

Add to the success stories:



Be a part of the WASHINGTON YOUTH TOUR



BYRON MCCOMBS

Cream of the crop. The best and brightest. Upper echelon. High achievers. Just about any superlative fits each year's group of Georgia delegates for the Washington Youth Tour (WYT), sponsored by the state's electric membership corporations, including Georgia EMC.

Every delegate's accomplishments and interests are highlighted during the kickoff banquet each year, before the high school students begin their whirlwind week of team-building, traveling, sightseeing, learning and bonding. There are some common themes: Not only are these young people very smart—and



DANIEL PECK STUDIOS

Far left: Sandy Creek High School student Shelby Worrell and East Coweta High School student Min Lim visit sites such as the Washington Monument as representatives of Coweta-Fayette EMC on the 2015 Washington Youth Tour. **Left:** Min, Shelby and other delegates from Georgia's 3rd Congressional District meet with U.S. Rep. Lynn Westmoreland.

college plans and career aspirations, and it's clear that all set the bar high for themselves.

Ready to count yourself among the success stories? The 2016 Washington Youth Tour will be held June 9-16. For information, contact your local electric cooperative.

Are you a Washington Youth Tour alumna or alumnus? If so, we would love to hear from you! Fill out a quick survey at goo.gl/forms/eQM7kt6RT7.

polite—but they also do *a lot*. Active in their churches. Busy with volunteer work. Gifted athletes. Beta Club. National Honor Society. Eagle Scouts. The list goes on and on.

Considering the rigorous application process (which varies by EMC), it's not surprising that the students chosen as WYT delegates have such impressive backgrounds. Some EMCs test applicants on their knowledge of electric cooperative history. Others receive recommendations from school counselors. Many co-ops conduct in-person interviews with the best candidates.

A big reason these delegates—who begin Washington Youth Tour week as strangers—bond so quickly and develop lasting friendships is that they are all driven to succeed. Those biographies shown at the kickoff banquet list the delegates'



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Above: Shelby practices her interview technique with a familiar face at one of the more lighthearted stops on the trip: Madame Tussauds Wax Museum. **Right:** A trip to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. is always fun . . . maybe one of our delegates will be in that White House one day!



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★ Washington Youth Tour 2016 tentative itinerary

June 9: Kickoff banquet, Atlanta

June 10: Team-building activities; flight to Washington, D.C.

Dates TBD for the following activities:

- Tour and lunch at Mount Vernon; dinner at Union Station; evening guided tour of memorials; photo op of White House
- Guided tour of Lincoln, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans memorials; Arlington National Cemetery guided tour; dinner performance of "Peter Pan" at Toby's Dinner Theatre in Columbia, Md.
- All States assembly; tour Smithsonian museums; cruise on Potomac River
- Tour Supreme Court, U.S. Capitol and Washington National Cathedral; Sunset Parade at U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima statue)
- Meet with Georgia's congressional delegation; tour Newseum and Madame Tussauds Wax Museum; All States farewell event

June 16: Return flight to Atlanta

Note: Itinerary subject to change



PHOTOS BY BYRON McCOMBS

WYT delegates—in their own words

Above: As they delve into what it means to be a leader, Washington Youth Tour delegates have a chance to interact with peers from across the state, and lifelong friendships are often formed. **Left:** At the Newseum, a popular stop on the tour dedicated to championing the five freedoms of the First Amendment, Min brushes up on her television news anchor skills with Cobb EMC delegate Nethra Rajendran.



What lesson did you learn from the Washington Youth Tour that you think will serve you best in life?



Kirsten Farmer, *Diverse Power, LaGrange*. The improved skill of communication will serve me throughout my life. At the beginning of the week, you're introduced to total strangers, but through communication, you feel like one huge family by the end of the week. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Sinead O'Bryant, *Habersham EMC, Clarkesville*. Apart from rising to a new level of patriotism for the USA, one of the most practical lessons I have learned is to meet new people "right"—to seek out connections with each person and to become excellent at quickly attaching names to faces. 😊



Kristen Atkins, *Hart EMC, Hartwell*. I learned from one of my fellow delegates that we each have a small candle, but when joined together, we shine so bright. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Rosie Simpkins, *Planters EMC, Millen*. When you're taken away from everyone you know and thrown into the arms of the leaders, chaperones and 110 other like-minded individuals, you will learn, you will grow, you will love, you will ache and you will cry all kinds of tears. I learned indescribable lessons from my experience with these people. 😊



Min Lim, *Coweta-Fayette EMC, Palmetto*. Out of numerous lessons, I have learned to give interminable respect and gratitude to the ones who have fought for what we take advantage of today—freedom. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Jacob Duke, *Irwin EMC, Ocilla*. To cherish every moment with your friends. The Youth Tour opened great opportunities to meet new people around the country and showed me I'm not the only one interested in a specific subject, such as law and other degrees. [Like](#) . [👍](#)

