

BLOUNT COUNTY BUSINESS NEWS

Volume 1, Issue 1

Alcoa Maryville Friendsville Greenback Louisville Rockford Townsend Walland

JANUARY 2026

It's tough to be in the coffee business these days

Local coffee entrepreneurs find ways to stay profitable in light of increased coffee prices

By Mathaus Schwarzen

Julia Sayles has learned a lot about coffee prices this year.

Her company, called Kindred Coffee, opened in August. She offers a mix of drinks from the back of a specially designed trailer – a business location chosen because of the lower overhead needed to break into the local scene. She has catered events, served at markets and plenty in between.

There's just one problem.

"I quickly realized I'm actually not making enough money," Sayles said.

A major culprit, she explained, is the cost of the coffee itself. Since hitting the local market, Sayles said the price of the roasted beans she's buying has jumped by about \$2 per pound.

She doesn't use as much coffee as many of her competitors, but at 10 to 15 pounds per week, those price changes add up. And there are other prices to consider, as well.

The average coffee shop owner has to pay for beans, syrups, milks and even the coffee cups themselves.

Within months of opening, she's already had to raise her prices. Now, with more events under her belt and a better understanding of the local market, she's feeling steadier. Although she's still in the "paying things off" phase, she's making enough to cover operating expenses.

Sayles works another job on the side. But if she ever wants to open a brick-and-mortar store, she said, she needs to find a niche. Blount County has 25 coffee shops and a few coffee trailers, each competing to attract their own slice of the local clientele.

To find her own spot, Sayles is leveraging social media marketing and even paying a little more to change the shape of her cups in an effort to "go viral" through online connections. Every time a customer posts a photo of her cups online, she said, it's free advertising for the business.

Her process is working well – most of her bookings come from social media. But as costs continue to rise, she may need to reassess prices yet again.



Photo by Robert Berlin

Alec Glover, 30, pours espresso at Beard Brothers Coffee in Maryville. He's been in the coffee business for more than 10 years. "For me, it's about the people," he says. "Coffee is a great way to build relationships."

Global Issues Affect Local Prices

Tosha Wilhelmsen has operated Southern Grace Coffee Co. in Maryville for about a decade. The business roasts and sells beans, offers a mix of coffee and tea-based drinks and also sells baked goods with a gluten-free focus. But over the past several years, Wilhelmsen said she's seen a steady rise in the price of green, unroasted beans.

In the coffee business, volatile prices are a fact of life. Two years ago, Wilhelmsen was paying about \$4 per pound for beans. In 2025, she saw prices around \$6.

Those prices reflect national trends recorded by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and according to the National Coffee Association, "There is no single reference for the global market price of coffee. But

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Walland man's program gives aggressive dogs a second chance

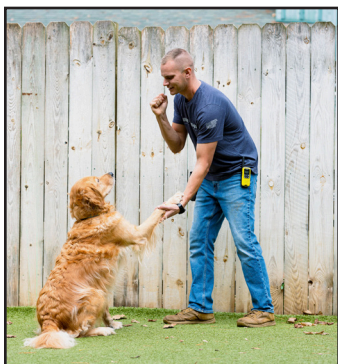


Photo courtesy Estarr Vilson

Shane Hawkins shakes hands with one of his clients at his training facility co-located with Crikett Lane Kennels in Walland.

By Robert Berlin

Shane Hawkins is a successful entrepreneur, but he got there on the hardest pathway.

"Well, I didn't know any better back then, and I was just trying to get through life the best I could," Hawkins said while sitting in the middle of a brightly painted room where a wall mural of dog pictures and the musky smell of dogs hangs in the air.

He was a young man growing up wild an hour north Atlanta in Buford, Georgia, doing all the things that would eventually land him in the Gwinnett County jail waiting to begin a 15-year sentence for Driving Under the Influence - Serious Injury

by Vehicle in 2014.

"They threw the book at me, and I needed it too," he admits.

He was caught in a vicious cycle and it was going to take something big to straighten him out.

Two things happened to him in jail that changed the course of his life.

First, he met Mac at an AA Meeting.

"This guy named Mac walks in and he says, 'When I was a kid, I watched my stepfather murder my mother and he would always molest me and rape me,'" Hawkins remembers. "This man went through the craziest thing, and yet, he stands there in front of a whole crowd of people with peace and freedom like

nothing happened to him."

Hawkins wanted to experience that peace and freedom too. So he started seeking ways to change how he thought and felt about himself and others – ultimately finding his Christian faith.

And then he was chosen to participate in Operation Second Chance, also known as the Gwinnett Jail Dog Program.

This was a partnership between the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office and the Society of Humane Friends of Georgia. The initiative sought to rescue shelter dogs, train them for adoption while also rehabilitating inmates. From 2010 until ending

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BUSINESS BY THE NUMBERS

AIRPORT

	SEP 2025	OCT 2025	+/-
FLIGHTS			
Air Carrier	3,041	3,389	11%
Air Taxi	2,254	2,344	4%
General	4,426	4,770	8%
Military	484	458	-5%
PASSENGERS			
Enplaned	158,327	173,431	10%
Deplaned	154,970	182,002	17%
FREIGHT			
Enplaned (lbs)	1,824,565	2,037,789	12%
Deplaned (lbs)	3,016,362	3,279,908	9%

Source: Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority as of: 1/1/2026
Note: Numbers are delayed until FAA Audit is complete.

TOURISM/HOSPITALITY

Occupancy Taxes Collected	
OCT 2025	\$725,297
NOV 2025	\$793,078
% Change	9%
Hotel/Motel Taxes Collected (Gross)	
Alcoa	\$3,995,045
Maryville	\$570,680
Townsend	\$10,824
GSMNP Visits & Overnight Stays	
Visits	Overnight Stays
NOV 867,677	84,200
DEC	Not Available due to Government Shutdown

Source: Blount Partnership, Blount County Clerk's Office & U.S. National Park Service as of 1/1/2026. NOTE: Does not include AirBNB tax collections, which are reported once annually.

