

Tennessee CONNECTIONS

SUMMER 2025 | CUSTOMER FOCUSED ⚡ COMMUNITY DRIVEN

Fun-Filled Summer

Tomato Festival,
Fort Pillow activities,
Veterans Museum history
talks—and more

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Fort Pillow State
Historic Park is the
site of an 1864 Civil
War battle.
PHOTO COURTESY OF
ROBBY TIDWELL



Fort Pillow

Power and Light helps fund suspension bridge

A Fort Pillow Park ranger gives a history talk to a group of students.

Thanks to donations from organizations like Ripley Power and Light Company, visitors at Fort Pillow State Historic Park will soon be able to use a new suspension bridge to walk from the park's welcome center and museum to the reconstructed fort and main area of a Civil War battle site.

Work on the bridge started this spring and should be done in September. The 120-yard bridge will have suspension cables and a walking platform over a large ravine.

The bridge has been out for about 19 years, said Park Manager Robby Tidwell. "The new bridge will help visitors retrace the steps the soldiers took."

While the bridge is under construction, park visitors will find plenty of activities to keep them busy this summer.

The park features 13 miles of trails, a newly renovated campground and RV park, and a 25-acre lake.

On every Saturday, Sunday and holiday, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, park visitors can go on pontoon tours and guided canoe and kayak floats on the lake. Park rangers give talks about the fort's history.

Visitors can also tour the museum and reconstructed fort and watch the park video.

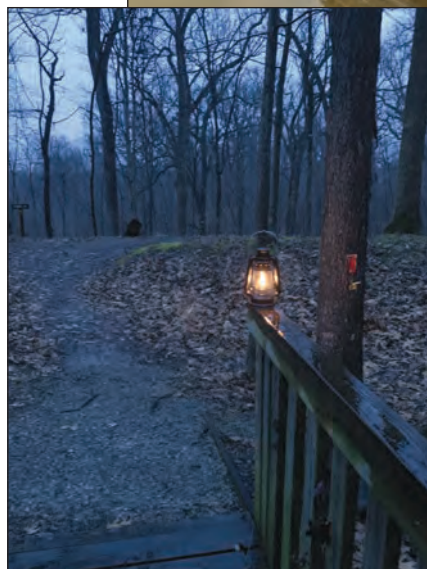
Steep bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River made the Fort Pillow area a strategic location during the Civil War. Confederate soldiers built the fort in 1861, but they abandoned it the next year as the Union Navy advanced down the Mississippi River. Fort Pillow was the site of a Civil War battle on April 12, 1864, which the Confederates won.

For more information about the park and its activities, visit the Fort Pillow link at tnstateparks.com or call 731-738-5581. ■

A new suspension bridge, to be completed this fall, will take visitors across a ravine from the park's welcome center to the reconstructed fort. Ripley Power and Light donated funds to help pay for the bridge.



ABOVE: Visitors enjoy a pontoon boat ride on Cold Creek to observe lower river batteries. **LEFT:** The night is perfect for a lantern light hike along the park's trails.



Tomato Festival

The Lauderdale County Tomato Festival this July at Ripley City Park celebrates the county's rich agricultural heritage and small-town charm with plenty of activities for the whole family.

The festival, which celebrates Ripley's juicy, homegrown tomatoes, begins Thursday, July 10, with a children's parade and concert by Dr. Zarr's Amazing Funk Monster. Two full days of activities on July 11 and 12 begin that Friday with an 8 a.m. Chamber Coffee hosted by Ripley Family Fitness Center. Opening ceremonies are at 10 a.m.

Other Friday events include a tomato contest and the opening of the kid's zone and vendors. Entertainment on the main stage begins at 4:30 p.m.

Saturday activities include a car and truck show, a magic show performed by Mr. Nick, Saturday Salad, Dino Show, Dance Studio, Cheer Squad, Tomato Festival Idol, Baby Crawling Contest, crafts and more main stage entertainment. From tomato sandwiches and tastings to the "Biggest Tomato Contest," a tomato theme is found throughout the activities.

"The Tomato Festival brings together families, friends, local vendors, schools, churches and civic groups," said Susan Worlds, executive director of the Lauderdale Chamber,



ABOVE: Nightly entertainment draws crowds at the Tomato Festival. **BELOW:** Ripley Middle School cheerleaders prepare to go on stage.



the event's sponsor. "It's not just about tomatoes—it's about tradition. Visitors come for the food and fun, but leave with a deeper appreciation of the people, history and pride that make Lauderdale County special." ■

The Fair

Mark your calendars!

The Lauderdale County Fair will be Sept. 10-13 at the county fairgrounds.



Dyer County High School American history and AP geography teacher Josh Lents talked about "The Rise of Totalitarianism" during the Veterans' Museum's History Beyond the Classroom series this past spring. The series continues at 6 p.m. on Thursdays in September in the museum's Headquarters Building. Lents again will be one of the presenters discussing the Pacific Theater during World War II. For more information about the History Beyond the Classroom series and other Ripley Power and Light stories, see pages 20-21.

