

Youth Tour Provides Full D.C. Experience



Thomas Hannon, Emily James and Zulma Escobar (left to right) attended Youth Tour from June 16-20.



A major part of Youth Tour is meeting with congressional leaders, such as, from top, 10th District Rep. Jennifer Wexton and 6th District Rep. Ben Cline, and U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va.

From June 16-20, 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 provide high school students a one-of-a-kind, all-expenses-paid experience. More than 50 students from the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives attended this year's event.

In all, about 1,800 students from 43 states converged on Washington for the tour, which officially started in 1958 at the suggestion of then-Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson.

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.

Youth Tour embodies both the 5th (commitment to education) and 7th (commitment to community) cooperative principles. It helps co-op youth gain 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, hear directly from the SVEC participants below.

Thomas Hannon, Fort Defiance High School

What are your future plans?

I hope to attend Virginia Military Institute and enter the Air Force ROTC and major in chemistry. Once I graduate I want to commission into the Air Force as an officer.

Why did you apply to go on Youth Tour?

It sounded like a great opportunity to further my knowledge of both electric cooperatives and our U.S. government. The trip did that and so much more for me!

What were your top two to three moments from Youth Tour and why?

My first was going in the tunnels beneath the Capitol because not many are privileged to go there and it really showed how lucky we were as Youth Tour participants to get the entire Capitol Hill experience. Another great time was the "tailgate" before the Nationals game and also just being in that MLB environment made for a great time.

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

I definitely gained lots of knowledge about both the capital and my local electric cooperative. I also made new friends and had lots of fun during the trip while meeting new people from around the nation.

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

Youth Tour is a great way to familiarize yourself with our nation's capital and learn about electric cooperatives. While you do learn a lot, there is so much fun woven in. What can be gained from the trip is definitely worth your while!

Emily James, James Wood High School

What are your future plans?

Prior to Youth Tour my plans were to become a lawyer and fight for justice for the people who need it. Now post-Youth Tour a part of me still wants to be a lawyer but another part of me wants to go further in politics.

Why did you apply to go on Youth Tour?

I applied because I saw it as a great opportunity to further explore things that I may have already known about our capital.

What were your top two to three moments from Youth Tour and why?

My top three moments from Youth Tour were the rained-out baseball game, seeing *Hello Dolly!* in the Kennedy Center and trading pins with

Youth Tour attendees from other states in our free time. Even though we didn't get to see an actual game, I had Dippin' Dots ice cream for the first time. I got to experience my first musical in a beautiful theater, and I got to meet a ton of new people where we all laughed about our different accents.

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

I definitely feel not only did I gain some knowledge by just visiting museums, I feel like I gained a motive to possibly become a congresswoman at some point in my life.

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

You have SO much fun. Not only do you get closer with the people from your co-op, throughout the week you gain friends, make a ton of memories and gain a possible motive for the rest of your life.

Zulma Escobar, Handley High School

What are your future plans?

I am still deciding between majoring in international relations, public health or political science.

Why did you apply to go on Youth Tour?

This program offered a unique perspective on the political side of Washington that I was interested to learn more about.

What were your top two to three moments from Youth Tour and why?

My favorite moment from the Youth Tour was hearing U.S. Paralympian Mike Schlappi's story. He explained the hardships he faced as he was shot by his friend and paralyzed. He told us how he struggled to maintain optimism with his disability, but he persevered. His story was captivating, and his humor showed me how your outlook and perceptions play a large role in your success.

I also enjoyed touring the Capitol. We were able to get a unique perspective on a day in the life of all those who work there and learn more about our representatives.

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

I gained a lot of insight on various aspects of the government and how people from across the U.S. can work to shape our politics. I enjoyed meeting people from all sorts of backgrounds and got new motivation to be involved more in my community.

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

Even though I have been to Washington, D.C., many times, I still learned and experienced many new things during this trip. I'd strongly encourage any of next year's juniors to consider applying and take part in this amazing opportunity.



A visit to Arlington National Cemetery to witness the changing of the guard ceremony is one of the most impactful moments during Youth Tour. Inset: Although the game was rained out, a trip to Nats Park was one of the recreational opportunities during Youth Tour.