REAL ESTATE



Blount County Housing Market Data

Metric	\$	1Y Change	3Y Change
Median Home Price	\$399,900	0.00%	7.73%
Price per sq ft	\$240	2.50%	10.42%
Active Listing	\$1,050	12.00%	27.43%
Avg Days on Market	\$72	13.89%	29.17%
Rental Properties	\$47	19.15%	-6.38%
Media Monthly Rent	\$1,850	-17.30%	0.00%

Source: Realtor.com as of: 10/2025



Mortgage Rates

15 YEAR FRM		30 YEAR FRM	
Rate	5.44%	Rate	6.15%
1-YR Change	-0.69	1-YR Change	-0.76
52-WK Avg	5.78%	52-WK Avg	6.59%
52-WK Range	5.41% - 6.27%	52-WK Range	6.15% - 7.04%



Blount County Building Permits

Permits Issued in DEC	Total Est. Value	Total Permit Fees
64	\$22,091,696	\$70,755

New Home Construction - December 2025

> \$200k	\$200-399k	\$400-699k	+ \$700k
9	8	7	10

Source: Blount County Development Services as of: 1/1/2026

CONSUMER/RETAIL

Fuel Costs



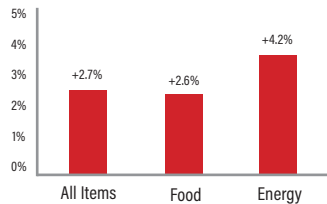
National Average
Regular \$2.833
Diesel \$3.559

S/ gal	Knoxville Metro		Tennessee Avg	
	Reg.	Diesel	Reg.	Diesel
DEC	\$2.584	\$3.391	\$2.607	\$3.423
JAN	\$2.455	\$3.240	\$2.528	\$3.310
+/-	-\$0.129	-\$0.151	-\$0.079	-\$0.113

Source: AAA as of 1/1/2026

Consumer Price Index

12-Month Percentage Change Major Categories



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as of 11/2025

LOCAL STOCKS

CIRRUS AIRCRAFT LTD (CRRSF)

7.00 -1.27% (-0.090) 1M

Market: OTC

Mkt. Cap	20.39B	52-wk High	\$9
Avg. Vol.	280	52-wk Low	\$3
Volume	0	Outstanding	365.99M
		Employees	3K

DENSO ADR (DN20Y)

13.64 +4.04% (+0.53) 1M

Market: OTC

Open	\$13.71	52-wk High	\$15.85
High	\$13.77	52-wk Low	\$10.96
Low	\$13.64	Beta	1.08
Mkt. Cap	6.28T	Outstanding	2.91B
Avg. Vol.	104.33K	Employees	158K
Volume	44.69K		

Newell Brands (NWL)

3.72 -2.36% (-0.090) 1M

Market: NASDAQ

Open	\$3.76	Qtrly Dividend	\$0.07
High	\$3.79	52-wk High	\$10.85
Low	\$3.71	52-wk Low	\$3.07
Mkt. Cap	1.56B	EPS	\$0.06
Avg. Vol.	7.45M	Beta	0.90
Volume	4.71M	Outstanding	419.20M
Dividend	753%	Employees	24K

Smith & Wesson Brands (SWBI)

9.87 +13.71% (+1.19) 1M

Market: NASDAQ

Open	\$9.97	Qtrly Dividend	\$0.13
High	\$10.04	P&E Ratio	44.48
Low	\$9.85	52-wk High	\$11.50
Mkt. Cap	439.15M	52-wk Low	\$7.73
Avg. Vol.	690.70K	EPS	\$0.22
Volume	368.90K	Beta	1.11
Dividend	5.27%	Outstanding	44.49M
		Employees	1K

Vulcan Materials (VMC)

285.22 -2.27% (-6.63) 1M

Market: NYSE

Open	\$288.01	Qtrly Dividend	\$0.49
High	\$289.09	P&E Ratio	33.91
Low	\$285.14	52-wk High	\$311.74
Mkt. Cap	37.69B	52-wk Low	\$215.08
Avg. Vol.	946.52K	EPS	\$8.41
Volume	621.95K	Beta	1.06
Dividend	0.69%	Outstanding	132.13M
		Employees	11K

Source: Google Finance as of 1/1/2026

LOCAL GROCERIES	Aldi Alcoa		Food City Springbrook		Food Lion E. Broadway		Kroger Alcoa		Publix Foothills Mall		Walmart Hwy. 411	
	Price	% Change	Price	% Change	Price	% Change	Price	% Change	Price	% Change	Price	% Change
Bacon/lb	\$4.48	0.7%	\$7.49	-6.1%	\$6.37	41.9%	\$5.73	14.8%	\$6.99	0.0%	\$4.67	0.0%
Chicken/lb	\$3.49	0.0%	\$3.99	33.4%	\$2.69	0.0%	\$2.79	-53.4%	\$4.99	-28.6%	\$3.57	0.0%
80/20 Ground Beef/lb	\$3.44	-36.2%	\$6.99	-12.5%	\$6.59	-5.7%	\$8.49	27.7%	\$9.59	-4.0%	\$7.19	0.0%
Whole Milk/gal	\$3.38	-14.2%	\$2.99	0.0%	\$2.49	-3.9%	\$2.39	0.0%	\$3.55	0.0%	\$2.22	0.0%
Eggs/dozen	\$1.96	0.0%	\$2.99	25.1%	\$2.89	32.0%	\$2.09	0.0%	\$2.48	18.7%	\$1.97	0.0%
White Bread/loaf	\$1.39	0.0%	\$1.99	-26.0%	\$2.39	0.0%	\$2.99	15.4%	\$1.99	0.0%	\$0.96	1.1%
Carrots/lb	\$0.95	0.0%	\$1.50	25.0%	\$1.00	-28.6%	\$1.00	-33.3%	\$1.49	-6.3%	\$0.93	50.0%
Potatoes/lb	\$0.37	12.1%	\$1.25	78.6%	\$1.20	39.5%	\$0.55	-1.8%	\$0.80	-20.0%	\$1.38	4.5%
Gala Apples/lb	\$0.66	-20.5%	\$1.99	42.1%	\$1.29	-13.4%	\$1.49	0.0%	\$1.59	0.0%	\$1.42	0.0%
Coffee/lb	\$8.96	0.4%	\$10.65	48.3%	\$11.32	13.3%	\$8.72	-18.2%	\$15.96	-25.0%	\$6.98	-27.1%

Methodology: Our reporters visited each location in person to gather prices for common items families purchase. We select the lowest priced items (typically store brand) compared to last month's prices. Prices may have changed since publication. This table is for general price awareness only. As of 1/1/2026.

GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

ALCOA

Jan. 20 | 7pm
Alcoa School Board
Alcoa High School, 1205 Lodge St.,
Alcoa www.AlcoaSchools.net

Feb. 10 | 7pm
Alcoa Board of Commissioners
City Building, 223 Associates Blvd., Alcoa
<https://www.CityofAlcoa-TN.gov/AgendaCenter>

BLOUNT COUNTY

Jan. 22 | 5:30pm
County Planning Commission
County Courthouse, 345 Court St.,
Maryville
<https://BlountTN.Legistar.com>

Jan. 27 | 6:30pm
Soil and Water Conservation District
1217 McArthur Rd., Maryville
www.BCSWCD.org

Jan. 28 | 4pm
Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Commission
McGhee Tyson Airport - Henrietta Grant Board Room (3rd Floor), Alcoa
<https://FlyKnoxville.com/Airport-Authority/Board-Staff/>

Feb. 3 | 9am
South Blount Utility District
Main Office, 320 Partnership Pkwy, Maryville
www.SouthBlountUtility.org/Community/Calendar

Feb. 3 | 11am
Blount County Public Services Committee
Maryville Operations Center, 332 Home Ave., Maryville
<https://BlountTN.Legistar.com>

Feb. 3 | 12:30pm
Blount County Education Committee
Rockford Elementary School, 3728 Williams Mill Rd., Rockford
<https://BlountTN.Legistar.com>

Feb. 5 | 5:30pm
Blount County School Board
District Office, 831 Grandview Dr., Maryville
www.BlountK12.org/Board_of_Education

Feb. 12 | 5pm
Blount County Budget Committee
County Courthouse, 345 Court St., Maryville
<https://BlountTN.Legistar.com>

Feb. 19 | 5:30pm
Blount County Beer Board
County Courthouse, 345 Court St., Maryville
<https://BlountTN.Legistar.com>

FRIENDSVILLE

Jan. 26 | 6pm
Friendsville Planning and Zoning Commission
City of Friendsville, 213 W. College Ave., Friendsville
www.FriendsvilleTN.gov/Boards-Committees

Feb. 5 | 6pm
Friendsville Board of Commissioners
City of Friendsville, 213 W. College Ave., Friendsville
www.FriendsvilleTN.gov/Boards-Committees

Feb. 5 | 7pm
Friendsville Utility Board
City of Friendsville, 213 W. College Ave., Friendsville
www.FriendsvilleTN.gov/Boards-Committees

GREENBACK

Feb. 10 | 7pm
Greenback Board of Mayor and Aldermen
Greenback Community Center, 6889 Morganton Rd., Greenback
<https://Greenbackgov.com/Agendas>

LOUISVILLE

Jan. 20 | 6pm
Planning Commission
Town of Louisville, 3623 Louisville Rd., Louisville
<https://TownofLouisvilleTN.sites.thrillshare.com/page/events>

Jan. 27 | 6pm
Recreation Advisory Board
Town of Louisville, 3623 Louisville Rd., Louisville
<https://TownofLouisvilleTN.sites.thrillshare.com/page/events>

Feb. 10 | 6pm
Louisville Board of Mayor and Aldermen
Town of Louisville, 3623 Louisville Rd., Louisville
<https://TownofLouisvilleTN.sites.thrillshare.com/page/events>

MARYVILLE

Feb. 3 | 7pm
Maryville City Council
Maryville City Municipal Building, 400 W. Broadway Ave., Maryville
www.MaryvilleGov.com

Feb. 9 | 5pm
Maryville Downtown Design Review Board
Maryville City Municipal Building, 400 W. Broadway Ave., Maryville
www.MaryvilleGov.com

Feb. 9 | 6pm
Maryville Historic Zoning Commission
Maryville City Municipal Building, 400 W. Broadway Ave., Maryville
www.MaryvilleGov.com

Feb. 16 | 5pm
Maryville Municipal Planning Commission
Maryville City Municipal Building, 400 W. Broadway Ave., Maryville
www.MaryvilleGov.com

Feb. 16 | 5:30
Maryville School Board
Sam Houston Elementary, 330 Melrose St., Maryville
www.Maryville-Schools.org/School-Board/Meetings

Feb. 16 | 6pm
Maryville Historic Zoning Commission
Maryville City Municipal Building, 400 W. Broadway Ave., Maryville
www.MaryvilleGov.com

ROCKFORD

Feb. 12 | 7pm
Rockford City Commission
Rockford City Offices, 3719 Little River Rd., Louisville
www.RockfordTN.com

TOWNSEND

Jan. 20 | 5pm
Townsend Community Plan Advisory Committee
City Building, 123 Tiger Dr., Townsend
www.CityofTownsend.com

Jan. 20 | 7pm
Board of Commissioners
City Building, 123 Tiger Dr., Townsend
www.CityofTownsend.com

Feb. 3 | 7pm
Townsend Beer Board
City Building, 123 Tiger Dr., Townsend
www.CityofTownsend.com

Feb. 11 | 6pm
Townsend Parks & Recreation Board
City Building, 123 Tiger Dr., Townsend
www.CityofTownsend.com

Feb. 13 | 6pm
Townsend Planning Commission
City Building, 123 Tiger Dr., Townsend
www.CityofTownsend.com

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR HUMAN-
VERIFIED GOOGLE CALENDAR
OF GOVERNMENT EVENTS



Democracy depends on its citizens' active participation in government.

