



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Contact:**

Lynn Hutchison  
Director of Member Services  
Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
(618) 244-5151, ext. 234  
[lhutchison@tricountycoop.com](mailto:lhutchison@tricountycoop.com)  
[www.tricountycoop.com](http://www.tricountycoop.com)

## **Making Their Mark**

### ***Local students represent Tri-County Electric Cooperative in Washington, D.C.***

Students representing electric and telephone cooperatives across Illinois recently returned home after participating in the 2026 Youth Tour, a decades-long tradition that sends high school students to Washington, D.C., for an unforgettable week of leadership, education, and civic engagement.

This year, 49 students sponsored by 25 Illinois electric and telephone cooperatives participated in the June 15-22 Youth Tour, joining more than 2,000 students from 44 states to explore the nation's capital and gain a deeper understanding of government, history, and the cooperative business model.

Three students from Tri-County Electric Cooperative's service territory had the opportunity to attend this year's Youth Tour. The cooperative sponsored Katelyn Gogoleck of Okawville High School and Josephine Meyer of Christ Our Rock Lutheran High School, while Landon Hutchison of Woodlawn High School attended as the recipient of the Tootie Holmes Memorial Scholarship.

"Electric and telephone cooperatives across Illinois are investing in the next generation through Youth Tour," said Lynn Hutchison, Director of Member Services for Tri-County Electric Cooperative. "It gives students a chance to experience our nation's history and government firsthand. Just as importantly, it helps them discover their own potential as leaders."

One of the program's most unique traditions is the formation of a student-run cooperative known as Chip 'n' Pop Co-op. Students began their journey at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in Springfield, where they elected a board of directors. The board later interviewed candidates and selected the cooperative's manager.

Throughout the week, students managed snack sales, budgeting, and day-to-day operations, giving participants a hands-on understanding of how cooperatives operate through democratic leadership and shared responsibility.

Josephine Meyer, representing Tri-County Electric Cooperative, was selected by her peers to serve as manager of the Chip 'n' Pop Co-op. Other student leaders included board chair Elizabeth Hampton of Shelby Electric Cooperative; vice chair Brenna Hays of Wabash Communications CO-OP; secretary-treasurer Isabella Smith of Menard Electric Cooperative; and board members Iris Mount of SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative and Reece Whitley of Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative.

"Being part of the student co-op helps participants understand what makes cooperatives different," Hutchison said. "It's all about working together and making decisions that benefit everyone, not just one person or company."

During the week, students visited historic landmarks including Gettysburg, Arlington National Cemetery, the U.S. Capitol, the National Mall, and the Smithsonian museums. They also met with U.S. Senator Dick Durbin and participated in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Youth Day, where they joined hundreds of students from across the country to hear from national leaders and learn how to become stronger advocates in their own communities.

The week concluded with a farewell dinner and dance before students returned home on June 22.

"Students arrive in Washington not knowing exactly what to expect," Hutchison said. "By the end of the week, they've formed lifelong friendships, broadened their perspectives, and gained a greater appreciation for how they can make a positive impact in their schools, communities, and beyond."

High school students whose families receive electric service from Tri-County Electric Cooperative are eligible to apply for the annual Youth Tour program.

For more information about the Youth Tour program, visit [youthtour.coop](http://youthtour.coop) or [facebook.com/ILYouthTour](https://www.facebook.com/ILYouthTour).

*Tri-County Electric Cooperative is a member-owned electric cooperative serving more than 13,500 members in Jefferson, Marion, and Washington counties. The cooperative is committed to safely providing reliable electric service, superior customer service, and practical energy solutions at reasonable prices.*



Figure 1: From left Landon Hutchison, Josephine Meyer, and Katelyn Gogoleck at Gettysburg National Park