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# The 2023 Washington Youth Tour was a huge success

By Lindsay Penticuff

Georgia's 104 Washington Youth Tour (WYT) delegates were among nearly 2,000 students from across the country who visited Washington, D.C., last year for the annual Washington Youth Tour.

With 34 electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) in Georgia participating, the 2023 event held June 15-22 was the Youth Tour's 58th year in Georgia.

Once a year, high school students are selected by Georgia's EMCs to represent Georgia as delegates on the Youth Tour. This top-notch leadership experience and tour of Washington, D.C., includes meetings with state and national leaders, leadership training and visits to many major sites.

"This year's tour was a huge success!" says Andy Paul, WYT director and public relations representative with Tucker-based Georgia EMC. "I would describe it as a connection-making trip, as students from rural areas of our state connected with students from urban areas, and they made lifelong friendships."

During the 2023 trip, delegates visited many national memorials, including the National Mall, Lincoln Memo-



Georgia's 2023 WYT delegates meet with U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.) on the Capitol steps.

DOBY PHOTOGRAPHY

rial, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"It was so great to see students connect their local EMC with opportunities like this for learning and success for their local communities," Paul adds, "and all on a trip that is at no cost to the students!"

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## Serving as a WYT chaperone



KATHRYN GREEN, SOUTHERN RIVERS ENERGY

Tonya Jones, Sumter EMC

Electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) have been a part of Tonya Jones' life for as long as she can remember, so it seems only fitting for her to chaperone and represent Georgia on the Washington Youth Tour (WYT).

"My grandmother Sarah Sirmons worked as the cashier at Middle Georgia EMC [MGEMC] in Vienna for 28 years [1972-2000], and my husband, Chipper, is now in his 21st year at MGEMC," Jones says. "Chipper has worked with the team-building session of the Youth Tour for 15 years, so I am able to help as well."

Jones, who is the community relations manager at Sumter EMC in Americus, chaperoned her first WYT in 2007. She also chaperoned in 2008, 2011, 2016 and 2023.

"Watching students learn and grow is my passion," she says. "Before joining Sumter EMC, I was in education for 23 years. Tucker-based Georgia EMC is always looking for couples [to serve as chaperones], and they also encourage teachers to apply, so Chipper and I were a perfect couple when we first signed up in 2007."

Jones and the other 14 chaperones on last year's trip helped make sure that every student was safe and cared for while on the trip.

"Many of the students will take their first flight or have their first trip without family, so the chaperones are there to provide direction and provide comfort when needed," she says.

*Continued on page 22B*

# A Washington Youth Tour **love story**

**T** Tyler Day and Sarah Kate Miles Day met during the 2012 Washington Youth Tour trip, but little did they know that they were meeting their future spouse.

"I remember first talking to Tyler on one of our many bus rides on the trip," says Sarah Kate, who is from Alma and represented Satilla Rural Electric Membership Corp. on the trip.

"But we really became close friends on day five during the riverboat cruise," says Tyler, who represented Rayle EMC on the WYT and is from Maxeys.

They talked daily for the first few months after the trip.

"Eventually, we decided that we could try to make a long-distance relationship work," Tyler, 29, says.

Tyler and Sarah Kate, who lived about 175 miles apart at the time, had a long-distance relationship through the rest of high school and undergraduate school. Sarah Kate attended Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, and Tyler attended the University of Georgia in Athens, which are about 160 miles apart.

"He proposed our sophomore year of college, and we got married shortly after undergrad and before we moved to Birmingham for me to attend optometry school at the University of Alabama at Birmingham," Sarah Kate, 28, says.

The couple married on June 10, 2017, and they now live in Alma.

Nearly 12 years later, the Days still have very fond memories of the Youth Tour that brought them together.

"[The] WYT is an awesome trip, not just because of the sites in Washington, D.C., but because of the friends that you'll make as well," Tyler says. "I also feel like it is important



**Top:** Sarah Kate Miles Day met her now-husband, Tyler Day, during the 2012 Washington Youth Tour.  
**Right:** The Days got married in 2017 and now live in Alma.



at that age to get out of your comfort zone and spend a week away from family with a taste of independence. Getting to spend a week immersed in the sites and museums of our nation's capital is just a bonus."

For Sarah Kate, it was an incredible opportunity to meet students from all different backgrounds and form a network of colleagues from throughout Georgia.

"Also, the trip is crafted and coordinated so beautifully that you feel like a VIP the entire trip!" she adds.

