

## CVEA Foundation & Alaska Power Association Send Youth to Nation's Capital



Left: View of the Jefferson Memorial in the distance. Photo by Sharon Crisp

By Sharon Crisp

Keaton Shepherd of Kenny Lake, Alaska, was among more than 1,500 high school students from across the country who participated in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Tour June 11-17 in Washington, D.C.

The NRECA Youth Tour has been bringing students to Washington, D.C. every June since the late 1950s. Why do electric cooperatives bring high school students to Washington, D.C.? Because it is important to learn about the political process to interact with your government. And, in the years to come, it will be ever more important for our leaders to interact with government on energy issues. Students walk away from the National Youth Tour as better leaders and with a sense that they can make a difference.

Students compete for slots for this unique opportunity and are often selected by their local cooperatives.

For CVEA representatives, the process is a little different. Each year the CVEA Community Foundation offers two scholarships, one in each district, to attend the Idaho Cooperative Utilities Association (ICUA) Idaho Youth Rally, a leadership camp held in Caldwell, Idaho in July.

The Youth Rally is six days filled with fun and learning about consumer-owned electric utilities, developing teamwork and leadership skills and self-esteem, meeting area students, and building lasting relationships with other students from Alaska, Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming.

Throughout the week, chaperones evaluate the students; watching to see how kids interact, if they are participating, if they take leadership roles, and how they work together. In addition, each student is personally interviewed and scored. The scores, combined with evaluations, determine who is chosen to sit on the Youth Leadership Council (YLC).

The YLC emphasizes the development of strong leadership, presentation, and advocacy skills in America's most promising young leaders. NRECA coordinates a series of educational workshops for the YLC which cover topics such as the cooperative business model, grassroots advocacy, community service, and careers in public service.

These students also get the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. for the Youth Tour and the Youth Summit, and to attend the NRECA Annual Meeting the following year. As members of the YLC, students become part of a special group of talented individuals.

Keaton Shepherd received the highest score at the Youth Rally in 2009. This accomplishment secured him a seat on the Youth Leadership Council and an opportunity to represent Alaska, Copper Valley Electric, and the Alaska Power Association in Washington, D.C. in June.

Keaton and other Youth Tour delegates along with myself and the other chaperones, saw the sights of our nation's capital and learned about the history of the United States and the electric cooperative movement. The students also gained insight into today's most important issues through face-to-face visits with their congressional

delegations on Capitol Hill. Walking the hallowed halls of Congress is a memory that will undoubtedly stay with them forever. Meeting with the delegates' representatives and having the opportunity to talk about issues that are important to them is definitely a highlight of the tour.

On National Youth Day, Monday, June 14, the entire group experienced another highlight, Keynote Speaker Mike Schlappi. At the age of 14, Schlappi was student body president and an Eagle Scout, and was dreaming of a career as a top American athlete when he was accidentally shot by his best friend. Doctors told him he'd never walk again, but after rigorous therapy, he began playing basketball from his wheelchair. Schlappi is now a four-time Paralympic Medalist and two-time World Champion in Wheelchair Basketball who shared an inspiring message for every American young or old; "Just because you can't stand up, doesn't mean you can't stand out."

During this year's trip, we visited Mt. Vernon and saw where George Washington lived, but also learned about his life, service, and dedication to making our country great. We visited the Ford Theatre and Museum and learned about the contributions of Abraham Lincoln. A solemn trip was made to the Holocaust Museum where students and adults alike saw, in graphic detail, how Hitler and his regime rose to power during WWII and the horrors they committed throughout the war.

We visited the Washington Monument and the Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln Memorials. These were beautiful, massive, and awe-inspiring. We were moved by the war memorials including the Air Force Memorial, WWII Memorial, Iwo Jima Memorial, Korean Memorial, and the Vietnam Memorial. The group also saw Arlington Cemetery's massive number of headstones set at attention and watched the changing of the Honor Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

We spent a day and a half visiting the various Smithsonian Museums and went to the National Archives where we saw the Magna Carta, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence.

Keaton and I spent a day on Capitol Hill, starting the day touring the Capitol and the Library of Congress. We then had appointments with Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Representative Don Young (R-Alaska). The appointments were for the students to ask their representatives about topics of concern to them. Keaton talked about school vouchers and hydroelectricity. Keaton was informed and contributed to the conversation with both representatives.

Keaton received a compliment from Congressman Young, and at that moment I beamed with pride.

Having chaperoned the Idaho Youth Rally and now the



**Above: Keaton Shepherd, Sharon Crisp of CVEA, and Congressman Don Young. Photo courtesy Congressman Don Young's office**



**Left: Keaton Shepherd on the steps of the Capitol Building. Photo by Sharon Crisp**

National Youth Tour, I have seen students grow and I am convinced that the youth program offered by the CVEA Community Foundation is successful and truly enriching the educational experience of our local students and helping to create future leaders and members of our cooperative.

For more information on the Idaho Youth Rally, National Youth Tour, or any other CVEA Community Foundation program, please contact Sharon Crisp at 822-5506, 835-7705, or email [crisp@cvea.org](mailto:crisp@cvea.org). ■

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*Alaskan representation at the Idaho Youth Rally and the NRECA National Youth Tour is made possible, in part, with support and funding from the Alaska Power Association.*