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INSTITUTE *for* PUBLIC SERVICE

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The Circle of (Work) Life: The Importance of Internships

Margaret Norris
MTAS Executive Director

For those of you who are Disney fans or enjoy Broadway shows, I apologize now if you happen to get an ear worm of the theme song to "The Lion King." However, the song is an excellent representation of what I want to talk about today: the importance of internships.

We all began our careers with a first job. Then we had that first real job that was doing something we thought we wanted to do and not just a job to get a few bucks for gas money. And if you went to college or graduate school, your program may have required an internship to expose you to real world experiences before graduation. This short-term employment is an amazing opportunity to apply what you're studying to your daily work. It is also the best time to figure out if what you thought you wanted to do is truly what you want to do.

Think about an internship as trying on a piece of clothing before you buy it. Either you verify that you are on the right track with a good fit for your career choice, or you have an opportunity to pivot before you commit to a lifetime of something you have no passion for. What an invaluable experience!

So, back to the circle of life. You were given that gift of experience, at your first job and/or internship, which was the first rung on your professional ladder. Once you've climbed farther up the ladder, don't forget to reach down and help someone else take their first step. Set them up for success, just as someone once did for you. For example, one intern I worked with is now the city manager where my professor was city manager and told me about the MTAS internship which brought me to where I am today. By helping others get their start in this way, we keep the circle going and help build a brighter future for all Tennesseans.

This summer's public service interns L to R Rachel Armstrong- Elizabethton, Stephen Curtis - Red Bank, Luke Broj - Clinton, Margaret Norris, MTAS, Maggie Howard- Goodlettsville, Omar Watkins- Algood

The Importance of Well-Maintained Municipal Codes

A municipality's code of ordinances is the foundation of local governance. When clear and well-organized, it gives officials confidence in applying the law, ensures fair enforcement and helps residents understand the rules that affect them.

Confusing or inconsistent ordinances, by contrast, create frustration, weaken public trust and increase the risk of legal disputes. Well-maintained and codified ordinances also promote transparency and engagement. Citizens who can easily access and understand local laws are more likely to participate in civic life and support the work of their leaders.

MTAS offers codification services to help Tennessee cities and towns keep their codes current, consistent and accessible. A clear code is one of the most valuable tools a municipality can provide for its community.

Abb Oglesby
MTAS Codes and Legal Program Manager

CONTACT
For more information about MTAS Codification Services, please reach out to mtascodes@tennessee.edu.

BONUS TIDBIT!
Looking for general, foundational information on adopting and updating codes? Visit our **MORe** database.

What's on Your Training Wishlist for 2026? Share With Us

As we look ahead to 2026, it's the perfect time to reflect on your organizational or personal growth goals. What skills or knowledge will help you lead with impact next year? Share your top three training wishes with us—your input will help us shape meaningful development opportunities for you.

TRAINING WISHLIST

Think You Don't Need Professional Development? Think Again.

In today's fast-paced workplace, embracing professional growth and development is essential. Opting out of professional development can be a barrier to personal and organizational growth.

In the article, Contentment is not an excuse for opting out of development, the author shares how leaders can reframe the imperative of professional development.

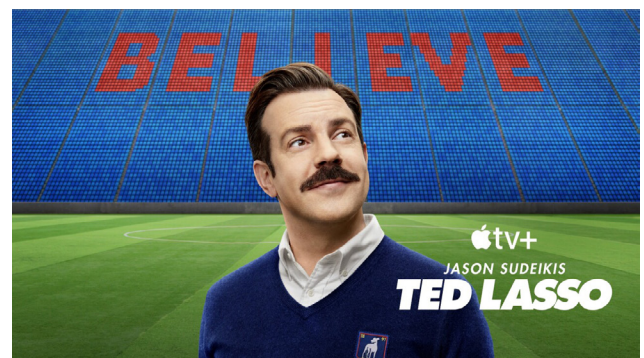## Ted Lasso Leadership Insights

Recently on an ultra-long-haul flight, I had the pleasure of binging "Ted Lasso." While I've heard many great things about the series, I had not dedicated the time to watch. Well, I am now a Ted Lasso fan!

