to do it,’ just exactly the way that Holly and I didn’t know how to do it.”

So they shifted their focus to build a company based in Tennessee, “owned by a couple of normal people with Southern accents, and just try to slowly build a culture of international adventure travel here,” Johnson says. They held meet-and-greet presentations at outdoors retailers across the Southeast. They stepped up to fill a void when REI exited the international adventure travel space. They made new partnerships to expand their offerings beyond Himalayan excursions — additional locations like Peru and Scotland opening Hobnail Trekking’s services to more people who, perhaps, wanted to travel but not to Southeast Asia. And they joined the Adventure Travel Trade Association, an international trade group bringing together trekking companies across the globe to offer travel options that can meet a wide array of tastes.

“Today, we’ve developed partnerships all over the world,” Johnson says, quickly listing off the top of his head some of the amazing destinations they’ve opened through their partnerships. “In addition to the Himalayas, we provide adventures in the Peruvian Andes and Chilean Patagonia in South America. In Europe, we offer the French, Italian and Swiss Alps and will soon add other locations in Italy and Spain. We have a partner in the Balkans based in Montenegro. We’ve also added Morocco, and that’s amazing because not only is there a mountain trek, but there’s also a Sahara Desert package. Over the next few months, we will add Spain and Tanzania.”

The Johnsons say they curate every trek they offer, striving to include historical and cultural elements and interaction with locals. That means travelers know they’re in good hands with Hobnail Trekking’s vetted partners at the destinations.

“Our website shows itineraries and prices, and Holly and I are the American-side contacts for those people who book through us,” Johnson says. “We teach them how to train and what to pack. We answer their questions and put all their fears at bay. And then all they have to do is fly to the destination country, and our partners become the extension of Hobnail Trekking, taking over with boots-on-the-ground expertise. Our customers simply show up prepared, and all they have to do is hike, take pictures, enjoy themselves and, most of all, make memories.”

A visit to hobnailtrekkingco.com yields a wealth of information — everything from pricing and itinerary information to frequently asked questions and customer testimonials. There are self-guided treks and helicopter-assisted trips to trim days of hiking from an excursion. And Johnson says that any prospective client is welcome to contact him or Holly to talk through options and get all the information they need.

“We get to know every single one of our trekkers personally,” he says. “We want people to understand that they have advocates in us to make sure their experiences are exactly how they want them to be. Hobnail Trekking is unique in that there is nobody else in the Eastern United States who handles all of these destinations and who you could call and they sound like you. At the very least, I want people know that they can do something that is life-changing and epic. I want them say, ‘Wow, even I can go see Mount Everest with my own eyes and not put myself at risk of death.’”

“This started as a bucket list wish,” Johnson continues. “It’s developed into a company, and we now have personal relationships with people in almost every corner of the globe who have great work ethic, love their countries and want to share their part of the world with other people. It’s a blessing that we never could have anticipated.”

Learn more about the offerings from Hobnail Trekking Co. by visiting hobnailtrekkingco.com, where you can also find information to directly contact Mark and Holly Johnson. You can also call 855-HOB-NAIL.

Left: In July 2022, a group of Hobnail trekkers take in the sights at Humantay Lagoon, a freshwater lake at the base of Salkantay Mountain in Peru. The Salkantay trek is an alternate route to Machu Picchu. Above, the Johnsons snap a selfie in the village of Lukla, the starting point for all treks into the Everest Region.
You can talk about the battles of Bunker Hill, Saratoga and Kings Mountain all you want, but more Americans died on British prison ships than in all the battles of the Revolutionary War combined.

Prisoners are a problem in every war. Since the British won most of the battles in the Revolutionary War, especially early on, the British had a lot of American prisoners.

When the war started, the British had humane procedures for handling prisoners captured in wars with foreign countries. They chose not to follow those procedures because King George III declared the rebelling Americans to be traitors, not foreigners.

To make sure American prisoners didn’t escape, the British turned some old ships into prisons. Most were located off the coast of New York, but there were also prison ships in Philadelphia; Charleston, South Carolina; and St. Augustine, Florida.

Conditions on these ships were appalling. Captured soldiers and sailors were chained up, packed in, fed very little and given little, if any, medical care. Disease was rampant, and thousands of men died of smallpox or cholera.

You might ask why the soldiers didn’t jump overboard and try to swim to shore and escape. Many of them couldn’t swim; others were too weak to try. Most who did

An artist’s depiction of what it looked like on the prison ship HMS Jersey. (Library of Congress)
attempt escape died trying. In October 1781, six prisoners tried to escape from one of the prison ships in New York. Four were either shot or drowned; one was bayoneted by a guard and died the next day; the sixth realized he had no chance to survive and climbed back up the anchor chain to the ship.

One of the few soldiers who did manage to escape from a prison ship was Robert Sheffield. When he got home, Sheffield wrote a detailed account of his experiences that was published in several American newspapers in the summer of 1778. Sheffield said prisoners were chained up naked and that the air was foul and the conditions so dark that it was often days until a dead body was discovered.

An excerpt:

“Their (the prisoners’) sickly countenances and ghastly looks were truly horrible; some sweating and blaspheming; some crying, praying and wringing their hands, and stalking about like ghosts and apparitions; other delirious and void of reason, raving and storming, some groaning and dying — all panting for breath, some dead and corrupting.”

Sheffield’s account was so horrifying, in fact, that it might have convinced a lot of colonists who were still “on the fence” about the Revolution to turn against the king.

The British had a policy under which prisoners could earn their freedom if they agreed to switch sides in the war and take up arms against the rebellious colonists. We now know that very few of the prisoners did this, which means thousands of men chose death over joining the British.

“They preferred to linger and die rather than desert their country’s cause,” Thomas Dring, one of the American prisoners, said of his colleagues.

The most infamous of the prison ships was the HMS Jersey, which was anchored off the coast of New York. About 1,400 men were imprisoned on the Jersey at one time, but it is estimated that the number of prisoners who spent time on that ship was several times that number because so many of them died.

In fact, about eight American prisoners died every day on the Jersey.

And what happened to their bodies? Some were thrown overboard, but most were taken to a nearby shoreline and buried in shallow graves. After the war, what was left of these bodies was exposed, and people who lived in Brooklyn found hundreds of bones and body parts along or near the shore. Some of these human remains now lie under the Prison Ship Martyrs Monument in Fort Greene Park — probably the most overlooked Revolutionary War site in United States.

Prison ships also had an important effect on Tennessee’s history. During the war, the British sometimes allowed volunteer doctors and nurses to go on board prison ships to treat the sick and wounded. One American woman who did this was Elizabeth Jackson, who traveled all the way from her home in the hills of North Carolina to nurse prisoners on a ship in Charleston. Jackson caught cholera and died, leaving her 14-year-old son, Andrew, orphaned.

With nothing to keep him in North Carolina, Andrew Jackson moved — first across the mountains to Jonesborough and Greeneville, Tennessee, and eventually all the way to Nashville. Jackson became a lawyer, a judge, a soldier and a general. He got revenge on the British on Jan. 8, 1815, at a battlefield near New Orleans called Chalmette.

Today, we estimate that about 7,000 Americans were killed in battle during the Revolutionary War, and as many as 14,000 died on British prison ships.