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



Chris Larkins, *Jackson EMC, Jefferson*. The Youth Tour has tremendously helped me turn into the leader I have always wanted to be. I had always known I had potential to become an extraordinary leader, but on this trip I discovered what was missing: passion. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Meredith Gunter, *Rayle EMC, Washington*. Yes, because it gave me the opportunity to be with 110 other leaders from all over Georgia. I got to see how they were successful leaders, so I could expand on my leadership abilities. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Caroline Sweat, *Washington EMC, Sandersville*. Growing up, I always struggled with being shy. However, this trip forces you to constantly go outside your comfort zone, which I sincerely appreciated. This trip pushed me to do more and become more, which is what being a leader is all about. 😊



Greg McKenzie, *Altamaha EMC, Lyons*. The people around me on the Youth Tour gave off a sense of drive in their lives, and you just knew that a majority of them will be successful later in life. Being around people like this motivated me to work harder and be the leader in my community that I know I can be. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Carrianna Simmons, *Central Georgia EMC, Jackson*. From the tour, I learned that it's so important to be kind and accepting to everyone, no matter their backgrounds or opinions. This skill will help gain the respect of your peers and those you are trying to lead. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Kerri Cheek, *Georgia EMC, Tucker*. Yes, because it showed me that I can stand up for what I believe and what I think is right without people thinking I'm weird or stupid. That doesn't matter in being a leader, and the tour has helped me see that in a different light. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



The purpose of the tour is to help EMCs nationwide promote stronger communities by giving young people the ability and desire to make meaningful contributions to society, the gratitude to recognize the service of those before us, the appreciation of diverse points of view and the acceptance of others from different backgrounds.



What one piece of advice would you give to potential Washington Youth Tour delegates?



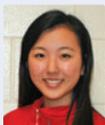
Kaleb Todd, *Canoochee EMC, Reidsville*. If you are chosen, do every last thing you can to enjoy the trip. You may think a week with strangers is a long time, but after the second day, those strangers will be family, and family time is like lightning! It strikes rarely, but when it does, it's always a rush of energy! [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Mary Beth McDermitt, *Carroll EMC, Carrollton*. Talk to everyone, but be yourself! Even if you don't think that you will be friends with someone because of how different you are, go talk to them. [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Kirtan Parekh, *Jackson EMC, Jefferson*. Make the most of the people who surround you, not necessarily the things. Yes, while in the nation's capital, take advantage of that, but those monuments will be there forever. The people that you're with, they won't necessarily be there with you for more than a week. Make sure to embrace that and really learn every person's story. 😊



Min Lim, *Coweta-Fayette EMC, Palmetto*. A week is not enough if you don't spend it wisely. Make new family members, take in all the knowledge you are given and don't come with a taciturn attitude! Enjoy! [Like](#) . [👍](#)



Jake Williams, *Oconee EMC, Dudley*. The biggest impact on my life from this trip has been through the people I met from Georgia. I've never been an emotional person, but I cried after leaving the airport in Atlanta when it was over. It seems strange to think that spending only a week with these people has left me with friends that will last a lifetime. 😊



Connor Poole, *Jefferson Energy, Wrens*. Get ready for the most jam-packed, activity-filled, fun week of your life, while running on four and a half hours of sleep every night. Also, be ready to develop lifelong friendships. 😊

Tour photographer relishes 'dream come true' ★

Every family has one—the designated photographer on vacations and for gatherings and special occasions. That person spends much of the time looking through a camera viewfinder (or at a phone) to capture every photo op for posterity. Except for the kindness of a passing stranger (or, these days, a selfie stick), there might be no evidence the photographer was even there.

Byron McCombs has served four years in that capacity for Georgia's Washington Youth Tour (WYT) family. McCombs, staff assistant at Blue Ridge Mountain EMC in Young Harris, went on three tours as a chaperone before he was asked to step into the new role of trip photographer. "To spend time with the caliber of young people selected to attend the tour—while surrounded by our country's history—is a dream come true," says the former history teacher and youth minister.

It's difficult enough just to keep up with the weeklong tour's breakneck pace and the many logistical obstacles of moving 120 people (counting students and chaperones) through Washington, D.C. But that's just part of the challenge. "There's no problem taking plenty of beautiful pictures in the nation's capital," says McCombs. "It's trying to get photos of the students with other students from their sponsoring EMCs in front of a historical landmark that presents the real challenge."

Electric cooperatives in Georgia use the photos taken by McCombs in their newsletters published in *GEORGIA Magazine* and can distribute them to local media to accompany stories promoting the Washington Youth Tour.