Yolanda Dillard
MTAS Training Consultant

The series is a masterclass in leadership. The foundation of Lasso's approach to leadership was rooted in a simple word, Believe. Lasso's simple yet powerful mantra reminds us that great leadership begins with unwavering faith—in ourselves, in others and in the journey. When we lead with optimism and heart, we inspire growth, resilience and connection that transforms teams into something extraordinary.

There's room on the "Ted Lasso" bandwagon so if you haven't watched the series yet, I highly recommend it!

Tennessee Municipalities Making Digital Assets Available to Their Communities

A team of MTAS staff evaluated the digital assets made available to the community in each city across Tennessee. The survey was sent to 325 cities, and 127 responses were received. Respondents were evenly divided across the three grand divisions and population ranges of Tennessee municipalities. Overall, our analysis revealed several trends regarding digital asset availability, marketing and areas for improvement for the responding cities.

Frances Adams-O'Brien
MTAS Librarian

First, about 50% of responding cities offer free public access to Wi-Fi somewhere within their municipality. The most popular locations with free public Wi-Fi included town/city halls, libraries and public parks. Secondly, 16% of responding cities have free public computer access somewhere in their city. We asked several follow-up questions and found that three cities have computer equipment loaner programs, six cities provide training programs for basic computer literacy programs, and one city offers an incentive to its residents for participating in their computer literacy programs.

Next, we asked questions about their digital asset marketing tactics and program funding. The most common form of digital asset marketing reported was printed material posted in public areas such as schools, municipal buildings or parks, with a close second method being to share the information on a municipal website. Regarding funding for these services, 59% of respondents reported that the municipal operating budget was their source for funding.

Regarding the future of these services for the community, we asked respondents what their highest priority areas of improvement were.

The top responses were:
1. Having more access and equipment (more access points, updated computers, Wi-Fi zones in downtown areas and parks).
2. Gaining improvements in infrastructure and facilities (more room for labs and classrooms).
3. Funding and support (grant availability, advice and consultation, and staffing).

The complete report will be available in the **MTAS Research Library Online (MRLn)** soon.

The research team included Desiree Eldridge, MTAS Library Associate, Chris Shults, MTAS Grants and Training Specialist, Lyndy Wibking, MTAS Librarian, and Frances Adams-O'Brien, MTAS Librarian.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?
Please contact me at
frances.adams-obrien@tennessee.edu.

Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) Use in Tennessee Cities and Towns

A webinar hosted by MTAS and the Howard Baker Jr. School of Public Policy and Public Affairs presented findings from a recent research project on how Tennessee municipal police departments are using automated license plate readers (ALPR).

Panelists MTAS Police Management Consultant David Burton Moore and Dr. Xuhong Su (Su Su), professor at UTK's Baker School, fielded questions, while MTAS Police Management Consultant Jeff Stiles moderated the discussion. Topics included the prevalence of ALPR usage, the technology's effectiveness and next steps for further understanding of best practices.

The research focused on the license plate reader technology utilized for strictly capturing license plate numbers of passing cars, not for tracking speed or the running of red lights.

Frances Adams-O'Brien
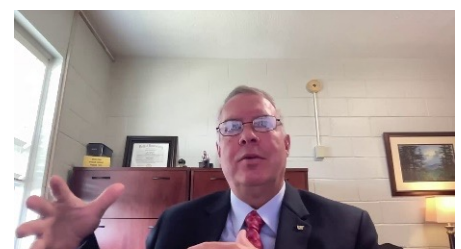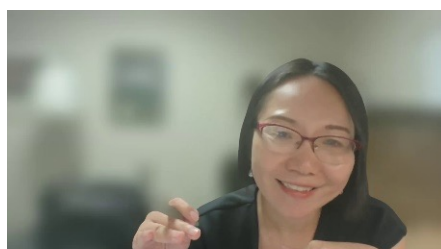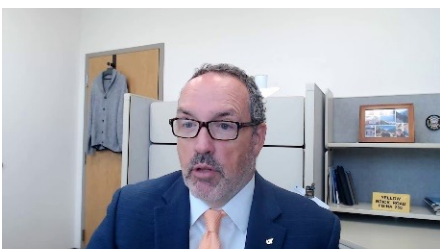**MTAS Librarian**

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Su explained the survey methodology, with the Tennessee research being modeled after a national research project on ALPRs. The purpose of the survey was twofold: to provide a snapshot of current usage and deployment of ALPRs in Tennessee police departments, and to identify challenges and best practices associated with ALPRs, policy development and community engagement. Survey invitations were sent to 150 police departments, and 53 responses were received for a 35% response rate. Of the 53 departments responding, 36 (67%) were currently using ALPRs, and 17 (32%) were not.