All of this reminds me of a trip I once took to Philadelphia. It was a beautiful day, and I managed to fit in tours of Independence Hall, Betsy Ross’ home and the new Constitution Center. However, the stop that made the biggest impression on me was the Tomb of the Unknown Revolutionary War Soldier in Washington Square. There’s a statue of the first president there, but it isn’t the statue itself that jumped out at me; it was the words in granite behind it.

“Freedom is a light,” the inscription says, “for which many men have died in darkness.”
Discover the three B’s and more of Edgar Evins State Park

Drive through any number of parks across Tennessee and it’s not unusual to be flanked by neatly mown roadsides. But the staff at Edgar Evins State Park in Silver Point decided to take a different approach to the park’s corridors by creating a natural habitat for pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

In planning for a number of years, the idea came to fruition in 2021 when park staff sprayed, burned and hydroseeded roadsides with a native mix of 21 different wildflower species. The park now has an abundance of native wildflowers along its roadways and steep banks. The result has been the observation of more than a dozen native bee species, four native fly species and a dozen-plus butterfly species working the habitat.

This project earned the park one of two Excellence in Resource Management awards given out last fall by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, the other going to Dunbar Cave State Park.

“These two parks have shown outstanding commitment to protecting our natural wonders,” said TDEC Commissioner David Salyers at the time the awards were presented. “From providing a natural habitat for pollinators to the preservation of a cave, the parks show an understanding of the responsibility we have in protecting the environment, and we are proud to honor both of the parks with this award.”

The pollinator corridor was the brainchild of Park Ranger Mark Taylor, who serves as the park’s resource manager.

“In 2013, I wrote up what needed to be done to the hillsides,” Taylor says. “So there is a large sense of accomplishment with the park receiving this award.”

Story by Trish Milburn • Photographs by Edgar Evins State Park Ranger Mark Taylor
The pollinator corridor is about 2 miles in length and covers about 2.5 acres, replacing the previously mown grass, what Taylor says was essentially a desert for insects.

“It also reduces our mowing and our carbon footprint,” says Taylor, who has been at Edgar Evins State Park for 20 years.

Managing flora and fauna

The bees and butterflies are not the only species that call this 6,337-acre park home or a temporary stopover, however. In fact, a lot of rare species are found here, including a couple that are only found in the relatively confined area the park occupies. One species of verbena plants is so newly identified that it hasn’t yet been given a taxonomic name.

Taylor says that spring wildflowers cover the forest floor along the park’s trails in early spring, starting in late February and continuing through May. Visitors can see a new selection of wildflowers almost every week through the spring months. April is a great month to view wild hyacinths at the park along the Millennium and Merritt Ridge trails. In especially good years, these flowers can be found covering several acres of the forest floor along these trails.

“In May, we provide boat cruises to see the western wallflowers that grow along the bluffs of Center Hill Lake,” Taylor adds. “We usually see over a dozen other species growing from the bluffs along with the western wallflowers during these cruises.”

The park is also the second-largest breeding site in Tennessee for the cerulean warbler, which is a species in decline. In addition to this little blue beauty, 195 other species of birds can be found in the park at one time or another.

“The diverse forests provide excellent habitat for a plethora of songbirds, especially the declining cerulean warbler, which loves to nest on the steep wooded slopes,” Taylor says. “The observation tower provides a bird’s-eye view into the canopy, giving birders great opportunities to see migrating or breeding songbirds that like to stay high up in the trees. The lake itself provides great habitat for wintering or migrating waterfowl, allowing further opportunities for viewing a diversity of birds. Bald eagles have also been nesting at the park for the past 20 years, and their numbers have been steadily increasing.”

But wait, there’s more!

Edgar Evins is located on the shores of Center Hill Lake, so of course there are plenty of recreational opportunities during a visit. There are three boat launch ramps, a marina with slip and boat rentals and fishing supplies for sale. With more than 18,000 acres, the lake offers ample opportunities for boating, fishing, swimming, canoeing and other water recreation. A restaurant at the marina is open seasonally.

Hikers can take to about 12 miles of trails that vary in difficulty. These trails provide scenic views of the lake, chances to explore the park’s biodiversity and opportunities to see some limestone sinks and old homesteads or give easy access between the marina and campground.

Speaking of the campground, it is here that you’ll find something unique among state parks: raised wooden platform deck sites instead of the more typical dirt or concrete pads. This is because 6,000 of the acres of the park are actually leased from the Corps of Engineers, and these campsites are constructed in such a way as to have less of an impact on the landscape.

There are 60 tent and trailer sites with electric and water hookups, picnic tables, grills and beautiful views of the lake. If more primitive camping is more to your liking, there are nine walk-in sites available. Campers will also have access to three bathhouses with hot showers (one of which is open year-round), a sewage dump station and a camp store. There is also a number of cabins available for rental.
Among the plants found in Edgar Evins State Park is a species of verbana that has been so recently identified that it does not yet have a taxonomic name.

Home sweet home
While the park is home to hundreds of species of flora and fauna and can feel like a relaxing away from home for visitors, especially many of the returning ones who discovered the park during the pandemic, for Brad Halfacre, the park really is home. Halfacre, the current park manager, grew up living in the park when his father, Carl, was the manager. The elder Halfacre retired in 2014. The park had a few different managers after that until Brad followed in his father’s footsteps when he became manager in 2018. His thoughts on being back at Edgar Evins are simple: He’s home.

Edgar Evins State Park
Visit the park’s website at tnstateparks.com/parks/edgar-evins or call the park office at 931-646-3080.

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NON-TOBACCO MONTHLY RATES
(Rounded up to the nearest dollar. Therefore, actual monthly rates may be slightly less)

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Tennessee’s electric cooperatives are making bold investments today to ensure clean, safe and reliable energy tomorrow.
CEMC youth programs deadline is Tuesday, Feb. 28

Students interested in submitting short stories for the Washington Youth Tour Writing Contest, applying for the Senior Scholarship Program or entering the Calendar Art Contest, mark your calendars for Tuesday, Feb. 28, which is the deadline for each of Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation’s youth programs.

Washington Youth Tour Writing Contest
The Washington Youth Tour Writing Contest is open to high school juniors within CEMC’s service area. To enter, students are required to write short stories titled “Electric Cooperatives Connect” explaining how electric co-ops connect Tennessee communities with energy, education, broadband, economic development and more. Each writer of the top 12 entries will win an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., in June. Additional details about the 2023 Washington Youth Tour Writing Contest can be found online at cemc.org and youthtour.tnelectric.org.

Senior Scholarship Program
CEMC’s Senior Scholarship Program will help graduating seniors pay for college by awarding 12 scholarships of $1,000 each to qualifying students. Each interested student must submit a completed application, including two letters of reference and an original essay of at least 300 words describing what the student most looks forward to about attending college and how a scholarship, in terms of financial assistance, will help in completing his or her education. Applicants must have also attained a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade-point average, enroll or plan to enroll as a full-time student at an accredited Tennessee college (Murray State and Western Kentucky universities are included) and be a graduating senior whose parents or guardians are members of CEMC and receive electric service from CEMC at his or her primary residence. Applications are available online at cemc.org.

