

Youth Tour “Blows Away Expectations” for Teens

Ben Hyland of Vinton and Rachel Wheelock of Rowley recently participated in the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour program in Washington, D.C., sponsored by East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative. They spent six days in the capital with 32 peers from Iowa.

Each year in June, an action-filled week provides high school students opportunities to learn first-hand what it is like to be involved in politics, community service, and today's pressing issues in the energy industry. Students met their elected representatives in the U.S. House and Senate, saw historic sites, and met nearly 1,600 students from across the country who participated in their state Youth Tour programs.

The Electric Cooperative Youth Tour has been a joint effort of local electric co-ops, such as East-Central Iowa REC, their statewide co-op associations, and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), based in Arlington, Virginia, for 48 years.

“The Youth Tour blew away my expectations,” said Ben, who had traveled to Washington, D.C., twice previously. “I thought that I knew every fact there was to know about the place. Yes, we saw all of the typical touristy sights, but also so much more. At Mount Vernon, we toured secret tunnels throughout George Washington’s property, just like in the movie *National Treasure*—all thanks to our Cooperative! We spent our mornings running with senators, and our evenings listening to the U.S. Navy Band on the steps of the Capitol. Our days were filled with Senate debates and tours of the National Archives and the Supreme Court, soaking up all of the stuff that makes our country great.”

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- Ben Hyland

Rachel also had a great trip, and she credited the tour with solidifying her decision of what to study in college. “At 4:30 in the morning, 21 of us from the Iowa group ran with Senator Grassley and were able to ask him questions. Being interested in politics and hoping to further study them in college, I asked Senator Grassley about his choice of college and study. Before Youth Tour, I was interested in studying politics, and I’m even more inclined now. Seeing the Senate and House of Representatives at work in the Capitol Building helped me



The 2013 Youth Tour provided opportunities for sight-seeing, making new friends, and humor.

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gain a more thorough understanding of how our government works and the causes behind the effects they produce.”

In addition to taking in the sights of the nation’s capital, all the state groups convened for National Youth Day, sponsored by NRECA, to learn from public figures and other inspirational speakers. This year’s Youth Day agenda included Mike Schlappi, a four-time Paralympic medalist and two-time world champion wheelchair basketball player. Schlappi shared his inspiring message for every American, young or old: “Just because you can’t stand up, doesn’t mean you can’t stand out.”

For more information on how you can participate in East Central Iowa REC’s Youth Tour program, contact us toll-free at 877-850-4343 or visit ecirec.coop. For more information about the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour Program, please visit www.youthtour.coop.

Since 1964, the nation’s cooperative electric utilities have sponsored more than 50,000 high school juniors and seniors for visits to their U.S. congressional delegations, energy and grassroots government education sessions, and sightseeing in Washington, D.C.