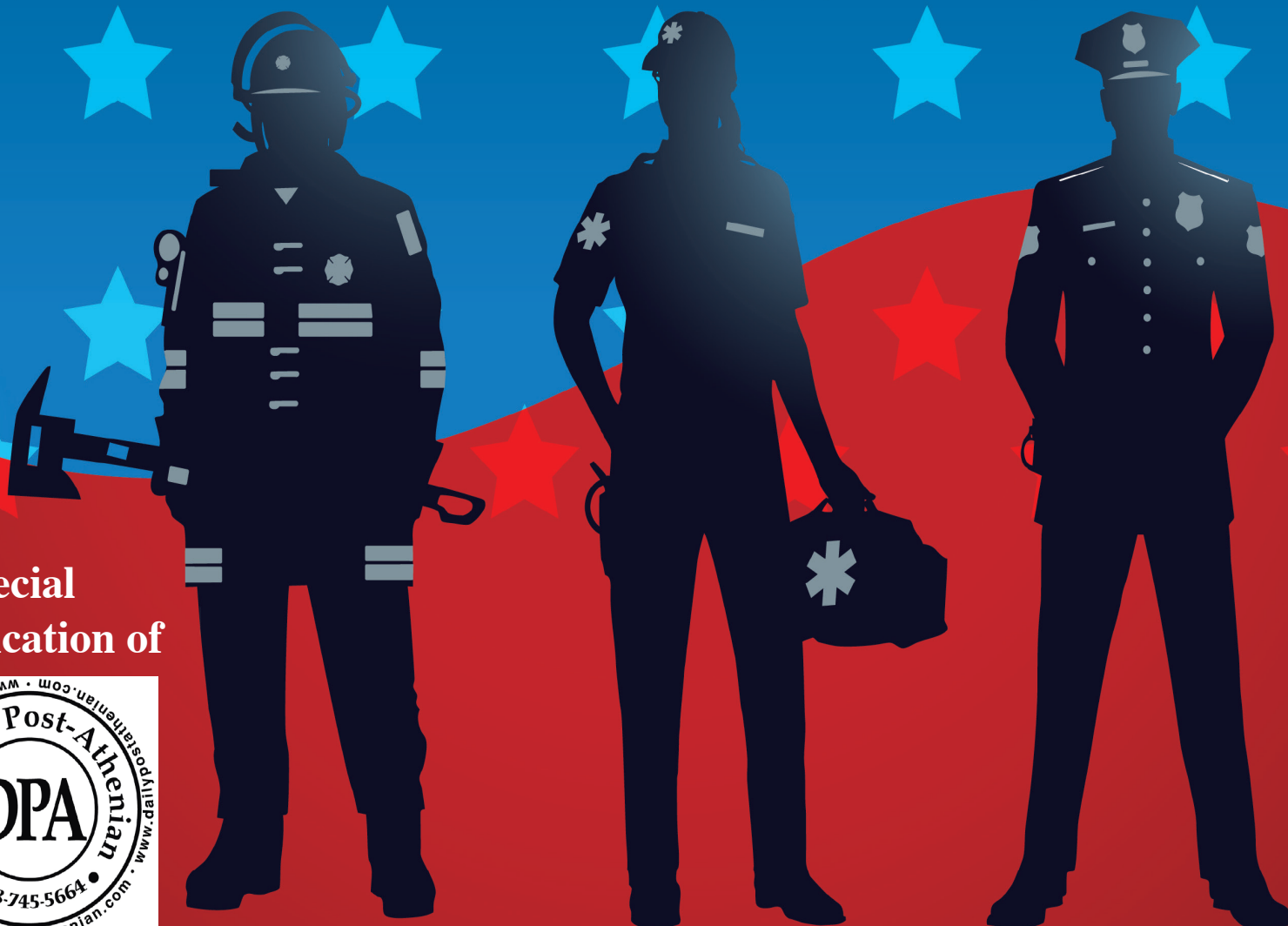


HOMETOWN Heroes



A Special
Publication of



New baby box installed at Athens Fire Department

The Athens Fire Department recently held a blessing for their new SafeHaven Baby Box.

