

# Washington Youth Tour builds bonds that last

**W**ashington Youth Tour (WYT) delegates get so much out of the weeklong experience—visits to many historic locations, lessons in leadership and team-building opportunities, not to mention an all-expenses-paid trip to the nation's capital. Although they cherish the memories, one thing that often stays with the delegates longer is the close bonds they develop.

"When you don't know anybody, you make friends fast," says Courtney Bearrentine, a 2012 delegate from Grady EMC in Cairo. "Fast friends are not always forever friends, but with WYT, somehow they are. It's the common experience that creates those strong bonds."

Ashley Thompson (2008 Snapping Shoals EMC, Covington) recalls fearing she'd be lost in the shuffle when she moved into her dorm to begin her freshman year at the University of Georgia in Athens. "I was incredibly blessed that Lindsay (Peavy) Drew (Ocmulgee EMC, Eastman) was randomly assigned to the dorm room next to me. What started out as friendship on the tour turned into a lifelong bond. I'm grateful that Youth Tour gave me that connection to spark a friendship in a place where I knew very few people."

Two other 2012 delegates developed more than a friendship. Tyler Day (Rayle EMC, Washington) and Sarah Kate Miles (Satilla REMC, Alma), who met on the tour, are engaged. Day attends UGA while Miles is a student at South Georgia State

**Top left:** Ethan Sisk, of Sharpsburg, and Edward Legaspi, of Fayetteville, represented Coweta-Fayette EMC on the 2014 Washington Youth Tour. **Above:** Edward and Ethan tour the Lincoln Memorial, a favorite stop for many delegates.

College in Waycross, so the odds of them ever meeting otherwise are remote. Their wedding is planned for spring 2017.

## ★ Washington Youth Tour 2015 tentative itinerary

**June 11:** Kickoff banquet, Atlanta Airport Marriott, Atlanta

**June 12:** Team-building activities; flight to Washington, D.C.

**June 13:** Tour and lunch at Mount Vernon; dinner at Union Station; evening guided tour of FDR, Jefferson, Martin Luther King Jr., World War II memorials; photo op of White House

**June 14:** Guided tour of Lincoln, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans memorials; Arlington National Cemetery guided tour; dinner performance of "1776" at Toby's Dinner Theatre in Columbia, Md.

**June 15:** All States assembly; tour Smithsonian museums; cruise on Potomac River.

**June 16:** Tour Supreme Court, U.S. Capitol and Washington National Cathedral; Sunset Parade at U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima statue)

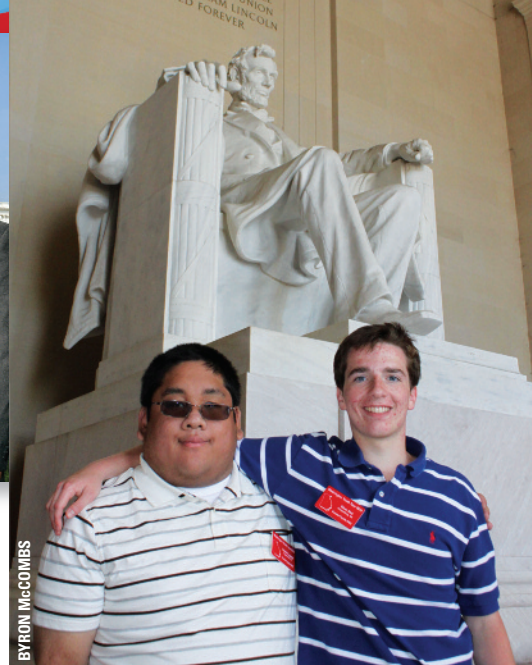
**June 17:** Meet with Georgia's congressional delegation; tour Newseum and Madame Tussauds Wax Museum; All States farewell event

**June 18:** Return flight to Atlanta

*Note: Itinerary subject to change*



**Above:** Enjoying a brief respite from the D.C. heat, Ethan and Edward take in the shady Washington National Cathedral exterior—a lovely backdrop for burgeoning friendships. **Above, right:** The tour always includes time for fun! Here, delegates cruise the Potomac River at sunset with their counterparts from North Dakota.