HIGHLIGHTS

In the cities that reported not currently using ALPRs, **top barriers** to the use of ALPR technology were funding availability, access to hotlists, lack of community support and competing priorities for the use of other technologies or equipment. Interestingly, the research found that these challenges applied regardless of the size of the police department responding.

In the cities that are currently using ALPRs, top motivations for deploying the technology were to detect stolen cars and to assist with crimes against property, crimes against people (i.e. homicide, assaults, robbery), and the investigation of vulnerable individuals such as children, missing persons, the mentally ill and the elderly. Respondents reported that ALPRs are primarily being used for local challenges rather than federal concerns such as homeland security.

Departments currently using ALPRs reported a **high satisfaction rate** with the results of the technology, and said they plan to continue using them.

Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) Use in Tennessee Cities and Towns, cont.

Going forward with ALPRs, the survey identified a need for improved data collection on their effectiveness in crime reduction and/or prevention. Additionally, transparency within the community regarding the use of ALPRs and the data they collect is another area for exploration as the technology gains wider use in Tennessee.

The [complete research report](#) is available in the MTAS MRLn database.

A recording of the panel discussion can be found on the [MTAS YouTube channel](#).

The complete research team was MTAS Management Consultant Program Manager Angie Carrier, MTAS Municipal Management Consultant Dana Deem, MTAS Librarian Frances Adams-O'Brien, David Moore and Dr. Xuhong Su.

The webinar was hosted by the MTAS Research and Information Center (RIC) and was part of the RIC Connect 2025 webinar series aimed at providing practical and valuable information for Tennessee municipalities.

Artificial Intelligence: A Beginner's Guide and Its Role in City Government

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a technology that enables machines to think, learn and make decisions like humans. At its core, AI uses data and algorithms to solve problems, recognize patterns and perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. For example, AI can analyze large amounts of information quickly, predict outcomes and even automate repetitive tasks.

Cyndy Edmonds
MTAS Online Training Specialist

Lisa Shipley
MTAS Information Technology Analyst

In city government, AI has the potential to transform how services are delivered and decisions are made. Imagine a system that predicts traffic congestion and suggests solutions before it happens: AI can do that by analyzing traffic patterns and real-time data. It can also help improve public safety by identifying crime hotspots or assisting emergency responders with faster decision-making during crises. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots can provide residents with instant answers to common questions about permits, utilities or city services, saving time for both citizens and staff.

By using AI, city governments can become more efficient, reduce costs and make smarter decisions that improve the quality of life for residents. From streamlining operations to enhancing public engagement, AI is a powerful tool for building smarter cities that work better for everyone.

A new curriculum now available in K@TE, is designed to introduce the topic of artificial intelligence and its applications in marketing, research and development. The courses cover beginner concepts related to ChatGPT, offering insights on how to effectively leverage this tool.

Additionally, the curriculum addresses topics such as ethics, security and governance, providing a brief overview of AI's potential and challenges.

To sign up for the curriculum, log in to K@TE and use the search to look for Getting to Know Artificial Intelligence.

Water Fluoridation Rules in Tennessee

The debate over the benefit of fluoridation of potable water versus the concerns has been ongoing for years. This brief article is not going to discuss the pros and cons of the process. Instead, the purpose of this article is to present the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) rules regarding fluoride in potable water.

Steve Wyatt
MTAS Utility Operations Consultant

The addition of fluoride to potable water is a **local decision** regarding the management of the public water system. Tennessee does not require fluoride to be added to the potable water.

