

Youth Tour Leaves Lasting Impressions

From June 10-14, three rising high school seniors from Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative's service territory participated in Youth Tour, a program of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Youth Tour is a jam-packed week of historical tours, political meetings and recreational opportunities that provides high school students a one-of-a-kind, all-expenses-paid experience. This year marked the first time in nearly 30 years that SVEC participated in the program, which began 53 years ago.

To join the trip, high school juniors whose parents or guardians are SVEC member-owners applied through their school earlier this year. The students then interviewed with SVEC staff before being selected to attend, joining 1,800 of their peers from across the United States.

A record 51 students from the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives attended this year's event.

The itinerary for SVEC's contingent included a riverboat cruise on the Potomac, a visit to Fort McHenry in Baltimore, a tour of Arlington National Cemetery, congressional visits with 6th District Rep. Bob Goodlatte and 10th District Rep. Barbara Comstock, and seeing the award-winning *The Scottsboro Boys* musical at Signature Theatre in Arlington.

Youth Tour embodies both the 5th (commitment to education) and 7th (commitment to community) cooperative principles. It helps co-op youth gain



L-R: Isata O'Dwyer, Nathan Harris and Alex White take time to pose during Youth Tour. Below, from left: Youth Tour participants met with 10th District Rep. Barbara Comstock to discuss politics and their career goals. They also met with retiring 6th District Rep. Bob Goodlatte to learn more about his leadership roles that include chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

firsthand awareness of all that America stands for, while building pride in our nation and making contacts that may guide their future endeavors.

To learn more about this year's trip, here are the three SVEC Youth Tour delegates' experiences in their own words.

Nathan Harris, Stuarts Draft High School

What are your future plans?

I'm looking at pursuing civil engineering. My top two schools are Virginia Tech and Virginia Military Institute (VMI). I plan to stay in Virginia after college. I love the natural beauty of the area.

Why did you apply to go on Youth Tour?

I've always enjoyed learning about history, so this past school year I took AP U.S. history. My teacher took a special notice in how I asked questions to acquire a deeper understanding of the information

he was presenting and gave me an application to the Youth Tour.

What were your top moments from Youth Tour and why?

Visiting Arlington National Cemetery was a top moment for me. It was a sobering moment for me seeing the endless graves. It helps bring in perspective the amount of men and women who gave their lives protecting this country.

Another top moment for me was the play we went to see, *The Scottsboro Boys*. This Broadway-quality play was held in a smaller, intimate theater really allowing you to connect to the actors.

On the morning of the second day there was a special speaker. He wheeled up to center stage in a wheelchair, instantly catching my attention. His talent for public speaking captivated the whole audience as he took us on a roller coaster of emotions that was his life story.



His name is Mike Schlappi. He was accidentally shot in the chest by his friend and paralyzed, but despite wanting to give up on life, he managed to push through and pursue his dream of becoming a basketball player. He went on to represent the United States four times in the Paralympics, winning gold and bronze medals. As I listened to him speak it really made me think about what I'd done with my life, and what I was going to do with it. He's a living testament to the idea that you can do anything you set your mind to.

What do you feel that you gained, personally, from attending Youth Tour?

I feel that I've gained a better appreciation for our country, history and culture. It's one thing to learn about it in school; it's another to see it in person, and it's even better when you see it with good company. I met many new people and made a few, hopefully lifelong, friends.

Why should next year's high school juniors apply to go on Youth Tour?

Again, I reiterate the fact that learning about history and government in school only goes so far. Seeing it for yourself is much better. Anyone who is interested in American history and meeting new people would enjoy themselves on this trip.

Isata O'Dwyer, James Wood High School

What are your future plans?

I would like to study international relations and Arabic for my bachelor's then go to law school. I want to be anything from an international lawyer to an ambassador.

Why did you apply to go on Youth Tour?

I applied because I thought it would be a great opportunity to experience the nation's capital through a perspective I never did before.

What were your top moments from Youth Tour and why?

The play (*The Scottsboro Boys*) was so great. It was a very enlightening experience and it was the first time I saw a live play.

My other favorite from the trip would have to be the farewell dance because I realized just how many new friends I had made on this wonderful trip.

What do you feel that you gained, personally, from attending Youth Tour?

I had forgotten how outgoing I could be and this trip definitely brought that out of me. I also gained affirmation of my love for the capital and the inner workings of the government.

Why should next year's high school juniors apply to go on Youth Tour?

It is a wonderful experience where you meet all sorts of different people, make new friends, and gain once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Alex White, Luray High School

What are your future plans?

I plan to attend school and become a lawyer, with my eventual goal being a career in public service.

Why did you apply to go on Youth Tour?

I applied with the intent of expanding my horizons via new experiences and friendships. That's exactly what happened!

What were your top moments from Youth Tour and why?

My top moments were all in the same day, when we visited the U.S. Capitol. The highlights of that trip were seeing the awesome history of our country by way of the art in the building, meeting my congressman (Bob Goodlatte), and getting a feel for daily life in the governing body of the greatest country in the world!

What do you feel that you gained, personally, from attending Youth Tour?

I personally gained a better understanding of government, a stronger grasp of rural America's role in politics, and a clearer vision of my own future plans. Most importantly, I cultivated friendships with people all across this great state. Those connections will be with me the rest of my life!

Why should next year's high school juniors apply to go on Youth Tour?

Next year's juniors would be derelict if they didn't at least consider applying. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and participating gives you the chance to do things that you may never be able to otherwise!



Left: One of the most emotional moments of Youth Tour is the visit to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Below: During a visit to Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Youth Tour delegates unfurled a large American flag that is a replica of what flew the night the *Star-Spangled Banner* was written.



PRESTON KNIGHT PHOTOS