2024 CEMC Calendar Art Contest
The 2024 Calendar Art Contest is available to students in grades kindergarten through 12 who live within CEMC’s service area. Winning entries will receive cash prizes and be featured in CEMC’s 2024 calendar.
Entries will be accepted through participating schools, and each grade has been assigned a calendar month to illustrate: January, sixth; February, seventh; March, eighth; April, ninth; May, 10th; June, 11th; July, kindergarten; August, first; September, second; October, third; November, fourth; and December, fifth. Seniors will design the cover.
For additional information about any of CEMC’s youth programs, contact Susie Yonkers, community relations coordinator, at 800-987-2362 or by email at syonkers@cemc.org.
Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation, in cooperation with local energy assistance agencies, offers a program in which members who choose to participate can donate $1 or more each month to help provide some relief to individuals who are struggling to pay their utility bills.

The program, Project Help, allows members to contribute an additional $1 (or more) on their electric bills each month to help pay the utility bills of the elderly, disabled and/or those who are not economically self-sufficient. Project Help is a completely voluntary program. All money collected from Project Help goes to energy assistance agencies in our communities, which determine how these special funds are distributed.

If you would like to contribute to Project Help, you can do so by marking the box on your bill stub and completing the Project Help section on the back of your bill or by contacting CEMC at 1-800-987-2362. Your donation of $1 a month will provide some relief to individuals who are struggling to pay their utility bills.
Look out for scams

Unfortunately, in today’s world, scams have become all too common. Scammers can threaten you with everything from legal action involving the IRS to turning off power to your home.

Utility scams often involve an individual or group posing as an employee of your electric cooperative. The scammer might use threatening language in order to frighten you into offering your credit card or bank account information. Don’t fall victim to these types of scams. Understand the threats posed and your best course of action:

• If someone calls your home or cell phone demanding you pay your electric bill immediately, gather as much information as you can from that individual, hang up the phone and contact the local authorities. Scammers often use threats and urgency to pressure you into giving them your bank account number or loading a prepaid credit or debit card. Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation will never ask you to offer up personal finance information over the phone. If you have any doubts about your utility bill, contact our Customer Service Department either in person, via Live Chat at cemc.org or over the phone at 800-987-2362.

• If someone comes to your home claiming to be an employee of CEMC who needs to collect money or inspect parts of your property, call us to verify the individual is, in fact, an employee. If he or she is not, call local authorities for assistance, and do not let the individual into your home.

There are other types of scams consumers should watch out for:

• Government agencies like the IRS will never call to inform you that you have unpaid taxes or other liens against you. You will always receive this type of information in the mail. If someone calls claiming to be the IRS, hang up immediately.

• If you receive an email from an unknown sender, an email riddled with spelling errors and typos; or an email threatening action unless a sum of money is paid, do not click any links provided within the email, and do not respond to the email. Simply delete the email, or send it to your spam folder.

• If someone calls your home claiming to have discovered a virus on your computer, hang up. This caller’s intent is to access personal information you might be keeping on your computer.

CEMC wants to make sure you avoid any and all types of scams that could put you or your financial information in jeopardy. If you have any questions or doubts about the legitimacy of a call, email or visit to your home, hang up the phone, do not give out any personal information, do not allow the individual into your home and directly contact the company or organization in question.
Should I close off unused rooms during winter?

It seems that if you close the door to an unused room, you can avoid paying to heat it, right? The opposite is true. When you close off an interior room or if you close the air vents in that room, your heating system has to work harder and can even break down as a result.

The reason: Your home’s HVAC system is designed to keep the whole house comfortable by distributing heat evenly throughout. If you close off a room or a duct, you reduce the airflow to that room and force your system to work harder to heat it up.

That can cause a pressure imbalance, which can damage your ducts or your heating system.

Here’s a better idea: Save money and energy by using caulk to seal air leaks around windows and holes in walls where cables enter the house. Add insulation to the attic. Install curtains that are thermally insulated. Replace your outdated thermostat with a programmable one that will lower the temperature at bedtime and when everyone leaves the house in the morning.

For more energy saving tips and information on how to help your home use energy wisely, visit Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation – your trusted local power company – online at cemc.org/programs/energy-solutions.

Weatherproof your house to stay warm

Weatherproofing is an inexpensive way to save money on your energy bills during the winter.

Even the tiniest gaps around windows, doors, light fixtures, electrical outlets and air ducts can slowly let your home’s heated air escape to the outdoors. That can add up to substantial heat loss. Here’s how to avoid leaks:

• Caulk throughout the house wherever walls meet floors or door frames and between the outside of the window frame and the siding. Choose caulk designed for the surface you’re caulking, and try a higher quality caulk, which will last longer.
• Apply weather stripping to all exterior doors and windows. Weather stripping is a thin piece of material that seals the gap between where the door or window meets the jamb. Self-stick foam pieces are quick and easy to apply.
• Replace worn door sweeps on exterior doors to help prevent heat loss under the door.
• Seal windows with thin plastic sheets using insulator kits. Shrinking the plastic film with a hair dryer ensures a smooth and tight seal.

Mind the thermostat. If you have a traditional heating and cooling system, set the thermostat to 68 degrees or lower. Consider a smart or programmable thermostat for additional savings.

Get cozy. Add layers of clothing for additional warmth, and snuggle up under your favorite heavyweight blanket.

Don’t block the heat. If your air vents or heating elements (like radiators) are blocked by furniture or rugs, your home isn’t being adequately heated.

Take advantage of sunlight. Open window coverings during the day to let natural sunlight in to warm your home. Close them at night to block the chilly night air.

Block air leaks. Seal windows and exterior doors with caulk and weather stripping to improve indoor comfort and decrease the amount of energy used to heat your home.
A Future-Proof Fiber Network: Deploying the Next Generation of Fiber Infrastructure

Throughout our fiber network project, one of our primary goals is to construct a reliable, state-of-the-art network that will continue to serve our members for years to come. The fast Gigabit speeds we offer are more than enough to handle the needs of most of our subscribers—but with data usage growing steadily every year, a 1 Gigabit speed may not be enough forever. That’s why Cumberland Connect is proactively future-proofing our network by deploying new infrastructure that is capable of delivering speeds even faster than 1 Gigabit per second.

Beginning in early 2023, we will begin deploying new state-of-the-art network equipment that will allow Internet speed offerings beyond 1 Gigabit per second. Cumberland Connect will begin offering 2 Gbps and 3 Gbps speed packages to select areas coinciding with the kickoff of Phase 4 service zone openings in February of 2023. This will not affect our existing residential packages; rather, the 2 and 3-gigabit speeds will be added to our package lineup. Phase 4 locations will be among the first locations to have access to our Multi-Gig offerings, followed by Phase 5 areas in 2024. Once Phase 5 is completed, we plan to circle back through all remaining locations to update the existing infrastructure and make Multi-Gig services available to all CEMC members.

Multi-Gig Speeds

With Cumberland Connect fiber Internet service, our subscribers are already benefitting from faster downloads and uploads that are far beyond what traditional Internet delivery methods offer. The progress of streaming videos, downloading large files, playing online games, and sharing data between devices has already been augmented considerably. However, as more devices in our homes aim to connect to the Internet, Multi-Gig broadband speeds are becoming increasingly necessary. A speed of 1 Gbps may not be sufficient for all households in the future—especially those with multiple users and many devices accessing the same network.

Without faster Internet speeds, network lag can become an issue with simultaneous usage, making streaming content and online gaming an unreliable experience. Mike Neverdusky, our Network Operations Manager, illustrates the benefit of additional bandwidth provided by Multi-Gig speeds by comparing a network to a crowded highway. “Think of it like opening additional lanes on a busy highway: with Multi-Gig speeds, more vehicles (devices/users) can access the highway (Internet), and the flow of traffic (speed) moves faster due to less congestion.”