NEW BUSINESSES

**65
NOV
2025**

**60
DEC
2025**

**1,061
YTD
2025**

ARN Gallery & School LLC, 3904 Poplar Grove Rd, Maryville TN 37804 - Alejandro Rodriguez
Bledsoe Heritage Works, 325 Agate Circle, Maryville TN 37804 - Chip Bledsoe
Blood Stripe Brewing, 355 Gill St Ste 110, Alcoa TN 37701 - Richard Deibler
C&J Aviation LLC, 1855 Nandina Dr, Maryville TN 37801 - Joel Brashear
Cabinets A-New, 208 Gateway Rd, Maryville TN 37804 - James Menard
Chaney Masonry, LLC, 308 Augusta Ave, Maryville TN 37804 - Temple Duncan
Charlee and Chase, 2120 Cross Creek Dr, Maryville TN 37803 - Kelcee Sparks
Comforcare Home Care - Maryville, 118 Parliament Dr Suite A-3, Maryville TN 37804 - Stephen Tadlock
Core Current Coaching, 3330 Preserve Pt, Louisville TN 37777 - Whitney L Hurst
Ditommasi Custom Shop Guitars, 407 Oakdale St, Maryville TN 37801 - Adrian J Ditommasi
Dollar Tree #10725, 141 Foothills Mall, Maryville TN 37801 - Todd Littler
Donna Pack, 1511 Peabody Dr, Maryville TN 37803 - Donna Pack
Elite Financial Studio LLC, 2120 Cross Creek Dr, Maryville TN 37803 - Kelcee Sparks
Enterprise Rent A Car, 326 N Washington St, Maryville TN 37804 - Ian Cahill
Eurest Services Inc, 1965 Hawk Landing, Louisville TN 37777 - Richard Rossitch
FernSyl Pottery, 1453 Nathan Hills Dr, Maryville TN 37801 - Fernando Cardiel
Fibrenew SW Knoxville, 2221 Chesterfield Dr, Maryville TN 37803 - N/A
Galco Industrial Electronics, Inc (DBA Brozelco), 229 Dunavant Dr, Rockford TN 37853 - Eric Moraw
Garcia Construction Solution, 313 McGinley St, Maryville TN 37804 - Joy Garcia
Gray Enterprises, 2952 Ellejoy Rd, Walland TN 37886 - Mitchell Gray
H&M Roofing, 6942 Jesse Conner Rd, Chattanooga TN 37421 - Joshua B Helton
Hall Construction, 1869 E Old Topside Rd, Louisville TN 37777 - Billy Hall
Hensel Phelps Construction Co, 2055 Alcoa Hwy, Alcoa TN 37701 - N/A
Hooters of Alcoa, 1094 Hunters Xing, Alcoa TN 37701 - Piece of Work Wings, LLC
Integer Tech LLC, 2918 Samples Rd, Louisville TN 37777 - Seth Moore
J & J Deals, LLC, 4744 Singleton Station Rd, Louisville TN 37777 - Ernest J Harmon Jr
JD Aesthetics - Divine Grace MedSpa, 843 Turner St, Maryville TN 37801 - Jessica Duggan
JD Construction, 3936 Gamble Ln, Maryville TN 37804 - Jason D Hibbs
Jennifer Willis Portraits, 5638 J Riley West Rd, Greenback TN 37742 - Jennifer Willis

JGL Spray Foam Insulation Inc, 1815 Lexington Trce, Murfreesboro TN 37130 - Claudia Gutierrez
Jonathan Hartford, 219 Camellia Trace Dr, Maryville TN 37801 - Jonathan Hartford
Joyful Simplicity Organizing LLC, 861 Country Lane, Walland TN 37886 - Angelia Wilson
Knox Tenn Roots, 3923 Big Springs Ridge Rd, Friendsville TN 37737 - Jason Latham
Magnolia Knight, 427 W Broadway Ave, Maryville TN 37801 - Magnolia Knight
McLemore Heating & Cooling, 556 W Vinegar Valley Rd, Friendsville TN 37737 - Mike McLemore
Moxie Home Improvements LLC, 507 Willard St, Maryville TN 37803 - Brenden Vargas
Nathan Fitzsimmons, 404 E Church Ave, Maryville TN 37804 - Nathan T Fitzsimmons
Proud Audio Visual, 5815 Old Niles Ferry Pike, Greenback TN 37742 - William J Proud
Rebels Market, 2905 Wilkinson Pike, Maryville TN 37803 - N/A
River Baby's Rummage, 3634 Hope St, Maryville TN 37801 - Jessica Clemmer
Rural Revamp, LLC, 319 LaVista Dr, Maryville TN 37804 - Alex Buckner
Rush N Relax, 729 Watkins Rd, Maryville TN 37801 - John Rush
Rustic Pour LLC, 2733 Timberline Dr, Maryville TN 37801 - Amber D Moss
S. Morgan Photography, 519 Jackson Ave, Maryville TN 37804 - Scarlett Price
Skyline Heating and Air LLC, 217 Springvale Ln, Rockford TN 37853 - Jesse Hester
Smoky Mountain Creations, 4308 Lorena Ln, Maryville TN 37804 - Michelle Kaufman
Smoky Mountain Tile Company, 1710 Jefferson Ave, Maryville TN 37804 - Dustin Cook
Suds & Bubble Clean LLC, 947 N Linden Dr, Alcoa TN 37701 - Danielle Collins
Susannah Raye Photography, 335 Creek Bridge Way, Maryville TN 37804 - Susanah Treadway
T Gibson Construction LLC, 1045 Towns View Dr, Seymour TN 37865 - Taylor M Gibson
T-Mobile, 1702 W Broadway Ave, Maryville TN 37801 - N/A
The Chop House, 1380 Tesla Blvd, Alcoa TN 37701 - Joseph M Connor
The Steel Room, 403 S Washington St, Maryville TN 37804 - Travis Cooper
Trust Group Media, 267 Foxboro Ln, Greenback TN 37742 - Thomas Koehl
Tucks Retreat, 235 Bishops Cap Circle Unit 206, Townsend TN 37882 - Greg Lightcap
Unique Construction LLC, 2321 Best Farms Ln, Maryville TN 37803 - Anatolii Onofrash
Vision Wellness, PLLC, 543 W Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Maryville TN 37801 - William Tantom
Volunteer Liquidation, 506 Howard Jones Rd, Maryville TN 37801 - Jeffery Allen
Wildflower Garden Center LLC, 3308 Old Knoxville Hwy, Maryville TN 37804 - Amber Houser
Woof There It Is! Dog Grooming, 836 North Union Grove Rd, Friendsville TN 37737 - Katy Boyd

Source: Blount County Clerk's Office
as of: 1/7/2026

News Briefs

LOUISVILLE

Donations, Grants Fund Louisville Park Improvements and Disc Golf Course

Public input and grant dollars are fueling Louisville's park improvements, with several hundred thousand dollars set to enable work on the Poland Creek Campground and Recreation Area and Town Hall Playground.

Town officials have also approved plans for a disc golf course near the town hall.

The plans stem from consultation with citizens obtained while drafting the city's parks and recreation master plan – a document Mayor Jill Pugh said was necessary to obtain grant money.