If the utility adds fluoride to the potable water, TDEC has the following rules:

Rule 0400-45-01-17 Operation and Maintenance Requirements

(20) Each public water system adjusting the fluoride content to the finished water must monitor for fluoride quarterly using a certified laboratory, and the calculation of the fluoride level will be by running annual average. If the quarterly analysis of a water sample from a public water system by a certified laboratory confirms that the level of fluoride in the sample exceeds 1.5 mg/L, the public water system must provide notification to its customers of the exceedance in the same manner as prescribed in paragraph (8) of Rule 0400-45-01-.19. The water system must begin monthly fluoride monitoring using a certified laboratory for analysis. Once the monthly analyses confirm that the fluoride level is less than 1.5 mg/L for three (3) consecutive months, the public water system may resume quarterly monitoring for fluoride.

The recommended level of fluoridation in the finished water is 0.7 mg/l. Note that "mg/l" is milligrams per liter.

Rule 0400-45-01-.06 Maximum Contaminant Levels

(1) Inorganic Chemicals
(a) The maximum contaminant level for fluoride applies to community water systems. The maximum contaminant levels for nitrate, nitrite and total nitrate and nitrite are applicable to both community water systems and non-community water systems. The maximum contaminant levels for the remaining inorganic chemicals apply only to community water systems and non-transient non-community systems.
(b) The following are the maximum contaminant levels for inorganic chemicals: 9. Fluoride 4.0 [milligrams per Liter]

Rule 0400-45-01-.12 Secondary Drinking Water Regulations

(1) The following maximum contaminant levels are established to provide a water that is aesthetically pleasing to the consumer. These standards will apply to all community water systems and to those non-community water systems as may be deemed necessary by the department. Monitoring for these contaminants will be set in the Monitoring Program for each system, but in no event less than once every year for a surface and surface/ground supply and once every three years for a ground water supply.
(l)   Fluoride 2 [milligrams per Liter]

Water Fluoridation Rules in Tennessee, cont.

Fluoride is mentioned 46 times in TDEC Rule 0400-45-01, Public Water Systems. These references include additional monitoring requirements, laboratory analysis methods, quality control requirements, sampling, storage requirements, laboratory certification fees and public notice requirements, if a maximum contaminant level is exceeded.

If the utility decides to start or stop adding fluoride to the water:

Rule 0400-45-01-.17 (20) Operation and Maintenance Requirements

If a public water system decides to start or stop adding fluoride to the potable water, it must follow the following TDEC rule:

> (20)...Any public water system which determines to initiate or permanently cease fluoridation treatment of its water supply shall notify its customers, the local environmental field office within the Department of Environment and Conversation, and the Commissioner of the Department of Health in the manner and within the timeframe as specified by T.C.A. § 68-221-708(c).

T.C.A. § 68-221-708(c) states:

> (c) Any public water system or waterworks system, as defined in this title, which determines to initiate or permanently cease fluoridation of its water supply, shall notify the department of environment and conservation and the department of health of its intention 30 days prior to any vote. The water system shall additionally give public notice to its customers in a general mailing at least 30 days prior to the meeting at which said vote shall take place.

The referenced **TDEC rules** can be found online.

Hotel/Motel (Local Occupancy) Tax Resources

A common request that MTAS receives is related to resources and advice regarding the Tennessee local occupancy tax, commonly know as the hotel/motel tax. With that in mind, we want to share some of the resources that are available to help those who already levy the tax, as well as those who are considering implementing a hotel/motel tax in their municipality.

Sample Annual Report of Municipal Hotel/Motel Revenues and Expenditures (MTAS)

A sample annual reporting form (Excel) produced by MTAS Finance & Accounting Program Manager Eric Spencer, will assist Tennessee municipalities to comply with *Tennessee Code Annotated* (T.C.A.) § 67-4-1401, et seq. The law requires each municipality to report the amount of occupancy tax received and to detail how those funds were spent during the fiscal year, specifically how those expenditures were used for tourism and tourism development.

The report is due not less than 30 days after the fiscal year ends and must be provided to the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, the Commissioner of the Department of Tourist Development, the Chair of the State and Local Government Committee of the Senate, and the Chair of the Local Government Committee of the House of Representatives.

Hotel/Motel Tax Annual Reporting : FY2025 Process and Submission Form (Tennessee Department of Tourist Development)

Pursuant to T.C.A) § 67-4-1403(c), all municipalities that levy a hotel/motel (i.e. occupancy) tax, whether authorized by statute, private act, ordinance or resolution, are required to submit an annual written report to the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development within (90) days following the end of the municipality's fiscal year.