Moreover, Multi-Gig speeds facilitate faster downloads and enable reliable performance for multi-media applications, such as virtual reality or teleconferencing, that demand higher than usual processing power. As Multi-Gig speeds become increasingly popular among consumers who understand their importance, having access to Multi-Gig Internet speed ensures more than enough bandwidth for all users and devices, allowing for a frictionless experience on the web.

Speeds faster than 1 Gbps also ensure that your Wi-Fi network is future-proof for years to come. Today, few devices on the market can single-handedly leverage an upload or download speed of 1 Gig. However, technology is constantly progressing every year—and in the near future, a single device will be able to surpass this speed.
Preparing our network with the next generation of fiber equipment ensures we will be ready for technological advancements before they even happen. “When we launched our services back in May of 2020, we delivered only the best and latest technology to our members. That commitment remains unchanged in 2023,” says Never dusky. “We are making Multi-Gig speed offerings a priority as an investment for the future, ensuring that our network will always be able to provide the speed and power to meet our subscribers’ needs.”

Our members are and have always been at the center of Cumberland Connect’s mission, and we are committed to ensuring that we can always offer the best service and experience possible. Our team will always strive to anticipate the future needs of our membership and proactively take action to accommodate these needs. We want to be your reliable Internet provider for years to come – and to us, that means making sure our fiber network is always prepared for anything the ever-changing future may hold.

Members can learn more about our Multi-Gig speed offerings and check availability on our website:

www.CumberlandConnect.org/MultiGig

The Affordable Connectivity Program provides qualifying households with up to a $30 monthly credit to help pay for Internet service. Cumberland Connect offers a 100 Mbps service package at no cost to qualifying households (100 Mbps package is only available to ACP participants).

Two Steps To Enroll:

**STEP 1:** Go to ACPBenefit.org to submit an application or print out a mail-in application.

**STEP 2:** Contact Cumberland Connect directly to select an eligible plan and have the discount applied to your bill. Eligible households must both apply for the program and contact us to select a service plan.

Members can learn more about how to enroll in the ACP and qualification criteria by visiting

www.CumberlandConnect.org/ACP

Scan this code to learn more about Multi-Gig offerings and check availability.

Scan this code to learn about ACP qualification criteria and how to apply.
Q: Are there ways to reduce energy use on a farm?

A: The importance of farms cannot be understated. Farmers feed our families and keep the country running, but the business brings many challenges, including risk and uncertainty. Finding ways to use less energy can reduce costs and result in energy savings for years to come.

When looking to improve farm efficiency, consider these areas:

Motors and pumps
Because motors and pumps account for a significant amount of energy use on a farm, replacing inefficient motors with efficient models can save energy and reduce costs. Adding variable frequency drives (VFDs) allows you to vary the frequency and voltage supplied to the motor or pump to adjust the motor’s speed. This saves kilowatt-hours and reduces load by only operating at the needed capacity. VFDs can be used in place of a phase converter, which allows use of three-phase power equipment where there is only access to single-phase power.

Irrigation
Upgrade irrigation equipment to use less water, which also means less pumping and less energy consumed. The goal is to get the right amount of water where it is needed. This can be accomplished by reducing evaporation through system design and fixing leaks in the system. GPS and geographic information system technologies allow for more specific irrigation targeting.
Monitor and test systems regularly to ensure maximum efficiency.

**Lights**

The longer lights are on, the higher the potential for savings. Prioritize replacing incandescent or fluorescent exterior lighting on photocells or lights that stay on all night. LED lights last two to four times longer than fluorescents and 25 to 35 times longer than incandescents. That means less frequent replacement, which saves on materials and labor costs.

**Heater controls**

In climates where engine block heaters are used to keep vehicle engines warm enough to start, adding engine block heater controls with temperature sensors and timers will reduce electricity use. To keep water from freezing on farms with livestock, save energy by using stock tank heaters with thermostatic controls, which operate only when needed instead of running constantly. Insulated stock tanks could eliminate the need to heat water.

**Emerging technology**

New farming technologies that offer efficiency possibilities include electric tractors, space heating and water heating. Equipment with information technology capabilities can aid efficiency by monitoring conditions and automating farming tasks. As with home efficiency practices, consider the equipment used most and the savings potential from upgrading or modifying existing equipment.

**Rebates**

About 80% of U.S. farms are located in counties served by electric cooperatives. Check with your local electric co-op to see if it offers rebates on farming equipment and energy-efficiency projects that help reduce energy use.

Improving efficiency on the farm can result in reduced energy use, lower bills and improved farming success during challenging financial times.

Miranda Boutelle is vice president of operations and customer engagement at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company. She also writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.
A Tennessee Magazine Special Report

The Rural Risks to Health
hen looking at health data broken down by state, Tennessee ranks relatively low compared to other states around the U.S. A list by U.S. News ranked Tennessee at 40 for healthcare, which took into account public health, healthcare access and healthcare quality.

“We’re one of the least healthy states, but that actually hides an underlying problem, and that is, within Tennessee, there are huge variations,” said Randy Wykoff, dean of the College of Public Health at East Tennessee State University (ETSU). “We have about five relatively wealthy, largely urban counties, and then we have a number of counties that are among the poorest and most rural in America. In those counties, we really see significantly worse health challenges.”

Wykoff said that a number of years ago, ETSU did a study that took all 3,145 counties in the U.S. and ranked them from richest to poorest and then divided them into 50 new states, so the top 2% of the wealthiest counties were put together in a new “state” down to the bottom 2%.

“Tennessee was one of five states that had a county both in the top state, the richest state, and three counties in the poorest state,” Wykoff said.

He added that researchers found nationally that counties that were a part of the poorest 63 counties in the U.S. had a life expectancy below half the countries in the world.

“Basically, we have health statistics comparable to a developing country within the United States defined by poverty, and three of those counties were in Tennessee at that time,” Wykoff said.

Tennessee is a part of two federally defined regions, the Appalachian region and the Delta region, that both have many persistent poverty counties, which are some of the poorest counties in the U.S. While there are certainly health-related problems in Middle Tennessee’s rural counties as well, they are more pronounced in the East and West, said Michael Meit, director of ETSU’s Center for Rural Health Research and deputy director of the ETSU/NORC Rural Health Equity Research Center.

“If you look at Tennessee overall and say, ‘This is how we are in terms of health statistics,’ you’re really ignoring the problems of the rural counties,” Wykoff said.

Those urban, wealthier counties are lifting up the statistics of Tennessee, so health in rural areas is worse than what appears in that statistic.

“I think right now the field of public health broadly has embraced the concept of health equity, and what we mean by that is equal opportunities for everyone to live healthy and productive lives,” Meit said.

Meit said the idea of rural health equity is for rural residents to have the same opportunities to be healthy as everyone else in the U.S.

“Health disparities are kind of the other side of the coin from health equity,” Meit said. “When we talk about health disparities, we’re talking about areas where there are inequities — areas where one population group fares worse than another on a health indicator.”

One of the ways rural health researchers encounter health disparities is through studying the leading causes of death for rural populations versus nonrural populations.

“When you look at the 10 leading causes of death, rural residents nationally and in Tennessee are more likely to die from nine of

The public health field embraces the idea of health equity, or to give rural residents the same opportunities to be healthy as the rest of Tennessee and the U.S. Photograph by Courtney Leeper Girgis
the 10 leading causes of death, and some of those disparities are very, very dramatic.” Meit said.