Athens Fire Chief Brandon Ainsworth started the Blessing of the Box program at the Athens Fire Department as a way to inform the public of their new service as well as introduce the community to the people who helped make this project possible.

“We started this process with SafeHaven to have this SafeHaven baby box installed a couple of months ago and that process included our city council. It had to go to them for a vote, which it passed unanimously,” Ainsworth expressed. “We’ve built along the way a relationship with the people from SafeHaven and I’m grateful they were able to make it here today.”

The SafeHaven Baby Box is an area set into the side of the fire department that will allow women the ability to anonymously relinquish their baby of 46 days or younger to the fire department.

Once the baby box is opened, an orange bag will fall out of the door for the mother to claim once she has securely placed her baby in the box. The box is temperature regulated and will notify authorities that a child had been placed inside of it.

The orange bag that will fall to the ground upon opening the door contains information for the mother who released her infant that will provide knowledge of laws that protect them as the parent of the baby.

According to the founder of SafeHaven Baby Box, Monica Kelsey, the average time a baby is alone in the box is two minutes with the longest recorded time of a baby being held in the box for five minutes.



“We have learned a lot about this and about the state law. What a lot of people didn’t know is that we are already a safe haven, even without this box ...,” Ainsworth expressed. “I truly do appreciate all of the relationships that we fostered through this and of course the community has been overwhelming.”

Ainsworth noted that the community did not pay for the SafeHaven Baby Box and instead it was funded through a private

donation.

Various other speakers participated in the program leading up to a speech made by the SafeHaven founder.

“It is always a blessing to come to a community that values life,” Kelsey expressed. “By the amount of people that showed up today, you can tell that Athens is one of those cities that values the life of a child.”

Kelsey stated that this marked the 354th baby box in the nation.

“When I started this, I only wanted to save a few babies in Indiana. I’m from the State of Indiana, I started this in Indiana, and we were finding on average about two babies dead in our state,” Kelsey stated. “I thought if I could just save those two babies every year maybe I could get a ticket into the golden gates and Christ obviously had a different plan for me because now