During the creation of the plan, town officials asked residents what parks they visited, how they heard about events and what they wanted to see in the future.

That plan was completed in 2024, with residents overwhelmingly citing a draw to nature, playgrounds and walking/running opportunities. By early 2024, Pugh said the town was working to implement it, and now the town has just under \$400,000 in combined grants to start bringing those ideas to life.

Improvements to the Town Hall Park – one of the city's most-visited offerings – aim to meet residents' requests for items like disc golf and aquatics. A \$255,000 grant from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation will fund renovations to the seating area near the playground. It'll also help install a 1,800-square-foot pavilion alongside ADA improvements and a new entryway.

In the future, a concept plan provided by the town imagines the park equipped with a splash pad.

In December, the town approved a plan to install a nine-hole disc golf course near the back of the park property. The plan will cost \$10,000 in engineering fees, but town officials hope to manage the rest in-house. That project, Pugh said, should be completed in 2027. Once completed, it'll save residents the drive to nearby courses in Maryville or Knoxville.

On the other side of town, a \$100,000 grant from the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development will go to repairs at the Poland Creek site – one of the area's less-visited parks.

When asked how frequently they came to the park, which opens onto Fort Loudoun Lake, residents often indicated they weren't familiar with the offering. At best, many visited "rarely."

The coming work could change that.

"It'll be some grading, gravel and cross ties around the campsite," Pugh said, "as well as work on the fishing pier and upgrades to the bathhouse."

Louisville plans construction during the off-season to affect the least number of visitors, with completion aimed for 2027.

The property, which Pugh said originally fell within town limits, is now owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority and leased back to Louisville. All work requires TVA approval.

TOWNSEND

Townsend Prepares for Annual Winter Beer Fest

Company Distilling in Townsend will play host to the annual Tennessee Winter Beer Fest Feb. 21, an event that has raised more than \$266,000 to date for the New Hope Children's Advocacy Center.

The hoppy celebration promises all-you-can-drink access to at least 20 breweries and helps fill an expanding gap in the nonprofit's funding.

The festival's success comes at a time when the center is relying more heavily on community fundraising.

Open since 2003, NHCAC has operated with the mission of restoring hope to abused or traumatized children and families in Blount County. They offer forensic interviews, medical examinations and ongoing therapy for victims and families.

Anna Ferrell, director of marketing for the center, said the hope is to reduce the number of people victims must tell their story to and eliminate as much childhood abuse as possible.

Ferrell said the nonprofit receives grant funding but has seen regular cuts in recent years.

Grants now only cover half the organization's operating expenses, leading them to rely more and more on donations. In the meantime, the center has served roughly 650 families and children annually since 2023.

Todd White, president of the festival, said every dollar left over after paying expenses goes to the center.

At the Winter Beer Fest, organizers cap guest counts at 350 – a move intended to keep lines short and conversation friendly. Plenty of breweries donate their beer to the festival, increasing the cash left over for donation.

Local businesses are sponsoring the TWBF including Old Gods of Appalachia, Insurefit, The Trentham Santiago Group, Meadowlake Airpark, Green Meadow Liquor Wine and Beer experts, The Brewing and Distilling Center, The Townsend Abbey, Premier Event Rentals, The Talley Ho Inn, Little Arrow Outdoor Resort, and The Causal Pint Northshore.

Beer festivals can be a "necessary evil" for brewers, White said.

"For most, it's not something they super enjoy, but almost to a brewer, this is their favorite event," he said.

Tickets cost \$75 (discounted designated driver tickets exist) and include free access to the beer and a catered meal from a local Townsend business. Guests also have access to discount offers on local lodging.

Those perks help drive attendance, encouraging visitors to put money into the local economy and increasing the amount left over to support the advocacy center.



For more information and tickets:
www.TennesseeWinterBeerFest.com

ALCOA

Pistol Creek Stormwater Work to Begin Immediately, Prepare for Future Development

Alcoa will pay \$1.2 million for stormwater infrastructure off Faraday Street, setting the stage to open an interior section of the Springbrook Farm development.

The scheduled work will begin immediately and allow construction on the Werner Avenue corridor to continue.

It also enables installations like the anticipated Alcoa Costco location.

"We're going to put in this stormwater infrastructure and then immediately following, probably in an April or May timeframe, the actual Werner Avenue roadway project should begin," Gentry said.

City officials awarded the bid to Blount Excavating, the only bidder, during a Dec. 9 Board of Commissioners meeting. Dakota Gentry, an engineer for Alcoa Development Services, said construction is anticipated to begin mid-January and last through late April. City staff said construction should have minimal impact on pedestrians and traffic.

The planned work on Werner Avenue, Gentry said, will funnel water to Pistol Creek. It will carry the majority of water from the Springbrook Farm development, which city officials have long planned as a downtown area for Alcoa.

It also lays the groundwork for additional developments. In October, Alcoa announced plans to partner with developer RealtyLink to bring a Costco store to Springbrook Farm. To do that, they'll need roads, traffic management, and other improvements.

This project installs manholes, inlets and other stormwater management systems.

Although the Springbrook Farm site is designated a brownfield, Gentry said the city does not anticipate any issues and keeps an environmental consultant on hand anyway.

City staff are currently working on plans for the next phase of development.

Climate change, increased demand, tariffs contribute to coffee price changes

Continued from Page 1

the commonly-referenced green coffee price has hit record highs over recent years due to decreased supply that diminished previously large global coffee surpluses, as well as other factors."

Essentially, there isn't as much extra coffee in the system as there used to be. Coffee demand is on the rise and production is up globally. But the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that global coffee stockpiles are expected to drop for the fifth year in a row in 2026. Analysts point to poor production years in Brazil, among several other sources, thanks to unpredictable elements like heat and rainfall.

Less extra coffee means more competition for what remains – no matter the source nation.

Despite those trends, it's impossible to pin rising coffee prices to just one factor. Andrew Muhammad, an economist with the University of Tennessee Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, said the market usually isn't quite so simple.

Widespread tariffs implemented in 2025, for example, have likely affected U.S. coffee imports. Those added import charges, Muhammad said, are often passed on to consumers.

Therefore a hefty added tariff on Brazilian imports to the United States, Muhammad said, "isn't helping an already bad situation."

