



Plugged in to Altamaha EMC

January 2026
LYONS, GA

Official Newsletter of Altamaha Electric Membership Corporation

Serving Toombs, Montgomery, Emanuel, Treutlen, Laurens, Johnson and Tattnall Counties

GEORGIA'S LARGEST WYT DELEGATION EVER

By Lindsay Penticuff



In June, Georgia's electric membership corporations (EMCs) sent their 60th—and largest ever—delegation of students to Washington, D.C., for the all-expenses-paid, weeklong Washington Youth Tour (WYT).

Representing 38 Georgia EMCs, 116 high schoolers attended, along with 14 chaperones sent by co-ops and three representatives from Tucker-based Georgia EMC. The tour was June 13-20.

"The 2025 Youth Tour was a huge success!" says Andy Paul, WYT director and public relations representative with Georgia EMC. "Our students got to see historic events happening in our nation's capital, meet with legislators and tour several museums."

Highlights of last year's event included stops at the Smithsonian Institution museums, the National Archives, George Washington's Mount Vernon, Arlington National Cemetery and the World War II, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Korean



From left, Aiden Harvill, Izzy Edge and Kingston Ryals proudly represent Altamaha EMC while posing for a photo in front of the White House during the 2025 Washington Youth Tour.

War and Vietnam Veterans memorials. On Capitol Hill day, students met with U.S. representatives in a congressional town hall, then spent time with U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock on the Capitol steps.

Paul says one of the most memorable parts of the Youth Tour was participating in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Four delegates—Reginald Ward from GreyStone Power Corp. in Hiram, Leila Eastmead from Planters EMC in Millen, Chloe

Toole from Walton EMC in Monroe and J.C. Nimmer from Satilla REMC in Alma—represented Georgia's EMCs during the ceremony.

Each year, one Georgia student-delegate on the Washington Youth Tour is chosen to join the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Leadership Council (YLC). Kevin Ray from Grady EMC in Cairo was selected by his peers as the 2025 YLC representative.

MORE ►



Celebrating 60 Years of the Washington Youth Tour

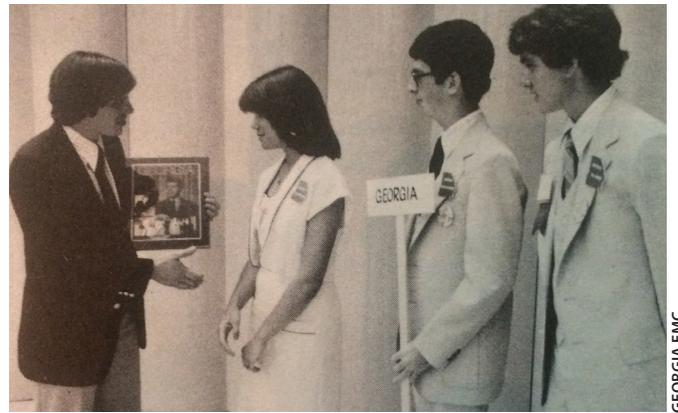
Georgia's electric membership corporations (EMCs) participated in their first Washington Youth Tour (WYT) in 1965, making the trip last June the state's 60th year attending what many students have described throughout the years as the "trip of a lifetime."

In June 1965, Georgia was one of 17 states to send students on the tour, joining more than 600 students from across the nation. Twelve students from three Georgia electric co-ops—Walton EMC in Monroe, Flint EMC (now Flint Energies) in Reynolds and Planters EMC in Millen—left Savannah by train to visit the nation's capital.

Today, 38 states participate in the WYT, and more than 1,800 students attend. Georgia's 116 delegates represented 38 Georgia EMCs.

The idea for the program took shape in 1957, when future President Lyndon B. Johnson—then majority leader of the U.S. Senate—suggested at a National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Annual Meeting that rural electric co-ops should bring their young people to the nation's capital to learn firsthand how their government operates. Co-ops began sponsoring individual youth tours like the one Georgia's EMCs host today.

Coordinating the Washington Youth Tour takes year-round preparation by Georgia EMC's WYT director as well as each EMC's tour coordinator.



Bill Verner, right, was a Washington Youth Tour delegate in 1979, representing Central Georgia EMC in Jackson. He also served as Georgia EMC's WYT director in the '80s and '90s.

"Preparing for the Youth Tour involves constant studying and research," says Andy Paul, WYT director and public relations representative with Tucker-based Georgia EMC. Last year was his third year coordinating the trip. "I also try to communicate as much as possible with delegates and parents so that trust is built before 130-plus of us travel to Washington, D.C., after having just met at the kickoff banquet."

He adds that local WYT coordinators also are working to prepare delegates for the trip.

"This includes hosting events to answer questions from students and parents, offering clear communications about expectations and building excitement by assuring them all



In the early years of the Washington Youth Tour, Georgia delegates met with U.S. presidents in the White House Rose Garden. Delegates visit with the late President Lyndon B. Johnson, above, and the late President Jimmy Carter, right, who was also from Georgia.