SEE BABY BOX, A3

Baby Box

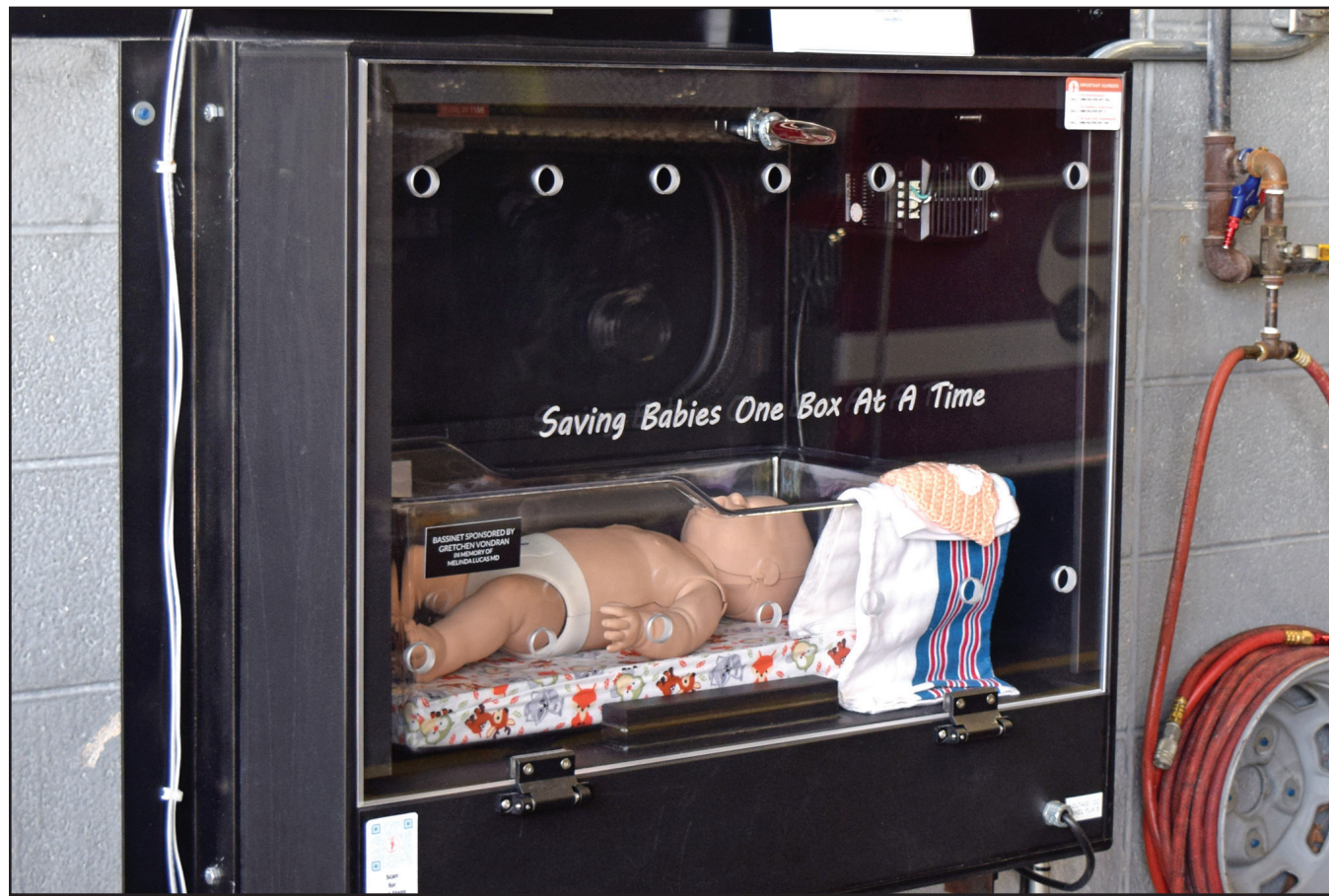
Continued from A2

I'm in 23 states, 354 locations and we are not stopping."

Kelsey stated that she had a personal interest in providing a safe environment for parents to give up custody of their children anonymously due to having been abandoned as a baby herself.

"I stand on the front lines of this ministry as one of these kids that wasn't lovingly, safely, anonymously, placed in a SafeHaven Baby Box," she expressed. "This is my legacy and I am now their voice. I will forever walk with these moms as they choose something safe for their child and I'll forever walk with these kids and show them their worth."

Kelsey did note that any parent that changes their mind can still reclaim their child within 30 days of relinquishing them to the baby box.



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New AMR leadership now in place in McMinn County

The local branch of American Medical Response (AMR) has new leadership.

McMinn County Mayor John Gentry recently introduced the two new local leaders of the organization that provides ambulance service to the county.

Lance McConkey is returning as the county director and Greg Miller has taken over in the role of regional director.

McConkey, who lives in Englewood, talked to the McMinn County Commissioners about his familiarity with them and the community.

“I know most of you quite well,” he said. “This is my second time around being in this position.”

McConkey added that he plans to get more into detail with commissioners on his plans in the near future.

“We’ve got some stuff coming up to meet with ya’ll about in the next couple of months,” he said.

Miller, meanwhile, is not quite as local as McConkey but is native to the area. He said AMR officials believed someone with strong ties to the area would be a good fit.

“The company decided

instead of appointing someone else to fill this seat from Birmingham, they realized the importance of our partners in East Tennessee,” he said.

Miller grew up in Jefferson County, where he began in emergency services in 1990.

He would later become a professor of paramedics at Walters State Community College, where he also worked with the RN program and police academies.

After that, he became the fire and EMS chief in Gatlinburg during the 2016 wildfires and then moved to Sumner County to serve in the same role there.

He retired for a brief period before deciding to come back to duty again.

“The private sector said ‘no, we think there’s a little more gas left in the tank,’” Miller said. “The passion and the dedication is the same as it was in 1990.”

Now that he’s in this role, Miller stressed the importance of working together with the community.

“Our focus is to continue improving the level of care and efficiency we provide to you and your citizens,” he said. “We’re here, I’m close by. Hopefully that means we can be a lot more responsive to you guys.”



