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VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

2019 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.

Reflections for this year's participants

By Cassidy Broere

Visiting our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I want to thank Vigilante for sponsoring me on this trip — it has been a real honor to be part of the Youth Tour.

Visiting the Arlington National Cemetery is one of the best experiences that I will remember from this trip. Pictures cannot explain the number of graves and the overwhelming sadness that comes with seeing them. I am beginning to understand the sacrifices that our soldiers have made. The changing of the guard happens every 30 minutes, and we were able to see one session. The process is very organized and people are extremely respectful. Once we were done at Arlington, we took off for the baseball game.

The Washington Nationals and the Arizona Diamondbacks baseball game was a lot of fun. In our seating section things got interesting with the rival fans. The Arizona and California Youth Tour groups were with us. Our Montana group was cheering for the Washington Nationals, and the Arizona and California groups cheered for the Diamondbacks. That stadium was by far the biggest stadium I have ever had the chance to see. The Washington Nationals pummeled the Diamondbacks. If I had the opportunity, I would definitely attend another baseball game.

The Smithsonian Museums were surreal because of the huge buildings and amount of history and art. My favorite museum was the art gallery. It had every kind of art that you could ever imagine. The piece of art that stood out to me the most was an elephant statue in the middle of a huge room. It had so much detail, and I could tell that the artist took his time to design and make a fascinating elephant.

After learning about art, space and marine animals, it was time to make our journey to Old Alexandria. When we drove into the town it was like we had entered a whole different era. The streets, and buildings in the town made me feel like we had gone back in time to an old town by the water.

We were very fortunate to be able to tour the White House. Going through White House security made airports look easy. We were only allowed to see a small portion



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By Sarah Welborn

The Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour gave me an opportunity to grow in so many ways. I was very nervous about taking this trip because I generally find it difficult to participate in group activities, and I am usually not comfortable in crowds. The thought of traveling across the country with more than 50 strangers was very frightening. I was forced to step out of my comfort zone, and it turned out to be one of the best experiences of my life.

This experience began with the orientation in Great Falls, to introduce all of the participants from around the state to each other. We became familiar with the rules, expectations and what we would be doing throughout the tour. The rural electric cooperative was very generous with supplies that we would be needing in the next week. Our chaperones were very creative in methods of getting all of us to interact and become comfortable with each other.

We arrived in Minneapolis, where we met up with the North Dakota crew. With everyone from Montana and North Dakota gathered up, we proceeded to Baltimore. We got on the bus and met Michael, our bus driver. Our first stop was the Hard Rock Café, where we ate dinner — just the beginning of our D.C. cuisine experience. The following days were packed with visits to numerous memorials, museums and monuments.

The Arlington National Cemetery was an impactful visit because of its size and what it represents. It is unbelievable to see the amount of people — in just one of the many military cemeteries — who have given their lives for our freedom because “freedom is not free.”

We also visited the Jefferson Memorial. My favorite of the four quotes was the second paragraph to the United States Declaration of Independence, which begins, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.”

The Smithsonian Museums were unbelievable. There is no way to see all that is there in a week, let alone in the amount of time that we had. I was drawn to the Air and Space Museum and the Museum of Natural History. I was able to see the first airplane to ever fly, and can actually say that I touched part of the moon. I saw everything from modern animals, such as giraffes and moose, to ancient animal skele-

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of the house for security reasons, but the parts that we did see were beautiful and full of history. My favorite part was seeing the movie theater in the White House because many presidents have sat in it.

The Holocaust Museum made a significant impression on me. Seeing the videos and pictures of starving people and models of the gas chambers and cattle carts that people were transported in made me feel sad. Although the entire museum was somber, one thing that hit me hard was seeing people's shoes. The shoes were from real people who had been put in concentration camps and died. All of the shoes were a darker, sad gray color, ranging in size from a big man's foot to a very small child's foot. I know that it's important for me to learn more about this time in history.