When looking at data from 2015 to 2017, rural Tennesseans ages 25 to 64 fared worse across nine of the top 10 leading causes of death — those being (at the time) cancer, diabetes, heart disease, homicide, liver disease, lower respiratory disease, septicemia, stroke, suicide and unintentional injuries. The exception for the cause of death being higher in rural communities was homicide, but even then there was a disparity among rural women in Tennessee. Meit said he suspects most of the data collected then would be roughly the same as today, with the exception of COVID-19 now being among the leading causes of death.

“Those are the leading causes of death all over the United States, so it’s not so much that the health issues we face are unique; it’s that the people who live in our rural communities tend to face more of these health inequities than other people in our state,” Meit said.

Meit pointed out that overdose mortality, which falls under unintentional injuries, is particularly challenging in the area near ETSU — East Tennessee and Appalachia — and something ETSU has been tracking very closely.

“There are a lot of reasons for that and a long history that’s tied into that. It goes back to the availability of prescription drugs, which were marketed very, very heavily in the Appalachian region,” Meit said. “As states started to realize that there was this opioid problem growing, they clamped down on overprescribing, they clamped down on access to prescription drugs but did so without addressing the underlying addiction that people had.”

Meit said people turned to illicit substances, primarily heroin, which is more recently being laced with fentanyl. As the substances people used became more deadly, overdose mortality rates got higher. This was made worse during the COVID-19 pandemic where people struggled more economically and had trouble accessing their substance use disorder treatment.

“The latest data to come out of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that the overdose mortality rates are the highest they have ever been in the United States,” Meit said. “They’re the highest they have ever been in Tennessee as well.”

Meit also highlighted lower respiratory disease, which relates to smoking, environmental conditions and work environments, as a cause of death at “exceedingly high rates” in Appalachia.

“Across the board, though, none of these disparities are acceptable,” Meit said. “There is no reason you should be twice as likely to die from heart disease based on your ZIP code or 60% more likely to die from liver disease. That is the magnitude of the disparity seen here in Tennessee among our rural residents.”

Meit said it’s also important to think about the bigger picture as to why rural people are more likely to die from all of these causes of death.

He said that when researchers think about that, they refer to social determinants of health, or social drivers of health, which are things like lack of economic opportunity, lack of access to healthy foods, poor housing and limited educational opportunity.

“All of these are things that are important to people’s health that we have less of in our rural communities, and when we have less of those things, our health suffers,” Meit said.

Wykoff said that one of the biggest issues in rural health right now is direct access to healthcare. There are fewer general healthcare providers in rural communities, and rural hospitals are closing down.

“That’s a problem if you have a health emergency in a rural area in Tennessee,” Meit said. “With that, we lose providers in our communities, so people are then less likely to be able to access basic healthcare services.”

“When people talk about rural health, typically the first thing that comes to mind is access to healthcare services,” Meit said. “The availability of doctors and nurses, whether you have a hospital, whether you have specialists in your community — all of those things are absolutely very important to the health and well-being of rural communities.”

Tennessee is the state with the second-highest number of hospital closures in rural areas, only second to Texas. Since 2010, Tennessee has had 16 rural hospitals close, which account for more than 11 percent of the 140 rural hospitals closed nationwide since 2010, according to data tracked by the University of North Carolina’s Sheps Center.

“Hospital closures are easy to measure, but the impact goes well beyond the loss of access to healthcare,” Wykoff said.

He explained that many people and most businesses are unwilling to consciously move to a community that
doesn’t have healthcare and also that healthcare facilities are economic engines for communities.

“When you see a hospital closing, you see a community that’s been on a downward spiral for a while, and unless something happens to break that spiral, it’s going to continue,” Wykoff said.

“If you drive through small towns, a lot of times you see buildings that are shut down, businesses that didn’t make it, small towns that are struggling to survive, and that’s sort of a surrogate or a representation of rural America,” Wykoff said. “It’s a long, slow process of deterioration, and if it’s something we don’t deal with, it’s not going to go away.”

“One of the tropes we hear in rural health is, ‘If it’s so bad, why don’t they move?’ Well, people choose to live there,” Meit said.

Meit said this is a kind of victim blaming and that people are proud of their rural communities.

“They’re proud of the history and the culture within their communities,” Meit said. “People want to live where their families are and where they’ve lived for generations. And that’s not a bad thing; that’s actually a strength of our rural communities.”

“More importantly, if you want food on your table, if you want energy, if you want recreational opportunities, if you want military protection, all of these things emanate from our rural communities in the United States,” Meit said.

Rural communities comprise about 20% of the country, and Meit said we need to be concerned for the people in rural communities if we want to have those things.

“We have a country of 330 million people. We can’t afford to abandon a significant portion of them just because they seem to have challenges that are hard to get over,” Wykoff said.

Meit said he thinks the key question is not just, “Why should we be concerned?” but, “What should we do?”

“I think there’s an immediate issue to stabilize our rural health systems and our rural hospitals because I will say that once you lose a rural hospital, getting reinvestment in the community becomes much, much harder,” Meit said. “It’s really hard to encourage a large employer to come to a rural community when there’s not an emergency room, when there are no providers to care for their workers, so that’s a problem.”

Stabilizing healthcare systems already established in our rural communities will help us have the foundation that’s important for economic investment to follow, Meit said.

“To the extent that economic well-being drives health status and drives the well-being of our rural communities, we need to make sure that we have economic investment, economic opportunity and educational opportunity,” Meit said. “All of these things that will lift up our rural communities economically will improve health in our communities and make them and make our nation stronger.”

Wykoff said one of Gov. Bill Lee’s first acts in office was to ask his cabinet secretaries to come up with a plan to address the challenges rural Tennessee faces, not just health challenges. Gov. Lee also established a Rural Healthcare Taskforce that meets regularly to come up with solutions specific to Tennessee.

“One of the key elements is to have committed political leadership,” Wykoff said. “Very few things turn on a dime. Things can get worse on a dime, but they don’t get better on a dime, so these are problems that are going to take a while to address, and it does start with leadership.”

One of the things that came from that leadership was the creation of ETSU’s Center for Rural Health Research, which is funded both by the state and a gift from Ballad Health and focuses on distressed counties all over the state of Tennessee.

Wykoff said in some ways, the issues of rural America are also experienced in suburban and urban areas.

“Over time, we as a country have not yet figured out how to make sure people have access to healthcare, and we know that healthcare costs are the leading cause of bankruptcy,” Wykoff said. “That’s going to be just as true for urban Americans and suburban Americans as it is for rural Americans, so we have some problems in rural America that need to be addressed just for the public good.”

It is not all bad news in rural America, Wykoff added. “In addition to the resilience and dedication of the people and the political leadership mentioned earlier, many rural areas have tremendous resources that can be harnessed to improve the health and well-being of the people of the region. There are opportunities in agriculture, tourism, e-commerce and many other fields.”

