



Plugged in to Altamaha EMC

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Washington Youth Tour returns to nation's capital

The Washington Youth Tour (WYT) celebrated its 57th year in Georgia by returning to an in-person experience in Washington, D.C., June 16-23, 2022. Seventy high school delegates sponsored by 26 electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) throughout Georgia and by Georgia EMC made the trip, in addition to seven chaperones and three staff members from Tucker-based Georgia EMC.

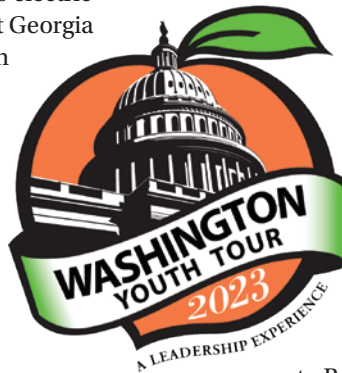
"The trip was a triumphant return of Georgia's EMCs to Washington, D.C.," says Beth McMillan, WYT coordinator and senior communications specialist at Georgia EMC. "On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and with all the logistical challenges that presented in the planning stages, I'm proud of the program we put together and the experiences we provided to the delegates."

McMillan, who represented Marietta-based Cobb EMC as a delegate in 2004, says there's something special about a large group of strangers who meet and become close friends in just one week.

"Late high school is such a pivotal time for developing character, and the high caliber of the students our EMCs send on this tour each year creates a perfect environment for young people to discover themselves as individuals, as well as learn how many others there are across the state with their same passion, drive and enthusiasm for making a difference," she says.

A few of the group's standard stops were not on the program in 2022 because some buildings had not been

reopened to the public or large groups since the onset of the pandemic, but McMillan says they managed to include a majority of their traditional tour stops.



"Travel disruptions were certainly our biggest setback, but in many ways, this offered delegates opportunities to see and demonstrate leadership in action," McMillan adds.

"Resilience, positive attitude, problem-solving and teamwork were all on display in reacting to sudden changes in our plans, and these are all areas in which we encourage growth during a normal tour. Student evaluations were extremely positive, with many describing the tour as a life-changing experience."

The eight-day Youth Tour kicked off with a visit to Roosevelt's Little White House State Historic Site in Warm Springs. The hope was to introduce former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the creator of the Rural Electrification Administration (REA)/rural electrification movement and the Little White House as its birthplace, thus giving delegates a better understanding of the history and purpose of their local electric co-op and the statewide network of EMCs that provided this leadership experience for them.

The group viewed an introductory video upon arrival, then enjoyed a self-guided tour of the museum, house and grounds.

"That visit helped tie together nicely the sponsoring EMCs with our nation's capital, which we were about to visit," McMillan says. "And it helped demonstrate the power local folks have to effect change, better their own communities and better the nation as a whole."

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Hill Day offers meaningful opportunities for **Georgia delegates**

DANIEL PECK

The 2022 Georgia congressional delegation meeting, referred to as Hill Day, was held June 22, 2022, on Capitol Hill. Delegates met with U.S. senators and representatives from Georgia, asked them questions and took photos with them. They also toured the U.S. Capitol and visited the Library of Congress.

During the Congressional Town Hall held in the Rayburn House Office Building, delegates heard from and participated in a Q&A with U.S. Reps. Buddy Carter (R-Ga.), Drew Ferguson (R-Ga.) and Rick Allen (R-Ga.), as well as Kenneth Cutts, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.).

After the town hall, delegates had an opportunity to meet and hear from U.S. Sens. Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.) and Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.) on the Capitol steps.

During the meetings, delegates asked members of Congress a variety of questions related to topics like energy, environmental considerations and renewables, rural broadband and their relationships with other legislators from opposite political parties. A few delegates also asked how U.S. representatives and senators are able to balance living in Washington, D.C., with representing constituents living in rural communities in Georgia. Beth McMillan, WYT coordinator and senior communications specialist at Georgia EMC in Tucker, says the statewide organization hopes these congressional delegation meetings show delegates that their input can contribute to the political

Georgia Youth Tour delegates meet with U.S. Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff on the steps of the U.S. Capitol June 22, 2022.



Above: Youth Tour delegates from Georgia's 12th Congressional District meet with U.S. Rep. Rick Allen (navy suit in middle) in the Rayburn House Office Building. **Right:** U.S. Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff pose with Youth Tour delegates on the steps of the U.S. Capitol.





Youth Tour delegates pose for a photo outside the U.S. Capitol.

Altamaha EMC delegates never leave Washington, D.C., without stopping for a picture outside the White House.



process and that their elected representatives want to hear what they have to say.

"Talking with their representatives in person will, I hope, help them feel more accessible to delegates as they continue engaging in politics after we leave Washington, D.C. I also like when legislators discuss their paths to Congress so delegates can see there's not one set route to public service," says McMillan.

"The representatives and senators provided us with meaningful life advice and taught us how to become better leaders," says Lekhan Patel, a Coastal Electric Cooperative delegate from Richmond Hill. "This experience lit up a lightbulb in my brain and allowed me to look at this world through a different lens."

Hill Day was Brady Hussion's favorite stop on the Youth Tour.