Each year brings a new group of exceptional students, and the opportunity to interact with them is what draws McCombs back. "Each of them has a story to tell, and I like hearing them—where they come from, how they got where they are and where they think they are going," he says.

McCombs' contributions to the Youth Tour go far beyond photographs. "Byron's knowledge and background as a history teacher enrich the group's experience, and his witty sense of humor has caused many uncontrollable bouts of laughter," says Gale Cutler, tour director for Georgia EMC. "The students love him, and I am so thankful that he is involved with the Washington Youth Tour."



Tour photographer Byron McCombs, center, enjoys a rare moment in front of the camera with a group of 2015 Washington Youth Tour delegates.

A number of former Washington Youth Tour (WYT) delegates followed a path that led them to military service. Here's a look at a few:

Tara Wickersham Miles

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, 2010 WYT delegate

- Graduated in May 2015 from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point with a degree in kinesiology.
- Graduated in December 2015 from Basic Officer Leaders Course (BOLC) in Fort Sill, Okla.; air defense officer.

“My time at West Point taught me a lot about leadership and life. Following freshman year, I attended Air



Tara Wickersham Miles with her father, Retired Lt. Col. Daniel Wickersham.

Assault School, where I learned a great deal about transporting equipment via helicopters and rappelled 90 feet from a helicopter.

“Going into my junior year, I was put in charge of new cadets as they began their first summer at West Point. That is where I met my husband. The following summer, I spent two weeks learning infantry tactics in the mountains of New York and later shadowed a second lieutenant in South Korea for three weeks. My senior year, I was a leader in the Professional Military Ethics Education program.

“I was lucky enough to marry my best friend, Nicholas Miles, a fellow West Point graduate, this past summer. My husband and I will be stationed at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Md.”

★ **About the WYT:** *“I made great friends, and I learned a great deal from the experience. I hope this trip continues to help develop young leaders like it helped me.”*

Hannah Masterson Warren

Okefenoke Rural EMC, 2008 WYT delegate

Jimmy Warren

Oconee EMC, 2008 WYT delegate

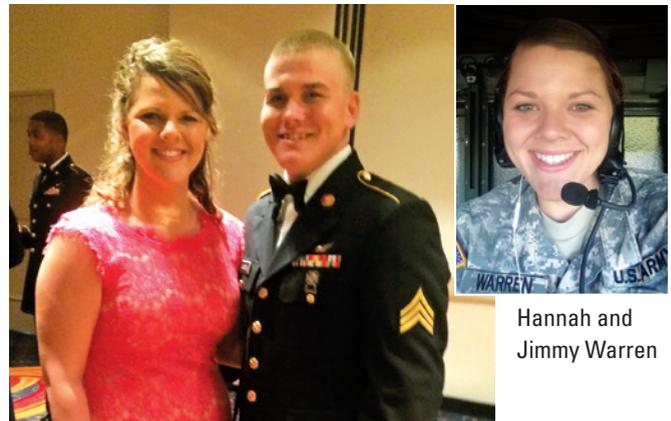
When Hannah and Jimmy met on the 2008 WYT, they realized they had some things in common: They both lived in the country and were very active in the National FFA Organization. They started dating in 2011 and were married in 2014, before Jimmy was deployed to Afghanistan. They now live in Macclenny, Fla.

Hannah:

- Graduated from Florida Gateway College in Lake City, Fla., in 2013; studying public safety management at Florida State College in Jacksonville.
- Assigned to the Florida Medical Detachment with the Joint Force Headquarters out of Camp Blanding Joint Training Center in Starke, Fla.

“Being a Navy brat, I was raised to have a high respect for all military. In 2012, I joined the Florida Army National Guard. After completing my training as a 68W-Health Care Specialist, I returned to my unit out of Tallahassee, Fla. Since then, I have a different assignment. I received my emergency medical technician certification.”

★ **About the WYT:** *“The Youth Tour allowed me to really blossom and become more outgoing. I learned some great lessons on creating teams, friendship and partnerships. My sergeants know they can entrust me with a task, and it will get done with some great teamwork.”*



Hannah and Jimmy Warren

Jimmy:

- Graduated in 2010 from West Laurens High School in Dexter.
- Assigned to Delta Company, 1-169th General Support Aviation Battalion out of Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah.

“I was fascinated with jets from a young age and always wanted to be a fighter pilot, but poor vision prevented that dream. So I went for the next-best thing: working on helicopters. The two jobs I hold are classified as a 15B-Aircraft Powerplant Repairer and 15U-CH-47 Helicopter Repairer.”

★ **About the WYT:** *“I have been able to use some of the leadership techniques acquired on the trip to lead my soldiers. The most important ability I have taken from the Youth Tour is the cohesion portion. To be a great leader, you have to have that connection to make the mission run smoothly.”*