## The 2014 Washington Youth Tour

# In their own words ...

### Which tour stop or activity made the greatest impression on you?



**Cecelia Giangacomo**, *Coastal Electric, Midway*.

In meeting with U.S. Rep. Rob Woodall, I saw a different side of our representatives on Capitol Hill. He was humble and honest, and his goal was to work with all congressmen, no matter what their political standing. My only hope is that my generation has representatives like him. 😊



**Edward Legaspi**, *Coweta-Fayette EMC, Newnan*. Mount

Vernon. Whether it was learning about George Washington's mansion or speaking to a character, the history was just amazing. Like . 👍



**Cole Madray**, *Satilla REMC, Alma*. We visited the Viet-

nam Veterans Memorial on Father's Day. It was very moving to see all the wives, sons, daughters, friends, brothers and sisters there, laying their roses and letters. Like . 👍

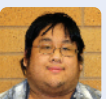


**Sarah Roberson**, *Middle Georgia EMC, Vienna*.

From the pictures on the wall to the shoes, the Holocaust Memorial Museum was filled with devastating news and images from this tragedy. The museum makes everyone aware that something like this should never happen again.

Like . 👍

### What lesson learned from the Washington Youth Tour will serve you best in life?



**Edward Legaspi**, *Coweta-Fayette EMC, Newnan*.

I learned to do things out of my comfort zone. Before, I was quieter and more reserved and never dreamed of introducing myself to almost 109 people, but this tour gave me that opportunity, and I couldn't be more grateful. Like . 👍

**Above:** Washington Youth Tour delegates from Georgia's 3rd Congressional District meet with U.S. Rep. Lynn Westmoreland. **Left:** Ethan and Edward pause for a photo at the Little White House in Warm Springs.



**Emily Hill**, *Georgia EMC, Tucker/Planters EMC, Millen*.

I learned to stop looking at my generation as a "lost generation." I saw teens my age passionate about being the best teens we can be, which boosted my hope for my generation.

Like . 👍



**Je'Marcus McDaniel**, *Canoochee EMC, Reidsville*.

I learned a lot about being tolerant of others and their differences, what it takes to be a good leader and the importance and joys of learning about our nation's history. Like . 👍

### Do you think the Youth Tour will help you become a better leader?



**Luke Gamble**, *Irwin EMC, Ocilla*. Yes. This trip gave me

an incredible opportunity to strengthen my leadership skills through the many team-building games and the opportunities to communicate with complete strangers. Like . 👍



**Edward Legaspi**, *Coweta-Fayette EMC, Newnan*. Yes, it

allows people with leadership potential to shine. Whether they are already social and showcasing their skills by leading a group of strangers, or they are introverts learning to get out of their shell, the youth tour helps build leadership. 😊



**Laiken Owens**, *Amicalola EMC, Jasper*. One of the many

leadership skills I learned on the tour was that to be a good leader, you must first be a good listener. Like . 👍



DANIEL PECK STUDIOS

U.S. Sens. Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson welcome the delegates to Capitol Hill.

## I survived Washington Youth Tour 2014 ... and loved it!

By Amy Lott, Coweta-Fayette EMC Communications Coordinator

When I volunteered to help chaperone more than 100 of Georgia's best and brightest teenagers to D.C. for a week, I said, "How hard could it be?" Meanwhile, a little voice inside me warned I might have bitten off more than I could chew. I thought, "They want me, Amy Lott, to be responsible for wake-up calls, room checks and punctuality?" And secondly, with growing concern, "That's a lot of teenage hormones ..."

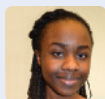
I would soon find out, however, that not only would the much-beloved Washington Youth Tour prove to be one of the most challenging experiences of my life, but also one of the most rewarding and inspiring.

The purpose of the tour is to help EMCs nationwide promote stronger communities by giving young people the ability and desire to make meaningful, lifelong contributions as leaders. Another key component is to teach students to appreciate diverse points of view and accept different social, racial and cultural backgrounds.

My personal takeaway from this beautiful whirlwind trip, besides being blown away by all the moving and fascinating aspects of D.C., was the realization that we should have no worries about this future generation of leaders. Against this amazing backdrop of history, I saw an energetic, bold, kind, reverent, responsible, empowered, charming group emerge as a fully fused family. They were bursting with ideas, songs and intentions. They said "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am" religiously. Yes, they took countless selfies, but they also embraced differences, accepted challenges and remembered sacrifices. I saw my country's capital through their eyes—fresh, and without cynicism.

So, despite my nervousness and the miles of walking in blazing sunlight through swampy humidity, I came away with a new appreciation for my country and the Washington Youth Tour itself, a program I've coordinated for five years but never fully grasped. I soaked it all in, bonded with my fellow chaperones and mothered the delegates. But most important, I came to understand these teenagers have a lot to offer if we will only pay attention—what bright lights they will be in this world!

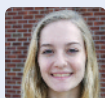
### What advice would you give to future Youth Tour delegates?