Local Occupancy Tax Rates Map (Tennessee Department of Revenue)

This is an interactive map of Tennessee for identifying occupancy tax rates in counties and cities statewide. The site offers a downloadable spreadsheet version as well. The online table is filterable by jurisdiction type (county, city, special tax jurisdiction), county and city.

MTAS Salary Survey: Now Collecting FY2026 Salary Information

Have you ever needed salary information when looking at increases or creating a new position? The MTAS Salary Survey can help! The Salary Survey reporting dashboard is available to any city that participates in the survey.

Are you a returning participant?

If you participated in the FY2025 Salary Survey, just log in and start a new survey. You will be able to import your data from last year. If any of the salary information has changed since FY2025, you can update it after you import it.

If you have forgotten your password, simply reset it from the homepage of the Salary Survey.

Is this your first time participating?

Register as a new user, and we will help you from there. If you need help getting registered, please refer to the **MTAS Salary Survey Help Materials.**

We look forward to working with you soon!

MTAS SALARY SURVEY

OUR MTAS HR CONSULTANTS ARE AVAILABLE TO ASSIST

East Tennessee
Betsy Cunningham
betsy.cunningham@tennessee.edu

Middle Tennessee
John Grubbs
john.grubbs@tennessee.edu

West Tennessee
Peter Voss
peter.voss@tennessee.edu

You may also email
salaryinfo@tennessee.edu
with any questions you might have.

Tennessee Changes Population Estimates for Revenue Distribution

Starting January 1, 2026, Tennessee will implement a new Population Estimates Program to ensure more accurate and equitable distribution of state-shared revenues to counties and municipalities.

- The **Boyd Center** at the University of Tennessee will produce annual population estimates.
- The **Department of Economic and Community Development** will certify these figures.
- This replaces the previous system that relied solely on decennial census data.

Why it matters: Communities will now receive funding based on **updated population figures**, reflecting real-time growth and change. The first certified estimates will be published **July 1, 2026**.

LEARN MORE ABOUT REVENUE DISTRIBUTION

Middle Tennessee Mayors Gather in Sparta to Foster Regional Interests

Warren Nevad

MTAS Municipal Management Consultant

MTAS Executive Director Margaret Norris speaks at the MTMA lunch in Sparta on July 10, 2025.

The Middle Tennessee Mayors Association (MTMA) held its second meeting in Sparta, hosted by Mayor Jerry Lowery and supported by the University of Tennessee (UT) Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS). Seventeen mayors from across the region gathered to share updates and strengthen regional collaboration. Speakers included:

- **Margaret Norris**, MTAS Executive Director
- **Anthony Haynes**, Tennessee Municipal League Executive Director
- **Johanna Owenby**, MTAS Training and Development Program Manager
- **Tommy Lee**, Upper Cumberland Development District Deputy Director
- **Gary Cohen**, Tennessee Waste to Jobs Director

The mayors discussed community updates, infrastructure, budgeting, and MTAS training opportunities. The newly elected MTMA officers are:

- **President**: Mayor Lori Burnett (Livingston)
- **Vice President**: Mayor Jerry Lowery (Sparta)
- **Secretary/Treasurer**: Mayor Donna Hartman (Fayetteville)

MTMA's mission: To mentor new mayors, foster networking and advocate for the economic interests and public welfare of the municipalities in Middle Tennessee.
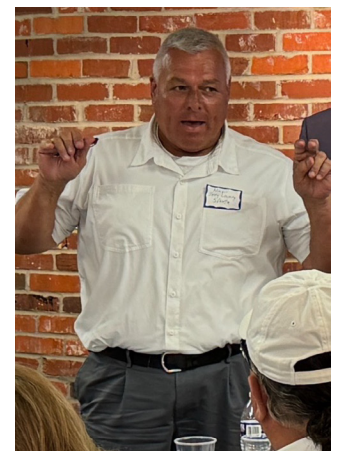

Mayor Lowery welcoming and presenting to the assembled group.

Gary Cohen, Tennessee Waste to Jobs Director, and Sofie Payne, Tennessee Environmental Council Intern, in front of the Oldham Theatre displaying a warm welcome to MTAS and MTMA.