Today, Tyler is beginning a new career as a financial planner after working as a research analyst for a commercial-development advisory firm for many years. Sarah Kate is an optometrist in her hometown, practicing with two other doctors.

"It has been an incredible honor to help care for the community that invested so much in me growing up," she says. ☺

## Serving as a **WYT chaperone**, *continued from page 22A*

Her favorite part of the trip? Watching delegates form long-lasting friendships.

"They begin the week as strangers and end the week as a family," Jones says. "It is truly amazing that we experience this same feeling each and every year. Both of our sons were delegates—Joseph in 2014 and Bo in 2019—and they returned with the same feelings Chipper and I have had for the Youth Tour."

In order to chaperone the Youth Tour, a person must be either an EMC employee, an educator or a WYT alumnus. Candidates submit applications detailing their involvement with cooperative programs and youth development. The applications are reviewed by Youth Tour staff.

"Georgia EMC does a phenomenal job with this program, but it is not possible without chaperones, so take the step and apply," Jones adds. "You will not regret it!" ☺

## 2023 WYT chaperones

**Christy Chewning**, Central Georgia EMC, Jackson  
**Quamid Green**, Jefferson Energy Cooperative, Wrens  
**Daniel Hannoush**, Cobb EMC, Marietta  
**Jim and Becky Hines**, Diverse Power, LaGrange  
**Abigail Holtzouser**, Middle Georgia EMC, Vienna  
**Anitra Ellison**, GreyStone Power, Hiram  
**Karen Ewing**, Jackson EMC, Jefferson  
**Tonya Jones**, Sumter EMC, Americus  
**Tamika Lampkin**, Jefferson Energy Cooperative, Wrens  
**Carissa Parish**, Jefferson Energy Cooperative, Wrens  
**Rogie Roberson**, Flint Energies, Reynolds  
**Yolanda Robinson**, Sumter EMC, Americus  
**Ryan Sammon**, Carroll EMC, Carrollton  
**Brittany Shadix**, Carroll EMC, Carrollton





*Doster Harper (left) poses with fellow Washington Youth Tour delegates in 2017 at the Lincoln Memorial, which overlooks the National Mall and Washington Monument.*

## Where are they now?

**D**oster Harper, a 2017 Washington Youth Tour delegate from Covington, says his favorite experience during the trip was the group’s private tour of the chambers of the U.S. Supreme Court.

“That was a surreal moment to be in the highest court of our country, where so many cases have been heard to interpret our nation’s Constitution and federal law,” he says. “I will never forget that!”

He was inspired to apply for the Youth Tour by Scott Fuss, Snapping Shoals EMC’s marketing and public relations coordinator.

“[Fuss] has always done an incredible job of serving and being involved in our community in many ways,” Harper says. “I wasn’t accepted the first summer I applied, but he encouraged me to try again, and, thankfully, I got the opportunity [to attend the next year].”

The trip sparked a lifelong curiosity about U.S. history and government for Harper, which led him back to Washington, D.C., last summer. He served in Rep. Austin Scott’s office as a Congressional Agricultural Fellow for 12 weeks after graduating from the University of Georgia (UGA) in Athens in May 2023.

“I had the opportunity to work as an intern while focusing on agricultural policy in Rep. Scott’s office. He serves on the House Agriculture Committee, so I attended committee hearings, prepared Rep. Scott’s binders and other material for committee meetings, wrote briefs, conducted research on current agricultural issues and met with constituents,” Harper says.

Harper studied agriscience and environmental systems at UGA, which he says helped him with his role in Scott’s office, as his district is home to a lot of agriculture, primarily row-crop operations in South Georgia.

Today, Harper is the corporate sustainability director at Rose Acre Farms, the second-largest egg producer in the country with 15 farms in eight states. He oversees the company’s sustainability program and department.

“One of the leading environmental concerns for layer poultry housing is energy use and conservation, so I’m grateful for the experience the Washington Youth Tour provided—not only in helping me find a passion for rural community development but also in educating myself and the other delegates on rural electrification,” he says. “The lessons [the] WYT taught me are still pertinent in my life and career today in very many ways.”

