

In packing for trip, delegates leave comfort zone at home

A few months before the Washington Youth Tour (WYT) each year, delegates from Georgia's electric cooperatives receive a suggested packing list for the weeklong trip. Among other items, the list includes six casual touring outfits, two dressy outfits, comfortable shoes, rain gear and sunscreen.

One thing not on the recommended list, though, is each delegate's comfort zone. It's definitely excess baggage for this trip.

Stepping boldly outside the familiar and being flexible and open to new people and activities are part of the leadership experience designed to help delegates grow in many ways so the trip can have a lasting—often lifelong—impact.

Forgoing the comfort zone is a common theme in the surveys that former WYT delegates complete after the trip ends. The 2017 group, which numbered 113, is no exception.

"A lot of times, your comfort zone is holding you back from achieving something, whether it be meeting new people or trying new things," says Dalton Crowe, who represented Amicalola EMC in Jasper on the 2017 tour.

"Be open to new friendships and new opportunities," advises Abby Adams, who represented Coweta-Fayette EMC. "There are so many people I wouldn't have met and so many chances I wouldn't have gotten without Youth Tour. I learned to open up to people and be myself. Everyone on the trip is smart and kind and open to new friendships. Take advantage of that."

"Each person had their own backstory, ideas, beliefs and personalities," says Tillman Kinley, who represented Hartwell-based Hart EMC. "Despite our differences, I now have a family of 112 new people who will be great friends, no matter how different we are."

At the end of the tour, the delegates' parents notice the dramatic impact that just one short week can have. "From the bottom of my heart, thank you for giving my daughter the experience of a lifetime," writes one mother to Senior Tour Director Gale Cutler of Georgia EMC in Tucker. "Her world is larger, her vision longer and her aspirations greater."



KATHRYN CLAXTON

From left, Abby Adams, of Starr's Mill High School, and Rachel Gomes, of Fayette County High School, represented Coweta-Fayette EMC on the 2017 Washington Youth Tour.



KATHRYN CLAXTON

CFEMC delegate Abby Adams, center, and her fellow delegates from Georgia spent one day on Capitol Hill. She said the experience has made her want to intern in Washington, D.C., and sparked her interest in many new subject areas.

Washington Youth Tour 2018 tentative itinerary

June 7: Kickoff banquet, Atlanta

June 8: Team-building activities; flight to Washington, D.C.

Dates TBD for the following activities:

- Tour and lunch at Mount Vernon; Holocaust Memorial Museum; dinner at Union Station; evening guided tour of memorials; photo op at White House
- Guided tour of Jefferson, Lincoln, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans memorials; Arlington National Cemetery guided tour; dinner

performance of "Newsies" 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 Library of Congress; All States farewell event

June 14: Return flight to Atlanta

Note: Itinerary subject to change



BETH McMILLAN

From left, U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.) visits with delegates Derek Huell (Flint Energies) and Garrett Botkin (Sumter EMC) at the Capitol. Huell was chosen by his fellow delegates to be Georgia's representative on the Youth Leadership Council, a nationwide organization.

'Visiting the National Cathedral allowed me to humble myself and focus on who is truly in charge.'

Corbyn Dent
Jefferson Energy

'The bus rides were probably one of my favorite parts. We told weird family stories, laughed, sang "High School Musical" and became best friends.'

Jennifer Thorpe
Coastal Electric

'The showcase of Pulitzer Prize-winning photos at the Newseum revealed the true power of a single image.'

Rachel Gomes
Coweta-Fayette EMC

'The Vietnam [Veterans Memorial] Wall had the greatest impact on me. You read in history the numbers of how many died, but when you see all the names listed, it just has a whole new meaning.'

Garrett Martin
Amicalola EMC



Want to go on the 2018 Washington Youth Tour?



Georgia's delegates gather for a photo op during their cruise on the Potomac River.

'This trip will make a bigger impact on you than you could ever imagine. You won't make friends; you'll make family.'