Cooking Up Confidence

Lauderdale County 4-H teaches lifelong skills in the kitchen

In a world of fast food and microwave dinners, knowing how to cook a simple, healthy meal is more valuable than ever. That's why Lauderdale County 4-H is ensuring the next generation knows its way around the kitchen—starting as early as fourth grade.

The Lauderdale County 4-H Culinary Club is more than just an evening activity. It's a growing, hands-on program that's giving young people real-life skills they can use for the rest of their lives, said Christian Hawbaker, Lauderdale County 4-H agent.

Filling a gap

"Whether a student is learning how to make scrambled eggs for the first time or refining his or her baking skills before heading off to college, this program is filling an important gap in youth education."

Young people don't have formal culinary education available in school, Hawbaker said. "Unless they're learning at home, many kids just don't get this kind of experience. We wanted to change that."

Each month, students of all ages gather in the evening for a themed cooking class that blends fun, food and learning. So far, club members have learned how to make cookies and candy during the holidays, breakfast basics like pancakes and eggs, and even homemade jam and butter.

"The kids take pride in what they make," said Jackie French, UT Extension Family and Consumer Science agent. "They light up when something turns out right, and they're always excited to go home and try it again."

Hawbaker works closely with French and Alexis Dixon, TSU Extension SNAP-Ed agent, to create fun and educational lessons introducing basic kitchen techniques, safe food handling and nutrition. The classes are simple enough for beginners, but designed to grow with students over time.

"Some of these kids might not cook again until they're adults," Dixon said. "So our goal is to give them enough knowledge and confidence now that they'll feel ready when that time comes."

Cooking all day

Besides the monthly club meetings, Lauderdale County 4-H also hosts Culinary Day Camps during school breaks. These one-day events are a big hit with students, who spend the entire day cooking their own breakfast, lunch, snack and dessert—all from scratch, Hawbaker said.

"We pack a lot into one day. They're learning time management, food prep, teamwork and how to follow recipes. Plus, it's just fun. They leave with full bellies and big smiles."

Day camps offer a more in-depth experience and allow students to get creative, make mistakes and figure things out along the way. For many, Hawbaker said, it's the highlight of their break.

More than just a meal

"Students leave with more than a recipe card," he said. "They leave with confidence. They gain responsibility. They learn how to care for themselves and, eventually, others."

Parents are noticing, too. Several say their children now ask to help with dinner, want to grocery shop with a purpose, or even surprise the family with a home-made meal.

"It's empowering," French said. "They start to see themselves as capable. That's what makes the difference."

Hawbaker's goal is to help young people gain lifelong skills in a fun, welcoming space. "We want kids to know they can do this," he said. "Whether they're cooking for themselves in college, helping out at home, or just making Saturday morning pancakes, we want them to feel confident in the kitchen." ■



ABOVE: 4-H volunteer Teresa Queen, helps Chesslee Dawson, left, and Zackary Alverson crush strawberries to make jam. BELOW: Aiden Turnbow cooks an omelet.



ABOVE: Alexis Dixon, left, teaches how to make rice crispy treats. BELOW: Maddie Shepherd makes butter.



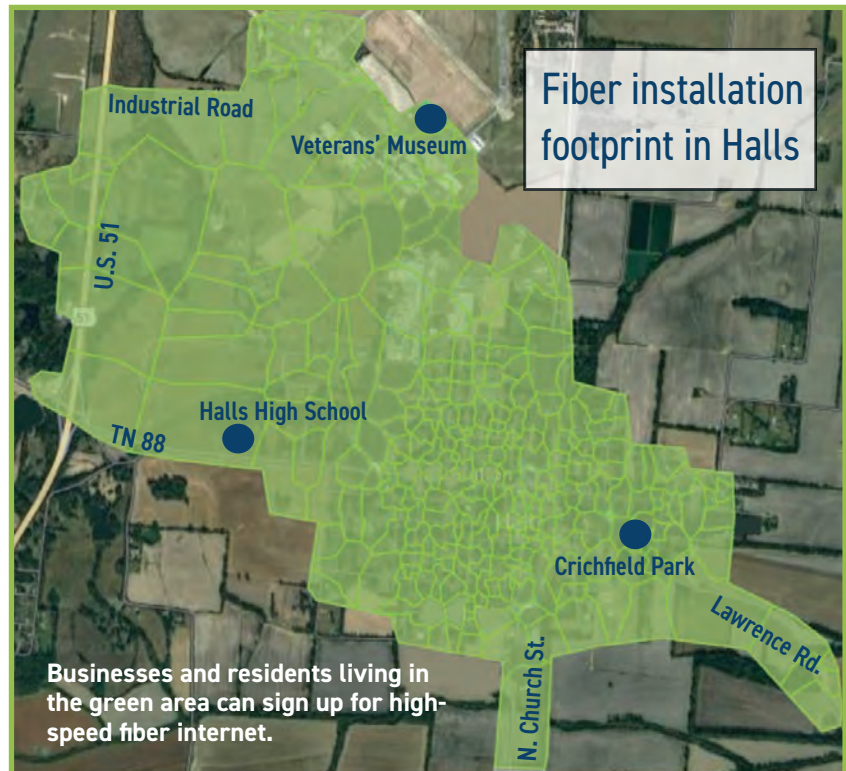
High-speed, fiber internet available in Halls area