From left, Altamaha EMC's Washington Youth Tour delegates—Aiden Harvill, Izzy Edge and Kingston Ryals—visiting George Washington's Mount Vernon.



WYT delegates taking in the sights at the iconic John F. Kennedy Center during the Washington Youth Tour.

that this will be their favorite week of their high school career," he says.

Paul attended the Washington Youth Tour as a delegate representing Washington-based Rayle EMC in 2011, when he was a rising junior in high school.

"I grew up in an EMC household, with my dad working at Rayle EMC and also Walton EMC, so I knew the sense of community that EMCs carried," he says. "I love being in Washington, D.C., and one of my passions is creating meaningful experiences for students, so this was truly the perfect role for me!"

Bill Verner was Youth Tour director in the 1980s and early 1990s. He retired after 40 years in the electric co-op world in September 2020.

Like Paul, Verner had been a WYT delegate before becoming the WYT statewide director. He attended the Youth Tour in 1979 shortly after graduating from high school, representing Central Georgia EMC in Jackson, and his sister, Sandra Verner Latimer, participated in Georgia's first Youth Tour in 1965. Verner also was elected by Georgia's delegation to represent the state on the 1979 NRECA Youth Leadership Council, formerly the Youth Counseling Board.

"I had an incredible year and got to speak on behalf of the NRECA youth program at the national FFA convention in Kansas City, at the National Grange farmer meeting in Pennsylvania, to a national 4-H gathering, and then to the NRECA meeting in New Orleans," Verner recalls. "It was a pretty

heady experience for a college freshman from the little town of Rutledge."

As Youth Tour director during the beginning of his tenure at Georgia EMC, Verner says it was an honor taking young people to Washington, D.C., each year.

"Seeing the nation's capital and getting to interact with our elected officials ... I think it makes our federal government more tangible and relatable," he says. "The laws and regulations that come from our nation's capital are going to affect all of us, and understanding where that policy comes from and the history of our country is something everyone should have an experience to see firsthand. And there's no better way of doing that than on the Washington Youth Tour."

Gale Cutler became the statewide director in April 2000—two months before her first-ever WYT—and took 2,007 students on the tour over two decades. She says it's difficult to choose a favorite place to visit or a memory after 20 years of coordinating the trip, but she cherishes the delegates' day at the Capitol.

"At the beginning of the week, they are kids going on a field trip. But when they are talking with our legislators, they are young, engaged constituents. ... They realize that their government is close enough to touch it if they want to, and they get legislators to look them in the eye, listen to their questions and answer them, and at 16 or 17 years old," Cutler says.

MORE ►



Apply for the 2026 Washington Youth Tour

Each year, Altamaha EMC selects three local students to represent our cooperative on the Washington Youth Tour. The dates for the 2026 Youth Tour are June 12-19. All high school juniors and seniors interested in the opportunity can obtain information by contacting Altamaha EMC Washington Youth Tour Coordinator Will NeSmith at (912) 526-2173 or will.nesmith@altamahaemc.com.

Meet the 2025 Altamaha EMC Washington Youth Tour Delegates



Bailey "Izzy" Edge



Aiden Harvill



Kingston Ryals

Altamaha EMC's Washington Youth Tour delegates are selected through a comprehensive application process. Juniors and seniors from high schools in our seven-county service area are eligible to apply. Applicants first go through a preliminary interview with Altamaha EMC's Washington Youth Tour coordinator. Finalists are then invited to a second round of interviews and evaluated by a panel of judges from three different electric membership corporations in Georgia. Ultimately, our Washington Youth Tour director and judges select the top three students to represent Altamaha EMC on the Youth Tour.

Our 2025 Washington Youth Tour delegates were:

Bailey "Izzy" Edge is a senior at Treutlen County High School in Soperton. She is the daughter of Martin and Rachel Edge.

An outstanding student, Izzy is ranked in the top two of her class academically. She is involved in a variety of extracurricular activities, including Beta Club, soccer, cross-country and track.

Outside of school, Izzy is active in her church, where she sings in the praise and worship band, and volunteers with Vacation Bible School.

Aiden Harvill, a freshman at Mercer University, is majoring in pre-med with the goal of becoming a primary care physician. A recent graduate of Vidalia High School, Aiden is the son of Jason and Elizabeth Harvill of Vidalia.

Throughout high school, he was an active and accomplished student. He participated in the band for all four years and was involved in several leadership and academic organizations, including Beta Club, National Honor Society, Honor Band, the Greater Vidalia Chamber Youth Leadership program and the Chick-fil-A Leadership Academy.

Kingston Ryals is a senior at Vidalia High School. He is the son of Ketrina and Curtis Ryals of Vidalia.

Kingston is highly involved in Georgia 4-H, where he serves as the state board president after previously holding several other leadership roles within the organization. He is also active in FCCLA and previously served as president of the Vidalia High School chapter.

Kingston's talents and interests span a wide range of activities, including One Act Play, Literary, Student Government Association and Beta Club.

The 2025 Washington Youth Tour delegation was all smiles during a visit to George Washington's Mount Vernon.



KATHRYN GREEN