As of early 2026 there was no longer an added tariff on American coffee imports, although the Associated Press reported in November that Brazilian prices may remain high for retaliatory reasons). High price tags can stick around longer than their causes. Coffee beans roasted, ground and placed on store shelves must cover the cost it took to get them there – and that means prices at the grocery store often lag behind production and import costs.

As new beans come in, prices may go down.

Bringing it home

Some local roasters may already be seeing that happen. Although her coffee costs have spiked for years, Artistic Bean owner Lauren Snodgrass said she's seen a drop in recent green coffee costs. So has Wilhelmsen.

It hasn't been much – a dollar or so per pound at most – but both local business owners said the reduction was a welcome reprieve from regular price increases.

Snodgrass has had to think care-



Photos by Robert Berlin

fully to keep the business steady recently. She and her husband bought the Townsend-based roaster and coffee shop in 2023. They've worked to emphasize quality, free-trade coffee beans in their drinks. In mid-2025, she opened a second location on Old Knoxville Highway, anticipating increased demand in the Eagleton Village area thanks to development on Pellissippi Place.

She's seen \$2 to \$4 price increases per pound in recent years. That may not look like much, but the pennies add up after a 1,000-pound order. The change for her business has meant thousands of dollars in added costs.

Because of that, she's had to analyze her labor costs and find ways to save money while still keeping her 14 employees happy and healthy. She and her husband have both worked shifts at the shops to save money.

"Our supplier said just from projections that [the price of coffee] is on a downward trend, so hopefully in the next month when we have to order it'll be even less," she said. "As long as it's not going up, I think we can sustain what it is at current prices."

The new location has been "slow growth" but enough to keep itself going. And thankfully, the costs of Snodgrass' other materials – cups, lids, milk and syrups – have been remarkably steady.

For her part, Wilhelmsen said she's been bundling her orders to save money as prices rise. Although her recent orders have dropped in price,

Scarlett McClain, 21, passes coffee to customers (above) at the Quik Fix Coffee drive through on Washington Street, owned by Gary Washburn and founded in 2014. While the business model is about selling coffee, a major side benefit is providing a place for community to develop. Vienna Coffee (below), owned by John Clark opened the first roastery in Blount County in 2002, but has since become an important place for community connection.



they still haven't recovered to where they were years ago.

They're closer to late-2024 prices, she said.

Wilhelmsen is no stranger to thinking outside the box to keep her business steady. Southern Grace survived the COVID-19 pandemic largely thanks to customer dedication and staff ingenuity. Seeing the community developed from her business, Wilhelmsen said, has made the work worth the effort.

She thought Southern Grace would create a community for young mothers. What she's seen has surprised her. Sometimes the clientele is young mothers as expected.

Sometimes it's a group of men holding a Bible study, she said, and other days the store is full of teenagers.

"A coffee shop equals fellowship and family," she said. "And it's beautiful."

Whether that community remains affordable depends on forces largely outside a shop owner's control. If coffee prices continue to ease, Wilhelmsen said, she may finally have room to roll back prices for customers.

In the meantime, local coffee businesses, as always, are adjusting their models with an eye toward maintaining both affordability and long-term sustainability.

MAKING MOVES

LAMBERT'S OPEN NEW LOCATIONS ON BROADWAY

After suffering a major setback this year when the building where they launched both businesses was sold and began undergoing major renovations, Angela and Charlie Lambert moved both Southern Pies & Bake Shop Cafe and Flooring Solutions to their new location at 1116 and 1118 E. Broadway, Maryville.

"We were already outgrowing our downtown space," explained Angela. Initially, she was not sure where they would find a new space to reopen the cafe, using her mobile kitchen to do pop-up events and borrowing Richy Kreme Donut's kitchen from time to time.

"We prayed for God to make a way for us to be beside each other," Charlie said. "It was all one big building when we got it."

The entrepreneur couple divided the 8,000 square foot building to accommodate both the Cafe and the Flooring companies.

"The best part is that now we have room to grow and plenty of parking," Charlie said, pointing out the cafe will ultimately be able to seat 60 people at a time.

The Cafe is open Tuesdays through Fridays from 10am until 4pm, serving lunch and full-service bakery.

But the move has also had some additional challenges.

"Our biggest hurdle right now is the grease trap," Angela said. Installing the required equipment can cost as much as \$20,000.

"We don't go into debt, so this will take a while," Charlie said.

In the meantime, Angela uses her mobile kitchen unit to prepare food and will spend the next year slowing adding seating and kitchen capacity to the new location as funds become available.

The Flooring Solutions side of the business is currently being renovated and Charlie said they expect to reopen their storefront by the end of January.



Photo by Robert Berlin

RT LODGE & CARRIAGE HOUSE CHANGES LEADERSHIP

After more than 20 years as the General Manager of Oldham Hospitality's RT Lodge, Gary Doyle passed the reins to Kelley Harris at the end of 2025.

Doyle began his hospitality career at the first Ruby Tuesday restaurant opened in Knoxville in 1972. He became the innkeeper and manager at Blackberry Farm in 1980 where he worked for the next 13 years. He later opened Bistro by the Tracks in Knoxville before joining RT Lodge in 2004. Doyle said he will remain on the Morningside Lodge, LLC's board of directors.

Harris brings more than 20 years of hospitality experience from Blackberry Farm where she managed the event programming and spa operations.

Susan Wiley Cooper Walker built the first 26-room residence and adjacent Carriage House in 1932, according to government records. Maryville College records show that following Walker's death in 1950, the property was donated to the College where it was used as an event center and the President's residence. The main residence was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 and was later purchased by Ruby Tuesday, Inc. in 1997. Morningside Lodge, LLC, purchased the property in 2021.



Photo courtesy RT Lodge

Kelley Harris

ALLEVIA TECHNOLOGY BUYS HISTORIC BANK BUILDING

Longtime friends and business partners Stefan Wilson and Drew Miles purchased the historic Bank of Maryville building originally built in 1915 at the corner of Cusick and Broadway, Downtown Maryville.

Allevia Technology began vacating two locations on East Broadway to establish its new headquarters in the bottom floor of the building in December.

"I have literally prayed for years to be downtown," said Wilson.

The Blount Memorial Financial Operations Center will continue to occupy the middle floor and Julia Spannaus, Goddard & Gamble and Brett Smith will continue to occupy the upper floor.