**MORE** ▶



KATHRYN GREEN



*Above (l-r) : Coweta-Fayette EMC WYT Delegates Emily Kirk, Mariana Torres and Kalani McClendon pose for a picture at the White House. Left: They also took a tour of the U.S. Supreme Court building.*



## 2023 Washington Youth Tour delegates

### Altamaha EMC, Lyons

Bralie Carey  
Raymond Florez  
Darius Knight

### Amicalola EMC, Jasper

Mac Blackwell  
Heather Fernandez  
Read Fernandez  
Olivia Shull

### Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, Young Harris

Maverick Imlay  
Kendra Mason  
Anna Mauldin  
Harley Trantham

### Canoochee EMC, Reidsville

Jena Hales  
Mollie Lane  
Kaelyn Smith  
Damonae Wharton

### Carroll EMC, Carrollton

Audrey Browning  
Eli Jarrett

### Central Georgia EMC, Jackson

Neal Patel  
Adison Smith

### Coastal Electric Cooperative, Midway

La'Mirica Armstrong  
Lily Bell  
Rebecca Clark  
Cadie Martin  
Mackenzie McGrath  
Christyn Riggins

### Cobb EMC, Marietta

Chaithanya Ganji  
Sydney James  
Julia Randall  
Anna Roberts

### Colquitt EMC, Moultrie

Thomas Nichols  
Matthew Rakestraw  
Karson Smith

### Coweta-Fayette EMC, Palmetto

Emily Kirk  
Kalani McClendon  
Mariana Torres

### Diverse Power, LaGrange

Alexandria Gipson  
Elisha Mata  
Richard Rogers

### Flint Energies, Reynolds

Zachariah Hickey  
Matty Hulbert  
Jay'Shun Mathews  
Jevon Walker

### Georgia EMC, Tucker

Margaret Horton  
Collin Ulm

### Grady EMC, Cairo

Caden Godwin  
Ja'Mydra Graham  
Alden Majors

### GreyStone Power, Hiram

Danae Anderson  
Brandon Hawkinson  
Matthew Johnson  
Chloe Pergrem

### Habersham EMC, Clarkesville

Conner Brookshire  
Savannah Tucker

### Hart EMC, Hartwell

Thomas Floyd  
Ella Jones



Delegates attend guided tours of several memorials during the 2023 Youth Tour.



The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial is one of many stops for the Coweta-Fayette EMC WYT delegates.

### Irwin EMC, Ocilla

Jarrett Hancock  
Haigen Walker

### Jackson EMC, Jefferson

Lanier Ashley  
Orit Endalk  
Kendis Parks  
Luke Winter

### Jefferson Energy Cooperative, Wrens

Kimora Bullard  
Elizabeth Wansley  
Bennett Williford  
Zachary Wilson

### Middle Georgia EMC, Vienna

Trae Collins  
Ava Greer  
Luke Mitcham  
Maddie Grace Wall

### Mitchell EMC, Camilla

Kiersten Johnson  
Isabelle Rubendall

### Ocmulgee EMC, Eastman

Emmi England  
Barrett Nardi  
Ethan Parks

### Oconee EMC, Dudley

Nathan Mercer  
Caroline Smith

### Okefenokee EMC, Nahunta

Taryn Fenwick  
Jady Harris

### Planters EMC, Millen

Caleb Asbury  
Autumn Dailey  
Bryan Lanier Jr.

### Rayle EMC, Washington

Emma Grace Cliatt  
Ava Wright

### Satilla REMC, Alma

Connor Chapman  
AnnaKate Hollingsworth  
Kaitlyn Tanner  
Maura Waters

### Snapping Shoals EMC, Covington

Abby Malcolm  
Emily Nichols  
Emerson Van Ness

### Southern Rivers Energy, Barnesville

Raychel Caldwell  
Lily Glover

### Sumter EMC, Americus

Ella Hamsley  
Abby Henderson  
Joshua McCain

### Tri-County EMC, Gray

Jayden Daniel  
Esteban Zabala

### Upton EMC, Thomaston

Mayah Fry

### Walton EMC, Monroe

Katia Busch  
Keely Gray  
Deeya Mepani  
Julianna Walker

### Washington EMC, Sandersville

Gracie Foskey  
Emerson Sheppard



A tour guide teaches delegates about the Capitol at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center.



## Apply for the 2024 Washington Youth Tour

The 2024 Washington Youth Tour is scheduled for June 14-21. This all-expenses-paid, eight-day event will feature visits to and tours of some of the United States' most iconic and historic venues, such as George Washington's Mount Vernon, Arlington National Cemetery and the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Applications for the 2024 Youth Tour are due Feb. 16. Apply today by visiting [www.utility.org](http://www.utility.org) or submitting an application to Rachel Camp at [rcamp@utility.org](mailto:rcamp@utility.org).