If you want to find out more about ETSU’s Center for Rural Health Research, go to etsu.edu/cph/rural-health-research. For more information on ETSU’s Rural Health Equity Research Center, visit etsu.edu/cph/rural-health-equity.
Looking for DATES

Chilled Date Cake
Recipes by Tammy Algood
Photograph by Robin Conover

Edible Flowers courtesy of Red Thread Farms located in Leipers Fork
Cinnamon Date Coffee Cake

Yield: 8 servings
1½ cups plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour, divided
1½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup unsalted butter, divided and softened
½ cup granulated sugar
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 egg
½ cup milk
½ cup firmly packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
½ cup chopped walnuts or almonds, divided
¼ cup chopped dates
Powdered sugar for garnish

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour an 8-inch cake pan and set aside.

In a medium bowl, stir together 1½ cups of the flour along with the baking powder and salt. Set aside. In the bowl of an electric mixer, cream ½ cup of the butter, the granulated sugar and extract. Add the egg and blend well. Alternate, add the flour mixture and the milk, beating well after each addition.

Dollop half of the batter into the prepared pan, then spread smooth with a spatula. Set aside.

In a small bowl, melt the remaining butter on low power for 20 seconds in the microwave. Add the brown sugar, remaining flour, cinnamon, half of the nuts and the dates, stirring well and sprinkle evenly over the batter in the pan. Only take to within a half-inch of the pan edge. Dollop the remaining batter over the filling and spread smooth with a spatula. Top with the remaining nuts.

Bake 35-45 minutes or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan on a wire rack for 20 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature with a dusting of powdered sugar for garnish.

Dried Fruit Granola

Yield: 9½ cups
1 cup unsalted butter
½ cup maple syrup
5 cups old-fashioned oats
1 cup pecans, cashews or walnuts
1 cup sliced almonds
½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 tablespoon finely grated orange zest
½ tablespoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon nutmeg
½ cup chopped dates
½ cup golden raisins
½ cup dried cranberries or cherries

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Line a large-rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper (or 2 smaller pans) and set aside.

In a medium bowl, stir together the dates, pecans, cashews or walnuts; almonds; sugar; orange zest; cinnamon; and nutmeg. Drizzle the butter mixture over the oat mixture, stirring well. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet and spread evenly in a spatula. Top with the remaining nuts. Stir well and spread smooth with a spatula. Set aside.

Pipe half of the batter into the prepared pan, then spread smooth with a spatula. Top with the remaining nuts. Stir well and spread smooth with a spatula. Set aside.

Meanwhile, in an extra-large bowl, stir together the oats; pecans, cashews or walnuts; almonds; sugar; orange zest; cinnamon; and nutmeg. Drizzle the butter mixture over the oat mixture, stirring well. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet and spread evenly in the pan. Bake 35-37 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. When golden-brown, remove from the oven and allow to cool on a wire rack.

Meanwhile, stir together the dates, raisins and cranberries or cherries in a large mixing bowl. Break apart the cooled granola and stir together with the dried fruits. Store in airtight containers at room temperature.

Bacon-Wrapped Dates

Yield: 8-10 servings
24 whole dates
12 slices thick cut bacon, cut in half

Place 24 toothpicks in water to soak for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, cut the tips off each end of the dates. Insert the flat end of a skewer into the date until it pushes out the pit. Repeat with each date and discard the pits.

Preheat the grill to medium-high with the lid closed for 10 minutes. Lightly brush the grate with oil. Wrap each date with a cut slice of bacon and secure with a toothpick. Place on the grill, close the lid and grill 4 minutes per side or until the bacon has browned. Serve warm.

Dried Fruit Bourbon Balls

Yield: about 4 dozen
4 ounces whole blanched almonds
4 ounces pecan halves
1 cup cooked millet
Zest of 1 orange, finely minced
4 ounces currants
4 ounces pitted dates
4 ounces golden raisins
4 ounces dried apricots
¼ cup bourbon
6 ounces chopped pecans

Place the whole almonds and pecan halves in a food processor and finely mince. Transfer to a mixing bowl and combine with the millet and zest. Set aside.

Lightly spray the food processor blades with cooking spray. Add the currants, dates, raisins and apricots, pulsing to chop. Add the bourbon and millet mixture and process until the mixture comes together in a ball.

Shape into walnut-sized balls and roll in the chopped pecans. Allow to meld in an airtight container at room temperature for 3 days, then transfer to the refrigerator where they will keep for up to 3 months.

Chilled Date Cake

Yield: 6 servings
3 eggs, separated
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract, divided
½ cup all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ cup finely chopped pecans

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1 cup chopped dates
½ pint heavy cream
¼ cup powdered sugar

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9-inch round cake pan and set aside.

In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat the egg whites at high speed until stiff. Set aside.

In a separate mixing bowl, beat the egg yolks, granulated sugar and ½ teaspoon of the extract for 2 minutes, until thick. Stir in the flour and salt, blending well. Add the pecans and dates, then fold in the egg whites. Transfer to the prepared pan and bake 30 minutes or until the surface springs back when lightly touched. Cool completely in the pan on a wire rack, then invert onto a serving plate.

Whip the cream at high speed of an electric mixer, adding the powdered sugar a tablespoon at a time. Add the remaining extract. Spread over the top of the cake, cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour. Serve cold.

**Baby Spinach and Date Salad**

Yield: 4 servings
3 cups baby spinach
½ cup chopped pitted dates
2 tablespoons orange juice
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon olive oil
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper

Place the spinach in a serving bowl and set aside. In a jar with a tight-fitting lid, combine the dates, orange juice, lemon juice, oil, salt and pepper. Cover and shake well to emulsify. Pour over the spinach and toss to evenly coat. Serve immediately.

**Date night trivia**

The Greek word “daktulos,” which means “finger,” is where we get the name.

The clusters of fruit grow on giant palms that require very hot, dry weather for flourishing. Most produce fruits that are around 2 inches long and oval shaped.

No matter the variety, all dates have one long, relatively narrow seed. Dried dates that are seedless outnumber those with seeds over two to one.

All dates begin as green fruit but change to different colors as they ripen. Those can range from deep red to yellow to black depending on the variety. Most are allowed to ripen off the tree.

Dried dates are fine to store at room temperature with a shelf life of up to six months.

**Tips and tricks**

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

**William writes:** I am trying to save money at the supermarket, and meat is a big area that grabs much of my food budget. I often find skin-on chicken breasts on sale, but most of the recipes I use call for skinless. Is there an easy way for me to remove the skin myself? It is awful slippery!

William, yes! And you are wise to realize that the more that is done to meat, the more expensive it will typically be. Removing the skin can easily be done if the chicken is slightly frozen and you are wearing rubber gloves. So place the chicken in a zip-top bag and put in the freezer for around 20 minutes. Then, after making a couple of connective tissue cuts, the skin will quickly pull off.

**Joyce asks:** I am cleaning out little-used items in my kitchen and wonder how important it is to have a pastry blender.

Joyce, it is very important if you are a baker. When cutting fat into dry ingredients like flour for things like biscuits, a pastry blender evenly distributes the fat throughout the dough. Two knives will work nearly as well if you elect to get rid of your pastry blender, but it will take a little extra “cutting” to make sure the knives make the mixture crumbly.

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.
Do you have a way with words?
Poet’s Playground returns with quarterly contest

After entertaining our readers each month for several years, the frequency of the Poet’s Playground contest was changed at the beginning of 2023. We’re pleased to present the first call for entries in our new Poet’s Playground.

We’re searching for Tennessee’s most talented and gifted poets for our Poet’s Playground contest.

Subject: While the theme of your poem must include something Tennessee-related, including the word “Tennessee” is not required.

