

NEWS RELEASE FROM:
Luke Johnson, General Manager
Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 309
Mt. Vernon, IL 62864-0307
Telephone: 618-244-5151
Email: ljohnson@tricitycoop.com.
www.tricitycoop.com



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Empowering tomorrow's leaders in Washington, D.C.

Local students represent Tri-County Electric Cooperative during Youth Tour

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Each year, hundreds of high school students from across the United States embark on an educational and inspirational journey to the nation's capital city. Sponsored by Illinois' electric and telephone cooperatives, 54 students departed Springfield, Ill., by bus on June 14 to Washington, D.C., for a weeklong trip of a lifetime.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative sponsored three students within its service territory. These students included Calissa Bailey, Isabelle Ritter and Timothy Meyer.

Youth Tour began in 1964, after President Lyndon B. Johnson inspired the nation's electric cooperatives to sponsor youths to go to D.C. to educate young people about the role of electric co-ops and the significance of the legislative process. It became an annual tradition.

"Youth Tour is more than just a trip," said Brooke Gross, Youth Tour coordinator from the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that empowers future leaders to become informed, engaged, and active citizens. Many Youth Tour alumni go on to become leaders in their communities, inspired by this experience."

The event offers a unique opportunity for students to explore the nation's capital, meet their peers from across the state and beyond, and engage with the political process. Youth Tour not only highlights the importance of electric cooperatives but also fosters civic engagement and leadership skills.

The itinerary for the Youth Tour was packed with both educational and cultural experiences. The students visited major landmarks such as Gettysburg, Arlington National Cemetery, the U.S. Capitol and the National Mall. They also visited several museums, including the Smithsonian, Air and Space Museum, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

"There's a lot more to Youth Tour than sightseeing," Gross said. "It also provides students with a deeper understanding of American history and government and the role electric and telephone cooperatives play in the communities they serve."

One way the students learned about cooperatives was by forming one themselves. The Chip 'n' Pop Co-op is an engaging way to provide the Youth Tour participants with experience in understanding the fundamentals of the cooperative business model.

“This hands-on activity emphasizes the importance of teamwork,” Gross said. “The students gained practical business skills and a deeper appreciation for cooperatives.”

The students created their own snack shop cooperative by forming a nominating committee, electing a board of directors, and hiring a co-op manager. They worked together to manage all aspects of the operation and had an equal say in decision-making, just like the cooperatives that sponsored them on the trip.

High school students who live within the service area of Tri-County Electric Cooperative are eligible to participate in the annual program. To learn more about Youth Tour, go to youthtour.coop or [facebook.com/ILYouthTour](https://www.facebook.com/ILYouthTour).

Tri-County Electric Cooperative is a member of Touchstone Energy — a national alliance of local, consumer-owned electric cooperatives providing high standards of service. Tri-County Electric is committed to providing superior service based on four core principles: integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community. The co-op serves 16,513 meters over 3,410 miles of line in parts of Franklin, Jefferson, Marion, Perry and Washington counties. For more information visit www.tricountycoop.com.

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Youth Tour Students at Gettysburg (from left): Isabelle Ritter, Calissa Bailey, and Timothy Meyer