

Rayle Lines

Member Newsletter

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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.

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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

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.

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Tonya Jones, Sumter EMC

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



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.

important 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*

“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.

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!”

Rayle EMC honored for job safety

Rayle EMC was recently recognized for three consecutive years without any employee missing work due to an injury in the workplace or in the field, an impressive accomplishment given the complexity and inherent dangers of the electricity industry.

“Our business inevitably involves risks from energized wires, working high off the ground and moving heavy items like poles—not to mention being out in storms to restore power,” says Tony Griffin, General Manager of Rayle EMC. “We strive every day to minimize these dangers by investing time and attention to safety measures and careful work practices.”

To acknowledge the co-op’s robust safety program, Rayle EMC was presented the No Lost Time Award by Georgia EMC during its annual meeting held Nov. 6 in Savannah. The award recognizes EMCs that have outstanding work habits, resulting in no lost-time accidents during the preceding year.

Nationally, electrical linemen suffered 18.6 fatalities for every 100,000 hours worked in 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, compared to just 3.4 fatalities per 100,000 hours for the average American worker.

Rayle EMC had no fatalities or injuries at all that required the worker to miss any time away from the job.

Today, electric utility employees, including those with Rayle EMC, work in a much safer environment due to advances in equipment and safety techniques, along with stricter safety regulations and oversight. This leads to a significant reduction in accidents and time away from work for many employees, according to Georgia EMC Vice President of Training and Safety Harry Reeves.

Still, the nature of the electricity business makes it

a challenge to avoid an injury no matter how many safety practices are in place, making it especially noteworthy when EMCs such as Rayle EMC earn this award.

“It’s a testament to all our employees and our highly skilled linemen,” says Rayle EMC Safety Coordinator John

Moon. “Our success and safety depend on all of us following carefully designed safety precautions to ensure we return home to our families at the end of each day.”

While protecting the safety of employees and the public is the primary goal of workplace safety and training, Rayle EMC’s stellar safety record also translates into significant savings for the cooperative and its members.

When an injury does occur, the total costs go beyond emergency department visits, doctor appointments and other related medical costs. Indirect costs, such as administrative time dealing with the injury, increases in insurance costs, hiring another employee and even loss of reputation can add up to four times the direct cost of the injury.

Georgia EMC offers more than 50 different safety programs, as well as training and accreditation courses to EMC employees.

Honoring the commitment to a culture of safety, Georgia EMC’s annual Safety Awards recognize electric cooperatives that have created an environment where employees live out safety principles in both their professional and personal lives to protect not only themselves, but others as well.

Rayle EMC is a consumer-owned cooperative providing electricity and related services to more than 15,000 members in Wilkes, Oglethorpe, Lincoln, Taliaferro, Greene, Hancock, Morgan, Oconee, Madison and Clarke counties.



Presenting the award to Tony Griffin, General Manager of Rayle EMC, are Wendy Sellers, President of Washington EMC and Chairwoman of the GEMC Services Committee, right, and John Durden, GEMC Training and Safety Instructor, on the left.

Rayle EMC scholarship applications deadline Jan. 19



Rayle EMC General Manager Tony Griffin reminds high school and college students of the Jan. 19, 2024, deadline for scholarships that will be awarded to 10 deserving students from Rayle EMC's service territory. The scholarships are open to anyone who has not yet completed a bachelor's degree and is attending, or planning to attend, a two- or four-year accredited university, college or technical school in Georgia within the next two years.

Application forms are available at schools

located in Rayle EMC's service area and at all three co-op office locations. Applications may be submitted to the nearest co-op office, or they may be submitted to: Richard Heard, Rayle EMC, P.O. Box 1090, Washington, GA 30673.

Applications must be submitted to Rayle EMC no later than Jan. 19, 2024. The top two applications will be entered in Georgia EMC's statewide Walter Harrison Scholarship contest. Should an applicant be selected for a Walter Harrison Scholarship, the next qualifying student will receive the Rayle EMC scholarship.



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 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Applications for the 2024 Youth Tour are due Feb. 23, 2024. Apply today by visiting rayleemc.com or by submitting an application to Member Services Director, Richard Heard, PO Box 1090, Washington, GA 30673.