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 pertaining to the theme. One entry per person, and please give your entry a title.

Deadline: Entry must be submitted online or postmarked by Friday, March 31. First-place poems will be published in the June 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 and the name of your local electric cooperative.
Find the Tennessee flag

We have hidden somewhere in this magazine the icon from the Tennessee flag like the one pictured here. 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 us with the page number where it’s located. Include your name, address, phone number 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 20-26 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 or email flag@tnelectric.org. Entries must be postmarked or received via email by Wednesday, March 1. Winners will be published in the April issue of The Tennessee Magazine.

December Flag Spotters

We had an issue with one of the photos in our December issue right at press time, necessitating an unusual, last-minute replacement. Unfortunately, we replaced the image containing the hidden flag, and we didn’t catch our mistake until it was too late.

This is a first for us, and we included all entries — regardless of where readers said the flag was hidden — in the sweepstakes drawing for December. The winners are:

William M. Wood, Michie, Pickwick EC
Louise Spivey, Lafayette, Tri-County Electric
Cindy Mathews, South Pittsburg, Sequachee Valley EC

Artist’s Palette
Assignment for February

Three age categories: 1 to 9, 10 to 14 and 15 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.

Entry: Send your original art to: The Tennessee Magazine, Artist’s Palette — February, 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 Wednesday, March 1.

Include: Your name, age, address, phone number, email address and electric cooperative. Leaving anything out will result in disqualification.

Artwork will not be returned unless you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission. 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 April 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 checks, artwork and certificates of placement within six to eight weeks of publication.
WINNERS, 10-14 AGE GROUP: First place: Marlee Levesque, age 13, Volunteer EC; Second place: Nevaeh Roberts, age 14, Appalachian EC; Third place: Brooke Robinson, age 14, Middle Tennessee Electric

WINNERS, 1-9 AGE GROUP: First place: Aryahi Shaw, age 6, Middle Tennessee Electric; Second place: Whitley Haden, age 8, Volunteer EC; Third place: Katelynn Connor, age 9, Middle Tennessee Electric

WINNERS, 15-18 AGE GROUP: First place: Aimee Coel, age 17, Gibson EMC; Second place: Hannah Laughlin, age 18, Middle Tennessee Electric; Third place: Ellen Randall, age 18, Volunteer EC
Great Backyard Bird Count

Feb. 17-20 • birdcount.org

Join the global bird count this February by participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, or GBBC! A collective initiative by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society and Birds Canada, the GBBC helps scientists better understand and track bird populations across not only the United States or North America but around the globe.

The bird count runs from Friday, Feb. 17, to Monday, Feb. 20. Participants are encouraged to spend 15 minutes or more out in their favorite places in nature on one of these four days and take time to identify the birds they see, count them and submit a list of the birds they find to eBird, online at ebird.org.

In 2021, over 6,400 bird species were identified during the GBBC with an unprecedented nearly 380,000 participants. Join the ranks to increase participation even more this year!

For more information on the GBBC or to participate in the count this month, visit birdcount.org. For more information on bird data collected all over the world, visit ebird.org.

West Tennessee

Now-Feb. 28 • The Making of “Elvis” Movie Exhibition Tours, Graceland, Memphis. 800-238-2000 or graceland.com

Feb. 3-5 • 19th Annual Reelfoot Lake Eagle Festival, Reelfoot Lake State Park, Tiptonville. 731-253-9652 or tnstateparks.com/parks/reelfoot-lake

Feb. 3-19 • “Macbeth,” Theatre Memphis. 901-682-8323 or theatrememphis.org

Feb. 11 • T.G. Shephard, The Dixie, Huntingdon. 731-986-2100 or dixiepac.net

Feb. 11 • The Jackson Symphony — February Pops, Carl Perkins Civic Center, Jackson. 731-427-6440 or thejacksonsymphony.org/concerts-events

Feb. 14-19 • “Tina — The Tina Turner Musical,” Orpheum Theatre, Memphis. 901-525-3000 or orpheum-memphis.com

March 3 • Chris Botti, Soundstage at Graceland, Memphis. 877-777-0606 or gracelandlive.com/chris-botti

March 3-5 • Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Orpheum Theatre, Memphis. 901-525-3000 or orpheum-memphis.com

March 3-5 • Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Weekend Contest 2023, Graceland, Memphis. graceland.com

March 4 • The Doo Wop Project, The Dixie, Huntingdon. 731-986-2100 or dixiepac.net

Middle Tennessee

Now-Feb. 23 • Winter Concert Series, Cheekwood Estate and Gardens, Nashville. 615-356-8000 or cheekwood.org/calendar/winter-concert-series

Feb. 3-4 • 17th Annual Southern Motorsports Invitational Tractor and Truck Pull, Tennessee Miller Coliseum, Murfreesboro. 615-809-6154 or southernmotorsports.net

Feb. 9 • Dancing in the Street, Music of Motown with the Nashville Symphony, Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville. 615-687-6400 or nashvillesymphony.org

Feb. 11 • Fifth Annual Victorian Galentine’s Day, Cordell Hull Birthplace State Park, Byrdstown. 931-864-3247 or tnstateparks.com/parks/cordell-hull-birthplace
Feb. 1, 8, 15 and 22 • Winter Wednesdays, 50% off Admission, Museum of Appalachia, Clinton. 865-494-7680 or museumofappalachia.org

Feb. 11 • Sweet As Candy Crafts Show, Coffee County Fairgrounds, Manchester. 931-841-5584 or facebook.com/oliverswoodandfabric

Feb. 25 • Maker Market and Craft Fair, Bledsoe Creek State Park, Gallatin. 615-452-3706 or tnstateparks.com/parks/bledsoe-creek

March 2-5 • Nashville Lawn and Garden Show, The Fairgrounds Nashville. nashvillelawnandgardenshow.com

March 2-11 • 36th Annual Fabulous Fifties Show, Central High School, Fayetteville. 931-433-1234 or fabulousfiftiesshow.com

March 4 • Shabby Lane Spring Emporium, Lane Agri-Park Community Center, Murfreesboro. 615-305-5954 or shabbylaneshoppingevents.com

March 4 • Mardi Gras Excursion Train, Tennessee Central Railway Museum, Nashville. 615-241-0436 or tcry.org

February 2023

List your events in The Tennessee Magazine

The Tennessee Magazine publishes event listings as space allows, giving preference to events of regional or statewide interest and those that are annual or one-time happenings. The magazine does not publish recurring events such as those held weekly.

The magazine assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of information submitted for publication and advises calling or emailing ahead to confirm dates, locations, times and possible admission fees.

To be included in the calendar, visit our website, tnmagazine.org, and fill out the submission form. You can also email listings to events@tnelectric.org or send them to Tennessee Events, P.O. Box 100912, Nashville, TN 37224.

Please include the name of the event, where it will be held (both town and physical location), a phone number readers can call for more information and an email or website address, if applicable, where readers can learn more.

Information must be received at least two months ahead of the event date, and we accept submissions up to a year in advance.

Due to the great demand for space in each month’s magazine, we cannot guarantee publication.

Find a complete listing of submissions we’ve received at tnmagazine.org/events.
Dear reader,

Over the past 16 years, I’ve written 192 “It’s Just Stuff” columns. This will be the last one.