"To hear such great advice and meet the people who represent our state was such an amazing and great learning experience," says the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC delegate from Blairsville.

"It was an honor that they took time out of their busy schedules to meet us," adds Bishop Jackson, a Grady EMC delegate from Thomasville. "It was an honor to see how much they care about their constituents."

Grace Perez, a 2022 Central Georgia EMC delegate from McDonough, agrees. "The place that made the greatest impression on me was visiting and meeting the senators. That was simply such a life-changing moment!"

Perez adds that the experience could also influence a change in her career path. "I actually might want to intern for a representative or senator for either economics or agriculture."

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Meet the 2022 Altamaha EMC delegates

Altamaha EMC's Washington Youth Tour delegates are carefully selected through a rigorous application process. Any junior or senior who attends a high school in the cooperative's seven-county territory is eligible. School counselors from our seven-county territory nominate students for the Washington Youth Tour. The nominated students are first brought in for a preliminary round of interviews with our Washington Youth Tour coordinator. Candidates will then move on to the final round of interviews in front of a panel of judges from three different electric cooperatives in the state. The top three students are then selected by our Washington Youth Tour director and judges to represent Altamaha EMC on the Youth Tour.

Hollan Coleman is a freshman at Georgia Southern University and the daughter of Vince and Kristi Coleman. Hollan was very active in many organizations and extracurriculars in high school, such as Future Business Leaders of America, Beta Club and Student Council. She was also a member of the Band of Gold Danceline, concert band and golf team. She is a member of the Citizens Bank Student Advisory Board and the Sudie Fulford Leadership Academy. Hollan is pursuing a career in the medical field, where she plans to become a dermatologist.



Seth MacGregor is a senior at Vidalia High School. He is the son of Scott and Marca MacGregor. He is currently taking advanced placement and honors classes, and he's a dual enrollment student at Southeastern Technical College. Seth is very active in school activities like Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Beta Club, the Technology Student Association and SkillsUSA. He also participates in many sports, including cross-country, track and swimming.



Seth is a member of the 2023 Greater Vidalia Youth Leadership Class and participates in the Chick-fil-A Leader Academy. After graduation, Seth plans to attend college and pursue a career in engineering.



Rebecca Stone Beasley, 2004



Emma Beasley, 2022

Like mother, like daughter

Rebbecca Stone Beasley knew that her daughter, Emma Beasley, couldn't miss out on the annual Washington Youth Tour (WYT) experience.

Rebecca, a 2004 WYT delegate sponsored by Coastal Electric Cooperative and a 2005 graduate of Liberty County High School in Hinesville, learned about the opportunity from her guidance counselor.

"I wasn't well-traveled, but I was very social," she recalls. "Our guidance counselor thought it was something I'd be interested in, and I was."

It was the first time Rebecca had ever flown.

"It was just such a diverse experience with the activities we were engaged with, the people we got to meet, the politicians we got to engage with and even some of the girls that I went with," she says. "I'm still friends with them all these years later, and every time someone shares the *Georgia Magazine* cover from that year on Facebook, we tag each other."

Her favorite experience during the visit in 2004 was seeing the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. "It really was the most impactful thing I remember from the whole trip," she says. "And that shaped my interest in that time period today. I read a lot of historical books from that time period now, because it was just so interesting."

When the opportunity arose for Emma to apply for the Washington Youth Tour, her mother urged her to do so.

"I definitely knew that once she saw what all the trip entailed, she'd be interested in it on her own," Rebecca says. "The work that goes into putting this together is tremendous, and you develop such an appreciation for the people at your local EMC and within the statewide program. It's a lot of work and effort, and it's an experience that you'll remember for a lifetime."

Emma, who is a senior at Liberty County High, says she remembers her mother talking about the WYT ever since she was a little girl.

"It was something I heard about several times in my childhood," she says. "So, when my junior year came around,

she kept telling me to figure out when the application was due. My media specialist at my school sent me the link for it, and I thought it was really cool."

Today, Emma is grateful for her mom's influence in participating in the Youth Tour.

And her favorite part of the trip?

"I really liked Mount Vernon," Emma says. "I thought it was very cool to see where George Washington lived. That was also the day that my friend group on the trip formed. I got a lot closer with people that day, and we traveled through all of Mount Vernon together."

Emma also enjoyed meeting the U.S. representatives and senators.

"It was really cool to get to see those politicians without the media aspect of it—just being able to talk to them and interact with them without any extra distractions and seeing who they are. Their individuality was pretty cool, and we got to see them as an actual human rather than just a figure you see on TV."

Emma's advice to students interested in participating in the WYT in coming years is simple: "Embrace your difference."

"You're going to meet all different kinds of people, but just having an open mind and wanting to be welcoming and kind to everyone is super important," she says.

2023 Washington Youth Tour

Each year, Altamaha EMC selects three local students to represent our cooperative on the Washington Youth Tour. The dates for the 2023 tour are June 15-22. All high school juniors and seniors interested in the opportunity can obtain information by contacting Altamaha EMC's Washington Youth Tour Coordinator Will NeSmith. He can be reached at (912) 526-8181 or will.nesmith@altamahaemc.com.