The move solved three business problems Wilson was struggling with: not enough space for his entire technology support staff to be in one office, not enough parking, and a downtown location that is more appealing to his younger workforce members, Wilson explained.



Photo courtesy Maryville City Archives

Bank of Maryville Building, circa 1932.

BLAZE PIZZA FRANCHISE CLOSES ALCOA LOCATION

Blaze Pizza closed its only Blount County location in December, with staff clearing equipment from the building as late as Dec. 30. The Hunters Crossing, Alcoa location opened in 2018.

A statement issued by the company called the move "necessary" but did not go into detail on why the business closed its doors. The future of the space was not immediately clear.

"We thank our loyal customers and amazing team members for all the memories over the years," the company said, adding that Knoxville locations will still serve customers.

Founded in California and now based in Atlanta, Blaze Pizza franchises more than 340 locations nationwide with a fast-casual business model built on customization and assembly-line cooking. The company estimates the cost of franchise investment falls between \$565,000 and \$1.1 million.

Blaze franchises four remaining locations in Tennessee. Two of those are in Knoxville, with addresses in Cedar Bluff and Turkey Creek.

Mike Forte, franchisee for the Alcoa restaurant, said there are no current plans for another nearby development.

"We have our two locations in Knoxville that are not going anywhere," Forte said, "but we're not doing any other locations here right now."



Photo by Robert Berlin

Jacob Andrews helps clear out the Blaze Pizza location in early January.

BROADWAY COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE UPGRADES BRING THREE ADDITIONAL STOREFRONTS TO AREA

The former James Upholstry Building underwent extensive renovation and code compliance updates in December to create three storefronts across from the new Eagleton Baseball Fields on East Broadway.

"Our objective is to attract tenants who will benefit from the enhanced facilities and contribute to this vibrant location," said Pete Dedes, Commercial Realtor with The Real Estate Firm in Knoxville.

"I think it would be an excellent opportunity for a boutique restaurant," he added.

Each of the three units offer approximately 1,700 square feet, one of which includes a roll-up garage door opening to Broadway. Dedes said the spaces could be combined.

Upgrades include stylized brick facades, new electrical service, roofing, windows and insulation, Dedes said.



Photo by Robert Berlin

Jonathan Rangel, 21, with Gudino's Drywall and Painting, applies final coats of plaster to the newly renovated storefronts on East Broadway.

Hawkins' experience leading dog training program in prison leads to business that saves aggressive dogs

Continued from Page 1

the program in 2023, the inmates trained and placed more than 1,000 dogs with families, according to the Society of Humane Friends of Georgia's summary of the program.

"It was a good thing," Hawkins says. "It gave us the ability to work and train with dogs while we were in there (jail)."

This was a skill he already suspected he possessed.

He remembers this one story.

"My neighbor had a pit bull that was so aggressive," he recalls. "She'd run the fence and try to attack people. There was one day when I was like, you know what, I'm just going to sit at the end of this leash, and she's going to bark at me all day long to get so tired that maybe I can reach over and pet him."

It worked.

Now he was in a program where he could spend 24 hours a day with a violent dog, working to decrease aggression and prepare for eventual adoption.

This is where Hawkins' character really began to come alive.

The program's leadership provided training and resources to the inmates to help them acquire additional dog training skills.

In fact, he became known in the program as the person who could rehabilitate the worst-behaved dogs.

Hawkins took that training and experience working with dogs and wrote his first book.

"He would write probably 10-12 (pages) front and back on notebook paper and mail them to me," said Judith Vilson, Hawkins' mother. "When I received them, I'd start typing. His 10-12 pages would be maybe three pages of typed words."

At night Hawkins hand wrote chapters of his 70-page book and put them in the mail to his mother who prepared them for publication on Amazon.

"Troubled to Trained: All dogs need a leader they can trust" was published November 2017 and has sold more than 1,000 copies. Sonia, his favorite

dog while in the program, is on the cover. The title suggests the theme of his own life.

But Program administrators also recognized Hawkins had leadership qualities.

"I became the head trainer of the

program," Hawkins says, explaining he was responsible for managing and helping 30 inmates working with dogs in the jail. He proudly states he helped 327 dogs get adopted during his time in the program.

Not everyone serving time in prison experiences personal growth like this.

"I wanted it more than anybody," he said. "I was always doing extra work, reading extra books, going over my past, like really diving into it."

A New Chapter

All that hard work paid off. He was paroled after serving six years, two months and 1 week of his 15-year sentence - three years in County Jail and another three in prison.

With a new chance at life, Hawkins (now 38 years old) knew he had to make some good choices.

First, he recognized he needed to surround himself with good people. Then he knew he had to find a way to make good money while trying to overcome significant challenges.

So he moved in with his mother in Walland, who owns a cabin next door to Crikett Lane Kennels.

"I had to walk everywhere when I first got home," he recalled. No car. No license. A felony record and parole fees to pay until he completes parole in 2037.

Although he had a small farm job making \$15 an hour, he started doing side gigs as a dog trainer to keep up with finances.

While sitting on his mother's back porch, he realized that to have the flexible schedule he needed to abide by his parole rules and to make enough money to support himself and pay his fees, he needed something better.

Hawkins decided to focus all his energy on building a dog training business.

"The whole thing was challenging," he admits. Business license. Market-

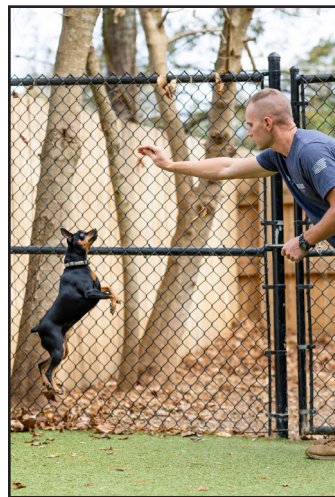
ing materials. Website. Insurance. Facilities. Advertising. Accounting.

Without transportation, these details were much harder.

But one piece of luck helped a lot. His mother's cabin was right next door to Crikett Lane Kennels where



Photos courtesy: Estarr Wilson



While in the Operation Second Chance program in the Gwinnett County Jail, Shane Hawkins, now 38, learned ways to meet aggressive dogs where they are and help them trust human leadership again. Today he helps nearly 700 families achieve peace with their dog family members.



Jennifer and Scott Hicks offer dog boarding services and Misty Toler provides grooming services.