We left the hotel for the last day of our trip and drove to the Marine Corps Museum, where we awarded our bus driver Michael with his brick from Youth Tour. We wanted to honor him for his service to our country and thank him for being such a wonderful, loyal bus driver over the years.

The Marine museum was my favorite museum because it had a lot of interactive stations to help people understand the overwhelming history. Our last stop before going to the airport was the National Aquarium. At the aquarium it had everything that you could ever think of in the sea. I think the best part was going to see the dolphin training. The dolphins loved to play with humans, and play with different toys.

My trip to Washington, D.C., gave me an experience that was outstanding. I would like to give a huge thanks to Vigilante Electric Cooperative for choosing me as one of the recipients. Also, my thanks go out to Montana Youth Tour, my chaperones — Leanne Hall, Melissa Greenwood, Rod Siring, and Jonnalea Tatsey, our bus driver Michael Anderson, and last but not least National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). I enjoyed being immersed in the history of our nation.



Kassidy and Sarah in front of Hard Rock Café, Baltimore.



Arlington National Cemetery.



Pentagon Memorial.

Youth Tour

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tons, such as the T. rex and the triceratops.

Then we relaxed on the Potomac Riverboat Cruise. The rain was relentless while we were waiting to board the boat. Even though we were completely drenched, we had a great time dancing and playing games with our new friends from other states.

My favorite part of the trip was the visit to the White House. Our group was very fortunate that we were able to tour the White House. It is quite possible that we were the only group out of all the Youth Tours that was able to see the inside of that beautiful building.

Probably the most impactful of all the memorials was the Holocaust Museum. It made me realize that these events actually happened to real, live people. When I saw the thousands of shoes, the living conditions and the atrocities that those people endured, I realized that it isn't just a story.

The World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War memorials were each very impressive and memorialize the men and women who served and died all over the world for freedom because, again, "freedom is not free."

The majestic Lincoln Memorial is one of my favorites. This memorial is one of the most famous and publicized memorials, and I feel very fortunate to have seen it first hand.

I enjoyed the guided tour of the Capitol building. There is no way to appreciate the massiveness of the rotunda unless you see it in person. Of all the buildings, memorials and museums, the Capitol building is the most impressive architecture that I visited in D.C.

At the Capitol building, we met Senator Steve Daines and Representative Greg Gianforte. I appreciate the fact that both congressmen gave their time and visited about issues that concerned us.

The National Museum of the Marine Corps memorializes the men and women who served in the Marines. The actual flag that was placed atop Mount Suribachi during the battle of Iwo Jima is displayed there.

I not only enjoyed the Washington, D.C., experience, but I learned so much about our country's history, how cooperatives work and how important they are in our lives. I encourage kids from rural communities to participate in this program. This trip allows you the opportunity to meet new people, see our history first hand, and create life-long memories and friends.

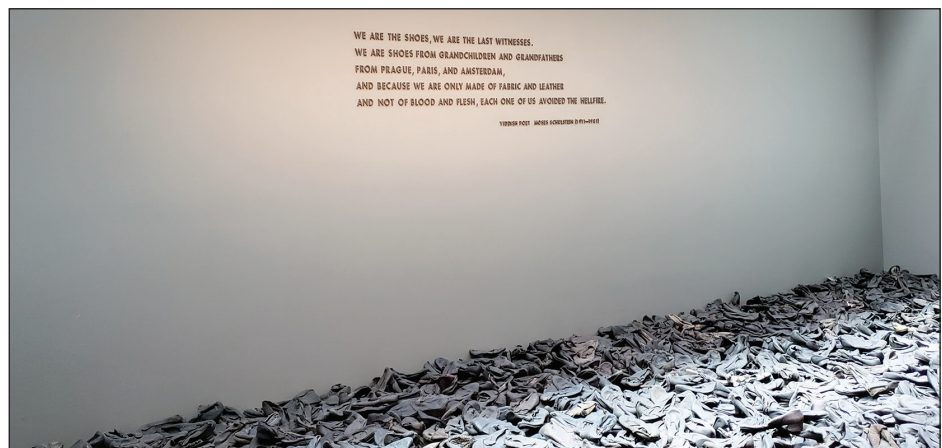
I want to thank all of my family and friends who encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and participate in the Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour. I want to send a special thank you to Vigilante Electric Cooperative for the opportunity to go on this once-in-a-lifetime journey.