Greg Miller



Lance McConkey

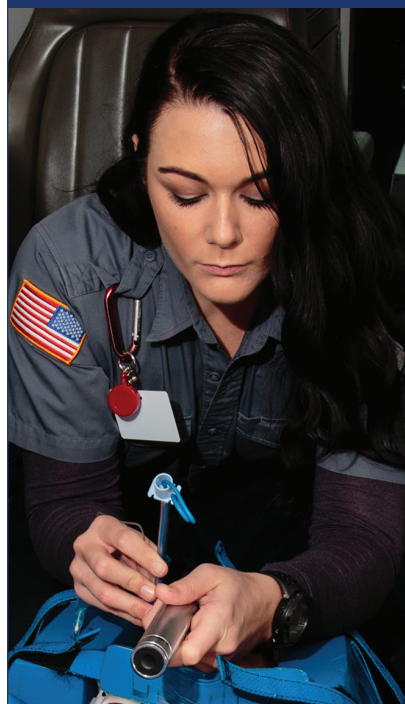
Rachel Jestrab Worley, MD, FAAP
Melanie Long, FNP-BS
Joy Asbury, FNP-C



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A native of Cleveland, Tennessee, Dr. Spangler is fellowship trained and specializes in arthroscopic surgery with a focus on shoulders, hips and knees. He has extensive training in total shoulder, total hip and total knee replacements and a special interest in treating sports-related injuries.



Jason Spangler, DO
Orthopaedic Surgery
Sports Medicine

McMinn County first responder recognized as emerging EMS leader

American Medical Response (AMR), a division of Global Medical Response, recently announced Critical Care Transport (CCT) paramedic Andy Hardy has been awarded the American Ambulance Association (AAA) EMSNext Award for 2025.

This national honor — awarded to just 16 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) professionals across the country — celebrates emerging leaders who are shaping the future of the EMS industry.

Starting out as a volunteer firefighter, Hardy's journey with AMR began in 2012 as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT).

According to a news release, “Since then, he has exemplified what it means to grow with purpose. His steady commitment to learning, paired with his calm presence in high-pressure situations, has made him a trusted and respected clinician.”

“Andy has consistently risen to the challenge of growing in his knowledge of EMS and skillset,” said Lance McConkey, operations manager for AMR. “We are proud of the great work he has accomplished and look forward to see what he does next.”

As part of the EMSNext class, he will participate in a yearlong leadership development program.

“I love being a first responder and think this is a career path for individuals who want to help others,” said Hardy. “I am a firm believer that advisory support is the foundation for a team's long-term success, and I encourage anyone new to the EMS industry to consistently seek advice and feedback. We as providers should always be looking for opportunities to grow.”

The 2025 EMSNext class was recognized at the AAA Annual Trade Show and Convention.

For more information about the EMSNext program, visit the American Ambulance Association online.



Eight police forces serve McMinn, Meigs counties

Along with a sheriff's department in each county, McMinn and Meigs counties have six total police departments spread across the region.

McMinn County

- McMinn County Sheriff's Department: Joe Guy, sheriff
- Athens Police Department: Fred Schultz, chief; Jason Garren, deputy chief
- Etowah Police Department: Scott Hicks, chief
- Niota Police Department: Brandon Jenkins, chief



Guy



Melton

- Calhoun Police Department: Michael Bledsoe, chief
- Englewood Police Department: Michael Hayes, chief

Meigs County

- Meigs County Sheriff's Department: Jackie Melton, sheriff; Brian Malone, chief deputy
- Decatur Police Department: Brandon Crisp, chief



Tribute to the City of Etowah Police & Fire Departments

In Etowah, where the spirit of community runs deep, we are blessed by the steadfast presence of our police and fire departments.

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To Our Police Department:



You patrol with purpose and walk with compassion. Whether responding to a call or simply checking in on a local business, your presence brings peace. Through walk-ins and neighborhood patrols, you build trust one conversation at a time. You uphold the law with fairness and empathy, reminding us that safety begins with relationship.