**Grace Essien**, *GreyStone Power, Douglasville*. Absorb every opportunity you're given. Take lots of pictures, but remember to learn about the events that shaped our nation into what it is today. [Like](#) . 👍



**Ethan Sisk**, *Coweta-Fayette EMC, Newnan*. Make sure you talk to your fellow delegates. You don't need to try to meet everyone, but the trip is really fun if you make friends with a few new people. [Like](#) . 👍



**Kitty Shepherd**, *Planters EMC, Millen*. Jump in headfirst the moment you get there and don't come up for air. Stay in the moment the entire week. WYT 2014's motto was "Sleep when you get home." You will not regret it for one moment. [Like](#) . 👍

### Do you think participation on the Youth Tour will help you grow as a person?



**Ethan Sisk**, *Coweta-Fayette EMC, Newnan*. I think the Youth Tour will help me grow as a person because it taught me important social skills and gave me a sense of maturity.



**Danielle Diehl**, *Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, Young Harris*. I met people on the tour from many backgrounds who excelled in a number of different areas. It helped me grow as a person by meeting them and realizing that everyone has something they can teach you. [Like](#) . 👍



**Sarah Wilcox**, *Flint Energies, Reynolds*. Absolutely! It has reinforced the idea that it is better to push myself out of my comfort zone than to live in ignorance inside of it. [Like](#) . 👍



BYRON McCOMBS

Coweta-Fayette EMC Communications Coordinator Amy Lott (front row, third from left) bonds with fellow chaperones during the trip.

## ★ From delegate to co-op employee

*Participating in the Washington Youth Tour (WYT) often opens delegates' eyes to potential career paths. Sometimes, they find a job with one of Georgia's electric cooperatives, which sponsor the tour. Three former WYT delegates who followed that path answer this question:*

**What Washington Youth Tour lessons have stayed with you and now help you in your work with an electric cooperative?**

### Kelly McEwen

**Participated:** 2001, representing Carroll EMC (CEMC), Carrollton  
**Current job:** Administrative assistant in Engineering and Operations, CEMC; also worked at CEMC while attending college



All the delegates became friends so easily, and we were made to feel like we were part of a family. That is also what I recall from my past experience working at Carroll EMC during college and it is true today. Cooperative employees—within their own cooperative or with another from across the state—share a special camaraderie and relationship.

Cooperative employees strive to make their communities the best places to live and work and feel it is our duty to be responsible citizens and give back to our communities. Our world would be a better place if everyone held fast to these values.

### About the 2014 delegates of the 65 who submitted survey responses ...

- 43** are members of the **National Honor Society** and/or **Beta Club**
- 31** had **never flown** in a plane **before** the **WYT**
- 19** are members of **4-H**
- 17** had a family member participate in a previous **WYT**
- 14** are **members of FFA**

**The Holocaust Memorial Museum** was the tour stop or activity that left the **most lasting impression**.



### Charlie Durden

**Participated:** 2001, representing Georgia EMC, Tucker, and Washington EMC, Sandersville  
**Current job:** Member services representative, Sawnee EMC, Cumming

Before I participated in the WYT, at the age of 17, my life revolved around school, church and sports. By the time I started my senior year of high school after returning from the trip, the WYT had given me a more guided focus on the things I wanted to do with my life. After the events of Sept. 11 (we were the last tour group before 9/11), I felt a stronger sense of responsibility and the need to be a good steward to my community, just as the pioneers of the electric membership cooperatives were to the communities they served at the dawn of the Rural Electrification Administration.

I now get the great opportunity to meet the tour delegates we send to Washington, D.C., each year. I enjoy learning of the experiences each had on the trip.

### Leah Tritt Johnson

**Participated:** 2007, representing Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, Young Harris  
**Current job:** Member services representative, Amicalola EMC, Dahlonega office



The Youth Tour helps the younger generation with public speaking, responsibility and time-management skills, and gives small-town students the chance to travel somewhere they may never get to see or go otherwise.

I was extremely shy and attended the smallest school in the state, Woody Gap School in Suches. For me, it was a lot of firsts: first time flying, first time traveling farther than a surrounding state and the first time being alone on a trip without my family. But the Youth Tour gives you a chance to create a new kind of family ... a one-of-a-kind connection with youth across the state and even the country. I created a special bond with the Georgia group and love being able to see where they are now.

As a member of Amicalola EMC's Youth Tour Selection Committee, I interview and evaluate applicants. I hope that one day my husband, John, and I can go back to Washington, D.C., as chaperones.