"Crazy right? But it was God, though. He had it all laid out," Hawkins says gratefully.

Jennifer and her husband, however, were not immediately certain.

"The tricky thing about trainers is they are all different in their methods," Jennifer explains. "We had been looking for a trainer to partner with for a while, but weren't finding what we needed."

She read Hawkins' book, liked his approach and in 2020 while things were slow during the pandemic, she decided to take a chance.

"He quickly showed us that if he says he will do something, he does it," she says. "He's stayed with it and slowly we've started depending on him and our customers are super happy with him. He meets the dogs where they are and communicates with them to find out how they respond best."

Jennifer says she and her husband believe in second chances and admits she's happy with her decision.

"You know the Serenity Prayer?"

Hawkins asks. "God helped me to accept the things I cannot change, gave me the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

In fact, Hawkins recently published his second book: "How to Train a Dog - 12 Steps" (available on Amazon).

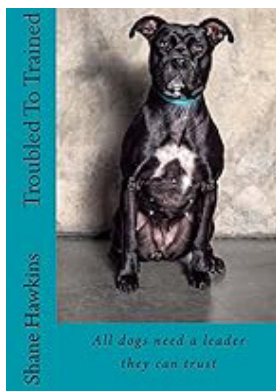
He also works with almost 700 dogs locally and is hoping to hire an assistant dog trainer this year. He proudly admits he paid cash for the truck he now drives and owns his own cabin nearby - all possible from the six-figure gross revenue his business now generates.

And he gives back to the community.

"I just got back from Georgia a couple of days ago," he says. "I went down there to speak at two prisons and showed the guys, hey, you can change your life. You can do this."

He also shares his story at local drug rehabilitation facilities.

"I feel like God has equipped me. He saved me. He got me through this," Hawkins says, wiping his eyes. "He's doing this for me to help others."



BLOUNT COUNTY

BUSINESS NEWS

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JANUARY 2026

Friday, Jan. 16 | 9-10am

How Businesses Can Partner with ORNL to Drive Economic Development
Oak Ridge National Laboratory Manufacturing Demonstration Facility, Oak Ridge, TN
Register on EventBrite at > <https://www.eventbrite.com/checkout-external?eid=1786615658529>

Friday, Jan. 16 | 12-1:30pm

Blount County MLK Celebration Business Luncheon
Hilton Knoxville Airport, Alcoa, TN
Keynote Speaker will be TN Tennessee State Representative Sam McKenzie. Tickets are \$40 each.

Tuesday, Jan. 20 | 11:30am-1pm

Blount Chamber: Power Connect Lunch
Hilton Knoxville Airport, Cascade Ballroom, Alcoa, TN
Register at > www.BlountChamber.com

Tuesday, Jan 20 | 4-5pm

Blount Chamber Young Professionals: Ignite the Future Mentorship Program
Blount Partnership, 201 S. Washington St., Maryville
Register at > www.BlountChamber.com

Tuesday, Jan. 20 | 6:30-8pm

Sky City Entrepreneur Center: Markets & Fairs 101

Sky City Entrepreneur Center, 429 S. Washington St., Maryville

Join experienced market and fair experts to learn the basics of how to apply for a market, what event planners look for in vendors, how to choose markets and what beginners can do to avoid common pitfalls. For more information, contact Sky City Entrepreneur Center at (865) 448-4782.

Thursday, Jan. 22 | 8:30-10am

Blount Chamber Young Professionals: Vision Board to Inspire Action in 2026
Blount Partnership, 201 S. Washington St., Maryville
A workshop to explore what motivates you while creating a vision board to inspire action in 2026. Register at > www.BlountChamber.com

Thursday, Jan. 22 | 9am-4pm

East Tennessee Realtors®: TREC Core Class
East Tennessee Realtors®, 609 N Weisgarber Rd, Knoxville
Register at > <https://members.etnrealtors.com/ap/Events/Register/dxFe6MBIoC0Cv>

Thursday, Jan. 22 | 6-8pm

East Tennessee Realtors®: YPN New Network Kickoff at Zero/Zero Wine Bar
Zero/Zero Wine Bar, 1211 N. Central St., Knoxville
For more information, call (865) 584-8647

Tuesday, Jan. 27 | 8:30-9:30am

Success in 90- The ROI of People: Making Employee Growth a Competitive Advantage
Blount Partnership, 201 S. Washington St., Maryville
Join David Schwall to examine how employee development contributes to organizational performance. Register at > www.BlountChamber.com

Wednesday, Jan. 28 | 8:30-10am

Blount Chamber: Veterans in Business (VIB)
Blount Partnership, 201 S. Washington St., Maryville
Register at > www.BlountChamber.com

Thursday, Jan. 29 | 7:45-9am

Blount Partnership: Coffee Club
Pickleville, 2639 Topside Rd., Louisville
These gatherings are designed to help our members build relationships and gain exposure for their businesses or organizations in a welcoming "open house" environment. For more information, call (865) 983-2241.

Wednesday, Feb. 4 | 8:30-10am

Success in 90- The Resilient Leader's Playbook: Being Your Best When Times Are Tough
Blount Partnership, 201 S. Washington St., Maryville
Join Leslie Beale for a discussion about The Resilient

Leader's Playbook: Being Your Best When Times Are Tough" equips leaders with practical strategies to maintain their effectiveness during challenging periods. Register at > www.BlountChamber.com

Saturday, Feb. 14 | 10am-1pm

Blount County Job Fair
Foothills Mall, 197 Foothills Mall Dr., Maryville
Job seekers looking for career development opportunities, internships, service opportunities, as well as full-and part-time positions are invited to attend this free job fair. For more information, contact Tammy Bolt at (865) 983-2241.

Monday, Feb. 16 | All Day

Public Schools Out for President's Day

Tuesday, Feb. 17 | 10am-1pm

Downtown Greenback Farmers Market
Greenback Drugstore & Diner, Greenback
The Farmer's Market re-opens for weekly market hours. Market Managers are seeking a Jam & Jelly vendor to join the market. For more information, www.Facebook.com/GreenbackFarmersMarket

Wednesday, Feb. 18 | 8-9am

BNI Sunrise: Weekly Networking Event
Blount County Public Library, Maryville
Join the BNI Knoxville's Sunrise group for professional development and networking. For more information, <https://BNIKnox.com/sunrise>

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BUSINESS NEWS

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