Halls residents are enjoying internet speeds that are often 10 times faster than what they previously had. They're taking advantage of the new high-speed, fiber internet Ripley Power and Light Company is offering in their community in partnership with Aeneas Internet and Telephone.

"We've had excellent feedback from customers who have signed up for the new fiber-based internet," said Kami Wright, Ripley Power and Light Halls Office Manager. "People are bragging about the reliability and speed they are getting."

Ripley Power and Light owns the fiber network and leases it to Aeneas, which is initially offering telephone and tiered, internet services with speeds up to 1 gig. The lowest tier offered is 250 Mbps (megabits per second) for \$59.95 a month.

Ripley Power and Light has explored ways to bring fiber broadband to all customers, said Mike Allmand, the utility's President and CEO. "We decided to start with a pilot project in Halls. Customer response in Halls and funding options will help determine if the fiber network will expand beyond Halls to other Power and Light customers."



If you want high-speed fiber internet, you can sign up at RPL's Halls office (ask for Wright) or go online at fiber.aeneas.com. At that website, you can type in your address to find out if the new service is available at your location or you can refer to the map, above.

Residents with questions can call Ripley Power and Light's Halls Office at 731-836-7595 or drop by the Halls office, 509 S. Church Street. ■

Veterans' Museum offers 'History Beyond the Classroom'

To commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Halls Veterans' Museum hosted its inaugural "History Beyond the Classroom" discussion series on six Thursday nights in March and April.

The next sessions, offered over four Thursday nights in September, will focus on the Pacific Theater in World War II. The discussions are free and open to anyone age 16 and older.

Last spring's discussion leaders were Josh Lents, Dyer County High School American history and AP geography teacher, who talked about the rise of totalitarianism after World War I. Lents presented a second session on the effect of the war across the United States.

Deborah Puckett, history teacher at Crockett County High School, talked about the Holocaust. Dyersburg military historian Matthew Stafford led two sessions, the first on the air war in Europe and the second on the ground war.

Museum staff led the last session about the effects of World War II locally. Museum Administrative Assistant Hillary Wheeler discussed the history of the Dyersburg Army Airbase and the museum, which is located on the former base.

Board Chairman Pat Higdon read interviews from some of the 40 families whose property was condemned in order to build the base. Some townspeople shared their homes with soldiers' families, and they remained friends for life.

Although building the facility uprooted some, it also provided jobs for area civilians. Warner Pace, a 99-year-old from Ripley who attended every session of the series, worked in the PX on the base and made \$25 per week.

The museum staff thanked all who attended the series. "I am so excited that we are doing something in education for adults," Higdon said. "There rarely is a venue for adults to come together to remind ourselves of this era and discuss those critical times."

The next four-part series on the Pacific Theater begins at 6 p.m. Sept. 4 at the museum's Headquarters Building. Presenters will be Lents and Stafford.

Other upcoming museum activities are the Ladies Fall Luncheon, Oct. 16; Veterans Day Celebration, Nov. 9; and Christmas Memories, Dec. 3. For more information, follow the museum's Facebook page. ■



RIPLEY POWER AND LIGHT COMPANY

ripleypower.com

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Office Hours

We are open 47 hours each week to serve you better!

7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Monday-Thursday

7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Friday

You can pay your bill ...

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- Through the RPL mobile app
- Through bank draft
- At our Ripley & Halls offices
- In office night deposit boxes
- At the kiosks at our offices

If you are not receiving your bills, call our office so we can verify your mailing address.



Ripley Power and Light offices will be closed ...

**Thursday, June 19
for Juneteenth**

**Friday, July 4
for Independence Day**

**Monday, Sept. 1
for Labor Day**

Mobile app gives you access to your account anytime, anywhere

Ripley Power and Light's mobile app enables customers to manage their accounts right from their smart devices—anytime, anywhere. It is secure, easy to get and simple to use.

“So many of our customers’ questions can be answered in the app,” said Mike Allmand, Ripley Power and Light President and CEO.

Customers can pay their electric bills through the app on their smartphones and tablets and set up notifications about a bill's due date. They can also set up automatic payments using a credit or debit card and see their payment history.

The app allows customers to monitor their daily electric use—both in dollars spent and kilowatt-hours used. A graph shows usage for the past three to four months.

The app is free and available on Google Play, the Apple App Store or by scanning the QR code, at right. ■

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