Sarah Kate Wall
Middle Georgia EMC

'At the National Archives, when I was inches away from the Constitution, Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, the true story of our nation hit me. It's a story of leaders and dreamers. It's a nation built long, long ago, yet the same values are still shared today.'

Cecilia Tatro
Jackson EMC

'Stay off your phones and get to know people around you.'

Kristin Pirkle
GreyStone Power

Contact your electric cooperative for information!

WYT alumni thrive as leaders of nonprofits

The week on the Washington Youth Tour (WYT) leads delegates down a variety of paths. Whether they go into politics or some other kind of public service, enter the military, work for an electric cooperative or pursue

other jobs, delegates find that the WYT experience can have an indelible impact on their career track or reaffirm a path that already had started. Here are two WYT alumni who are making their mark with nonprofits.

Emilee Connell
2004 WYT delegate
Grady EMC, Cairo
Founder, SoloHope

Emilee's story:

After traveling to Honduras many times on mission trips, in 2012 I had a random idea to create bracelets with pine needles and thread. For years, I had seen the extreme poverty in Honduras and had listened as women shared their challenges of providing basic necessities for their children. I began to see the real need for jobs that would have a long-term impact and not just provide a quick fix.

We have grown to nine artisans, and we partner with local women's co-ops to create other products. We started with just a simple bracelet design and now create an array of jewelry and home-goods products. Each piece is handmade by women overcoming poverty, allowing them to provide for themselves and their families as well as send their children to school, make improvements to their homes and even purchase land. It truly makes me so proud.

Now I live in Honduras with my husband, Ever Umanzor, leading our organization and taking on new projects to further education and empowerment. Additionally, we have the privilege of hosting volunteer teams from the U.S.

Our U.S. office is located in Albany, where my friend and partner, Ashley Griffin, leads our stateside operations. We're a small organization, but we're growing. We know it's all because of the faithfulness of the Lord, and we truly feel honored to have been entrusted with such a special journey.

What's the best way for people to learn more about your organization or to help you?

Go to our website, solohope.org, to learn more about our artisans and their stories, make a donation or purchase, sign up for our email updates and even learn how to join us in Honduras on a team.

Facebook: [facebook.com/solohopeorg](https://www.facebook.com/solohopeorg)

Instagram: [instagram.com/solohopeorg](https://www.instagram.com/solohopeorg)



Emilee Connell, founder of SoloHope, lives in Honduras with her husband, Ever Umanzor.



Amelia Day, right, joins Operation: Veteran Smiles volunteers from the Muscogee County 4-H Club in Columbus outside one of the veterans' hospitals where they deliver cards and hygiene care packages.

Amelia Day
2016 WYT delegate
Flint Energies, Reynolds
Founder and director, Operation: Veteran Smiles

Amelia's story:

Both my granddads and my dad are veterans. I started Operation: Veteran Smiles in 2012, after I learned that many veterans in Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals often have no family or friends to support them. Many experience depression and have longer recovery times.

I began gathering volunteers and donations to make handmade cards and hygiene care packages. These items are then personally delivered to veterans in VA hospitals.

In 2016 I applied for the National 4-H Council's Youth in Action Awards for my work with OVS. In March 2017, at the National Legacy Gala in Washington, D.C., I was named the National 4-H Youth in Action winner.

U.S. Cellular, my sponsor for the National 4-H Youth in Action Awards, "adopted" OVS as its community service project for its associates nationwide. Before this, OVS had delivered more than 4,800 hygiene care packages (which include soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, tissues, etc.). As of October, U.S. Cellular associates had delivered 2,000, bringing OVS deliveries to more than 6,900 cards and care packages to hospitalized veterans in 15 states.

As founder and director of Operation: Veteran Smiles, I can't tell you how much this means to me.

What's the best way for people to learn more about your organization or to help you?

Follow [facebook.com/OperationVeteranSmiles](https://www.facebook.com/OperationVeteranSmiles). There is also a site for those who would like to donate a care package or host a delivery: bit.ly/helpOVS.