Kassidy and Sarah at the White House..



Day at the Capitol.



Holocaust Museum.

2019 Youth Tour

Reflections from a Chaperone

By Rod Siring, Member Services

In June, I was blessed, for the second time, to be a chaperone for the Montana contingency of the Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. This trip was so amazing that I felt the need to do my own story, but not only about the places we went and the things we did. My story highlights my favorite memories about what truly made this a fantastic experience for me — the kids.

Our initial meeting of chaperones and kids was in a banquet room at the Heritage Inn. After introductions, we ran the kids through a few games designed as ice breakers. Immediately, you could tell who the introverts and extroverts were, you saw the nervousness fade, and groups formed based on commonalities. In a matter of hours, this group of strangers was acting like life-long friends. Even the shyest kids stepped outside their comfort zone and shared in this wonderful experience.

On June 15, we departed Great Falls on a 6 a.m. flight to Minneapolis, where we would meet our travel partners for the week. Montana and North Dakota have teamed up on the Youth Tour for years. Now, there were 46 students and six chaperones.

Many things about these kids impressed me, but one of the coolest was their love of music and their fondness of singing. Most times when we were on the bus, you could hear music playing through a portable speaker in the back. The music selection was good, and the genres were all over the board.

My favorite moment with our participants happened at the youth rally on Monday morning. The room was filled with nearly 1,000 people. To say there was a lot of energy in the room would be an understatement.

The rally started with an invocation and pledge of allegiance, followed by everybody singing the national anthem. I am not bashful about singing, but I could not get one word to leave my mouth because I was overcome with emotion. I was standing in the midst of hundreds of voices singing absolutely beautifully.

As the week progressed, this group showed great respect and regard for the things we did and the places we saw. This was never more evident than our day at the Capitol. When meeting with our congressional delegation, our participants were polite, asked well thought-out questions and, I feel, made a great impression on Senator Jon Tester, Senator Steve Daines and Representative Greg Gianforte.

There were two stops where I prayed that the magnitude of the sites would not be lost on our kids. Hallowed ground is defined as a par-

cel of land where something unique and/or profound is to have happened. For me, these sites were Arlington National Cemetery and the Gettysburg Battlefield.

Arlington National Cemetery is a remarkable place to visit. We took a trolley tour of the grounds and watched the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It was an awe-inspiring event. Our kids, with hats removed, were polite and respectful of the people around, and quiet during the ceremony.

Then there was our trip to Gettysburg to visit the battlefield. Many historians believe this battle was the turning point in the Civil War. We toured the visitors' center and museum, and watched a History Channel documentary about the battle, which transitioned beautifully into our tour of the battlefield. For many of the kids, you could tell that this was a unique and worthwhile learning experience.

During the tour of the battlefield, we had a professional tour guide on our bus. When we stopped at different landmarks, we had the opportunity to view the landscape from the perspective of a soldier who fought in the battle. This, coupled with our guide's excellent narration, made for quite a remarkable experience for everybody.

In retrospect, I marvel at how fast the time went this year compared to my first experience. I truly feel it was because of the young men and women that we had with us. Don't get me wrong, we did have our share of head-scratching moments, but mostly, this was a tremendous group.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the other key factor in this trip's success, and why it was such a delight: the five other chaperones. The way they interacted with our kids was wonderful, always friendly and patient, parenting at times, and stern when needed. They made me laugh often and I can't imagine a better combination of people to entrust your kids to.

The Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., is an incredible experience, and in my opinion, the best program we support for young people. This program is transformative in so many ways. The kids got to experience the history enshrined in Washington, D.C., broadened their view of the world, and made new friends.