To Our Fire Department:



You are protectors, educators, and neighbors. Beyond the bravery of emergency response, you step into classrooms and libraries with open hearts. You teach our children about fire safety, courage, and preparedness – planting seeds of wisdom that will last a lifetime. You assist with public library programs, making learning interactive, inspiring, and safe.

Your outreach is a gift, and your presence is a comfort.

Together, You Represent the Best of Etowah



Your patrols, walk-ins, school visits, and community programs show us that public service is not just about emergencies – it's about everyday care. You are the heartbeat of our city, and your dedication shapes the culture of kindness we cherish.

On Behalf of a Grateful City:

Thank You for your courage. Thank You for your presence. Thank You for walking with us, teaching our children, and keeping Etowah strong.

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Mull remembered as last MCSD deputy killed in line of duty on 50th anniversary

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the last McMinn County Sheriff's Department deputy to be killed in the line of duty.

That man was Deputy Dan Mull, who was killed by a suspect coming from Knoxville in 1975. Mull was killed on Aug. 20 and current McMinn County Sheriff Joe Guy remembered Mull and his heroism.

"Please join the men and women of the McMinn County Sheriff's Department in remembering Deputy Dan Mull and his ultimate sacrifice to the citizens of McMinn County," Guy said.

On Aug. 20, 1975, McMinn County Sheriff's Deputy Dan Mull stopped by Crazy Ed's Truck Stop at I-75 Exit 56 in Niota for a cup of coffee with a relative at around 3:30 a.m. on a Wednesday. While he was there, three young people from Morristown drove into Crazy Ed's parking lot and Kenneth Claiborne, 22, went inside.

The three were fresh off of robbing an Exxon service station at Cedar Bluff in Knoxville, where they had threatened a clerk with a shotgun and had hung around taking money as it was paid at the pumps.

Claiborne also apparently declared his intentions to kill a police officer that night.

After arriving at Crazy Ed's, Claiborne headed inside and asked the cashier for change



for two one-dollar bills. After getting that, he bought a pack of cigarettes and then spied Mull sitting at one of the booths.

Claiborne then walked over to Mull, pulled his gun and placed it at the base of the deputy's head. He warned Mull not to move and slid the deputy's gun out of its holster. Once that was removed, Claiborne pulled the trigger and shot Mull in

the back of his head,

Several people in the truck stop, including Mull's relative, thought it was some sort of joke to that point, but it clearly was not as Mull's spine was shattered by the shot and he fell to the ground dead.

"He shot him before he knew what was happening," then-McMinn County Sheriff Gary McAllister said at the time. "He didn't have a

chance."

Amid the confusion, a truck driver got up and attempted to keep Claiborne in the building. It was to no avail, however, as Claiborne shot at the truck driver and then fired several more random shots as he got back into his truck.

Claiborne and his two accomplices - Gary Wolfe, 23, and Joyce McIntosh, 19 - then took off in their pickup truck, but were caught by sheriff's deputies about a mile from the truck stop. Neither Wolfe nor McIntosh claimed any involvement in the killing and had attempted to calm Claiborne down earlier.

McAllister noted at the time that "several" guns were found in the pickup truck.

Claiborne was convicted of first-degree murder on Friday, Feb. 13, 1976, and sentenced to death in the electric chair.

Wolfe pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. McIntosh testified against Claiborne and the first-degree murder charge against her was dropped as a result.

Mull, 54, had no known family in the area as he had moved here from Fannin County, Ga., only about 2-1/2 years earlier. He did, however, have a girlfriend who worked at the truck stop at the time.

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911 dispatchers provide direct link to emergency services



Shown here is McMinn County E-911 shift leader Bridger Frerichs. “They are definitely hard workers,” McMinn County E-911 Personnel Manager Dana Mashburn said of the local dispatchers. “They’re all greatly appreciated.”



Shown here are McMinn County E-911 telecommunicator Jackie Holmes (left) and floor supervisor Lacy Farrell.



Shown here is McMinn County E-911 telecommunicator Lisa Craig.



Shown here is McMinn County E-911 telecommunicator Bobby Garren.



Shown here is McMinn County E-911 telecommunicator Shelby Young.

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do for our community!**

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