I started in the antiques business in 1974 with a small shop in Madison. I had a solid foundation in fine furniture, glassware, silver and other collectibles by working alongside my mother, Betty Jones. We went on many buying trips into Ohio and neighboring states. She loved the business, especially the interactions with buyers and sellers alike. At the time, the Nashville Flea Market at the fairgrounds was the highlight of her month. I also bought and sold there.

In 1988, I began taking appraisal classes with the International Society of Appraisers. I quickly realized how much more to the business there was than simply pulling a figure out of the air. I learned how to properly prepare appraisal reports that would stand up under legal scrutiny and IRS requirements.

On a more personal level, I was able to empathize with many folks who needed me at a time in their lives when personal and family issues had struck them a devastating blow. I laughed and sometimes cried sitting in the living rooms of hundreds of clients, evaluating the possessions that filled their lives.

This monthly space in *The Tennessee Magazine* allowed me to connect with many thousands of people. Each month, I averaged about 100 inquiries about people’s “stuff.” Choosing only five each month was challenging. Answering all the letters became impossible.

Major thanks go to editor Robin Conover, who recently retired her position. She gave an inexperienced writer the chance to try out a risky idea in the magazine that turned out to be a success. And love and kisses to my husband of 45 years, Mel, for his support and proofreading skills.

In addition to ending my monthly feature here in the magazine, I’m also winding down my appraisal business. I might continue doing occasional appearances before groups that bring items to an event for a quick look and chat.

But my biggest thanks go out to all of you for reading and responding to my efforts over so many years.

— Connie Sue Davenport

And now, one for the road:

Hello, Connie Sue,

I received this small red cup from my mother. I believe it might be Carnival glassware as her extended family members were carnival operators in the 1940s and 1950s, and my mother worked with them during the summers.

There are no maker markings on the bottom of the cup, so I’m at a loss.

Any thoughts or help you can extend would be greatly appreciated.

Michael

Michael,

Your cowboy mug was made by Hazel Atlas in the 1950s. There were four different Western motif milk glass mugs in burgundy, each with a white stencil of cowboys and Native Americans as portrayed by movies of the era. They currently sell online for $9 to $20 each.

It isn’t Carnival glass but might have been a prize at a carnival game.

Thank you, Connie Sue!

We thank Connie Sue Davenport for her entertaining, informative contributions that for years provided further background on our readers’ prized family heirlooms and interesting secondhand treasures.

For appraisals, she recommends contacting a credentialed appraiser. Find a list at isa-appraisers.org.
Why is it that finding a sand dollar on the beach, bleached and shining white, can turn almost anyone into a kid again? It does to me, anyway. I could walk barefoot in the sand for hours, collecting shells with the hope of finding just one complete sand dollar.

On a recent trip to Tybee Island, a bitterly cold wind and rain met me in this quaint coastal town just southeast of Savannah, Georgia. Arriving after dark, I hoped the weather would clear overnight for a sunrise walk on the beach the next morning. My wishes for fairer weather conditions for the next day and the rest of the week were met with a tepid response.

Winter can be a great time to visit the beach — smaller crowds make it more peaceful and tranquil while migrating birds can bring photographic opportunities, but the weather can quickly change for the worse. This particular trip gave me a few hours each day to enjoy being outside and exploring some of the northernmost sections of Georgia’s barrier island system that stretches for some 110 miles from Tybee south to Dungeness and the Cumberland Island National Seashore.

The barrier island systems include thousands of acres of salt marsh and dunes that help protect the main coastline from erosion. The sand here is different than the powdery white sands of the Gulf Coast. It’s more granular and looks like salt and pepper. Filled with tiny grains of granite and clay, dispersed amid pulverized shells and exoskeletons, including sand dollars, the sand contains fantastic black-and-white patterns created by wind and water.

Looking for interesting places to go, my group of friends and I decided to charter a boat to take us to Little Tybee Island for a day of exploring. Though Little Tybee is about twice the size of Tybee Island, it is an undeveloped, uninhabited nature preserve that’s only accessible by boat.

Perhaps the weather and the season played a role, but we were the only people on the Little Tybee beach that day. We had to get there and return through the salt marsh before the tide went out late in the day. This gave us about three hours to roam the beach.

Relatively few birds and a heavily overcast sky left me wondering what, if any, successful photographs I might come away with from this day. Looking around, the patterns in the dunes and the sand began to fascinate me.

With few daily visitors and beachcombers in the winter months, the artifacts carried ashore by waves remain in the place longer than they would on heavily traveled beaches. Remnants of a turtle, horseshoe crabs, shells and sand dollars were strewn everywhere. Many were broken and scattered by animals and birds feeding upon them, but others remained whole.

Each artifact seemed to form an anchor around which the sand then shifted and eroded. As I photographed this specimen, I wondered just how long it had stood up against the dune, untouched and unseen, before I had the opportunity to photograph it.
Eye Doctor Helps Tennessee Legally Blind To See
High Technology For Low Vision Patients Allows Many To Drive Again

For many patients with macular degeneration and other vision-related conditions, the loss of central visual detail also signals the end to one of the last bastions of independence: driving.

A Lebanon optometrist, Dr. John Pino, is using miniaturized telescopes that are mounted in glasses to help people who have lost vision from macular degeneration and other eye conditions.

“Some of my patients consider me the last stop for people who have vision loss,” said Dr. Pino, one of only a few doctors in the world who specialize in fitting biopic telescopes to help those who have lost vision due to macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and other debilitating eye diseases.

Imagine a pair of glasses that can improve your vision enough to change your life. If you’re a low vision patient, you’ve probably not only imagined them, but have been searching for them. Biopic telescopes may be the breakthrough in optical technology that will give you the independence you’ve been looking for.

Patients with vision in the 20/200 range can many times be improved to 20/50 or better.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and vision loss in people over 50. Despite this, most adults are not familiar with the condition. As many as 25% of those over the age of 50 have some degree of macular degeneration. The macula is only one small part of the retina; however, it is the most sensitive and gives us sharp central vision. When it degenerates, macular degeneration leaves a blind spot right in the center of vision, making it difficult or impossible to recognize faces, read a book, or pass the driver’s vision test.

Nine out of 10 people who have macular degeneration have the dry form. New research suggests vitamins can help.

The British medical journal BMC Ophthalmology recently reported that functioning, especially driving,” says Dr. Pino.

When Elaine, 57, of Kingsport, TN, came to see Dr. Pino she wanted to keep her Tennessee driver’s license and was prescribed biopic telescopic glasses to read signs and see traffic lights farther away. Dr. Pino also prescribed microscope glasses for reading newspapers and menus in restaurants.

As Elaine puts it, “My regular glasses didn’t help too much – it was like looking through a fog. These new telescopic glasses not only allow me to read signs from a farther distance, but make driving much easier. I’ve also used them to watch television so I don’t have to sit so close. I don’t know why I waited to do this; I should have come sooner.”

“Biopic telescopes can cost over $2,000,” said Dr. Pino, “especially if we build them with an automatic sunglass.”

“The major benefit of the biopic telescope is that the lens automatically focuses on whatever you’re looking at,” said Dr. Pino. “It’s like a self-focusing camera, but much more precise.”

To learn more about biopic telescopes or to schedule a consultation with Dr. Pino, give us a call at 1-855-405-8800. You can also visit our website at:

www.lowvisiontn.com

For more information and a FREE telephone consultation, call us today:
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Office located in Lebanon, TN

John M. Pino, O.D., Ph.D.
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