Mayor Jerry Lowery, Sparta, hosted the MTMA meeting.

"Sic Utere Tuo Ut Alienum Non Laedas": Thoughts on Property and the Public Good

It has been years since I first read this Latin phrase. At the time, I assumed I would never have a reason to use it. Yet throughout my career—and especially since joining MTAS—the concept has reappeared as a guiding principle.

Ford's BlueOval City project in West Tennessee is having a transformative impact on the region, both economically and socially. The project represents a $5.6 billion investment by Ford Motor Company and is expected to create up to 30,000 total (direct and indirect) jobs across the region. This past year, much of my work as an MTAS consultant in West Tennessee has been influenced by surrounding communities' efforts to position themselves for this unique shot at prosperity. That effort begins with the foundation of community building—leading communities to recognize the importance of civic pride and property maintenance.

Unfortunately, municipal leaders frequently encounter cultural resistance when implementing property maintenance standards, because many property owners believe in the absolute freedom and privilege to use their property with complete autonomy.

This brings us to the Latin maxim, sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas. Translated, it means, "Use your property in such a manner as not to injure that of another." Dating back to the ancient Roman empire, this principle remains a cornerstone of both property law and ethical community living, emphasizing the balance between individual rights and collective responsibility for the public good.

> *This brings us to the Latin maxim, sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas. Translated, it means, "Use your property in such a manner as not to injure that of another."*

James Lewellen
MTAS Municipal Management Consultant

For communities to thrive and sustain prosperity over the long term, cities must focus on the principles that define a great place to live. These factors include not only health and safety, but also aesthetics, order and livability. The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed this sentiment in Berman v. Parker (1954), stating: "It is within the power of the legislature to determine that a community should be beautiful as well as healthy, spacious as well as clean, well balanced as well as carefully patrolled."

At its core, sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas promotes the idea that ownership does not imply absolute freedom. Rather, the rights of property owners are limited by the obligation not to harm others. This concept underpins many legal doctrines, including nuisance laws, zoning regulations and environmental protections. While it's important for codes to be reasonable and not overly restrictive, property upkeep goes beyond mere appearance. It is a cornerstone of long-term community health, resilience and prosperity.

Ultimately, sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas is a timeless reminder that true freedom entails responsibility. It reinforces the idea that sustainable, just communities are built not only on individual rights, but also on mutual respect and shared accountability.

If you have questions regarding property maintenance standards in your municipality, please contact your MTAS management consultant.

Are you in the know on MTAS training news?

Turn conflict into opportunity! Join us October 9 for an interactive session facilitated by TDEC Talent Development Consultant, Keifer Helle, who will share strategies to improve your approach to resolving conflict.

Stay current on all MTAS training opportunities by signing up for our weekly training news delivered to your inbox every Wednesday.

Sign up to receive MTAS Training News! This weekly email is full of important upcoming training for municipal officials and staff. #BeInTheKnow

Other Conferences and Learning Opportunities
(September–October 2025)

TAMCAR 2025 Fall Conference

September 17–19, 2025 | Pigeon Forge

TCMA 2025 Fall Conference

September 24–26, 2025 | Kingsport

TGFOA 2025 Fall Conference

October 1–3, 2025 | Murfreesboro

Mark Your Calendars for the TREEDC Annual Conference

The Tennessee Renewable Energy and Economic Development Council (TREEDC) will hold its annual conference and awards reception on November 13, 2025, at the Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber of Commerce building in Cookeville.

We are excited to partner again on this conference with the Tennessee Tech University Center for Rural Innovation and School of Professional Studies, along with the UT Municipal Technical Advisory Service.

The conference will include presentations from municipal sustainability professionals, energy services providers, rural economic development officials, PACE clean energy initiatives, and updates from TDEC Office of Energy Programs and USDA Rural Development funding opportunities.

The awards reception will be held at 37 Cedar Restaurant (across the street from the chamber building) and will begin at 5:00 p.m. More information and registration details will be provided in early September.

For sponsorship and presentation opportunities, please call **TREEDC President Dwain Land at (423) 718-3436 or email at** mayorland@gmail.com.